If only it were that simple.
The educational approach of the Monte Sole Peace School.

"Peace Education"
When the question is asked, "What do you do at the Monte Sole Peace School?" and this answer is given, you can tell from the expression on the face of the person asking the question that his or her mind is searching for *more* (evidently, the answer has been neither complete nor satisfying). This concept is at the same time so complex and so familiar that it tends to cause people to turn to common wisdom and even stereotypes:

- education = transmission of content and/or modes of behavior;
- peace = idyllic situation with love and mutual serenity.

The person asking this question does not recognize that the answer is contained in the question itself: *Monte Sole*. Monte Sole as *a site*. A site of *memory*.

Visiting the site
But you can't *explain* Monte Sole, you have to *experience it*. The search for an interpretive key must lead through doubts and questions. That is its special strength. Participating in this experience requires full personal risk: emotions, rationality, intellectual passion, social interaction….
So the visit to the site is a journey within oneself, the point of departure for a journey and a topic for reflection.

It is a *journey* because visiting Monte Sole entails distancing oneself from a personal everyday reality characterized by familiar environments and well-established behavior. It places us far from the noise of everyday life. It entails crossing over. To arrive, you climb from the valley – from the Reno River or the Setta brook – up a steep hill. To ford these bodies of water is to cross a natural border that abruptly divides the plain (the valleys) from the location of the slaughter; and at the same time that border serves as a line of demarcation between "before" and "after," an intimate and personal symbolic border. It serves to open up a view of a new encounter with oneself, through which one opens up to a new encounter with the other.

It is a *point of departure,* so that the Monte Sole narrative develops into historical, ethical and communal journeys. Walking through these places at a slow pace provides the time and space to come into contact with these places and to *feel them*. A memory site such as Monte Sole begins to speak through this contact, mediated by the group's guide.

Guides, the individuals who give voice to Monte Sole, handle a wide range of tasks, so that it has proven difficult to come up with a suitable title for them. Most important is their grasp of history and historiography. Because of it, they can reconstruct the context, employing and interweaving various historical interpretations and going beyond a mere discussion of events. Thus they explain how mechanisms are used and constructed, and consequently they bring to light history's use of memories and show how certain memories are excluded as history is written. They explain that the memory of this massacre is made up of many different, often contradictory memories, memories of

women and men who were part of this tragic event at different places and in different ways. Their goal is to select some of these voices and to state the reasons for that choice, granting the event the kind of complexity it needs in order to be understood fully.

These people are educational experts as well. They manage through teaching to didactically transpose[1] the historical content, that is, to develop understanding by transmitting their knowledge, constructing a kind of laboratory in which the visitor, based on age and prior knowledge, actively participates in the process of enhancing and expanding knowledge.

Finally, these guides boast notable relationship and emotional skills, so that they can manage groups by becoming involved with those groups in a sincere manner. They study their visitors, win their trust and establish educational relationships via a system of scientific authority, human understanding and mutual interest. In this way, they communicate their emotional involvement with these sites. As a result, all the guides working at Monte Sole are expert historians, mediators, facilitators and educators.

The laboratory-visit is structured as a journey in stages, making it possible to unspool the historical narrative through increasing drama designed to build emotional tension (*Spannung*) that culminates with the reading of an eyewitness account inside one of the memorial's most significant sites (Casaglia cemetery).

The historical narrative remains open at every stage, which invites the active participation of visitors. Factual information is provided alongside comments meant to encourage thoughtful consideration. This way the narrative takes the form of a puzzle, consisting of information, questions, doubts and deliberations that participants can use to color their own interpretation.

In the first stage, the narrative has two voices: One reconstructs the facts of the Monte Sole slaughter, while the other dwells on the *emotional context* preceding and following it. We attempt to recreate the mindset of those involved (both Nazi soldiers and residents) in the events of those years. We encourage visitors to imagine what their lives might have been like, what kind of education they might have received, what type of public discourse they heard, the effect on the war of the Nazi retreat from Italy as the front lines remained in place, linking all of these facets to their effect on people. To bring the experience to an even more personal level, visitors are asked to write an emotion, an idea, a concept, a thought, a word, the thing that struck them the most in the narrative they just heard, on a piece of paper.

It must be emphasized that this first stage takes place at an "educational" site of our choice and not one of the massacre sites, the "memory sites" (115, including scattered houses, churches, hamlets and villages). The "educational" site was selected for its geographical characteristics – it stands on a crest, which provides a panoramic view of the area where the sweep was conducted. In order to understand this historic event, one needs to be familiar with the area's geography.

The other three stages (village of Caprara di Sopra, Casaglia church and Casaglia cemetery) increasingly focus on the experience of witnesses who survived the slaughter and their relationship with the perpetrators: This is conveyed only through a reading of selected eyewitness accounts. There are several reasons for this: there is still no complete reconstruction of what happened in those days in the individual places, and a direct reading of the narrative enhances the listeners' emotional involvement.

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[1] The concept of "didactic transposition" was introduced in France in 1975 by Michel Verret.

Once an overview of the event has been provided, we approach discussion of, on the one hand, the dynamics and mechanisms of the slaughter and, on the other, the preservation and processing of memory. Different topics are investigated at each stop, and the entire visit thus becomes a prism of contiguous themes, a kind of modular journey where the historical, ethical, sociological, political and human issues continuously encourage debate and deep thought not only about the past, but also about the present and our daily lives.

The dramatic tension that develops during the journey and encourages emotional involvement among the participants transforms what could have been "just" a guided tour into a *human and emotional experience* that everyone experiences under the sway of their own personalities and sensibilities.

The laboratory-visit, transformed into experience, thus prepares fertile ground for thought.

The laboratory

As we have seen, touring the sites *stimulates reflection*. The history and memory of Monte Sole as narrated during that journey are the catalysts for a cognitive process that through exploration of emotions allows us to deal with various topics in an in-depth way, but always according to individual abilities. Each visit is different, as each one focuses on different aspects, depending on the topics discussed and the participants present (children, preadolescents and adolescents, adults).

Each stage is used to introduce specific premises for consideration.

We begin with the *educational site* on the crest, where the narrative of the events gives rise to various questions that will be addressed over the course of the visit. The topics for reflection derive from the personal and collective histories of the perpetrators of the slaughter: totalitarian education systems; exposure to propaganda; previous war experience; histories of the individual battalions; orders in the Italian theater of war; the emotional background of the Nazi army; the emotional background of the Monte Sole population; the relationship between an individual's opportunities for free choice and that individual's background.

The carefully chosen words used to relate the narrative make all of this possible. Close attention to terminology is an integral part of a practical laboratory setting where nothing is taken for granted, and where the goal is to develop in participants a critical awareness of the deliberate relationship between a signifier and its meaning, leading to recognition that signifiers necessarily have numerous connotations that can influence our interpretation of the world. For example, using the expression *Nazi soldier* rather than *German soldier*, or explaining the reasons for or simply focusing on different definitions of the presence of the Resistance in Monte Sole (*partisans, bandits, rebels, terrorists*), allows understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon, its ties with the present and awareness of multiple points of view to flourish.

What were the circumstances and the spatial-temporal context for the massacre?
What was the purpose of the action and what were the elements that made it particularly brutal?
Why were most of the victims women and children?
Who were the men who committed the massacre?
What type of education did they have?
What role did the creation of an enemy through propaganda play?
Were they just following orders?
Could they have chosen to act otherwise?
Does individual responsibility exist in the context of a war?
What does choice mean?

Once visitors reach Caprara, these questions are discussed, and visitors begin to feel personally involved. Reading/performing one or more eyewitness accounts makes space for identification with and empathy for the victims, facilitating individual involvement and bringing the thought-provoking issues raised previously ever closer to common experience.

What are the reasons behind that kind of brutality and aggression?
What does "brutality due to war" mean? Is that the only reason?
Was/is it possible for people to disobey orders?
What were those who did this thinking and what was their situation?
What does it mean to talk about *conforming* both in war and in everyday life?
What does it mean to make a *different choice?*
Where were the partisans? Why didn't the Nazi soldiers go into the woods and flush the partisans out of their hiding places, but instead stopped in the villages to massacre civilians?
In addition to the fear felt by the victims, can we talk about the fear felt by the perpetrators?
What kind of fear would that be? How does it differ from the fear felt by the victims?
Can we talk about *constructing fear* with regard to this type of massacre?

Where audience make-up permits, time is devoted to observing the area's layout and its monumentalization, so that the concept of the site and all of its inherent issues are etched in memory. The idea is to make visitors aware that they cannot take a place for granted, but that instead each place needs to be "read," as if it were a text in the strictest sense of the word. In its current state, the "site" consists of a series of pieces of writing, one superimposed over the other, which as such must be recognized, read and subsequently decoded, analyzed and deconstructed.

Reading and decoding this site means observing it in its entirety and understanding that it is more than merely the sum of its parts. On the contrary, visitors are often surprised and unsettled when they realize that the memories layered one on top of the other in this way sometimes clash. It may seem obvious, but it is often necessary to help visitors create a kind of map of the many "signs" encountered during the walk. Otherwise, visitors run the risk of becoming disoriented by the swirling emotions provoked. In fact, the educational work performed at Monte Sole is not meant to amaze people, or to leave them with a vague feelings of sadness. Instead, it is meant to "utilize" emotional involvement to trigger ethical awareness on the part of visitors of themselves and their own context. This way, visitors manage to come to terms with their initial expectations, adjust them and then relate to the actual experience of being *there*.

What do you see around you?
What strikes you first?
How do you interpret the meaning of these visual elements in relation to this site?
What method of memory do they use?
Can memory be layered? What comprises the layers? How can you differentiate them?
How valid are they?
How could a memory site be arranged to give equal importance to the layers of memory that have accumulated over the years?

The final stage of the journey is structured in two parts: the Casaglia church and cemetery.
This is where emotional tension reaches its height.

The group's guide takes a step back at this point and relies on the suggestive nature and power of the site. This will only work, however, if the relational and educational work leading up to it have

been effective. indeed, visitors develop the ability to listen to the site during the slow, gradual involvement process comprised of the previous stages in all their complexity. Entering into contact with the surrounding environment of forests, wind, ruins and silence means bringing to its conclusion the distancing from common experience that began with climbing up from the valleys. Visitors immerse themselves in a separate space (*sacer*, sacred) to discover their own time and space and to recognize and manage the emotions and thoughts that have been experienced throughout. Seen this way, both the silence and the voices of the eyewitness accounts have been produced by means of the Socratic method.

Silence allows visitors to concentrate and listen to their own emotions and thoughts. It also guides them to a deeper perception of the site as a whole and in its parts. The oral testimony emerges as a link between the site and the visitor in the present and the site and a participant in the past. It must be noted that the reconstruction of the past provided through the eyewitness narrative can only be partial. This statement in turn serves as a cue for thinking about various points of view, their relative nature and the problematic nature of historical reconstruction in general. This then leads to the fact that the existence of numerous points of view that may differ from each other and even conflict is a factual reality and not just a theory or abstraction. This serves as a jumping off point for considering the visitors' own habits in observing context, which again makes them question their awareness of themselves and the world. Pointing out that the narrative is incomplete lends itself to permission to ask that visitors accept the proposed point of view, at least temporarily, and allow themselves to be guided by a process of partial identification that will allow them to pass through and overcome the horror. The narrating voice accompanies visitors from the Church into the Cemetery.

Despite the fact that the Monte Sole massacre represents a total collapse (the complete destruction) of "sense," bringing people to these sites represents an attempt to construct and reveal "sense" precisely by going through that horror. This is done by means of a dual method: in the stages up to Casaglia, rational investigation is meant to establish the event's conditions and context; Casaglia then symbolizes the incompleteness and inadequacy of this investigation and at the same time offers a chance for in-depth examination, as well as a chance to arrange the elements according to a different perspective. In the Casaglia cemetery, the final moments are dedicated to Giuseppe Dossetti, buried here in 1996.

The fact that Dossetti's grave is located here is no accident, and the intentional nature of its location is the first consideration offered here. Giuseppe Dossetti experienced all the tragedy and horror of war, both emotionally and physically, that visitors have just caught at least a glimpse of during their tour. In this way, they move beyond their own personal experiences to a communal experience and toward sense. The emphasis on political engagement is the first step in the process we call citizenship education.

Dossetti's physical presence in that place is parallel to and connected to the absence left by the horrors of the massacre and the war. For example, article 11 is no abstract or utopian ideal in that place, but instead becomes cohesive and fundamental in part because it probes emotional potential (in a non-secondary way) in a search for rational meaning and ethical and political doubts, all with the goal of constructing a culture of peace. From this perspective, thinking about building a culture of peace is not random, abstract or rhetorical. It stems from being *there*, where *there* indicates not only these specific sites, but the world as a whole.

> Let's stop and consider this place. What does the silence tell us?
> What do the words of the survivors tell us?
> What is war? What is peace?
> What is the meaning of Article 11 of the Italian Constitution?
> Why was it written right after World War II?
> Can there be justice for a massacre like this? Who was responsible?
> What do the trials that began 60 years after the incident represent?
> What is forgiveness? Is it a possibility in cases like this?
> What does reconciliation mean? What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?
> What is the real meaning of the word "peace"? What does it mean to "build a culture of peace"?
> What role is played by memories and their mutual acknowledgement?

The themes underlying the Peace School's education theory are
- dialectic between individual and collective memory, and their historical and anthropological processes;
- dynamics of the mechanisms of violence;
- balance between individual choices and context: individual responsibility;
- collective responsibility: education and propaganda
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights: context and propaedeutics;
- democracy as daily practice and choice, active citizenship;
- non-violent transformation of conflicts;
- spirit of the rules and genesis of constitutional charters;
- construction of the self and others: the role of stereotypes and prejudices.

Educational practices and methods
Stimulating thought and finding meaning.

As described and analyzed above, a visit to the sites can be a true *topic for reflection* only if it sits within a broader educational context. In fact, the laboratory-visit is a journey in and of itself, but visitors are left with a need for discussion, progress and a search for meaning, and those require more time and additional space.

In order to become a substantial educational experience, a visit must be supplemented by educational practice, during which visitors have a chance to express themselves actively and to participate through directly interactive and experiential methodology.

This method lies at the center of the journey toward sense described above. The method affords space for considering all of the doubts, questions and ideas raised during the walk. Visitors become involved as individuals and are called upon to create their own meaning. Visitors who up until that moment have related to the guide as learners can now play active roles, while the guide becomes "merely" a facilitator of the Socratic method.

How is an interactive and experiential laboratory transformed into a space hospitable to the Socratic method?

First, the guide is transformed into an educator/facilitator. The guide maintains expert authority, but focuses more on listening to, observing and enhancing personal and group dynamics. Managing these dynamics becomes the guide's principal task and, the guide's principal purpose is to create an appropriate and fertile setting, where all can feel comfortable taking risks with their individual personal methods serving as guidelines.

This atmosphere is created from the time that visitors arrive, and that is fundamental to helping visitors separate from everyday life in order to participate fully in the experience at Monte Sole. Introductory games help guides to gain awareness of the different individuals and how they interact; they also help break the ice as visitors begin to understand the type of educational relationship to be formed and dismantle their expectations. Those expectations are investigated purposefully when visitors are asked to express their thoughts, possibly anonymously, about the journey they are about to undertake. Another essential part of the welcoming process is the discussion of rules. Rules are discussed and shared openly, and eventually a "charter" is drawn up and voted on democratically rather than being imposed from above. The charter is hung in the main room of the Peace School building and remains valid throughout unless changes are collectively discussed and decided upon. In this way, one of the major facets of the experience, the development of active citizenship, is made clear and tangible immediately through the spirit of the rules, and the fact that they are drafted and amended by the group as a whole.

For groups that visit Monte Sole for more than one day, even sleeping arrangements can take on value. Sharing sleeping quarters is itself an opportunity for coexistence, respect, tolerance and acceptance of the other. If roommates are partnered at random, with no regard for existing relationships (exceptions may be made in special situations), participants are forced to confront the other and the unknown, with no chance to hide or rely on others and not themselves. Reactions can range from fear to enthusiasm, and some may feign indifference. In any case, the goal of helping others to experience "difference/the unknown" is given concrete form and begins to spur discussion of issues.

The laboratory-visit described above comes after this welcome period, so operators can adjust the journey to reflect the group characteristics that have been revealed.

Following the laboratory-visit to the sites, some free time is provided, and that, too, serves a function in the educational process.

In fact, in the Peace School's approach, "wasting time" is essential. The "school-house" formula fosters an environment where education rubs shoulders with downtime, with everyday life, with periods of play and periods of chatter. The frenetic rhythms of daily life slow down, and the learning process comes to fruition in all of its complexity and totality by combining the special features and characteristics of all of these very different "periods."

So education at Monte Sole also includes moments for relaxation that allow participants to process their experience emotionally and intellectually.

The work of pondering the questions raised by a tour of the sites is done in mixed, balanced and small groups. These three adjectives tell a good deal about Monte Sole's educational theory. The groups are mixed in the general sense and, in the case of international groups, their nationality is mixed as well. They are then balanced according to different criteria, depending on the type of work to be done and the goals. In fact, grouping the most aggressive and the most passive individuals together does not always work. The former are often concerned only with performing the assigned task and neglect the process of sharing with other members of the group, while the latter run the risk of being swept along without taking any risks. A facilitator must be present in order for this first type of mixed group to work. The facilitator makes it possible for everyone to take part in the discussion. When the main goal is not to encourage discussion alone, but to foster a *creative cooperation effort*, the best type of group is formed by uniting aggressive types, who will have to compromise and mediate, with passive individuals, who will be forced to take on responsibility for the group achieving its goals. Groups are generally small, and their size, too, is adjusted to help them meet their goals. Discussions involve a maximum of 15 participants, while no more than five

people at a time participate in creative cooperation efforts. This method allows everyone the possibility, time and space to make a contribution.

The entire body of participants meets together only to communicate the results of the individual groups, in order for groups to share their results with each other.

These results cannot be evaluated in absolute terms, but must be considered relative to the starting point for each group and each group element. After taking note of these starting points during the preliminary activities and the tour, the educator can make adjustments to meet the needs of individual groups.

The preferred method is to give broad suggestions and to allow total expressive freedom by means of a wide variety of materials: writing, paints, Plasticine, fabric, music, etc.

By broad suggestions, we intend general instructions that leave much room for interpretation. This means that we are not evaluating how certain information has been received, but instead are encouraging reflection based on issues raised and questions asked, all presented in a way that allows individuals to become more aware on their own. This methodology often disorients visitors, who may find themselves facing their own limits, as well as the difficulty of creating the autonomous awareness needed in order to continue on their own intellectual journeys. They may feel inadequate while also recognizing how complex and interesting cognitive tension can be.

Unexpected cognitive elements may emerge, on the part of the educator as well.; responses to roughly the same intellectual journey may vary widely. If, for example, an Italian propaganda image from the period 1943 – 1945 is presented and interpretations are solicited, the results may be very varied interpretations, which in turn lead to discussion and comparison, an activity that may shed light on stereotypes and prejudices relied on during interpretation.

As is surely clear by now, discussion is not an end in and of itself, but instead is one stage in a complex deconstruction process that aims both to spotlight the cognitive function underlying interpretation and to create awareness of the personal frameworks that inform meaning.

Discussion is the last phase of the laboratory structure. That does not deem it unimportant. Debriefing is essential, as it makes achieving a degree of awareness of the basic reasons for the laboratory, its various parts, the processes activated and the goals achieved possible.

In fact, the main question is "Why did we do all this?"

Answering that question leads to identifying and delineating the intellectual and emotional journey that groups and individuals participate in at Monte Sole. It may also point up differing perceptions of the links between the Monte Sole site and thoughts on the past and the present, with the very real possibility that it may not be easy for visitors to draw these connections to their everyday worlds. It must be debate among the various components that identifies these connections, and here again the facilitator plays a role by moving the discussion toward a search for meaning drawn from the Monte Sole site and the issues raised by the visit.

"Peace education." In any case, more practical than theoretical.

What we have described and analyzed above is the theoretical transposition of work that is completely practical and must compete every day for attention from "real people with real problems."

The theoretical intersections and methodologies used are continuously tested by experience and are consequently subject to change. Educational work consists of both research and action, and every laboratory is transformed into a piece of this complex conceptual construction.

Such pedagogical knowledge becomes even more necessary when "education" is linked with "peace." For us, these two concepts share a common root that makes both inescapably linked to our mutual participation in being *here*. At every turn we are encouraged to take risks: by making or not making choices, by taking or not taking positions, and always influencing the world around us.

In this situation, pure abstraction poses a danger. In the face of pure abstraction, we run the risk of feeling absolved and not personally involved (emotional, intellectual, physical), failing to perceive the importance of our own involvement, which stands as a key, crucial and substantial step toward responsibly and consciously building a *true* culture of peace.

Every generation does not have freedom handed to it,
every generation must create it for itself (...)
because when there is no individual or collective political subjectivity
the space is created to form "definitive" identities,
"definitive" diversities that clash with each other
that are by definition potentially violent
and reciprocally murderous
Rada Ivekovic[2]

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[2] Quote from the documentary *Il cerchio del ricordo* [The Circle of Memory] by Andrea Rossini produced in 2007 by Osservatorio sui Balcani

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