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ORIENTATION TO PEACE AND WAR IN THE READING BOOKS OF CROATIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

PROBLEM

In the region of the former Yugoslavia we have had the last years at war. We hope that is now finished. However, we need to find answers to the many questions about the causes of this war and how we can prevent the next one. Like any social phenomena war has a number of causes and it is very hard to say what the primary cause is. We are pedagogues and we can say that the politicians are guilty of this war. Croatian politicians know that Serbian politicians are guilty of causing this war. Serbian politicians know that world politicians are guilty of this war. This is not the best way of putting an end to war. Perhaps a better way is that we try to recognise our own role in this war and that this role is to prevent the next war. In this case we are not concerned with the question of who is guilty: we try to find possibilities for a way of life that gives peace in the future and what we pedagogues can do now.

Hypothesis

Most of us (pedagogues, teachers and educators) suppose that we taught students before this war for brotherhood and unity, for togetherness and that all people are equal regardless of nationality, religion or colour of skin. If you ask one among us, he or she will say: "Yes, that's what we did." This is our first hypothesis. We would like to research if we really did this and, if so, why is it possible we had such a harsh war with so much nationalistic animosity, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Our second hypothesis is based on the belief that we too have all been for peace and that we taught students for peace and against war. If it is the truth we need an explanation, which is very important for pedagogy. What influences were there that this education was so unsuccessful?

The third hypothesis is that we, after all this expensive schooling, have learned something and that we try alternatives in favour of peace and against war.

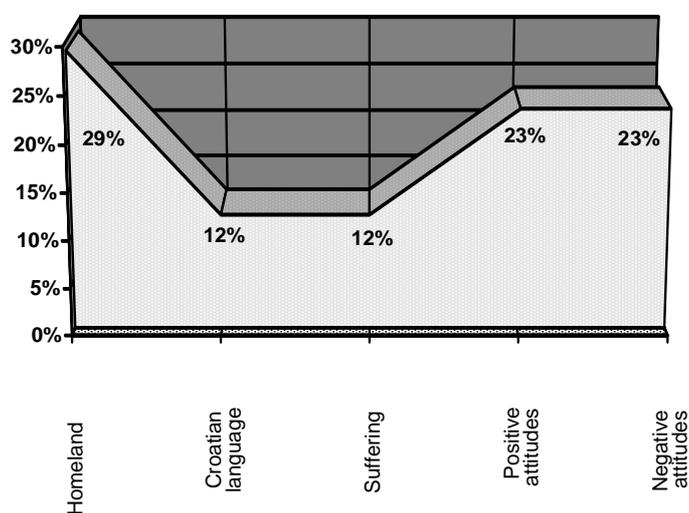
METHODOLOGY

For this research we will analyse the reading books used in primary schools both before and after the war because all these books have been changed. We will find a number of texts which speak about nations. We will cite characteristic texts which write about this. We will find a number of texts with positive and negative attitudes about war. The results will be shown in a graphic form.

RESULTS

In the old reading books we have found that about 6% of texts were about one's homeland and its relationship to other nations. We can read about the characteristics of our people: modesty, love of peace, odium for war, love for all people and nations, cheerfulness and love of freedom and patriotism. Some texts show a positive relationship to other nations. For example in the text, "The heart of my people", we read : "We are bringing love, not only for every Croat and for our nearest and furthest Slavenian brothers, but also for all men regardless of language, religion, profession, social status and regardless of colour of skin." (6th. class - page 12). In a war story a partisan, who is Italian, is in the house of a man whose brother was killed by the Italian fascists. He is afraid of the reaction of this man when he learns he is Italian. But the host said : "Eat, friend, they were not Italians they were fascists. You are Italian, you are our friend." The Author comments: "They were words high like a mountain." (8th. class, page 123).

We think that the crucial point in the approach to such national phenomena is to be unable to express in general to the nation what individuals, groups or the large part of that nation are doing. To our regret we had a number of texts which speak about other nations in this way. Concerning Hungarians we can read: "Arpad, you are the wind which devastates..... Your fury demolishes..... You are like a wild animal come to murder." (6th. class, page 68). There were some texts about the violence and tyranny of the Turks and that man cannot be happy in foreign countries.



Picture 1: Texts about national relationships in old reading books

From these results we can conclude that we cannot verify our first hypothesis or that before the war we taught only for the brotherhood and unity with other nations. We did do some of it but at the same time we learned that our people only have good characteristics and that we can expect evil only from foreigners. Here are some interesting results on the nationalistic attitudes of students in our primary and secondary schools before the war. We had 10% of students who had nationalistic prejudices towards other nations and 32% who believed that it was not possible to have trust in the majority of other peoples. It was the result of this education and its supposition towards war that was the problem.

What about the attitudes towards the war? In our reading books before the war we had many texts on war - 17%. Most of them are texts which speak positively about war - 73%! In the first four classes we had a lot of texts in which war is described as a celebration in which it is honourable to be involved:

"The war is, my brothers, the war for heroes,
Take the gun, point the sabre,
Saddle the horse, let go the infantry.
Let that be where our fame is
The greatest happiness is to be killed in war:
Be happy, sad mother,
Your worthy sons have fallen
Like heroes, like Croats,
They have shed blood for their homeland."
(4th. class, page 90).

In the third class we had a detailed description about the sabotage at the post office in Zagreb (pages 245 - 246), like idealistic men who tried to resolve conflicts in a violent way. In more advanced class books, the blood flows like water:

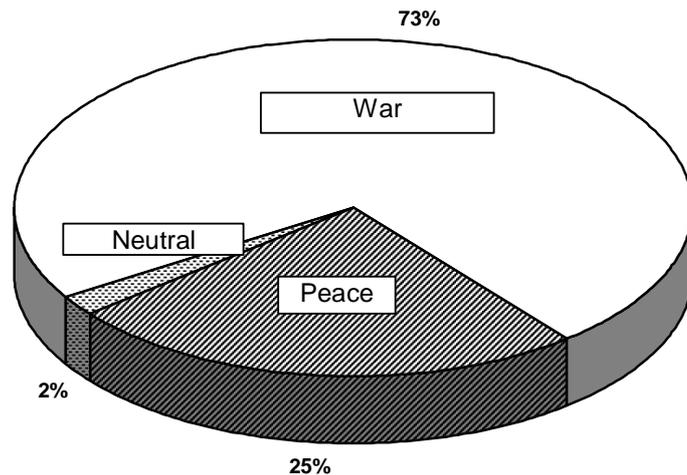
"The blood flows like water, like a road, like a water-mill it clatters, it flows, we go after it, after the sound of our blood. Someone in the moonlight flourishes a bloody sheet."
(8th. class, page 82).

The most important thing is to be unfeeling towards pain and to be ready to die in the torment:

"Through the meadow dark blood flows:
They neither utter a word or gnash their teeth;
The meadow is full of bodies:
They neither utter a word or gnash their teeth;
And easily take leave of the sun
Prisoners accustomed to dying."
(8th. class, page 92).

Warring and heroism are more important than work and family life. There are a lot of detailed descriptions of the struggles from which children can learn the technology of killing and the tactics of warfare. Why are all these texts in reading books? Why must children read about these horrors, this suffering and violence? The answer can be found in the reading books too:

The first big war is finished,
And the last finished too,
It is the beginning of future time.
All the malice and the nails with roses
And giggling together
We have put in our reading books
So that everyone knows that for us
Not only roses flower."
(8th. class, page 162).



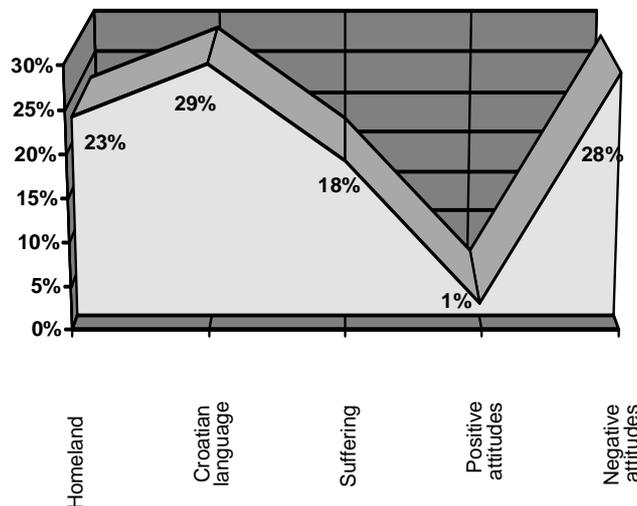
Picture 2: Texts about war and peace in old reading books

We had 25 % of all texts against war and for peace. For example: we had "A song for all children of the world" whose words and melody "silence the cannons, stop the finger on the trigger of the machine-gun". But, as the author says, this song is not yet written. In another poem a poet says: "I am standing for joy..... I don't hate and I don't go warring.... I am living and loving." However, in comparison with such great general glorification of war all these beautiful words leave us feeling too weak and helpless. In some texts we can read about the horrors of war and believe they are really a strong reaction to warfare, but they don't offer anything except condemnation

and revenge. The touching poem about fascist crime finishes with the verse: "Saint Freedom and revenge I am feeling." (8th. class, page 127).

This means that we cannot verify our second hypothesis that we have taught our students for peace and against war. Mostly we have taught our students about war. We haven't data for the other Republics involved in this war, but we can assume that it was similar there. There was a difference in the cultural atmosphere and this influence was accepted differently in the more patriarchal rural regions than in the more emancipated urban areas.

What has changed now after the war? How do we teach our students today about nations and about war? Texts about national phenomena have increased from 6% to 19%. Most of them are texts about the Croatian language and negative relations with other countries. The following are shown in a bad context, Turks, Hungarians, Latinians, Bulgarians, Austrians, Serbs and Montenegrans. All our neighbours.



Picture 3: Texts about national phenomena in new reading books

In one comic about old Croatia we can read what Croatian enemies looked like: "They did not speak but yelped like dogs and barked like wolves. Warrior Croats for a long time repulsed attacks from these dogs and barbarians." (7th. class, page 195). In one text we have detailed descriptions of how the Turks cut off the noses of dead Croats after a battle. After this the authors suggest to the pupils that they try to learn something more about the cruelties of the Second World War, about the cruelties in the Croatia War and who perpetrated them.

In one poem about young Montenegrans, the authors suggest to students that they check the historic and artistic truths because they took part in a war against Croatia in the last century, and they demolished Konavle too. (The same book, page 226). All these texts suggest to students

that it is nations that do evil and not single people or groups. Another conclusion is that our people never do anything wrong. For example, in one part of the poem "The Pit", in which are described the crimes of Croat fascists in the Second World War, there is the question - Are you reminded of the present crimes against Croatians in this poem?

Now we have fewer texts on the theme of peace and war. They are reduced from 17% to 8%, but most of them speak in favour of war. Already in the second class children learn that a homeland is something they have to defend all the time in different ways, but firstly with the gun.

"On the battlefield a homeland is defended with the gun,
In the country church with belief,
It is defended by work and strong masculine word,
Defended by the book, defended by the pen.
(2nd. class, page 60).

In the third class we suggest to the children that they give their lives for Croatia, and in the fifth class we come with a real war cry:

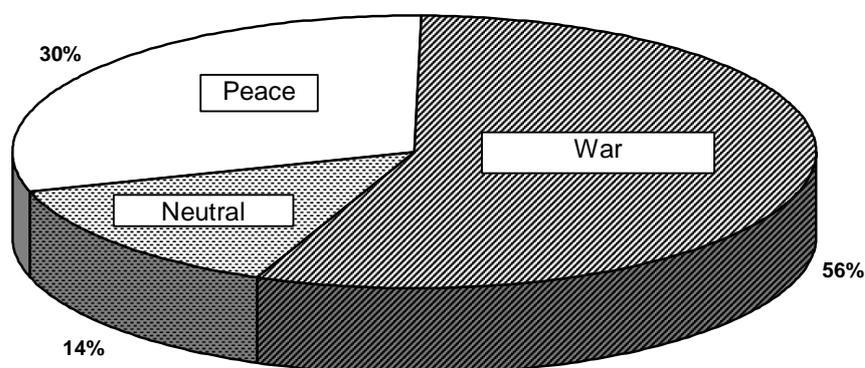
"Take out the eternal Croatian war flags!
To the streets, to the fields, to our rivers, our sea!
Now or never - we all have to crush the devil, that we forever be freed from our nightmares!
(5th. class, page 14).

Here too the blood flows, the heads fall and we glorify heroism:

Brave Croats cut down Turks;
How many days are in the year,
Ban Zrinovic has cut off their heads."
(Same class, page 62).

If someone comes back home from the fight everybody welcomes him with respect and wonder. They celebrate with glass, song and give a toast. (Same class, page 59).

All this is needed because the fight is the "only possible way to freedom which is spilled with blood." Freedom to men and nations does not come as a gift but the powerful alone take it. Is it not confirmed in our present bloody years? (Same class, page 69).



Picture 4: Texts about war and peace in new reading books

In the new reading books there are valuable texts against war and which are for peace (30%). For example:

"For the millions of people on the earth
 Arms are prepared for killing,
 But you wish that everyone hears your voice:
 Peace, my world! Freedom, my world!
 And for everyone on the table bread!
 (6th. class, page 250).

It is very important that we have one text where is described the possibility of non-violent conflict resolution. This is a text about the Croat King Kresimir, who tried in a peaceful way to resolve problems between Croats and Latinas. In our history the Republic of Dubrovnik maintained freedom for many centuries in a non-violent way, but we have no texts about this in our reading books.

We can conclude that our third hypothesis, that we have now learned something different from this war and that we now teach for peace, is not true. We have made some changes but the national phenomenon is even more orientated against other nations. We now have fewer texts glorifying war than before but there are still more of these than those for peace.

DISCUSSION

It would be too pretentious to say that the large number of war texts in our reading books is the cause of the war in Croatia. It is just a sign of the cultural environment and this cannot be changed just by changing the texts in our reading books. Our problem is nationalism, which was smouldering before (see results of the old reading books) and has now grown into a fire. It is a winner because many people, who before believed in multi-cultural and who lived together with other ethnic groups, today have had bitter experiences ; they have lost someone in their own family, they have lost their houses, villages, photos, memories and the belief in people. Nationalism and hate look like salvation.

Another problem is the non-existence of a paradigm of non-violent conflict resolution. All texts (except one), which talk about national conflict, suggest the violent model. Marko Hren from Slovenia thinks that a main reason for the war in the former Yugoslavia is that, in the period after the Second World War, no changes were made to structures and thought processes for non-violent change. (Hren, 1992 page 38). This war didn't resolve any problems in this region. They are bigger than before. That means that we can expect for a long time, if not war, then terrorism.

Nationalism is like alcohol: at the beginning we feel good, we are happy and we think we are the whole world. Later we have a headache and feel shame over what we did. We again become conscious. This time is coming. This is the time for pedagogic action. Pedagogues cannot change the world but they can help if the world wants it.

Our experience of the thesis that talking about war does not prevent war is very important. But, that is not possible either with the celebrations of the peace. The best way is that we gradually affirm non-violent communication on a micro-social level (families, peer-groups, schools, every life). A number of good people from a lot of countries have done a good job in helping us. They have confirmed our qualifications for this job so that today we have a number of teachers who everyday are practising this in their classes. We have some books about non-violent communication, conflict resolution, co-operative games and human rights. The next step is to initiate these steps in the other states of the former Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. We must help, support and connect with people who are ready to do this important work. Project "Peace Bridge" in Mohacs has done a great deal of this type of work in Serbia and occupied Croatian territory. The same has been done by the Peace Centre in Osijek and other peace organisations. Some activities have started in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this is only the beginning.

When we have enough teachers who are ready to teach differently then we can expect changes in the state schools, in our reading books, curricula and so on. It will be a time for peace education, education for multi-cultural, tolerance and human rights. How long do we have to wait for that time to come I don't know, but I am sure that it will come eventually.

CONCLUSION

We have analysed the reading books for elementary schools both before and after the Croatian war. We have found that, before the war, we had the same number of texts that talked both positively and negatively about other nations. We had three times more texts that speak in favour of war and violence as a way of national conflict resolution. After the war, we now have more texts which speak negatively about other nations, especially about our neighbours, but fewer texts that speak in favour of war (this is still twice the number that actively speak against warfare). It could be a bad sign of a terrible future, but it can also be the stimulus for us to try to prevent such. Pedagogues alone cannot change the world, but they are responsible for it too.