

# The Manifesto for Arguing at school

A serendipity case in Erasmus project





<b>Document Title</b>	<b>The Manifesto for Arguing at School. A serendipity case in Erasmus project</b>
Project title:	ARGUING at SCHOOL Psycho-pedagogical Methods to help children (2-18) learn from arguing
Authors:	Text by Elena Passerini - CPP / IT Drawings by Barbara Petracchi Innovative ideas and work by all project partners This is an unplanned Project Result and refers to all four planned results.
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# What is serendipity?

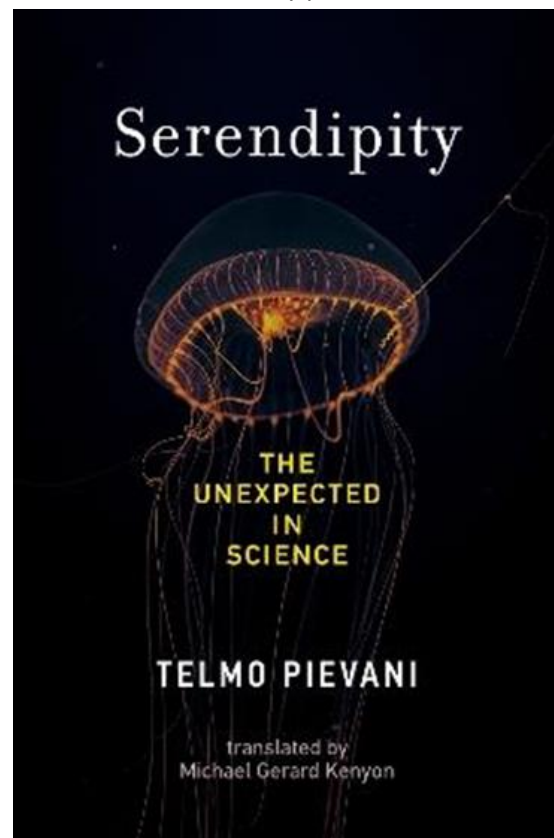
It happens that you feel wonder at the discovery of something unexpected. You were busy doing something, following the intuition or project you had in mind, and suddenly your eye falls on something else, which shines by its difference from your expectations.

What could it be?

It will take a while to figure it out, but *something*, a detail or a whole boulder, for some reason not seen before, astonishes and asks for more attention. It was already there, like a four-leaf clover camouflaged in the grass. Suddenly you see it! It is there and you sense that it is important, it indicates that you didn't know you didn't know.

This emotion, **surprise**, is the typical emotion of learning. Where there is serendipity, there is a lot of learning. A lot is learned in an Erasmus project, but often it is what was already planned and intended. The unexpected learning is present and comes from the intercultural experience inherent in Erasmus. In the [Arguing at School](#) project, carried out for 3 years by 10 partners I coordinated, many people, even outside the consortium, learned a lot, even skills that can be used daily.

A few months before the conclusion, while cross-referencing another international project on quarrels at school, funded by the Canton of Ticino (Switzerland), we found a single English word, *settlement*, where almost everyone, except a few, expected to find [solution](#) instead. This shift in meaning is an *insight*: it changes the perspective of observation of everything else. We gave it a home in the illustrated *Manifesto* in several languages. It is a one-page synthesis of our four project results: PDFs containing videos and multimedia documents, facts and experiences involving many people. In addition to the [Genially map](#) summarising the work, we have illustrated the essentials with comics drawn: the [Manifesto for Arguing at School](#), free downloadable and printable in large format and many languages. Is there a *single* word that particularly stands out to you?



# Manifesto for Arguing at School

**CHILDREN CAN LEARN TO SETTLE THEIR CONFLICTS. THEY ARE SKILLED**

YOU CAN ARGUE WELL, HOLD THE BALL OF YARN AND SPEAK

ARGUING AT SCHOOL TO LEARN HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER

**NO QUARRELS**

GOOD CHILDREN DON'T QUARREL

THIS CARD CAN HELP YOU

IT'S NOT MY FAULT IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

THE COMMON INTEREST IS TO PLAY AND LIVE TOGETHER IN PEACE

BY QUARRELLING, YOU LEARN

IT'S YOUR FAULT!

YOU APOLOGIZE!

A SLAP WHEN IT'S NEEDED, IS NEEDED!

YOU ARE GROWN UP, BUT STRUGGLE MORE THAN THE LITTLE ONES. YOU NEED A NEUTRAL MEDIATOR

MEDIATION CLUB

YOU ARE NOT THE PROBLEM WE ARE IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION

VOLENCE IS NOT ALLOWED

IF YOU WANT PEACE, PREPARE PEACE!

AVOIDING WAR IS THE TASK OF POLITICS

ESTABLISHING PEACE IS THE WORK OF EDUCATION

YOU DESERVE A PUNISHMENT!

YOU HAVE TO WIN FIGHTING YOUR WAY!

MANKIND SHALL RENOUNCE WAR

WAR

EVOLUTION

ARGUING SCHOOL

DESIGNER BY ANGIETA PETRACI - TEXTS BY ELENA FRANCO

ARGUING AT SCHOOL IS A PROJECT OF THE ARGUING SCHOOL NETWORK, A EUROPEAN NETWORK OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROFESSIONALS DEDICATED TO PROMOTING ARGUMENTATION IN SCHOOLS. THE ARGUING SCHOOL NETWORK IS A PROJECT OF THE ARGUING SCHOOL NETWORK, A EUROPEAN NETWORK OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROFESSIONALS DEDICATED TO PROMOTING ARGUMENTATION IN SCHOOLS.

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# Manifesto per Litigare a Scuola



The first vignette refers to the [Litigare Bene method by Daniele Novara](#), director of the Centro Psicopedagogico per l'educazione e la gestione dei conflitti (Psycho-pedagogical Center for Education and Conflict Management), the project leader. The basis of the Erasmus project Arguing at school is the long and positive experience with that method, validated by independent research in 2011.<sup>1</sup> Many teachers and parents use it in Italy, but millions of members of the Italian school community don't know it.

The first project result, [A methodological framework about quarrelling children \(ages 2 to 18\)](#), describes how methods work and the benefits for children's growth and well-being. The whole school community has benefits, visible in this [12-minute video](#) produced by one of the two Croatian partners, Vrbovsko Public School, which began using the method in 2017. The teachers' perspective is summarized in [this video](#) by Alenka Javor.

The Italian partner school, the Casa dei Bambini Montessori *Il Sassolino* in Gavardo (BS), had the opportunity to make a video with a group of former children who 10 years earlier had found Daniele Novara's *Litigare bene* method applied systematically and continuously since 2012, thanks to the more-than-Montessori educational direction. Listen to their viva voce from the links found in [this feature article](#).

The vignette shows very young children being invited to argue methodically, talking to each other one at a time. If a punitive or coercive interference of adults is suspended, contention over a toy is transformed into mutual acknowledgement: they learn to cope on their own in the *Conflict corner*. When the power of childhood rituals diminishes, the importance of the four basic rules for negotiating remains for arguing face-to-face by addressing the problem shared by two disputants, without the help of a third person. After 11 years of age, the 4 steps for arguing well are no longer addressed to adults but directly to young disputants, as illustrated on the following page. More information can be found in this News:

[Croazia](#), [Sassolino](#), [Malta](#).

<sup>1</sup> D. Novara, C. Di Chio, *Litigare con metodo. Gestire i litigi dei bambini a scuola*, Erickson, Trento 2013.  
D. Novara, *Litigare fa bene. Insegnare ai propri figli a gestire i conflitti, per crescerli più sicuri e felici*, BUR Rizzoli, Milano 2013 and [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metodo\\_Litigare\\_Bene](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metodo_Litigare_Bene)



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# 4 steps for litigare bene

by Daniele Novara

**" I don't insult you  
I don't hit you "**



**1 It's not my fault,  
it's not your fault**



**3 I speak you listen,  
I listen you speak**



**2 I don't command,  
you don't command**



**4 Have we  
cleared it up?**

Drawings by ROMINA SCARPANTI



**CPP**

Centro PsicoPedagogico  
per l'educazione e  
la gestione dei conflitti

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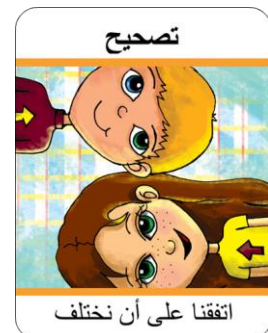
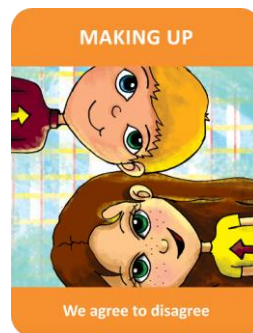
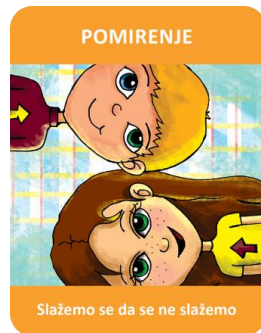
The second vignette shows one of the [Friendship Cards](#), produced by the Maltese partner *Relationships are Forever Foundation* and also used in the neighbouring partner school Maria Regina College, both as a prevention and an intervention tool in case of peer disputes and as a support for emotional and social-relational education.

The tool is extensively described in the first [project result cited](#).

The Cards enable students to become aware of their own emotions. It becomes easier to express and recognise others' emotions with empathy. With the guidance of a trained teacher, the Cards are used to create a journey from the initial situation of difficulty, with emotions at stake, and then to consider the range of possible actions each person can take and their consequences, summarised by a few coloured cards. Then the protagonist and his or her classmates learn to pause and, with the help of the questions printed on the back of the card, and the teacher, reflect together on the predictable effects of different reactions to the difficulty. What emotions will emerge at the end of the paths anticipated by the ["Bad Move"](#) or ["Good Move"](#) cards? The Feeling Cards help answer this question.

Will the disputants be able to make peace? Sometimes yes. They may even agree on the "We agree to disagree" card. The agreement is not there, and the situation is not resolved, but the feelings and points of view at stake have been clarified. The [situation is not one of harmony](#), it is an important step to learn by arguing and communicating with others even in complicated moments.

[Friendship Cards](#) are a Maltese product translated into many languages including Italian, Croatian, Romanian and French. They are aimed at the age group of 6 and up and are part of a larger set that also includes *Journey Cards* aimed at teenagers and others that embrace the entire span of life.

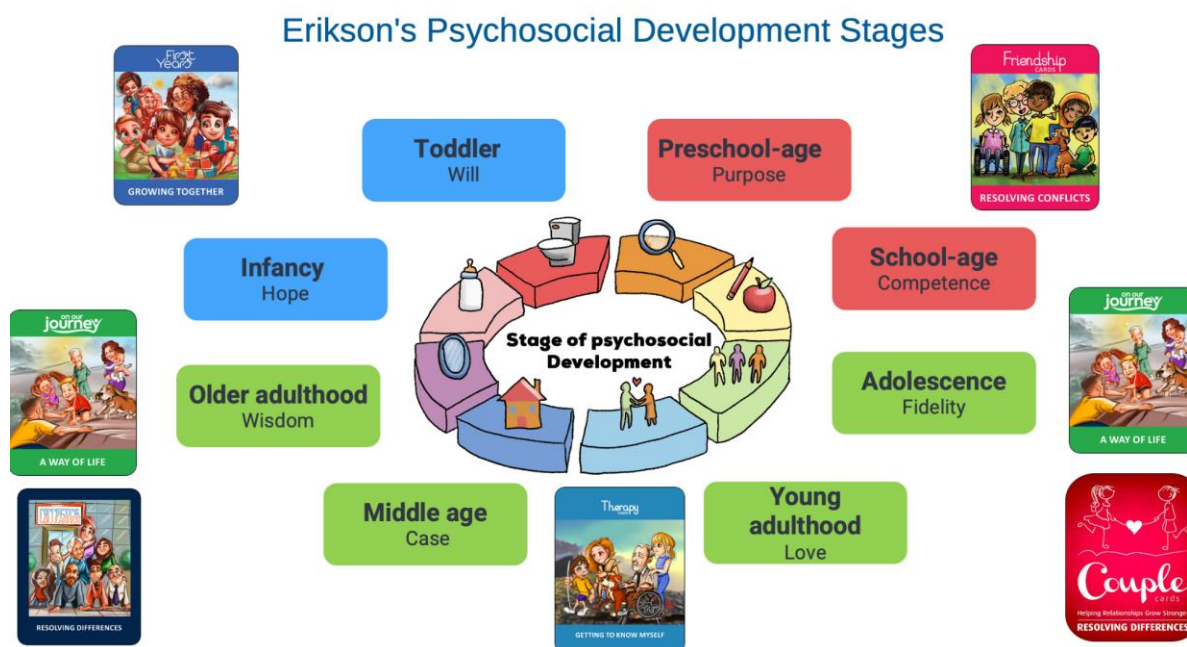




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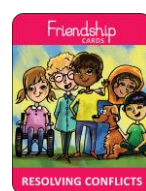
The Friendship Cards is part of a Tool Kit developed by Happy Life, the concept is to provide a spectrum of resources to map the life cycle of a person. The toolkit maps Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Stages:



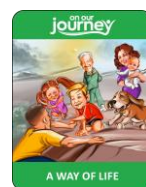
The resources that are relative to this project and may be used in a whole school approach are:



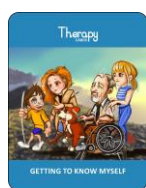
First Years is an innovative education tool to help children (0 to 7 years) develop social and emotional life skills in the first years of their life. Designed to support parents, caregivers and educators in understanding and regulating children's emotions, "First Years" offers a comprehensive approach to nurturing healthy interactions.



Friendship Cards are an innovative education tool where children and families can learn communication life skills while playing a game. Friendship Cards are an interactive tool that can be used with friends at school and families at home. The cards help develop emotional literacy and conflict management skills. (Children 6 to 12 years)



On Our Journey is an accompaniment to live a happy life, helping us to reflect, make healthy choices, validate our values/principles and calibrate our life compass. Experiencing the process of the cards will help individuals in their character formation and build meaningful relationships with themselves. (from 10 years upwards)



Therapy Cards were created to aid in the therapeutic process as a non-directive tool and help both clients and therapists go through a process of thought and reflection while giving more meaning to the experiences they are going through. They can be used at any phase of the therapeutic journey and help create a safe space where clients can explore their feelings. (all ages)





The third vignette shows two grown-up disputants who are in conflict for reasons other than children's bickering; these are no longer odds in games, but challenging situations tinged with complex emotions that are difficult to express. There may need to be more than negotiation. Students learn to seek help from a neutral, age-appropriate mediator who can listen to both parties without taking sides. This is done in a dedicated and regulated time and space. The [Mediation Club](#) is the name that Osijek's Croatian partner *Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights* uses for schools that choose the teacher and student training path, described in the [Map](#). There are also two videos, produced by the school Ivan Goran Kovačić in Vrbovsko, showing how [two girl mediators](#) in a few words clarify the rules and functioning of mediation, look at the screenshots on the next page. They listen to the parties and try to bring out the possibilities and proposals that the disputants managed to work out at that time. They use open questions to reach this goal: e.g. in the photos. In one case an agreement is reached, [in the other, it is not](#).

It is important training to grow up able to face difficulties together with others, not against someone, especially without trying to impose oneself by force or believing that one has no choice but to be subjected to commands.

The methods for arguing at school are different and adapted to the needs of people between 2-18 years old. All of the methods tested by the project partner schools require teachers to make a choice and go through more or less long and in-depth training. The second result of the project is made for them and consists of a [Toolkit with practical guidance, research among teachers](#) and the [Curriculum used in Croatia](#).

Some methods can be adopted because a single teacher chooses them, and decides how to direct his or her behaviour toward boys and girls when they argue<sup>2</sup>.

Peer mediation generally requires commitment and choice on the part of the whole school, which decides to embark on a major journey involving the boys and girls as protagonists, but it works best where the school community as a whole does not stand in the way and understands that conflicts can be managed without violence (which may not be the case as a rule in other adult organisations, as is evident from the daily news). This means adopting a whole-school system approach: the *Whole School Approach*. This shift requires an expanded awareness and commitment to the whole school community and also to the city, from a systems perspective which is the subject of the third result of the project: [Guidelines for a Systems Approach to School Conflicts, which can be found on the site here](#).

<sup>2</sup> There are also tools that allow a trained teacher to get students to work on conflict, such as the CPP's [Conflict Cards](#) that activate numerous possibilities for telling and reading about conflict (ages 16 and up).



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the first everything you say here  
remains between us.



the second I have to be neutral,  
I must not be on anyone side



Next time the teacher accused me of  
cheating on the test.



Do you have any suggestions?  
What can you do?



Do you have any suggestions?  
What can you do?



The Manifesto follows the concise illustration of three methods for *arguing in school* from ages 2 to 18 with this image: it is a crossroads that takes us beyond the level of pedagogy and education.

In 1936 Maria Montessori said, "Avoiding war is the work of politics; establishing peace is the work of education." The facts say that the message has not been understood: politics still thinks of its power as being *based on war* rather than aimed at preventing it. The UN itself *cannot* prevent wars and *simultaneously* maintain the privileges of the victors of 1945, because this is a paradoxical task, logically impossible. The ancient lie, "If you want peace prepare for war," must be exposed by coming out of the swamp of paradox.

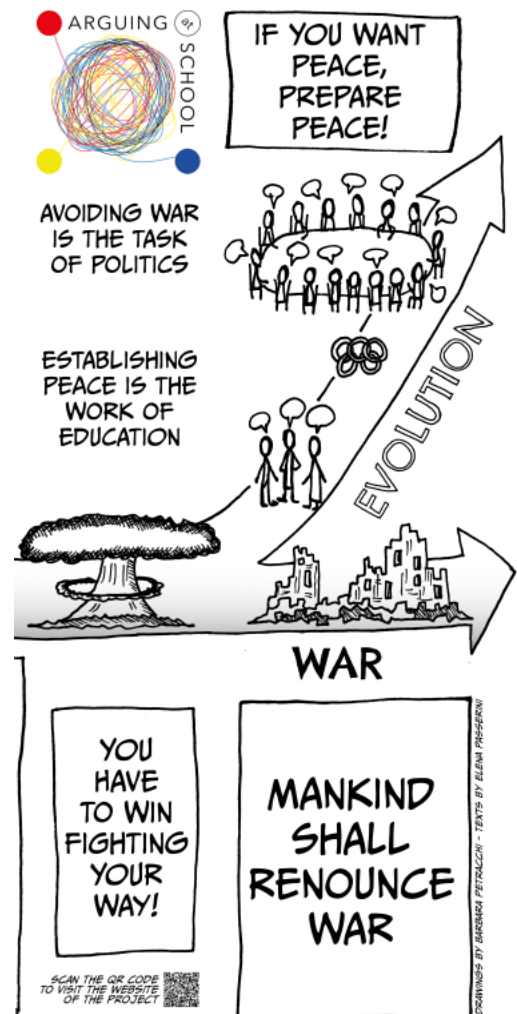
This *task* concerns all mankind, but especially the citizens of countries with a democratic constitution.

After the catastrophic Bikini test of 1954, Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein and other scientists used words similar to those written here under the word "war," from their [Manifesto published on July 8, 1955](#), which posed an inescapable question to governments, the scientific community and all mankind and offered a logical and practicable way out, although "distasteful" to some.

In the meantime, humanity has grown from about 2 billion to 8 billion people. The stark and dreadful question formulated in the Russell Einstein Manifesto is important today- They proposed to *abolish war*. To be able to renounce war one should have already started as a child. It is the boys and girls and then the young people who *can learn to be in conflicts without weapons, without insulting each other* and with the awareness and confidence that *problems are read and addressed together*, creating more evolved ways of living, to build a livable world, inhabited by humanity aware of its uniqueness and unity, capable of sustaining the life of the entire biosphere in ways worthy of human intelligence, scientific knowledge matured by humanity over the centuries and oriented toward life and the future.

It is more difficult for adults to (*know how to*)*stay in conflict*<sup>3</sup> competently because many have undergone an education that was not at all Montessori-oriented, that is, to liberty and peace. Still today, in many countries, they are educated toward war, competition and individualism. Still, there exists in the world an explicit and implicit education to violence and war.

*Violence is a learning*, just like nonviolence. And **war is an institution permitted by politics, not a conflict.**

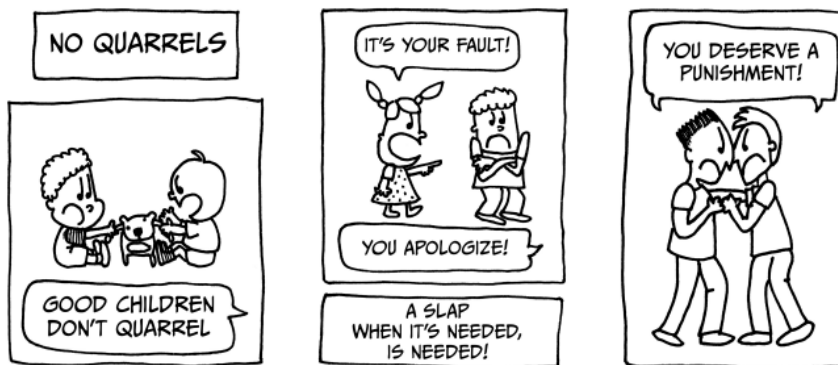


<sup>3</sup> This Italian-language pun (so-stare) was chosen by the CPP as the title of its conference in 1999 and of the annual course of the same name aimed at adults still on the calendar.



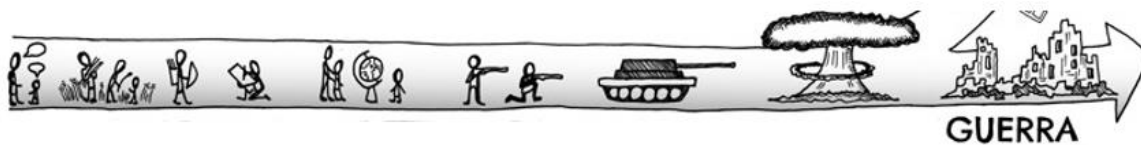
**Conflicts are inevitable**, from childhood, and can be managed and settled competently. Instead, **wars are avoidable**, are the result of choices, made by those with the power to make them, produce benefits for a few and irreparable damage, and can be abolished by shared legislative choices.

The Manifesto outlines some adult beliefs about the experience of arguing and some ways of intervening that hinder the development of children's and students' social skills. The quarrel is a universal social experience, common to all, although everyone experiences it in their way. How do adults react on these occasions? What do they say? What do they do? What are the outcomes of their inertial responses to child quarrels? These vignettes show the deep-rooted beliefs that many adults hold in their heads, more or less consciously.



School pedagogue Tanja Jakovac summarised the evolution of teachers' beliefs before the introduction of Daniele Novara's *Litigare bene* method and after seeing how boys and girls can use the *Conflict corner*. Find the table in the aforementioned [Toolkit for Teachers](#) and the [interactive map](#) that allows you to navigate through the most significant videos and pages produced by the consortium. The school pedagogist certifies that boys and girls, if they find in school an educational *setting*, suited to their developmental needs, become masters, make visible not only their skills and competencies being acquired but also show precisely the human potential, which often finds itself blocked by the deep-seated prejudices and school inertia that slow down organizational and pedagogical innovations.

The *Arguing at School* consortium wrote these [Policy recommendations](#) that summarize our main demands to decision-makers who choose priorities for public spending and public education's organisation. The central strip of the Manifesto evokes a few moments in human evolution, starting with language, which is also the endpoint.





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# And where is the serendipity?

The Manifesto and its illustration, enriched by links to the produced files and included videos, reflect the project results planned as far back as 2021.

In the meantime, a crossover with the project funded by Canton Ticino (Switzerland) has occurred: the new edition of the interactive exhibition *Conflicts, quarrels ... and other hassles (Conflitti, litigi ... e altre rotture)*. The topic is the same, but instead of comparing and experimenting with methods to make them more transferable and known, here it is an original tool designed by Daniele Novara and the CPP staff, touring Italy and used in Ticino schools since 2000, thanks to the work of teachers who propose it to students aged 12-14.



The new edition, dated November 20th, 2024, contains many characters drawn by Silvio Boselli, including this old wise man, easily recognizable by all.

A concluding panel shows exactly a few lines of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto, selected to be accessible for students aged 11 to 14 and useful to conclude their interactive journey that began with the question, "Is it conflict or is it violence?" referring to 5 photographs, continued with many other questions and activities about conflict (not war). The full sentence is:

*Here, then, is the problem which we present to you, stark and dreadful, and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race: or shall mankind renounce war? People will not face this alternative because it is so difficult to abolish war.*

The topic here is no longer quarrels, but war. Here is a fragment of the panel:





## Manifesto Russell-Einstein Ricordate la vostra umanità

Reso noto il 9 luglio 1955 e firmato da:

M.Born, P.W.Bridgman, Albert Einstein, L.Infeld, F.Joliot-Curie  
H.J. Muller, L.Pauling, C.F. Powell, J.Rotblat, Bertrand Russell, H.Yukawa

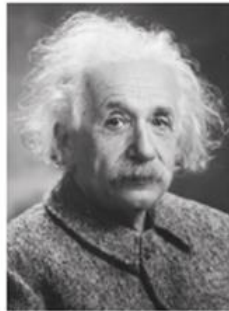
“ We have to learn to think in a new way.  
...shall mankind renounce war?

**The abolition of war** will demand distasteful limitations of national sovereignty. There lies before us, if we choose, continual progress in happiness, knowledge, and wisdom. ...we urge the governments of the world to realize, and to acknowledge publicly, that their purpose cannot be furthered by a world war, and we urge them, consequently, **to find peaceful means for the settlement of all matters of dispute** between them.



Dobbiamo imparare a pensare in un modo nuovo, in una nuova direzione.  
...l'umanità deve rinunciare alla guerra?

**L'abolizione della guerra** richiederà spiacevoli limitazioni della sovranità nazionale. Se lo scegliamo, c'è davanti a noi un continuo progresso in felicità, conoscenza e saggezza. Noi sproniamo i governi del mondo a prendere atto della realtà, e a riconoscere pubblicamente, che il loro scopo non può essere perseguito per mezzo di una guerra mondiale e di conseguenza li esortiamo con urgenza a **trovare mezzi pacifici per sistemare, comporre e regolare tutte le questioni controverse** tra loro.



To study how the word *solution* is used in the [Manifesto in English](#) is important. Where many would expect *the solution* of matters of dispute between states, or their governments, there is instead *settlement*. "...find peaceful means for the settlement of all matters of dispute between them."

This choice, weighed by a working group of the highest possible authority, was written in the *Resolution* proposed by the scientists assembled by Bertrand Russell to give governments a strong, clear message based on hard science, not personal beliefs and aspirations.

*SETTLEMENT* they wrote, not *solution* as one might expect and as it is usually translated into Italian. We are all too accustomed to believing that conflicts *must* have a solution, dissolve and disappear like salt in water, since they are as unpleasant as limitations on national sovereignty, *distasteful* to those who enjoy privileges from them, starting with permission to commit actions considered crimes in peacetime (and in wartime, too).

The widespread but in truth rather imaginary and utopian idea that *all problems can and should have "a solution"*, is a baseless *claim*. Many problems took several centuries or millennia to be "solved," at least temporarily, and just as many, and conflicts, remain unsolvable because the "perfect solution" does not exist.

States and public opinions are accustomed to considering two categories of conflicts: those that can be solved by words, diplomacy, etc., and those that are not soluble, but exist "because" those



“enemies” who pose them, would be “solved” by eliminating “the enemies.” So here is justification for war retaliation, “preventive” wars, which in addition to killing “enemies” and multitudes of children and civilians, destroy International Humanitarian Law and reaffirm *the logic of blame and punishment*, of permission to do evil as “retribution” for evil. The same mindset that children absorb like sponges when they are poorly educated, in a violent and anti-pedagogical environment that impedes quarrels stopping them from learning to live together competently, that is, without violence.

Here, then, is the first sentence of our *Manifesto for Arguing at School*: it contains the keyword indicated by Russell: *to settle*.

It is perfect for our methods, which are all basically educational *settings*.

CHILDREN CAN LEARN  
TO SETTLE THEIR  
CONFLICTS.  
THEY ARE SKILLED

LE BAMBINE E I  
BAMBINI POSSONO  
IMPARARE A  
SISTEMARE I PROPRI  
CONFLITTI CON  
COMPETENZA

For more than three years, we have been discussing how to “solve conflicts,” or how to manage or handle them, how to organize them and what roles to assign to adult educators and student quarrellers, what tools to prepare, how to transfer the methods, and how to raise awareness among the entire community involved in this pedagogical innovation. We emphasised that the “solution” of quarrels between children should not be imposed by adults, not only in Daniele Novara's *Litigare bene* method, which is lapidary on this point but also in all the other methods considered. Sometimes the disputants themselves, talking to each other, in one of the age-appropriate educational *settings* we have considered, find agreements. Sometimes clarifying the situation is ok. This agreement should be accepted and not judged by adults. And if “a solution” is not found by the disputants, that's okay too, the important thing is that they talk to each other, respect the prohibition against violence, and that the adults work on their own beliefs, on the hot spots related to their educational autobiography.

Even in the [Good Conflict Manifesto](#) published by the CPP in 2014, point 4 had the theme of solution.

It is necessary to take time in the conflict to listen, observe, and understand what is happening from different points of view, without excluding anyone.

**Learn how to stay into the contrariness.**  
It's better than looking for an immediate solution. Conflict is just the point of an iceberg hiding information, needs, emotions that you could learn how to recognize and respect.

The new idea is to finalize these peaceful means to a *settlement*, to an arrangement or regulation that is provisional but capable of organising people in ways that are clear to all and protect everyone's dignity, without excluding anyone. We inherit from the hard sciences an enlightening word that refers not so much to the outcome, a “pacification” hoped for or achieved *in the* sometimes possible *future*, but attention *to the concrete modes of operation and organisation of the present*. What always exists is the concreteness of the responses to the conflict and the outcomes of the different possible ways of managing the conflict: they can be settlements oriented first and foremost to the health of all or, on the contrary, to the domination of adults over children and winners over losers.



A choice between these two possibilities is required. *Settlements* are also the arrangements made to prepare for war, such as deployments of weapons ready to attack and the indispensable outline of propaganda and training for war. *Settlement*, *solution*, and even *education* refer to material, concrete practices that can be directed toward war or peace; they are not neutral but are real, tangible, and nothing from the city “Utopia”.

***The choice not to allow violence is preliminary and must be clarified and respected first and foremost by adults.*** For those with educational responsibilities, the prohibition against using violence and organizing for violence is the norm in all schools. More difficult is to *know how to organise*, especially at the educational level, to enable people, starting with the youngest, to develop their abilities to observe and listen to both others and themselves in times of conflict and quarrel.

Creating *settlements*, regulations or agreements provides for the opportunity, time and space to quarrel among peers, and developing one's interpersonal skills, is certainly possible, all the results of the Erasmus *Arguing at School* project lend a hand so that more teachers and communities can be involved in this school innovation.

The word *settlement*, used to name the end of political means and institutions created to avoid the scourge of war, was already written in 1945 in [the Charter of the United Nations](#):

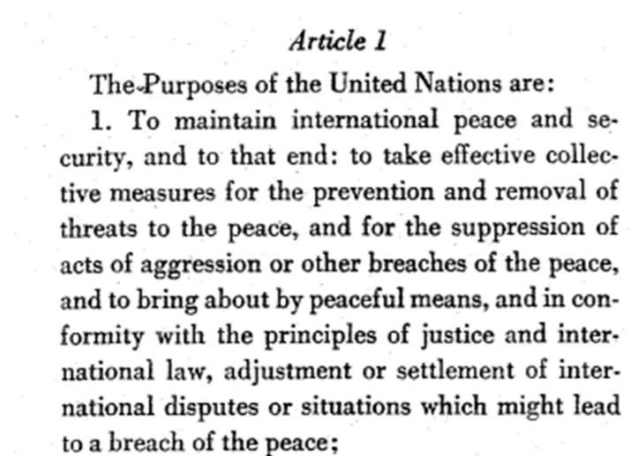
What is the difference between *settlement* and *solution*?

This question deserves [further investigation](#). One thing is certain: all methods of *Arguing at School* are educational *settings*; they are about *the organization of the living environments* in which children and young people grow up *and the roles* that the adults who accompany them in their growth have/should have and recognise for students, starting at an early age.

They should be *settlements* aimed at living together and learning skills to settle conflicts in ways compatible with everyone's life. The opportunity to play and learn happily together needs settlements. Humanity, in the early years, has the potential to develop antibodies against the dangerous effects of education for violence and war.

Russell, Einstein and the United Nations Charter confirm the importance of learning to live in *organized settings without allowing violence*, in *settlements* aimed at the health and life of all and personal growth and development of each person.

It is better to start as small children, learning from small quarrels, before getting involved in the *political* dimension, which should be the organization of civil confrontation and conflict between parties engaged in *managing together decisions that affect everyone, no one excluded*.







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