

Case archive III

Pedagogy of the League of Nations in the Weimar Republic

How I dealt with the League of Nations with 14-year-old girls from an elementary school (8th grade) in Berlin.

by Konrad Götz

The reason why I published the following lines was given by the Minister's question aiming at how his given guidelines were put into practice. How did we deal with the topic finally?

Quelle: Götz, Konrad. 1928. Wie ich mit 14jährigen Berliner Volksschulmädchen (8. Schuljahr) den Völkerbund behandelt habe! In: Pädagogische Warte, 35. Jg., S. 609 f.

At first, the girls were asked to bring material from the World War I as well as from the post-war era to class. This extensive collection, which I added, was arranged by the following self-chosen aspects:

I. **World War I:** 1. Pictures: photographs, illustrations, and drafts. 2. Lively descriptions: a) from the battlefield: letters, books, excerpts from diaries. b) From the home front: newspapers. (One child presented *Mom's letters to father!*) – lists of casualties.

II. **Post-War Era:** articles from newspapers and pictures of 1. Impact of the war: devastated cultural places, human losses of the war (deaths, seriously injured people, and mental illnesses). Loss of manpower and of culture, poverty, rising prices, inflation, need, illness, suicide, mortality rate. 2. Inventions for wars in the future: mustard gas, thermobaric weapons. We worked with the material by the methods of „activity school movement“ (Arbeitsschulform) (reading at home and in-class presentation, groups of girls made statistics at home, and so on and so forth) and the material led the children to the sub-headlines independently:

- a) War has a detrimental impact on the economy.
- b) War has a detrimental impact on morality.

In all, the girls agreed on the following summarized headline:

A. The war is the most devastating event in people's life!

Now, I told the children that noble and high-ranked personalities of warring as well as of neutral nations deal with these above-mentioned fundamental ideas, too. The girls concluded that these men wanted to avoid a war in the future, that they have to meet regularly in order to establish cooperation, and that they need to find a place where everybody can easily travel to (Genf). Further on, the girls concluded that these men were backed by millions of like-minded people, that each of these men was a representative for his nation and therefore their association can be called League of Nations.

Hence, the girls agreed on the following summarized headline:

B. Foundation and name of the League of Nations.

In the course of the lessons, the children were asked to form an opinion on the following question: "How

could wars be avoided?" The girls talked about their experiences that it was not allowed to carry sticks during demonstrations. As a result, they concluded that the nations must not have any weapons.

Ergo 1. Disarmament.

The children saw a risk that after successful disarmament of a nation this nation might tackle another nation, which is now as strong as the first-mentioned nation. According to their own experiences, they concluded: 2. All against one! The knowledge of the arbiter's task in judicial disagreements helped them to conclude:

3. The League of Nations is the arbiter for all serious nations' disagreements.

In all, the girls agreed on the following summarized headline:

C. The tasks of the League of Nations.

According to the former aspect, the children were asked to collect material as follows: newspaper articles about disarmament conferences, matters of concern for the arbiter of the League of Nations, signs of mutual respect and trust (e.g. mutual visits at sport events and the behavior of the audience, inter-continental flights and the behavior of the public, international meetings, and journeys of scientists, artists, and industrialists).

Newspaper article about major cultural achievements (e.g. explorations, inventions, residential construction, residential culture), moreover, about ideal ways of life of other nations, about film, radio and its value for international coherence, and in particular, about the extraordinary importance of the League of Nations for us, a disarmed nation. The material was processed by methods of activity schools and led the children independently to their conclusion as follows:

- 1. The risk to face a war is turned down significantly.
- 2. The lowered risk to face a war improved culture and
- 3. reinforced mutual trust.

In all, the girls agreed on the following summarized headline:

D. The beneficial impact of the League of Nations.

In sum, the pupils stated that the League of Nations can only serve to handle general areas, that each nation had to solve its particular problems, which re-



sult of its specific relations; for instance, questions concerning the employment rate, nutrition, housing conditions, health, and traffic. The children concluded: Each and everyone must feel personally responsible for his fatherland's welfare. Moreover, he must love it. However, especially because of his own involvement

with his fatherland he has to understand the other nations, as well; he has to owe respect to them. The girls voluntarily acquired the word of the Swiss poet Gottfried Keller: "Achte jedes Mannes Vaterland, aber das deinige liebe!" ("Respect everyman's fatherland, but love yours!")