

## THE UNEQUAL RESOURCES COMPETITION

*Iniquity, injustice, inequality: disvalues to be taught as such, or concrete problems, linked to the finite nature of resources and to contingencies, to be experienced first and foremost on a personal level in order to learn to recognise and deal with them in the context of collective history?*

We wanted to inaugurate this column with the proposal of a real classroom institution that guarantees a precise and regular space and time in which to welcome and manage together issues that the group must self-determine. It is a question of institutionalising, during school time, a message of openness and collaboration in the face of what arises, even unexpectedly, from the concrete unfolding of classroom life, understood not only within the confines of the class itself, because each class group (students and teachers) is part of larger collectivities and is a crucible fuelled by multiple personal connections with the rest of society. But this does not mean for teachers to devote themselves to total improvisation. Proposals on which to think and rule together can also come from the teachers themselves, from current teaching activity, or arise from experiments, workshops and other initiatives that the teachers have planned and that indirectly help the group to focus on authentic issues on which they can then dwell. In this article, we propose a type of workshop that particularly stimulates reflection on the problem of the distribution of scarce resources among human beings.

### THE ACTUAL SITUATION

It is a workshop that can easily be applied across the entire verticality of the first and second school cycle: what changes is the degree of abstraction with which the experience can be realised and discussed. Let us first see some concrete examples. The teacher prepares four differently coloured boxes. Inside each box she/he inserts a written task and a supply of materials necessary to realise it. The class is divided into four groups and, by drawing lots, one of the boxes is assigned to each group. Only the teacher knows at the beginning that the boxes contain the same task but a very different quantity and quality of materials. The best product will be rewarded. Let us suppose that, in a secondary school, the task is to translate an identical text from a second language into English but one group is assigned a monolingual vocabulary, another a SecondLanguage-English dictionary, yet another a tablet connected to the Internet and a final one nothing. Or, in a secondary school, the groups have to make as many baskets in the gymnasium as possible in a given time equal for all, but the members of the first group are given one ball each, the second one every two, the third one every three and the fourth one and that's it. Or again, in a primary school, let's

say the assignment is to design and build a construction with coloured bricks, but the first group is provided with a few and all of the same colour, the other groups are provided with more and more and a greater variety of shapes and colours. It may also be useful for the groups to be placed at different points in the classroom or gymnasium or courtyard where the experience takes place. The teacher leaves it unclear whether the groups can communicate and exchange with each other.

## BUILDING THE CONTEXT

The logic of the workshop is clear: it is always a matter of assigning the same task to all the groups into which the class is divided, but distributing the resources that are needed to achieve it inequitably among them. There will therefore always be one group that receives many more than the others and, at the same time, all available resources will be distributed, so it would be impossible to guarantee all groups the amount possessed by the one with the most. The task will have to be designed according to the types of resources with which the class is to work, which naturally allows the activity to also work in synergy with other learning objectives of the curriculum. Resources may in fact be material or immaterial and be linked to deliverables relevant to any discipline: stationery, ingredients for cooking, tools for physical and sporting activities, instruments for scientific experimentation and observation, for the in-depth analysis and study of certain topics in any subject (books, newspapers, documents, encyclopaedias, related devices), for the realisation of products and artefacts of any kind... but also the abstract resources of any system of signs, such as figurative art (colours, lines...) or music (notes, timbres, harmonies, dynamics...), computer programming and coding, natural languages (letters, sounds, grammatical categories...). The important thing is to construct a practical and real context in which, depending on the group in which they find themselves, some male and female students experience a situation of **privilege, advantage, enjoyment or fruitfulness** in the use of the assigned resources while others experience **deprivation, disadvantage, boredom** or a sense of **powerlessness**. The more the resources and delivery in question succeed in authenticating the feeling of inequality, the more the activity will naturally succeed in creating a real ground for the reflections that are to follow it.

## REFLECT ON THE EXPERIENCE

It is essential to bear in mind that the workshop is not a thesis-based game, in which the teacher ultimately tries to lead the class to some pre-determined truth or message to be discovered. Of course, with older boys and girls it is possible to frame the workshop as an

overt simulation. Or it may happen that during the workshop itself someone, realising the iniquity between the groups, denounces the rules of procedure, their injustice, etc. But this is precisely part of the type of experience we prompt the class to have, including the possible choice on the part of the teacher to accept an early termination. The important thing in any case is that, after the practical work and leaving the floor to each student/pupil so as to start from their own observations, the group as a whole tries to discuss issues of the following kind:

- *How many would have wanted to change groups?*
- *In the groups with the greatest shortage of materials, did particularly creative solutions emerge to realise the task assigned?*
- *In the most enviable groups, given the limitations of space or resources available, how many at most could have fit?*
- *Did proposals for redistribution, peaceful or violent, emerge during the experience?*
- *In any case, what redistribution criteria, if they could be discussed peacefully between the groups, would be most conducive to enabling the entire class to perform the assigned task?*

On this last question, in order for a wide range of possibilities to emerge, it will also be up to the teacher her/himself to add proposals and push for reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of each of them. Here are some of those that we feel it is essential to put forward:

*Is it up to each group to decide whether and how many resources to donate to others?*

*Can or cannot rules be changed? Does everyone get what fate or supposed merit has bestowed?*

*What would you think about pooling all your resources and share them from scratch?*

*How would it work if you decided to rotate individual presence in the various groups?*

*How could you regulate the number of possible movements or exchanges of resources?*

*What if you cancel the division into groups and introduce total freedom to move and use them?*

*What if you maintain the division into groups but introduce minimum standards of fairness that apply across the board to all?*