



IS THERE A CHANCE DIALOGUE WILL WORK?

"The future of mankind depends on the success of dialogue."

Martin Buber

Martin Buber's statement should make us ask this question: What does it take to achieve successful dialogue? In the search for an answer we may have to contemplate the value of peace education efforts.

Whenever school classes visit the First Austrian Peace Museum, I beg the accompanying teachers to spare enough time for a final round of discussion. These discussions are particularly helpful because they provide insights and widen my horizon. There are school children who instantaneously respond to a given topic, are firm with their opinions, and are even courageous enough to voice contrary opinions; others are completely reluctant to engage in dialogue.

In one of my "Peace Leaflets" I stress how deplorable it is that children usually do not have the satisfying experience that comes from knowing that their own opinion counts and that they are expected to state their position.

What are some practical steps that could be taken to change this? In order to encourage dialogue, the traditional classroom frontal seating arrangements could be replaced by a circular one, including the teacher an equal partner. Discussion topics could spring from my Peace Leaflets, for instance, or other sources as well.

Dialogue has to be encouraged. Here are some examples conducive to further discussion:

That is my opinion too!
I have judged this problem differently!
Who gave you this idea?
I still have to think about your remarks!
What do you think about it?
How will the other pupils react to your objection?
Are there more valid arguments?"

The above method of teaching is based on the following ideas: animate - provoke - listen - make a point - discuss the validity of arguments. From my own experience I know how difficult it is for a teacher to try something new, while other teachers keep doing the same old things.