



Geographical education and peace. Suggestions from a contemporary interpretation of the CISV project

Emanuela Gamberoni^a

^a Dipartimento di Culture e Civiltà, University of Verona, Verona, Italy
Email: emanuela.gamberoni@univr.it

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Abstract

Many Italian and international documents, such as the Italian National School Programs 2012 and 2018, the IGU Charter on Geographical Education (2016), the Lucerne Declaration on Geographical Education for Sustainable Development (2007) and the Rome Declaration on Geographical Education in Europe (2013), underline the role and the importance of Geography in the development of abilities and competences of the “future citizens”: it is a geography that puts children and students in action, with a very practical proposal aimed at developing an involvement in conscious citizenship. This paper resumes some of the characteristics and theoretical bases of the CISV Project (Children’s International Summer Villages, now CISV International – Building global friendship) and discusses a proposal about specific geographical activities aimed at experimenting situations that connect environmental situations to the decisions and perspectives of local communities. This approach pushes children to choose and analyze the different consequences of their ideas and peace solutions, in the context of an active didactics of geography.

Keywords: Citizenship, Education, Geography, Peace

*“To understand the world it is necessary to learn that
there does not exist a single way to be human beings,
rather there are thousands and thousands of different ways”.*
(Corna Pellegrini, 2003, p. 16) ¹

*“We become actors of the development,
of the peace of the world
in a difficult but very interesting and funny way”.*
(Pupil at the end of the project)

¹ Citations referred to Italian authors are translated by E. Gamberoni.

1. Introduction

Geography in schools is still often characterized by a sequential and mnemonic learning, related to a kind of descriptive tradition, often reflected by the structure of textbooks, the requests of the families who remember their school geography and the list of the regions studied and by the timetable that really assigns little time to the discipline. This detaches it from reality, making it seemingly useless in relation to the great issues of contemporary life. Furthermore, this moves it away from its deep meaning of knowledge and interpretation of the world in a perspective of awareness of the issues that affect the world and the existence of communities.

In the field of science, geography appears to be soft, uncertain, heterogeneous (Frémont, 2007) with respect to other disciplines. It has different positions, labels and aims in the various national curricula in the world (Brooks et al., 2017). In the Italian National Indications, it is presented as a “discipline of hinge” (MIUR, 2012, p. 56; MIUR, 2018), wording that, if not correctly understood, spreads its identity and autonomy among other types of knowledge, as if geography were involved in themes already debated by other disciplines, because it does not have enough independence to do it by itself. All this means that in school – but also generally in the public opinion – the quality of geography to be unifying of time, space and actions, to be attentive to the complexity of reality, to provide important keys for reading concrete life contexts, correlating them and linking them to the largest world, also in a diachronic perspective, is always escaping.

In this sense, while sharing many aspects with other social sciences, geography has specific features: it spatializes, relates, regionalizes and compares to different scales (Giorda, 2014). “It solicits and integrates a multiplicity of readings of the territory from ecological, economic and historical-social point of view. [...] [It] is able to unify on the level of awareness the two cultures, humanistic and scientific, to take charge of the great environmental problems that torment humanity” (Di Santo and Landi, 2007, p. 55). Geography interests everyone because since the beginning

of our life we have had a personal geography which, growing up, becomes a device of knowledge of the self and the world. It is undeniable that the spatial variable is omnipresent in the experience of everyday life. In this sense, geographical knowledge is the mediator in the interpretation of the world and in the possibility of living there: localizing, elaborating concepts and sense of distances (Rocca, 2007) to consciously appropriate our own mental maps. The “Geographical understanding is not a ‘spectator’ perspective” (Catling, 2015, p. 3). The educative opportunities of this discipline represented by the centrality of its ability to connect (Dematteis, 2011) are therefore manifold. The Italian National Indications (MIUR, 2012) underline that Geography trains to the observation of reality from different points of view; it guides to the knowledge of different places, it considers multiple visions, it accustoms us to the multiplicity of ways and forms of life, to the richness of the world.

As a discipline whose subjects of study are “the relations of human societies between them and with the planet that hosts them” (MIUR, 2012, p. 56), it analyzes the progressive transformation of the environment caused by man and promotes the knowledge of the landscape. It “is attentive to the present that studies in the various spatial articulations and in its demographic, socio-cultural and political-economic aspects” (MIUR, 2012, p. 56).

The openness to the present – particularly emphasized in MIUR 2018 – allows us to develop both skills related to active citizenship and a greater sensitivity towards sustainability. This theme has effectively come into the issues and problems faced by geography, starting from 1987, when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) declares that sustainable development fulfils “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). The three well-known objectives (ecosystem integrity, economic efficiency and social equity), reinterpreted at the light of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, recall the ethical dimension, the choice and the individual and collective responsibility, in a peace and justice

perspective, already well highlighted in the Lucerne Declaration (IGU, 2007).

Geography at school allows the acquisition of tools and a mindset suitable for making responsible decisions in the management of the territory and the protection of the environment, in the present and in the future: “Teaching geography at school means forming conscious, autonomous, responsible and critical Italian and worldwide citizens who can live in their environment and know how to modify it in a creative and sustainable way, looking at the future” (De Vecchis, 2011, p. 14).

These learning opportunities are best realized through educational paths characterized by an engaging, motivating and exciting didactics (Boscolo, 2012), making pupils protagonists of their own learning process, with the possibility to cooperate for an effective communication (Selleri, 2016). A high-quality teaching fosters the acquisition of skills, understood as “the level of conscious and appropriate use of all learning objects” (MIUR, 2017, p. 5), for one’s single and community life.

Although geography teachers share this professional patrimony, they often report difficulties in proceeding in didactic actions congruent with the above principles, that is, to field an experimental and playful geography (Nebbia, 2015; Scoffham, 2013), with a problem-based learning approach (Giorda, 2014).

It represents a kind of geography that nourishes a specific geographical imagination useful to decode and make one’s own personal reality (Corna Pellegrini, 2004b; 2011); it imposes choices of values to teachers. Teachers “compare themselves with the sphere of values in different times: in the selection of contents and concepts to which priority should be given” (Bernardi and Gamberoni, 2000, p. 261).

Active experiences, which are not exempt from a playfulness, are often offered by out-of-school educational associations that, in different ways and/or for specific themes, involve groups of children and young people. In this sense, for some time now, the organization Children’s International Summer Villages, (CISV from now), today CISV International – Building

global friendship, has been offering young people and families a set of activities oriented to the knowledge of diversity, cooperation and to the experimentation of situations-problem, aimed at education for peace².

2. CISV – Building Global Friendship

CISV is an international organization, apolitical and non-religious, affiliated to UNESCO, promoting peace education, intercultural relationships and international cooperation.

It was founded in 1950 by the American psychologist Doris Allen Twitchell (1901-2002), candidate for the Nobel prize for Peace in 1979. For her contribution to education at peace (Allen Twitchell, 1963), she won the UNESCO Prize for peace education in 2001. To date, CISV is present in 68 countries and more than 200 towns. CISV “was founded in the belief that peace is possible through building friendship and mutual understanding, starting with children” (CISV, 2018, p. 1).

Its mission is to “educate and inspire actions for a more just and peaceful world” (CISV, 2019b, p. 7). It is based on four important values: Friendship, Inclusiveness, Engagement and Cooperation. CISV puts participants in a condition to incorporate these values into their lives in order to become global citizens committed to a peaceful and just world.

The four values mentioned above are blended with Educational Principles guiding the following focused actions: to appreciate the similarities between people and give value to their differences; to promote social justice and equality for all; to encourage the resolution of conflicts through peaceful means; to support the creation of sustainable solutions to problems,

² In this sense *Peace Studies* provide the contents for a lively debate. Working ideas for peace – not understood as an “absence of war” but as intolerance, inequality, discrimination, injustice, lack of respect etc, (Fien, 1991; Snauwaert, 2020) – and the “Culture of Peace” (pivotal goal of SDG’s 2015-2030) come from specific teachers’ manuals and workbooks for students. By way of example, see Gonsalves (2018).

relating to our impact upon each other and the natural environment (CISV, 2019b).

Within this framework four main thematic areas for peace and an equal world are developed. The first is Human rights, focused on how human rights affect every aspect of life and how their violation can be at the basis of problems such as poverty, violence and lawlessness. Diversity, related to the former, is the second thematic area: the exploration of the identities of individuals and, at the same time, the need for people to consider themselves as an integral part of a local community. The third is Conflicts and their resolution: understanding their causes and what can be done to promote their peaceful resolution. Finally, sustainable development deals with the search for integrated approaches of promoting economic and social well-being, protecting the environment with a responsible use of natural resources.

Practically, CISV offers young people, from 11 to 19+ years old, some educational programs listed in international camps, family exchanges, local activities and territorial projects in collaboration with other local organizations. Each program is structured in specific activities, ages and number of participants. Concrete methods and activities are a starting point to encourage people to be peaceful active citizens, locally as well as globally. In depth: the activity Village is for 11 year old children coming from different countries. They live together for one month with a program of actions; Interchange is for 12-15 year old adolescents coming from two countries; Step up is for 15 year old teenagers. It is a more complex Village for 36 participants; Seminar camp is for 17-18 year old young people, based on complex activities about self-management for 21 participants and lasts three weeks; Youth meeting is for 12-19+ year old people, 25 participants for one or two weeks on a specific theme; International People's Project is for 19+ year old people, 20 participants coming from at least four countries. For two or three weeks they work on one theme, such as environmental degradation or migration, and/or practice specific work in local associations.

CISV activities are mainly simulation games, routines and special nights dedicated to the knowledge of specific countries. The activities are managed by appropriately trained volunteers. Their methodology is based on Learning by

doing, the famous theory of J. Dewey, mirroring into these steps: do, reflect, generalize and apply in contexts, experimented by each group during the different activities (Figure 1).

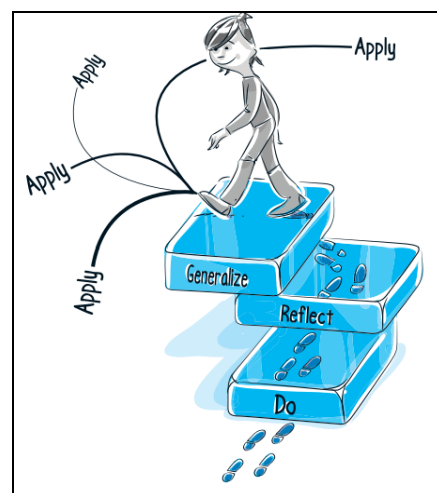


Figure 1. The CISV four steps.
Source: CISV, 2019a, p. 37.

A crucial point is the community-based nature of these activities: the aim is to tackle – through the activation of communicative and relational competences – geographical, political or environmental problems, making the participants feel part of a community, and thus let them arrive at the awareness of the concept of local-global even belonging to or coming from different parts of the world, with different languages and cultures. In this sense, the participants realize that they are joined to each other by the mutual effects of everyone's action and that each action always implies consequences and responsibilities.

The CISV vision for the future is just as relevant and important today as it was when the organization was founded. We consider that geography at school is the knowledge that more than any other could be appropriate as it allows students to have an experience of the intimate and deep connection between territorial and sociocultural dynamics.

The project was to rework some CISV activities within the Primary School Geography curriculum according to specific criteria and issues, in order to reach, educate, and inspire

young people to build a fairer and peaceful world.

This paper reports the reworking of *Fantasy Island*, a CISV start activity of *Village*.

3. Methodological Approach

The aim of the proposal is to increase students' possibility to be active (Artvinli, 2012), to be "makers" (Ye and Ji, 2019), in relation to a geographical topic, at the center of the geographical learning, to practice dialogues, confrontation, decision-making processes and the adoption of rules.

In the pursuit of an "authentic geographical education" (Pollard and Hesslewood, 2015, p. 11), the main methodological axes involved in this paper are the learning by doing approach, problem solving and cooperative learning (Lamberti, 2006), with specific attention to the relationship between participatory level and power (Gallagher, 2008).

Working groups were alternated with plenary sessions for sharing and comparing different positions and ideas. Participants experience a playfulness dimension in a very serious way.

For the setting, playing a crucial role for these types of activities, classrooms and the hallway were available. It is important that each group chooses its own specific place for working and finds a comfortable setting for the plenary meeting.

The assessment includes two steps: monitoring during the activities and a final evaluation on satisfaction, processes, quality of decisions related to the case study/geographical topic.

All this helps each student to understand their own "position" compared to others in order to discuss geographical dynamics and questions, different opinions and solutions. They begin to think about what, where, why and if it is possible to take decisions; they train on negotiation and mutual acceptance, understanding the origin of tensions and conflicts and try to find solutions together to the geographical question. This helps them to build a citizenship culture in a wider context of peace

culture and overall, for "survival" (Bonnett, 2012, p. 121).

4. We are the future! A proposal in primary schools

In the *Fantasy Island*, CISV kids are divided into groups. Each group is invited to draw a country that will be the result of the different ideas of the group members, to name it and attribute to the new country some characterizing elements (flag, language, customs, etc.). Then, all the countries created by the groups are put together to build a region. This activity allows kids both to compare the geographical differences of the proposals and to personally experiment in the communication of their own ideas, the ability to listen to each other, to mediate among different points of view and to choose solutions.

This path generates a system that has placed geographical knowledge as a tool connecting not only information and different points of view, but specifically different topics such as conflict, identity inclusiveness; responsibility, mutual help, citizenship; different scales; geography and image; sustainable development.

Translating this activity into primary school, the proposal was carried out in three lessons (each of 2 hours) in a 5th class. Twenty-two 10 year old pupils were divided into little groups, each composed of four or five pupils, in order to encourage and facilitate the interactions and participation of each child as much as possible within the framework of cooperative learning (Lamberti, 2013; Polito, 2003).

The problem-based learning approach was pursued by developing specific scenarios where each group was encouraged to use its own knowledge and relational skills to proceed.

The activities were proposed in non-structured spaces. The setting was organized by pupils: the benches became the bases for working materials and the corners of the corridor were the spaces chosen by each group. In order to favor interactions among pupils, conversations and discussion were planned, following what was reported in the methodological section; the former

“is an interpersonal exchange that spontaneously stems with no aim to be pursued [...] [*the latter*] is a particular type of conversation led with a precise and established aim, and strategically guided and controlled in order to reach a specific objective” (Blezza Picherle, 2013, pp. 166-167).

The teacher manages, supports and suggests questions focalizing “the attention of the pupils on crucial points of the work in order to help them to individuate the connections among the various activities, to build the common knowledge” (Selleri, 2016, p. 78). Nothing should be lost during the educational pathway.

The tools used were a voice-recorder, to record pupils’ dialogues and to analyze the teacher’s interventions/mediations.

It is fundamental to carry out intensive training to observation: “Observation [...] is different from simple watching because it is an intentional, aimed and active gaze, [...] aimed to focus what the observer considers more relevant and meaningful” (Castoldi, 2012, p. 69).

At the end, it is essential that all participants evaluate the whole experience, so that geographical and relational competences as well as ideas on the world become the heritage of the class.

The proposal followed three lessons.

First lesson

It was proposed to each group of pupils to create a country with specific characteristics (urban system, cultural and economic elements, resources). Some indications were given to each group by the teacher: indications about some physical elements of their future country (i.e. percentage of mountains, waterways and rivers in pie charts), basic urban organization, food and resources. Other elements were chosen by each group: currency, traditions, transports, flag, country name (for example one group created this name from the initial letters of the name of each member), the location of towns and road infrastructures, typical features of cuisine and cultural traditions, the form of government. In this way each group created its own country (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Pupils at work to create their own country.
Photo: E. Gamberoni and C. Zenere.

Then, each group presented its country to the other groups. After each presentation they built the entire territory composed of all their countries around a lake, thus forming a large regional area (Figure 3). This would have been the scenario for the second activity.

Second lesson

In the first part of the second lesson the teacher presented an element of destabilization: fish in the lake were beginning to disappear due to the overfishing carried out by another country. At first, each group discussed the geographical, political and environmental questions, the consequences related to the resource availability in each single country, the money needed to buy fish from outside, the possible modification of the eating habits, the ecological aspects (imbalance of the food chain of the life of the lake, loss of some fish species and excessive development of others).



Figure 3. The regional area created by pupils localizing the individual five countries around the lake. Photo: E. Gamberoni and C. Zenere.

Afterwards, pupils had to find solutions. They discussed which solutions could be more interesting for the environment and for the local population. Some different behaviors emerged. One group chose “to fight” against the country that caused the imbalance and kidnap the president. A “peace keeping” action was the second reaction: one country thought about the possibility of exchanging agricultural products with the fish resources of the problem-causing country. This solution was elaborated by comparing the different statistical data regarding the availability of agricultural products (pupil: “Since you have only 8% of crops and we have a lot of it, we can sign an agreement for an equal exchange of crops and fish. We can find together the rules”).

The third behavior adopted was “neutrality” (as the pupils called this approach), that is, to close the boundaries and choose a life based on self-sustainability. However, this solution was felt to be problematic and they discussed at length as to what kind of future is possible to imagine with this resolution. For example, some pupils noticed that this solution did not contribute to solving the initial problem: if a war had broken out, there would have been consequences in the lake that would have affected all of them too.

Overall, the common conclusion reached by the children was that only by acting in person

and in unison, starting from everyone’s little experience, could the problems be solved.

At the end, they shared the following solution: “For a period we fish from the lake and for another period we let the fish grow and, in the meanwhile, we eat other food (like meat, vegetables, bread). So, the fish amount can increase and we can start to fish again. And then, for another while, we stop to let fish grow up again. This is good! Moreover, we can find alternative solutions”.

Related to this, a second phase of the second lesson was oriented to a cultural valorization of the original resources of each country, for example how to develop some touristic activities by slogans, advertising on a local and global scale. An excellent analysis was produced on different types of tourism and the advantages or disadvantages of increasing tourism in quantity, quality and on different scales. “Continuous transitions of scale, from the local to the national, from the regional to the global, as well as from the local to the local and from the national to the national and so on, [...] therefore one feels him/herself citizen of a single place, rather than global, European or from a specific country, depending on the relational contexts where one finds” (Banini, 2011, p. 20).

Third lesson

During the third lesson, the children passed from the simulated context to the real world. They analyzed similar geographical situations in different parts of the world. By using Google Earth they looked at Lake Victoria (that is divided among Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania), the Lake Tanganyika (that is shared among Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Zambia); in Italy, Lake Garda (that is divided between the provinces of Verona in the Veneto Region, Brescia in the Lombardy Region and Trento in the Trentino-Alto Adige Region) and Lake Maggiore (that is divided between the Italian regions of Piedmont and Lombardy and the Swiss canton of Ticino).

The pupils thought about the land and water borders and their effects. They studied the different situations of these specific case studies: Lakes Victoria and Tanganyika are affected by

the fishery resource crisis and the Italian lakes are affected by tourist pressure³.

The pupils were particularly interested in what could be addressed as a sort of interest conflict: they discussed the exploitation of natural resources as sources of wealth so that a country loses interest in common politics pursuing only its own profit. As stated by Corna Pellegrini, “the dispute of interests is sometimes increased by the (real or supposed) presence of richness [...] to be exploited and directed to interesting markets [...]. Thus, we have to do with conflicts among human groups having, for different reasons, different cultures and habits” (2004a, p. 152).

At the end, to conclude the entire proposal, a discussion on the whole set of activities was held. In order to not overlook any individual thoughts and any overall reworking of the experience, each pupil also filled in a survey about their own consideration of their single ability in the group, the strategies, listening and comparison skills, interesting geographical ideas and the role of human communities in life contexts.

5. Discussion

Each lesson developed important geographical competences and activated values and relationship skills.

Referring to disciplinary aspects, i.e. spatial competences (Sarno, 2012), in the first lesson children practiced orientation and localization processes, some bases of cartography, like symbols and conventional colors, but overall the possibility to understand the limits of two-dimensional cartographic representation with respect to the complexity of the reality. They developed the ability to manage geographical skills to interpret territories, their organization and their multiple problems. This activity could be also used to check pupils' geographical knowledge, such as the distribution of natural or

anthropic elements, their relationships and consequences or dynamics. Notably, “No less important is geographical knowledge itself as it is a vital component in the education of young people in a globalizing world” (van der Schee, 2014, p. 12). This is intended to make students reflect on what the meaning of the identity of a country is. Moreover, the body language used to compose a traditional dance of the imagined country also created an interdisciplinary link with the movement sciences.

In the second lesson, that is central in the learning process, pupils imagined different worlds in relation to the three solutions identified and proposed. Imagination allowed the identification and elaboration of actionable hypotheses. “The discovery of the world [...] is also an essential experience of every human being” (Corna Pellegrini, 2011, p. 178). They used geographical knowledge linked to specific situations.

The geographical area created by children has become the space for their dialogue and exchange of ideas with their classmates, their different points of view and with the strategic choices. They were put in a condition to dialogue with one other, to identify themselves with the activities they were experiencing, to set out their own solutions or ideas, to understand the views of others and to find a solution: a “collective intersubjectivity” (Ligorio, 2003, p. 74).

Each child feels like a geographical actor in his/her own territory and also in other territories. In addition, students were able to find links between this experience and their everyday life. In particular, the issue of conflicts between peer groups and wider-scale conflicts was addressed. This is in line with the guidelines expressed for “reality tasks” (MIUR, 2017, p. 8).

The passage to the case study in the third lesson made it possible to deal with the knowledge of specific issues. “With their connection to real-world problems and contexts, civic engagement projects present pivotal opportunities for students to learn lasting lessons about the world, themselves, and collaboration” (Trudeau et al., 2018, p. 333). Pupils, with equal enthusiasm, involvement and awareness, analyzed the role of human and physical

³ Since “the development of citizenship skills is, necessarily, ‘localized’” (Gavinelli and Molinari, 2016, p. 230), pupils were also driven in a guided field trip to Lake Garda for didactic purposes.

components and their balances/ imbalances for the environment and the subsistence of communities. This is how the principle of sustainability has been approached and children verified that “there does not exist a universal recipe” (Puttilli, 2011, p. 109), but different possibilities based on the contextualization of phenomena and the concept of diversity analyzed at different scales, as the geography at school can do: “Il faut qu’ils puissent démontrer que leur savoir disciplinaire est un savoir actif et non une accumulation de connaissances inertes” (Graves, 1992, p. 118).

With both globalization and technology, the world seems closer and students have to understand the multiple possibilities of its representation: “We can no longer pretend to ignore that the world is no longer a two-dimensional map, but a sphere, a globe, something topologically irreducible to all our space-time models” (Farinelli, 2011, p. 27). This is why our horizons of meaning are much wider than in the past. We also find in the Italian National Indications the conviction that the centrality of people finds its full meaning in a school able to “include local, national, European and worldwide perspectives” (MIUR, 2012, p. 20; Rome Declaration, 2013).

Keeping together knowledge and skills, typically disciplinary, with ethical values is a fundamental connotation of the “Geographical Thinking” (Brooks et al., 2017) and according to the principles outlined in the International Charter on Geographical Education (IGU, 2016; De Vecchis and Giorda, 2018). This needs to be encouraged, not only in the broader framework of the dynamics characterizing the program of development sustainability 2015-2030, but also in the international – theoretical and educational – perspectives related to the Anthropocene (Puttilli, 2019).

In this sense, it should be emphasized how the activities of the first lesson have allowed an important final reflection elaborated by the whole group: the children stressed that they transferred the various features of their everyday life – such as their way of dressing or their work – into their creation of the country and they underlined the intensity with which everyone is

influenced by their own culture, fashion and the place where they live.

The second lesson allowed the students to consider the meaning of the common good, the current theme of geographic relevance (Celata and Gemmiti, 2016) represented by the activity related to the fishing resource.

Pupils discussed which elements have to belong to everyone and which have “to be safeguarded by removing them from the destructive logic of the short term, projecting their protection to the more distant world inhabited by the future generations” (Rodotà, 2012). One pupil’s consideration (“How did we get to this point in human history?”) allowed the group to discuss the relevance of the territory in relation to the intensity of exploitation, the exhaustibility of resources, the right of communities to use resources without degrading and/or exhausting them, but, on the contrary, “to take care” (Dematteis, 2011, p. 26) of them, with a sympathetic and emotional approach. “The ability to present the ‘vital relationships’ between human activities and the resources of the Earth is the qualitative core of geographical teaching, which is achieved through continuous, problematized relationship, between one’s own life experience and the understanding suggested by methods, concepts, analyses and disciplinary representations” (Giorda, 2011, p. 45).

To further deepen these aspects, the third lesson made it possible to address the issue of conflict “open or latent, for the possession or control of a territory” (Corna Pellegrini, 2004a, p. 151) and of one or more resources, with the geopolitical, environmental and life consequences of the populations, putting “in discussion traditional cultural and related management models of human societies” (Gamberoni, 2001, p. 102).

In this sense Geography allows us to develop hypotheses of life between local and global. It “involves many elements necessary to understand the mentality of people other than own’s” (Corna Pellegrini, 2002, p. 154). Considering that “geography is the study of the organization of territories, it is inevitable to state that this discipline, with its method, becomes an opportunity to reflect also on the values that have guided and guide the behaviors of people,

as well as to produce new perspectives” (Gamberoni, 2001, p. 95).

The trajectory is the correlation between present and future, that “assumes non-linear forms, curling up in unexpected loops and folds, until vanishing to the horizon because of a changed perception of human time and a new way of living the time that is spreading among us” (Dusi, 2019, pp. 40-41; Zavalloni, 2012) and which inevitably recalls to educational responsibility.

Other common aspects crossed the three lessons: the constant attention to the possibility of speaking, also thanks to specific aids such as the “speaking mouth” (Figure 4); the care for the communicative exchanges useful for the construction of knowledge aimed at decision-making, in the context of the cooperative approach; the elaboration of critical thought (Malatesta and Squarcina, 2011), managed with appropriate decision-making processes; the abilities of interaction, the mediation and choice of values aimed at a culture of peace (Wenden, 2004).

The overall assessment of the activities also considers some critical issues, reported by the teachers themselves and mainly related to time. The project, from planning to realization, requires a reasonable amount of time, especially in relation to two aspects: the possibility to carefully investigate and evaluate all the ideas and considerations raised by the children; the difficulty of managing the different times of the pupils with respect to the different conceptual passages and disciplinary knowledge (for example population density, the relationship between resources and wealth/poverty contextualized and localized). In general teachers often complain about the lack of time available and the difficulty of managing it on their own if they want to pursue very concrete and innovative paths. In this sense, for example, the Geocapabilities Project⁴ could encourage teachers to make use of innovative strategies in order to think the world geographically (Lambert et al., 2015).

⁴ See: www.geocapabilities.org. Another very interesting European experience is the VOICES network (Malatesta and Granados Sanchez, 2013).



Figure 4. The “speaking mouth” used by students during discussions. Photo: E. Gamberoni and C. Zenere.

6. Conclusions

The idea was to bring a CISV activity (based on games, simulations, reflection on one’s own ideas/emotions/values/choices/actions) in an educational context in and for geography and to structure it in order to encourage the learning of skills in the variety of possible geographical scales. It is an attempt at overcoming – or at least integrating – the still too marked sequential and mnemonic study approach proposed by several textbooks, in favor of a more engaging approach.

The participation shown by children, the interest in the issues addressed, the seriousness and depth of their discussions, and the willingness to get involved, led to a greater capacity to reflect on geographical relations between different territories and to a significant increase in the capacity to relate to each other by learning to dialogue.

A geographical learning by doing is fully coherent and effective to allow pupils to move – in the mental, emotional-affective, physical way – in the world. The approach to themes and problems is crucial not only because it allows pupils to question themselves in the present, to experience participation and responsibility for choices/actions, but also in the long term, to never forget that we can ask ourselves future

questions and have the confidence to find answers, with the awareness of the different outcomes of the choices themselves.

With this type of activity, the pupils feel themselves at the center of the didactic action, and develop the skills to observe, describe and critically understand the reality; it is certain that this capability is a necessary condition to develop “attitudes of curiosity and ways of looking at the world” (MIUR, 2012, p. 67).

In this sense, school can be the place of awareness and change (Keating, 2016; Chang and Kidman, 2020). One effective way is to try more and more to propose concrete and real activities and experiences that increase children’s awareness and put them in a position of being able to know other realities and reflect on their everyday life and on the world around them (Bednarz et al., 2013)⁵.

Compared to the CISV proposals, which were born after the Second World War as social and recreational opportunities for young people to understand the world with a lasting peace, school is the privileged place to test different ideas and visions, to reflect on stereotypes and prejudices – often resulting from missing or simplified knowledge – as well as to understand the multiple consequences that each action or choice entails, in an individual and collective responsibility: “In my opinion we must start from ourselves in our own small way so that in the future there will be no more war because we are the future!”: this is the convinced statement of a pupil, becoming a shared heritage by the class group as a witness of conscious citizenship.

⁵ Facing contemporary local and global challenges and to unfortunately still very different positions of geographical education in the school curricula, the international geographical education debate on theories, values, didactics, together with cultural and political actions, must be firmly carried forward, as discussed in the session *Teaching Europe and for Europe. Strategies for a geographical education in critical times* (Convenors Dino Gavinelli and Matteo Puttilli) at the EUGEO Congress 2019, where part of this work was presented.

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