



Associative Financial Literacy

Accompanying the journey of life

Published on behalf of the Economics Conference of the Goetheanum as a contribution to understanding and teaching financial literacy.
Comments and Enquiries: contact@associative-financial-literacy.com

Publication No. 4 / June 2021

Teaching Financial Literacy to Class VIII

Camila Pannain

(Scuola Rudolf Steiner di Varese, Lombardy, Italy)

In June, I taught three economics lessons to Class VIII at the Rudolf Steiner School in Varese, northern Italy.

Facing the responsibility of teaching a topic I love was exciting. However, being inexperienced and having not too much material about it, it was at the same time a little scary. Furthermore, these young people were finishing their journey within the school, as the school does not have a high school, so they were already in a moment of farewell. I didn't have a lot of time with them, so I had to condense a lot of what could be done.

The new financial literacy website Fionn Meier designed together with Christopher Houghton Budd helped me a lot, as did some published material. However, for me the email exchanges with Christopher and Fionn were also very important, and the phone-exchanges I had with Lucia Sigolo were even more essential.

How to start a youth lesson?

First of all, I think it's important to know the path of these young people and listen a little to what their teachers have to say. Because there are classes that can be listening to history for a long time and others that really need to start with "hands on". As a subject teacher, every time I enter a new class, I enter into a new world. They are totally different encounters. Also, if it's a class at a Waldorf school, where the teacher follows the class for 8 school years, I also see a lot of that teacher's 'I' within that class. So it's very important to notice these subtleties, to get their attention right from the start. Thus, it is clear that there is no cake recipe to follow, and that peer experience and support materials are critical to use as a starting point.

The VIII Class is formed by young people around 14 years old, who are starting their third seven-year period of life, where truth is fundamental. They have all gone through hormonal changes and are no longer "children", however, we cannot see them as little adults, as they are not yet fully formed and need a lot of support from us adults in front of them.

In school life, they are preparing for big changes, as they will leave elementary school and go to high school. They are preparing to deliver a thesis, which consists of an in-depth study of a chosen topic. They carry out a theater play, which ends up being the big event of this school year, where the preparation is dense, from rehearsals to the making of all the scenery and the clothes that will be used, then reaching the day of the presentation, a big step within the lives of these young people. Physics and chemistry – scientific matters – are also very important at this age, as well as the teaching of history, which goes through the Middle Ages and Renaissance in Class VII and will reach the present day in Class VIII.

According to Rudolf Steiner, between 7 and 14 years old, the human being is structured by the activity of his circulatory and respiratory systems, he is a complete "listener and musician". From the age of 12 onwards, drama gradually becomes an element in his life. Between the ages of 14 and 21, human beings develop imagination and judgment, discover their aspirations and beliefs on their own. Thus, teaching must be scientific.

How to inspire these young 'listeners or musicians' in financial literacy? Or even bring drama, help you form your judgment, bring something more scientific? I'm still searching for the 'how', the correct images, in the most fluid way. But 'what' we can bring now has become clearer to me.

A good lesson should be one that we manage to divide into three different moments, often simultaneously. There is a moment that will focus more on reasoning, on thinking; one in which the students' emotions are evoked – surprise, joy, sadness, etc. – and then the moment of doing, where some action is performed.

There is a good chance that young people have never come across the subject of money. Perhaps they receive pocket money or have a credit card. In any case, overall, a lesson on financial literacy will be a huge new thing, a subject never touched upon. There is great expectation and perhaps it is important to take distance from the idea that, just because numbers are there, it is something related to mathematics directly. Just as we have the amount of ingredients in a recipe, a chemical ratio, or even numbers on the calendar, this does not mean it's maths. An alternative would be to bring the themes without numbers, but a teacher has to be very imbued with the image or content that one will bring in this way, to really be able to do it.

What is money?

This is a question that should move them. They will say what they think, without judgment, any word is valid and all are written down on the blackboard, an activity that is very close to emotions, which causes feelings for these young people. Some teachers can already tell you at this point whether the answers are right or wrong. Particularly until the eighth school year, I let the answers flow and then I reflect on them together with them. I always wait for the correct answer to come from them, rather than having to be given by me. Furthermore, an answer such as "Money is to lose the divinity of man", which was given by one of my students, is a great answer in terms of right or wrong. It is always good to explore answers of this type together with them, as after all, children or young people are often little teachers. The teacher will obviously always conduct the lesson and ultimately he or she will give form to the final answers or conclusions.

After describing what money is, we take a money bill (or a few from different countries) and take a deep look at the characteristics of those bills. It may be important to notice if they know what it would be or how to observe, as some young people are losing the ability to observe an object deeply, for example. Many descriptions will come – and so we begin to approach these young people in a more rational, thinking way.

Finally, ask them to produce a world money bill, a single currency that represents the world currency. This will activate their will, move them to do something practical. Would there be a person, a monument, an animal that would represent this money of the world? What would it be called?

In my class, unfortunately, we were more in the debate on this topic and the young people didn't have enough time to make this bill in a practical way.

History of money

We started the history of money with Mesopotamia, passing through Greece and Rome, and then arriving in Medieval Europe and the Renaissance. But I felt the need to reach contemporaneity, that is, would we have 4 moments in this timeline or do we consider contemporaneity part of Renaissance?

This is still a point of doubt for me. While we adults know that we are still in this third moment, that is, that what we experience today is part of the same period where the great events of the Renaissance emerged, for young people I thought that this is not so didactic or perhaps clear. Even because, for them, they are moments experienced at different times: in Class V, the child learns about Persia, India and Greece; in Class VI, Rome; in Class VII, Medieval history and Renaissance; in Class VIII, contemporaneity is reached. So, I did it at 4 different points on the timeline shown to them, but maybe I would put 5 to follow the path they themselves have taken within the teaching.

As a Waldorf teacher, I also see the great need to bring images that make sense to the teacher, as students can perceive beyond what we say or do. There is a phrase by Rudolf Steiner that says: "The first thing that influences is the educator's personality. The second is one's conduct. Only the third is speech."

So, if inwardly that subject was handled in a different way, it's important to see if it can be shown to them that way. If what's inside is different from what's outside, even if they don't see it, maybe students will reflect that doubt as well.

Luca Pacioli and the double-entries

Going back a little to the Renaissance, I talked about Luca Pacioli and then we got into a practical case of a young man who decided to undertake and start a small bakery. In the second lesson, after discussing the

history of money, I presented this example at the end, demonstrating the cash flow and the steps in the construction of T-accounts. However, I was unable to complete it. So, in the third and final class, I went back to this example, starting with T-accounts, then arriving at Income and Expenditure and Balance Sheet. There is a lot of new information to be presented in the same class, as these young people had never seen an Income and Expenditure and Balance Sheet and, obviously, not even T-accounts. In other words, doing this in a single class requires prior knowledge that they did not have and, therefore, more time is needed.

Here, more than the explanation, again the image is fundamental. The T-account per se already brings a certain image, but the movement between these accounts is a different flow than they may be used to.

I asked two students to stand, facing each other, and each received a value of 100, which was the money that the parents of the young entrepreneur (in our example) donated so that he could start his business. One student held the card written 100 in his left hand, another in his right, both looking at each other as if they were looking into a mirror. Afterwards, I asked them to turn to the class and so it was noticed that what had previously appeared to be in the same hand, when standing and facing the class, was clearly side to side, side to side.

As a Waldorf teacher, I know that anthropologically the mirror image can be safely used. But as an economics professor, was this image well placed? Obviously, at that moment it looked good, that's why I brought it, but since it was my first experience, maybe there are more suitable images.

Conclusion

I came to the conclusion that my first lesson touched the students more in the scope of *Feeling*, the second of *Thinking* and the third of *Willing*. Without planning, it happened that way.

I end with the question of the "HOW", which, in my opinion, is essential. It was very gratifying and I hope to understand and be able to intuit the future "HOWs" correctly and/or together with the rich exchanges I already have with my colleagues and friends from the Economics Conference community.