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Peace education as an aim and means towards citizenship in Italian primary schools

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This paper described a peace education project currently being prepared in the Università degli studi Roma Tre. The project will develop intellectual skills, curricula and textbooks from primary school through postgraduate study and will include teacher training seminars focussing on conceptual investigation and workshops in which practical investigations will take place. The project will focus on:

- the causes of war
- peacemaking processes
- conditions of peace
- peace-building tasks.

To allow all people to be part of our pluralistic society, it is important to promote a new sensitivity among colleagues and schoolteachers in Italy about the relevance of peace education in educational institutions. The challenge is the establishment of 'global democracy'. The values of democratic pluralism need to be shared internationally, and education towards this will reinforce global interdependence and active membership in a world society. The target for educators is to convey the ideas of education for active global democracy, founded on universal human values and social behaviour. Education can play a vital role in cultivating mutual respect for human rights and moving from ethnic and religious hatred, thus bringing greater world peace and harmony.

Education can [play an important role in developing creative and peaceful means of resolving conflicts. Starting in pre-schools and primary schools, we need to teach the perception and acceptance of humanitarianism, and not just economic or political interests.

Global citizenship begins with mutual understanding

Education for peace concerns all subject areas in the curriculum. In our project, the basic assumption will be that mutual understanding is the connection between education for peace and multicultural education. It is fundamental that the teaching and education of all children is carried out in a collaborative atmosphere between pupils and teachers. A holistic approach to education involves organisation, ethos, teaching styles and every area of the curriculum: humanities (history, geography, social sciences, religious education); language and literature (mother tongue, modern languages), mathematics and sciences, arts and physical education.

Italian primary school programmes requires children consider complex societies, democratic coexistence, international understanding, the prevention of stereotypes and the marginalising prejudices. To achieve these ends, schools plan activities for the child to acquire the *knowledge* of individuality, the *feeling* of identity, and the *meaning*

of personal and social responsibility. Programmes of democratic coexistence concern the morality of what *ought to be* in a world society. The relationship between awareness of the many forms of diversity and the marginalisation and the prevention of stereotyping and prejudices (against individuals and groups) is close. Awareness of diversity and prejudice can coexist in the mind and behaviour of the same person. Peace-building teaching offers primary school teachers didactic tools for educating children in and for democratic community life. We will work towards the individual being an active protagonist of non-violent resolution of everyday problems.

World political events of the 1990s provided a new context and rationale for the relaunch of peace education, focussing on global citizenship within politically plural societies. That decade saw the democratic coming of age of many nations, and by the end of 1990 more than half the nations of the world could be described as liberal democracies. The main issue was the reconciliation of the freedoms inherent in democratic pluralism with the challenges of cultural diversity. Some newer democracies had little or no democratic traditions and had to cope with the pressure of a multicultural society that had previously been denied. Studies of citizenship in multicultural societies underline how education, and education for citizenship, can help develop the values and institutions needed to sustain culturally plural and democratic societies - both internally and in their relations with the rest of the world. Schools must prepare individuals for creative participation in the processes of peace-building.

Methodological traits

Lectures, seminars and workshops are all useful ways of teaching and learning for peace education, because they make students and teachers aware of prejudices, stereotypes, clichés and the 'enemy images' adopted in dealing with others. Getting-to-know-each-other exercises help in this, and also help overcome narrow-minded constructions and visions of the world. The aimed is to understand democracy operating in the context of autonomy. In such a context students do not simply follow traditional university courses, but also creatively and independently produce their own material.

Systemic interactionism will be adopted as the main approach: this is based on a comparative and experimental approach to education. Project-orientated work, workshops, quantitative and qualitative analysis, problem-solving and critical and reflective thinking will be useful in each specific section of the project; overall they will produce the interaction that will be the source of interpretation. Systemic interaction is the dynamic structure of this project, and includes a variety of methods:

- project-orientated work for experimental learning, leading participants to a common process of learning and experiencing
- workshops as a particularly useful way of learning education for peace, justice and human rights (suitable at various levels, for university and school students/ pupils/ teachers)

- quantitative and qualitative analysis of textbooks (particularly history textbooks and reference books, both important sources in the classroom in Italy)
- problem-solving as an algorithmic process to conceptualise, identify and solve issues
- critical and reflective thinking on principles (following John Dewey).

This methodology is used to develop curricula and texts that are sensitive of peace-building and citizenship education in Europe, designed by university students who are training to become primary schoolteachers. Workshops orientate students towards articles and books on citizenship in European schools and to their own projects for use in class.

Work plan

The peace education studies project contributes to expanding concepts and tools for the university training of students who will become primary school teachers.

- the project operates throughout the academic year
- participation is a compulsory part of students' university curriculum.
- students collect international materials - books, papers, poems, fairy-tales, stories, literature, music and religious symbols – and identify arguments, positions and strategies for and against peace
- students design protocols for peace-building directed at primary school pupils.

The final product is an academic article on the curriculum innovation project and its implementation (at both university and school levels) that identifies:

- educating for peace as an aim and means towards citizenship in primary schools
- creating school curricula that meet the needs of citizenship education
- finding key themes that promote mutual international understanding
- demonstrating children's experience of democracy as a life style
- showing how primary schools educate for peace through citizenship.

The phases of work are:

- reading knowledge: what is already known?
- practical experience: how can citizenship in schools be promoted and investigated?
- creative production: how can peace instruct the younger generation about citizenship?
- field application: what do children think of this in school?

Suitable strategies for peace culture, based on practical global citizenship education, are:

- the reinforcement of the validity of peace culture and citizenship culture;
- permeation of existing syllabuses to provide all students with the knowledge, attitudes and skills that foster understanding of the importance of peace;
- introducing a wide range of information and examples of world peace in various cultures;

- including a global curriculum dimension through studying peace-oriented countries and cultures;
- cooperative and participatory education between pupils/students and teachers.

The dissemination of the project materials, including articles and papers, will be based on four levels of interest:

1. university level - among students: Why should peace and citizenship education be emphasised in our pedagogy?
2. school level - among teachers: How can teaching accord with principles of peace and citizenship?
3. university and school level - in seminars in which student teachers and teachers discuss the materials, bringing together questions 1 and 2
4. pupils using peace-building in school: What is the pupil experience of peace-building and citizenship in Europe?

These processes are used to define a new hypothesis arising from the main problems that have arisen during the project.

Examples of two workshops on peace

Nomina sunt consequentia rerum

The first workshop started from what is understood as phenomenon: nomination and connotation are mental activities arise from interaction with the environment. The phenomenon has a name (nomination) and the name is defined with words that give a descriptive and qualifying meaning to the phenomenon (connotation). A specific example is the experience of violence, a phenomenon we all recognise in our lives. The experience of war opposes the idea of peace. The strategy adopted is teaching non-violence through meaningful examples of lives from all over the world.

Those who achieved peace in concrete terms are great figures of humanity: Gandhi, Einstein, Fleming, Chaplin, Abert Luthuli, Fermi, J. F. Kennedy, Anna Frank, Gagarin, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, for example' but also more familiar people, such as mother, father, brother, sister, grandfather, grandmother, friend, classmate, neighbour, teacher. We learn to recognise messages of peace among those of war and give these a name; we use words to describe what we see, feel and want. 'I feel the violence around me, I think of the peace within me, I want non-violence in my daily life as the only way that allows for civil coexistence'.

Belief and rule

Peace is a moral belief and a demonstration of a rule. It is a moral belief in that is followed for the good of the community, and a rule established for everyone. Trust and rights are corollaries of the reasoning that appeals to individual feeling and to the state,

so that dignity is given. If young people are asked, ‘could you survive an atrocity?’, the aim would be to find their capacity to meet this and confront reactions of fear: thus it rejects the hidden message. This is an enormous challenge: for a child to admit being afraid may undermine his acceptance by his peers. School reawakens capabilities and talents and develops the common feeling of existence, beginning with the valorisation of the unique person.

We cannot cancel the spirit in favour of matter, nor silence the mind to listen to the body. Spirit and matter, mind and body are reconciled in the idea of the ‘persona’: a complex, unique reality, the freedom to be and to exist beyond the conditions of the environment. Social life is based on mutual rules that education teaches, thus subjecting them to the critical rationality of the persona.

