

THE “DICE OF LOVE“

Irmgard Knab (PiB, Ottmarimg- D)

My name is Irmgard Knab and I am for more than 25 years teacher of religion in a school in Augsburg in the south of Germany. The age of my pupils is between seven and sixteen years.

When together with other colleagues I made for the first time didactical experiences in education with the “dice of love” some years ago, it was an important impulse for my professional life. I want to tell you briefly its history.

A colleague of mine, Roseli Weber, a remedial teacher, had the task to accompany in Switzerland a group of children and preadolescents during a weekend, following a specific program.

In order to have some little gift for these young people at the end of the course she designed this dice with six points for the six surfaces (, which Pierre introduced yesterday). These points are characteristics of Christian love, the so-called “art of loving”, which was already mentioned during these days, and they are: to love all, to be the first one to love, to love the enemy, etc. Roseli Weber was surprised by the positive response from her pupils and also from their parents who appreciated this original intuition but especially by the many experiences which the pupils made at home.

Since then the dice was brought to many youngsters but also to grownups.

I was fascinated by the idea to introduce this dice to my pupils, but I was aware that the concept of “love” was understood by my pupils in a totally different way and therefore there was the risk that the ideas could not be comprehended. The points had to be translated into their language. Moreover, our pupils have a totally different system of values, especially regarding the concept of “neighbour”. And they express this clearly in their way of thinking and acting. For me it was a new challenge to reach out to these young people according to our way of doing things, to try to view things from their perspective to understand them deeply and at the same time to offer them educational values which correspond to their mentality.

To motivate the young people to think in a different way which means to think from the viewpoint of the other I had to invent continuously new pedagogical strategies.

For all of this it seems to me important that these young people did not feel forced to do something, but that they discovered their own inner comprehension of new models of behaviour.

Now I want to introduce some didactical approaches which I’ve put into practice myself.

A first important element was the elaboration of the “golden rule”: What you expect from others that you should also do to them!” (Mt. 7,12) This rule has the effect that you start to see your own needs in relation to those of the others, because the needs of the others are very similar to our own. Moreover, they understand that it is legitimate to have your own needs, for example to feel respected by the others. However, if I want to be treated with respect I have to treat also the others with respect. It is not always easy to practice this way of seeing things, because the natural tendency is always to expect from the other to do the first step. If they instead understand that they have to start doing things, then they make the experience of having done something valid, (a golden action). This way of acting creates friendship, good relationships, satisfaction and joy, etc.

As the next step to practice more the dice is to be introduced. I have developed together with a class of 14-years old some analytical strategies in order to foster pro-social attitudes. Some important points can be read as for example: to see things from the viewpoint of the other, to go towards the other, to do something good for the other, or some even more practical suggestions like: greeting the other, helping each other, to take once in a while a task which is not so rewarding, etc. The dice revealed itself as something attractive for the different age groups. It is stimulating and entertaining because it brings something unforeseeable and very creative, a fundamental aspect in order to provoke interest and active participation, a sense of personal and collective identity.

The collaboration with the smaller pupils is more natural; with the older pupils more patience and also more teamwork with other colleagues are needed. A colleague of mine has introduced the dice in her 5th class and maintained the practice for two consecutive years. When these young people were already in the 7th year the dice reappeared only towards the end of the scholastic year, when we made an outing to Ottmaring. Their deepest impression there was that other young people they had never met before were very kind to them and showed them great esteem. When they had to ring the doorbell at houses they never went before to make an interview, they were surprised by the warm welcome they received in an atmosphere full of trust and they were also impressed by the fact how seriously their questions were answered. The people they met really tried to live in peace with one another reconciling after any conflict. Back to school the pupils prepared brief scenes which showed the difference between situations in which the golden rule is lived out and situations in which this doesn't happen. This was a great joy for them; they felt great because they realized that they could do something positive even though it was only by playing.

After these experiences I come to the following conclusion: we can not change the environment in which these children live because we are only a small cogwheel in the whole system. Nevertheless we have the function of being a model, if we have as teachers the attitude to promote prosocial experiences and to indicate values which contribute to prosocial actions. Most important in all of this is to tap the positive resources of the pupils in order that they develop them. I must admit, however, that the results of my efforts are often not so obvious or visible to me, because it is an inner change, something in progress and not something which can be clearly stated. My effort and dedication are necessary but what the pupils make of it is up to them – they are free children of God. But of course there are many negative influences which make it difficult to develop a social conscience and which we have therefore to counterbalance. In any case I am convinced that this patient and constant approach, possible with the dice, can give perseverance and passion not only to the young people but also to us in our professional life.

Stella Salin e Giovanna Girardini (Gruppo Tavolo Tuttospace, Trento)

We are Stella and Giovanna, and we are representing a teachers' group from Trento. We share a common objective: give and live the "universal brotherhood" in our working place, trying to share and transmit to our students life values.

What's about the choice of the universal brotherhood as working method? As Chiara Lubich writes, the "brotherhood" is the forgiven value in the French Revolution motto "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité", even if nowadays we consider it as the most important and necessary character for our community. To make "brotherhood" real effective and understood it has to be lived within the community and, at this point, it can become an effort horizon and a basic condition to the good living of the community.

Currently, we are working in different schools, at different level of formal education, from the primary school to the University, sharing a common way of working: living what we are teaching to our students. As consequence of that, we propose to our classes the *dice of love*: we have re-written the six sentences of the dice with our students giving them our interpretation.

I teach in a primary school in Trento by 13 years. After the eleventh of September 2001, a small group of students of my class started to think about spreading a new culture of peace and love and they involved the entire class: they proposed the use of the *dice of love*, they had the idea to write a school magazine to collect their experiences and diffuse them in the other schools of Trento. Nowadays, the "Tuttopace" Magazine is distributed to all the families of Trento.

The magazine helps us as a channel of transmission of common values and a link between schools, families and territory, contributing to build a network and support the good practices inside the city.

This experience contributes to institute a permanent editorial staff composed by teachers called "Tuttopace" Committee, representing the various schools. The head office is situated in Trento Municipality and about sixty teachers compose it. The Committee organised actions, initiatives and proposal regarding the theme of the peace and it is characterised by authentic dialogue and real comparison between different ideas, educational methods. It valorises the several proposal coming by teachers, professors, students and parents. Furthermore, many of teachers participants to the Committee are really enthusiasts about the possibility of working together in the field of the formal education.

Here are some Committee initiatives:

- The Municipality of Trento built a Garden for the peace with a monument of the dice of the peace, opened in May 2004. The inauguration coincided with the first event "Trento, city of peace". It is an entire day occurrence gathering all the primary schools of the city and a large representative of schools from other cities and nations. The last event about 3000 children, young and students were present.

- Public administration offices and by institutions belonging to the Committee instituted a training course for educators and teachers on pedagogic education to life and peace values: "The teacher as an actor of peace education".

- The Committee defined an Identity Card of the Committee, describing the vision and the strategy of working of the "Tuttopace" programme and underlining in particular the main effort to be peace actor inside own working place through the personal testimony. We strongly believe that a new pedagogy of peace and a real practice of peace are necessary and that contains thinking and life, principles and actions, values and life experiences. Moreover, we are convinced that this pedagogy is transversal to many subjects and an important educational instrument to obtain a human realisation for students and children.

- The Committee launches an operational book "Live for peace" to collect the most relevant experiences coming from the various schools, printed in 10.000 review copies and spread all over the Province of Trento. It is another educational instrument composed by 4 didactic units.

- Training project for parents and teachers on education alliances between school and family. This training project is raised from daily relations between parents and teachers on the theme of the values education and peace education. This course permits to the parents to strengthen family values and family educational instruments in order to give a clear testimony about them inside the family. This project involves institutions and several associations working on the theme of the family. Furthermore, we are studying a new teaching method of the different subjects centred in the universal brotherhood point of view. For example, we especially underline certain events in the history teaching rather than the usual ones: valuating the peace treaties, considering the cultural differences of nations and peoples as a richness rather than an obstacle, etc.

We can summarise that the strongest experience in this educational path is the education of new men understanding the real meaning of the word "love". We would like that the value of peace belongs to the life and belief of each student through this educational path.

The Peace Round Table "Tuttopace"



We are a group of teachers from different teaching backgrounds (from day care school up to High School). We are all involved in various peace initiatives.

The Peace Round Table was officially founded during the school term of 2004/2005. It unites schools from Trentino (Trento, Pergine, Lavis, Molveno, Andalo) and Vicenza (Cassola) and involves children, students, teachers, directors, associates, families and local authorities.

Originally intended as a tool to co-ordinate peace initiatives, it progressively developed into a working Round Table for interested teachers, gradually involving the Local Authority and the Education Department as well. It is now an established institution and meetings are held once a month in the Palazzo Geremia in Trento.

We firmly believe in peace education and its application as an educational tool. It must connect coherently theory and practice and values and experiences. Our task as teachers is to set an example and to demonstrate how to develop and maintain positive personal relationships on all levels in order to improve the quality of life for everybody.

It is fundamental to us to:

1. underline the importance of personal and community token, fundamental qualities of teachers with an open mind towards a world of different values and interaction between theory and practice.
2. pay special attention to the development of personal relationships and the construction of a sense of community in order to achieve an open-minded and constructive dialogue between different groups.
3. discuss various educational theories and educative practices to improve quality of life and to unite the world.
4. intensify research on peace education.
5. promote regular training opportunities for teachers relevant to the subject in order to provide the integration of the matter in as many teaching subjects as possible.

We therefore propose to:

- communicate respect for others, acceptance for one another, compassionate understanding, legality and reciprocity.
- promote positive conflict solving
- activate pedagogical collaboration open in the dialogue between family, groups, associations and institutions
- overtake the frequent knowledge fragmentation comparing knowledge to understand the interdependence and the specificity
- activate teaching methods based on co-operation to promote the formation of a thinking and dialogic community
- facilitate active involvement of teachers and youth in the relation with the institutions, the creativity and participation, to promote concrete actions of mediation and sharing to justice and to look for common well.

We are aware that these goals in peace education (taking ours the affirmation “the peace begin from me”) are much more credible and coherent to the goal that we proposed if we apply them on a daily basis, beginning from the teachers, with the continuity day by day step by step and testimony it on all levels of our lives. This way is difficult but effective to rich educative aim so high. This is the most precious gift an adult community can offer to their future generations, developing together an important and mature sense of citizenship and community, of universal fraternity.