

***Scuola serena beyond the classroom, yesterday and today.
Reflections on school innovation, prompted by the views
of Giuseppe Lombardo Radice***

***Scuola serena oltre l'aula, ieri e oggi.
Alcune riflessioni sull'innovazione scolastica a partire dal pensiero
di Giuseppe Lombardo Radice***

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This paper looks at how the ideas of educationist Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, with regard especially to his conception of an active school, critical didactics and the relationship between school and environment, can prove topical and useful today in offering guidelines for much-needed innovation and for the reorganization of schooling in the wake of the Covid-19 emergency.

KEYWORDS: *SCUOLA SERENA, DIFFUSE EDUCATION, OUTDOOR EDUCATION, HEALTH EMERGENCY, SCHOOL INNOVATION.*

Introduction

The Covid-19 emergency has reignited the debate around schools: their mission, their organization, how spaces are used and how pupils are taught. The very architecture of the school is under review, with attention focused not only on indoor but also on outdoor spaces, and by extension, on the identification of teaching methods seen not as a technical apparatus of the school, static and rigid, but as an educational tool capable of renewal and innovation in response to changing situations and emerging needs. Given the enforced suspension of classroom teaching, the recourse to on-line activity in its place, and the need for teaching staff to be able to rely on greater support from families in carrying forward the general business of education, it has also become important for all parties to embrace the ideas and goals of diffuse education – no longer limited to simply learning in school – and of the educational community. Hence the need to redefine the task of the school, the professionalism of teachers and the way in which the process of education and self-education are understood.

Schools are now facing new questions, not least due to the hitherto unexperienced setting of a public health emergency; and yet, these questions recall issues from earlier

times still awaiting a solution even today, despite the reforms that the school system has undergone. Indeed the search for satisfactory answers implies the recognition of certain pedagogical paradigms already exposed in the past history of education, which however appear to have been laid aside and even now encounter difficulty in being substantiated and possibly updated. In this context, the work of Giuseppe Lombardo Radice (1879-1938 - L.R. hereinafter) could provide inspiration for the task of redesigning school pathways in the post-Covid era. In effect, whilst there is obvious merit in the methods set out by the militant Educationist for the establishment of an «active» school, and the relative new models of teaching and learning, it seems that awareness on the part of the schools system has been lacking thus far.

The aim is one of taking the opportunity, in a resilient sense, to procure a possible cue from which to revive the school and education project, but also to make clear if and how the school – but not only the school – can support the life project of the pupil¹. And this theme has been extensively addressed by L.R., who stresses the importance of an education that is open and exploratory, defined today as «ecological»², which he links to the concept of diffuse education. This in turn calls for *enquiring* and attentive educators, observers of the reality that surrounds them, capable of shaping their mission to benefit the growth of the whole person that is embodied by every student. And so, it does not seem so out of place to seek out suggestions for our time in the pedagogical thinking of L.R., notwithstanding it is well known that, for one reason or another, his reflections have been somewhat neglected since the second half of the twentieth century. In the words of Hervé Cavallera, speaking at the centenary of the Educationist's birth in 1979:

The old philosophical pedagogy was set aside and the name of Lombardo-Radice seemed to have been listed among those classic thinkers associated with movements consigned definitively to the past. In an educational universe where no little weight is given to experimental sciences such as sociology and psychology, in an extremely politicized schools environment, in a nation wracked by a political, moral and social crisis without precedent, it seems that the calm and composed voice of Lombardo-Radice no longer has the power to draw listeners. And yet it is precisely the crisis of this present time [...], precisely the inability of the educational process to take a new direction that persuades us to look at and carefully reconsider the philosophy of Giuseppe Lombardo-Radice to see if it is instilled with a sound constructive force³.

Even forty years on, the reflections voiced by Cavallera on the educational crisis of the time continue to appear wholly reasonable, and indeed no less reasonable is the notion that the ideas held by L.R. on education and teaching still encapsulate vital elements that can help to qualify the school of today in the context of the reorganization it must necessarily undertake.

New and flexible schools, yesterday and today

It is certainly not the intention of this writer to explore the speculative writings of L.R. on pedagogy and retrace the steps whereby he reviews and above all revises the actualism of Giovanni Gentile, but rather to highlight the significance and the characteristics he attributes to *scuole nuove* – new schools – albeit described using idealistic language⁴, and to the construction of the *scuola serena* with a view to making the most of the broader education system⁵, the environmental context and consequently of outdoor learning. In other words, the aim is to see how, in the light of the aspects noted above, his vision of school and teacher can point us today toward a new order and a new governance of the school, favouring a reorganization that avoids a fragmented kind of teaching, sedimented on the transmission of knowledge, often in a mechanical and routine manner. On the contrary, teaching needs to be reshaped so that it can genuinely become a tool for the total education of students, one that can humanize them as individuals, and this will be possible only in a school able to expand and accommodate what today we see as broader ‘systems’ – the family, society, the nation – adopting various strategies, mixed teaching methods, workshop activities, diversified times, different spaces.

The point of the discussion is, essentially, to identify how certain concepts of teaching and education developed by L.R. can make an innovatory contribution to:

- the idea of instruction-education and self-education within a scenario of diffuse education, which today appears ineluctable;
- the educational and teaching notion of educational culture and environment, and of outdoor education, given the new representation of space and school architecture imposed by the post Covid-19 situation.

So, without dwelling on the epistemology and on the theoretical/philosophical foundation of L.R.’s pedagogical thought, or on how he seeks to overcome the inconsistency of idealistic dialectic, it would seem useful for our purposes to define his conception of *special uncodified teaching*, to use the *pedagogical device* he illustrates as pointing toward innovation today.

In the mind of L.R., the teaching method through which the educational process is delivered in schools must be self-renewing and continuously in search of varied solutions with regard to historicization of the educational process, taking account of the situation and the context in which the task is implemented, without being engulfed by it. The life plan can in fact be accomplished differently by every individual: not predetermined by genetics and by the surroundings, but absorbing their influences. As Giuseppe Catalfamo observes, L.R. saw the importance of knowing about the

«phenomenological and psychological conditions of the teaching problem»⁶ in order to make the best use of «live teaching», which avoids technicalisms and attempts to predetermine the educational pathway (precisely to avoid this risk, he arrives at a stance of completely denying the value of experimental pedagogy and the psychology that interprets the human being in mechanical terms). According to L.R., the teaching process involves constructive observation by educators of what happens in the school setting, so that this can be made subject matter for research and lead to an informed educational approach, designed to express and fulfil the value of the student as a person, who in turn cannot be understood (and assessed) only through objective measurements and psychological tests, or by reference to the *average* characteristics of pupils in a cohort. Rather, it is necessary, at very least, to get to know the student by establishing a relationship between educator and educand, between master and pupil: a relationship of *sympathy*⁷, says L.R.; ‘empathy in real world situations’, we would call it today. Via this relationship, it will be possible to identify the most suitable educational pathways for single pupils.

L.R. is unable to identify pedagogy altogether as being the science capable of producing a cognitive synthesis, regarding the educand, such as would be of use in materializing and steering the educational process, since he too is not immune from *idealistic prejudice*⁸. Nonetheless, when it comes to setting out guidelines for school education, he demonstrably follows a path of pedagogical research that renders his conceptual approach pertinent today.

The current distancing rules imposed by Covid-19 have had the effect of confusing, if not destroying, the value of the educational relationship in school, and tending to overlook the importance of existence to each individual, pupil and teacher, as a bodily experience in space and time, not only a virtual encounter, conducive to rich and flexible teaching. L.R. on the other hand highlights this dimension of the educational process, admittedly using the actualistic language of his time. In effect, he states the importance of formulating philosophical and general educational theorizations for the delivery of schooling, but also points out the need for material knowledge of the pupil and of the social and cultural world in which the education process takes shape. It must be therefore historicized, tailored to and kept in contact with the particular situation in which it operates. «And the exploration of schools is at once an exploration of the world and the soul of the child, an eager attempt to shed light on the creativity of young ones, to describe its growth and spiritual conquests»⁹. In reality, the very fact that L.R. senses the need for attention to be focused less on the concept of the Ethical State and more on the social and educational consideration of the entity, makes him a forerunner of the new and diffuse education, in which the ‘individual spirit’ of Gentile seems to have evolved into a communion of spirits that gives importance once again to relationships,

following the more socialist ethic of equality and liberation¹⁰. Diffuse education today becomes fundamental in combating educational inequalities, which have been highlighted additionally by the health emergency, and which translate into new educational poverty scenarios around the country, with differences in the opportunities available to infants and children¹¹.

Thus, in L.R. one sees conceptual nodes that on the one hand give place to a definite plan for the education of humankind and on the other draw attention to the *scuola serena* type of school, which expresses a certain vision of education and teaching, leading to the recognition and the offer of appropriate tools for making the most of childhood in its capacity to do things, and on the basis of a future placeable within space-time coordinates. L.R. sustains that school should form part of an organic system affording space for the growth and enrichment of young persons, who learn by expanding their creativity, since they are able to be active and participate, finding themselves in a world full of life and meaningful learning.

The basic paradigms suggested by L.R. that appear to offer certain guidelines for the current redesigning of school are connected with:

- a vision of childhood where the child is protagonist, active, creative and original, living in multiple environmental settings, which must be familiar in order that he or she can act responsibly;
- enhancing the capacity of the learner to do things, and likewise manual activity, not in terms of 'doing' for its own sake, but as the chance for creative and original expression, for fulfilment of the human spirit;
- considering the school as a place of learning, with outdoor-indoor type pathways, in which learners are able to find themselves, to give free rein to their artistic expression (especially through drawing, singing, language, scientific research) in the diffusiveness of the school as part of an 'education network';
- reviewing the '*serene*', educational, humanizing and dialogical relationship between master and pupil, which by no means implies extemporization, but a pedagogical approach able to stimulate and motivate learners to discover themselves and others;
- the training of teachers who, in the light of these considerations, must move beyond the guidance inherent in the actualism of Gentile and acquire vocational skills appropriate to the new situation.

These promptings to reflect on things are especially pertinent today, given that there must necessarily be a rethink of teaching in schools.

Environment and education

Specifically, the topic of interest to us here concerns the reorganization of school space, which means not only an overhaul of floor plans, or an arbitrary shift from lessons held in the classroom to lessons delivered virtually, or simply transferred to areas 'outside' the classroom. The question under consideration is the general vision of the environment or environments as educational elements, and of the relative indoor and outdoor teaching. Neither even is it a matter of identifying technical and logistical means of support, but genuine «factors of education»¹². And L.R. points out, appropriately, that teaching does not represent an apparatus detached from the learner, but seeks to be at the service of people, who must be helped to realize their full potential. The relative specific teaching indications – our discussion focuses in particular on 'environmental teaching' – cannot be referred to painstaking techniques or to action protocols dictated by a *corpus* of knowledge or erudition foreign to the learner and to the surroundings he or she inhabits. These would become didacticisms, imprisoned and exhausted in disciplinary particularisms. By contrast, the specific teaching methods must be aligned constantly with what the entire process of educating people is all about, which means they must be planned.

In effect, L.R. makes mention of «didactic criticism», which sees teachers constantly engaged with the full life of their subject, leading them to base their entire work effort not on some abstract method but, conversely, on close contact with the educational process, which is by nature experiential and environmental¹³. The life situation of the learner becomes a focus of specific attention for the educator, albeit within the neo-Platonic and romantic realm of philosophy in which L.R. sees himself. Indeed in the process of his research he senses the need for these didactic notions to become more and more social and humanized, directing his pedagogical focus toward school not only *for* the child but also *of* the child¹⁴. The educational interest becomes gradually more 'personalized', and is concerned primarily with the real world of the learner who finds there, as intimated above, exhilaration in artistic endeavour but also in manual work, which avoids any kind of formalism and sees nature and the environment as sources of research and experiment. There is the «identity of science and poetry in the culture of the child; the moral value of natural science; scientific lessons as illustrations of vital organic correlations [...]: the child initially as researcher and scientist»¹⁵. Accordingly, the idea of lifetime education is united with the valorization of childhood, an age of life that must be experienced to the full, thanks not least to the stimuli awakened by the environment, the foundation on which human life is built.

Precisely on the basis of these initial considerations, reflecting on the post-Covid education scenario, it seems somewhat unlikely to see an adaptation of the school

curriculum that would involve a mere shift from classroom teaching to remote teaching, consisting for the most part in the classic lecture, with teacher explaining and student listening. If however it is preferable to identify educational proposals that engage in the life of the person, it must be appreciated that school life and the life of the student have now changed. And as L.R. maintains that school should not be detached from life, but should be life itself, create life itself, provide an authentic experience, then equally – reaching beyond the problems of idealist dialectics – it seems today that educational pathways need to be redesigned in the light of the new social, cultural and environmental balance – and probably of a different quality of life – highlighted by the health emergency. Simply implementing a technological revolution is not enough; changes to pedagogical and didactic content are necessary.

Hence the observation that current school teaching cannot continue in its present form as a means of conveying fragmented notions, to the great disapproval of L.R., but must offer itself as an experience and exercise of life. In short, one cannot subscribe to the idea of teaching pupils as ‘interconnected loners’, to use an expression of Zygmunt Bauman¹⁶. In this regard, it is interesting to note the thoughts of L.R. on the experiences of the schools active in his time, and the meaning he gives to the term *experience*. His views seem fertile today, as concerning the questions of environment, diffuse education and outdoor education, to which we turn our attention here.

Clearly, the interpretation of these constructs by L.R. must be seen in the context of the times when he was working and writing, but equally, regarding conception, it seems we can identify an epistemological and pedagogical basis for *outdoor education* to be regarded today as existing within a legitimate pedagogical paradigm and not merely as an impromptu didactic expedient.

The reflections of L.R. on these matters should be taken together with his critique on «pedagogism»,

which could be termed *pedagogical prejudice*, a presumption that everything should be achieved within the school walls and all aspects of master-and-pupil activity isolated from real life. Pedagogism sees *time at school* not as already being life, full and complete, but as “*preparation for life*”, whereas one cannot prepare for life other than by actually living it [...]. Thus it has come about that the best reaction of modern education to traditional pedagogy has taken shape in organizations that offer the new generations not only knowledge, but also the activity and responsibility of working; contact with rich and varied Nature, consisting in a direct and personal exploration of its secrets [...] And it is with good reason that this trend in education, which distances itself from the old institutes and the old rules, has become known variously as “*Éducation nouvelle*”, “*Landeserziehungsheime*”, “*Open-air school*”, “*Scuola rinnovata*” and by other similar names: a symbol of the need, universally acknowledged, for the school – in itself not enough – to

turn itself from being the performer of a programme into an initiator of life, ensuring that the independent personality of the pupil is fully encouraged and thoroughly exercised¹⁷.

L.R. makes reference expressly to the notions of new education, renewal of schooling, school out of doors, thereby providing input for a present-day clarification of the expressions through which outdoor education is identified and for a definition of the underlying paradigmatic nodes¹⁸. In effect, the concept of outside or outdoors also refers to 'doing' things outdoors, hence to the educational methods utilized, which in their turn assume a vision of the school in which the educand is active and involved, playing a part in a diffuse education network, discovering bonds between 'pedagogical vocation' systems.

The words of L.R. invite reflection on the modern idea of community education partnerships, integrated education systems and education networks. Discussing new education, L.R. evaluates the expediency of creating territorial links:

the new education is an appeal, full of faith, to the private initiative of the better citizens, that they should integrate or if necessary replace school education, and to the free initiative of school teachers, that with a broader concept of education, that they should extend and articulate the work in the thousands of ways practically possible [...] so that pupils can be guided to a direct knowledge of the world around the school. Official schools, once teachers are stirred and made aware of the discontent at their seclusion and the sterility of the work accomplished by the school when isolated from life, will inevitably follow the new initiatives, little by little, and desist from the spiritual oppression they currently apply, in the name of bureaucracy and rulemaking¹⁹.

The ways in which L.R. speaks of diffuse education may certainly seem dated, especially when he thinks about the vision of the master operating with «priestly care» and the «voice» of the nation educating the entire population, but his views on the role of the educating community could nonetheless help to prompt a rethink of modern education systems. It is indeed true that L.R. sees the State as having the right to educate, but «his concept of the State is not totalitarian»²⁰ and he «considers the State above all as organizer and resolver of the needs expressed freely by citizens and by social groups subject to its sovereignty»²¹. Thus he distinguishes State from Government, asserting that «the State comprises, besides the Government, also the citizens and all the associations having educational value and an educational function. The State that suppresses free competition in the field of education, suppresses the citizen for the Government»²². L.R. then ends by defining private initiatives as a *moment* of the state initiative, but the pedagogical significance of the proposal for democratic education remains.

Undoubtedly, his *scuola serena* approach to education and schooling, which he wanted to extend through primary school programs developed in the context of the Gentile Reform, suffered from 'being Gentilian'. This led to the adoption of suggestions deriving from new schools, the wish to bridge the gulf between schools and childhood experiences, the focus on a school attentive to the needs of childhood and its real life experiences. At the same time however, one discerns a cultural image of childhood that is more romantic and poetic than empirical and experimental²³. But impacting most notably on his ideas of environment, of educating community and of *outdoor education*, is the importance given by L.R. to «rural and petit-bourgeois Italy, where work ethic, communitarian dimension of experience, religious sentiment, sense of duty and family unity represented a set of widespread and generally shared core values and attitudes»²⁴. In the context of these historically emplaced categories, all the same, it is still possible to profit from the educational thinking of L.R. and apply it to the present day, underscoring the need for school to avoid being a self-referential system, and seek rather to be independent, but more open to the wider world and able to use «critical» teaching methods near to the pupil, endorsing the «right of *their* [the child's] *future personality* which is in some way present and actual» and «the right of humanity, the value of which consists in the integration of the value of individuals»²⁵. What is needed is a school able also to recover the coordinates of a civic and ethical education of which the value has been lost. The school performs an educational role when it seeks the education of society and works to build the ideal society «which indeed can be nothing other than to integrate all the activities of individual co-members, a task made possible by mutual respect; hence, an *alliance of men serving to bring about their increased humanity*»²⁶. The various educational institutions operate with a 'unifying will', that is, in responding to the need of men for communion and to the desire of every individual for enrichment²⁷.

The need is even more evident at this time for the school to rethink its partnership with families and with the various education systems, associations, cultural agencies, institutions and educational representative bodies, in order to guarantee an educational offering that responds to the needs of children and adolescents. It is, in short, the paradigm of diffuse education:

a system of schooling based on learning through experience, conducted for the most part outside the school walls, in the local environment. The basic premiss is that authentic learning can be activated and internalized only if driven by an "*attraction passionnée*" (Fourier, 1966), by desire, by interest, by curiosity, and it is therefore much richer and more effective if acquired through real (and not fictitious) experience, and if the planning is shared with the young people involved²⁸.

Reflecting on environment-related teaching, one is prompted to address wider problems. Today, in effect, there is renewed debate on the meaning of compulsory schooling, delivery of state school education, and certification of skills²⁹. And indeed, as pointed out by G. Bertagna³⁰, the *Guidelines* issued by the Ministry of Education for managing the resumption of school activity following the *Coronavirus* emergency contain indications that confirm a change in the approach of the school with regard to the community, and a reshaping of teaching activity. The aim of these indications, more exactly, is «to give oneness of vision to an organizational, educational and didactic program connected not least with territorial peculiarities and opportunities», stating also that «schools must take care to ensure every child is given the same access to learning, while remaining free to adopt different organizational solutions, where opportune, for the creation of educational or training activities in parallel with or alternative to traditional teaching»³¹.

Evidently there are indications of renewal in the world of teaching, already proposed in previous directives but never implemented, which relate to a vision of new schools and personalized education. L.R. had himself made similar proposals, reiterating that «*school is made for the pupil*»³² and not the other way round, also that school should encourage the idea of exploring «nature and the spirit» at the same time, and therefore individual learners will be involved in different ways, according to their attitudes, interests and expectations:

An active school, while endeavouring to create a common culture and an equal degree of agility and thoroughness of work, does not expect by any means that all learners will accomplish the same thing in the same time: it differentiates individual tasks, groups pupils variously around different centres of interest, prompts and promotes individual expression, allowing everyone to develop their personal and direct experiences³³.

And, significantly, the school becomes a 'working community', generating synergic actions between students and the community³⁴. In doing so, the school engages with other bodies and organizations. L.R. points out the need of children «to look about them for people other than parents»³⁵, indicating the importance not only of the school, but also of other institutions in the wider area offering educational activities at different locations. These, then, are proposals which on the back of that openness to non-formal and informal educational settings already envisaged by L.R., we find are also incorporated into the recent *Guidelines*, which however must be supported pedagogically and politically, as noted, again, by Bertagna:

On this basis it would have been reasonable to expect that the *Guidelines* and the actions of governors, precisely to avoid undoing with the right hand what the left has put in place, might have declared courageously that to ensure orderly management of the new school as outlined on paper, there would be an immediate need for teachers skilled not only at what they do habitually in groups defined by level, by task, by workshop project, or elective, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary, offered on a weekly schedule by schools, but also at playing *gouverneur* to students in the manner of Rousseau. In other words, teachers able to accompany a group of, say, 10-12 students for the entire duration of a course in the role of tutor and work with them, thanks also to the provision of *Community education agreements*, on arranging all the non-formal and informal educational opportunities needed to develop the expected skills that will be documented ultimately in the personal portfolio they build up together³⁶.

The role of the teacher

L.R. effectively proposes a modernization of the school that it has not as yet been possible to implement. In all of this, nature and the environment are not systems extraneous to the person, psycho-physical limits, but integral to a single doing and becoming of Man, to a common human conscience³⁷, an education that targets the human³⁸. Thus, the school is characterized as a sort of workshop³⁹ in which every student uses tools, reprocessing them creatively and originally and interacting with the teacher, learning both from the school and from life. If there is a constant unitary vision of the human, then school-teaching cannot appear artificial, devoid of connections with all that is represented by the pupil and by the world he or she inhabits. In the thinking of L.R. one can therefore discern the reasons in support of an experiential kind of school-teaching that values exploration: «the master must study and discover everything, from the standpoint of children exploring their world and bringing out their interior cognitive and practical gifts, putting their intellectual, affective and constructive forces to the test»⁴⁰. Here, L.R. is looking to free the school from the laziness of teachers, because

the lazy are they who *work* and even work hard, but *doing only as they are used to*, giving no thought to renewal, sure of their own ground and without any idea that teaching might mean starting afresh every time a new soul is being taught [...]; self-criticism, doubt, looking for answers, re-examining the foundations of one's own culture⁴¹.

Lazy teachers «worship the method», 'reify' thought and are unable to enliven it⁴², because they» peddle a «*ready made culture*, without anxieties and without problems: fixed and lifeless programmes; things that *must be known*; notions», and a «*measured school*» for «made-to-measure» people⁴³.

L.R. attributes a role of importance and notable responsibility to the teacher: if he or she sets an exploratory, industrious, creative, open-minded, active example, then this can

be reflected in the school and in the pupil too; if the teacher is proactive, so too will the student be. Self-education, diffuse education, active learning between school and environment: none of these envisage students being left to their own devices. L.R. sees no place for spontaneity of action, maintaining that «teaching must never be improvisation»⁴⁴. In education according to L.R., the teacher is expected to plan, guide and direct activities both inside and outside the school, although leaving pupils free to organize their own particular experience. It is a way of stirring up the interior strengths of the child⁴⁵ through the lesson of the teacher, who becomes an example of the desire for research and activation, thereby fuelling the motivation to act. With this *modus operandi*, the school can be 'diffuse', adapting effortlessly to conditions, and in so doing, is no longer influenced by false humanism, abstract technicalism⁴⁶, or mannerism; the *scuola serena* is established drawing on everything that makes up the «concrete spiritual environment of the child», leading to full exercise and knowledge of the self. In the school-cum-workshop envisaged by L.R., the educand enjoys a condition of dignity, liberty and autonomy that also needs to be accompanied if its potential is to be unlocked.

Expressed in tones that perhaps sound dated today, L.R. sets out important principles regarding the role and professionalism of the teacher; the true master is

someone who never considers himself fully prepared to discharge his office, even though it be the most modest, in the smallest of schools; someone who every day *makes himself* a master, understanding the spirit of his pupils; someone who never forgets that he is not the sole educator and seeks therefore to link his efforts with those of other educators, working for his part toward the formation of a solid common educational purpose, shared by all the educators of a people. His integrity as a teacher lies entirely in being *honest with himself*⁴⁷.

Furthermore, L.R. is known for his interest in teacher training, a topic that continues in any event to be debated, and for the reference he makes to what is regarded today as the capacity of teachers for reflection on their educational practices. All of which recalls the well-known «reflective professional» of Donald Schön,⁴⁸ but also the current vision of teaching as a reflective practice instrumental in building a community of thought⁴⁹, given that «the master is continually learning of new resources from his colleagues, from his superiors, on his pedagogical travels, on his visits to educational exhibitions, and by reading books that reflect critically on the life of schools»⁵⁰.

Certainly, the teacher must raise awareness of the need for change in schooling and be prepared to manage that change, taking stock of his/her role and finding incentives to take on responsibility. Which is why, in the context of the present day situation, Bertagna speaks for example about the recognition and training of *tutors* able to back up the change and the appropriate measures required for the reorganization of

education and teaching, to ensure they will not be merely cosmetic. Today, in effect, there is a need to rethink the *mission* of the school, to combine the usual activities of teaching staff with e-learning and external activities, forging 'Community education agreements'. «What is needed, therefore, is the courage to use the occasion of Covid-19 to begin breaking out of the military-fordist paradigm from which we come and in which we are still firmly rooted»⁵¹.

In L.R. one is able to find pedagogical constructs that can encourage policy makers, local administrators, management and teaching staff to identify a new order of school: one that recognizes the value of the student as a person, with teachers having the ability to take on an ethic of responsibility, accompanying students in the construction of their own identity, enlivening school-based learning for, in and with the local surroundings, and ensuring that personal and community-based learning experiences become meaningful and real.

Providing diffuse outdoor education today

What are butterflies for, in a school-garden? Oh, not to sing a little song, certainly not [...]. Those that sing songs are not *real* butterflies, but butterflies "for children" fashioned by an adult, who does not hear the poetry of nature. At Portomaggiore the butterflies are *real*: they are those of Fabre; not Fabre the nursery-rhyming teacher, but Fabre the scientist⁵².

A pedagogical insight of L.R. that still holds good – even if expressed using certain justifiable archaic turns of phrase – concerns what is known today as 'outdoor education'. L.R. links this teaching to the educational principles that sustain the new schools, and spells out the relationship between man, environment and nature. His view seems to presage the current ecological vision, given the oneness with which it sees the becoming of person and spirit in their different manifestations⁵³. The environment is an arena for 'integrated' experiences to be supervised educationally and, in the mind of L.R., involves both the schoolroom *and* the outdoors. What is more, discussing the master who educates *man*, one sees how L.R. also speaks of education as being pertinent «to the family, to the city, to the nation»⁵⁴, since school is life, and therefore relates to all these different settings. L.R. appears to have a broad vision of outdoor education, given that he considers experience outside school and nature study not to be extempore teaching exercises but the experimentation of a new kind of school-teaching and learning conducive to the humanization of students. The spirit of the child manifests itself wholly, not least through experiences derived from its surroundings. Whilst L.R. expresses himself using terms such as 'realization of the spirit of the learner', his schooling and educational ideas are concrete and experiential, instrumental to the

becoming of the conscience, which is not idle, not found in the limbo of the intellect, but rendered active in social reality, in the institutions, in the environment⁵⁵.

Valuing of the environment by the teacher also means that the teaching can be rooted in the surroundings where pupils live and where their knowledge and responsible action can be redefined through «contact with rich and varied nature, consisting in a personal and direct exploration of its secrets, and in a free use of energies allowing them to be utilized and enjoyed»⁵⁶.

It is an invitation not to enclose the entire instructional/educational pathway «in the lukewarm glasshouse of school classrooms»⁵⁷. And in fact, when offering more specific disciplinary teaching indications for the primary school of the time, he clearly expresses the pedagogical paradigm of active, outdoor, democratic and diffuse education. So, with regard to the teaching of geography, referring to the novel *Emile* by Rousseau, he stresses the importance of actually *doing* geography by moving around the local environment, exploring and searching: «He truly builds the map of the area, through a series of little trips, and ensures it is truly examined and used during exploration, little by little suggesting the appropriate corrections and additions»⁵⁸. And likewise for the teaching of science, he relies on explorations of the environment that help, in a modern way, to build an ecological knowledge of man as a living being belonging to a system with which he must learn to relate:

A child who is able to roam free in the countryside knows where to find beetles, in which garden, on which plants, during which period: he knows how they live, and where; and he also sees them in the mind's eye. Detached and isolated from the rest of nature, but in a total picture of motion. This is what should happen with every natural history lesson: so, this study becomes a continual reflection, because every being lives in a constant logical relationship with all of creation: the child is forced to seek out, sense and deduce these relationships for himself [...]. On fine days, let school be held in the open air, as this is so easy in our rural schools, and let natural science lessons be held *on the ground*, in the presence of the living beings to be studied. But here, more than anywhere, it is essential that *the master prepare himself, correct his own failing*, which is so very often to know something scientific only in *verbalistic* terms, without realizing that this kind of knowledge is worth less than nothing⁵⁹.

And yet, even today teachers struggle to appreciate the *outdoor* option as a 'stabilized' educational opportunity, as a tool for dealing with the health emergency but also, and more especially, as a chance to bring about change in the organization of schooling based on classroom lessons and disciplinary knowledge.

In *Athena fanciulla* moreover, L.R. sketches out the framework for a reorganization of the school. In it, he describes and praises the method and the aims of Alice Franchetti in creating the *Montesca* rural school, which offers a concrete example of outdoor, active

and social education that has the effect of liberating childhood and the person. And whilst it is true that there must still be limits associated with a purely rural school, which came into being to bring about a «cultural redemption of *agricultural plebeians* through a renewed awareness of agricultural labour and of the intimate relationship between man and the soil»⁶⁰, L.R. nonetheless highlights its innovative features and the quality of its organization and management, to the point of identifying didactic indicators applicable to all schools:

Much of the schooling takes place in the park [...]. Crops are cultivated, animals bred. There are "hands-on" botany and zoology classes, and a *meteorological office* run by the children themselves, with systematic observations actually transmitted to and utilized by the central State Meteorological Office in Rome, which recognizes the school as an accredited *weather station*⁶¹.

The various disciplines are taught against a natural and environmental backdrop, taking on a value for children that can even be affective and emotive, and providing tools to aid their overall growth. It is a school in which collaboration is key, and the community spirit stimulates learners to discuss, to explore, to open their minds, to be industrious, to *do things*, ... that is – in modern parlance – to acquire skills.

Teachers do not only give a lesson, as they have prepared it, they also make suggestions and accept suggestions from the pupils, so that all can agree on and plan the work to be carried forward together [...] Working in a group inspires collaboration, a true assessment of the inventive contribution made by each individual. [...] These new forms of education using collective methods are beginning to see the work of the mind as an endeavour richer and more enjoyable than practical and immediate tasking. There is no rule dictating that 'doing' be limited to practical work; indeed it can be taken anywhere. All studies can be based on the principle of work⁶².

Teachers are expected to be capable of planning flexibly, gathering the elements of input received from the children and from the environment and arranging them to best advantage, otherwise the «*spontaneity of the child* runs the risk of becoming *casual* and disorderly»⁶³. At the same time, L.R. guards against the preparation of teaching pathways that are 'too regulated' and could lead to a certain uniformity of the 'product', as this would not allow the creativity and originality of the pupil to come through. And again, with reference to the activities of the *Montesca* school regarding the observation of nature, the study of phenomena and the drawing that accompanies such observations, L.R. does not fail to point out that: «examining these tasks performed by children, which indeed qualify as *collective* but are nonetheless genuinely *individual*, it is surprising to discern a certain uniformity, which over time tends even to come across

as *stiffness*. In this we see the great merit, but also the weakness of the Montesca approach»⁶⁴.

The way the education-school-environment relationship was structured in L.R.'s time, with all the envisaged pedagogical and didactic links in place, reflects the national historical context of Italy in the early 20th century, that is to say an essentially rural setting, typified not least by the organization of schooling on an *ad hoc* basis. A rural solution, consistent with a «campaign for the ruralization of society»⁶⁵. But it is certainly not on the basis of the 'natural exercises' borrowed by L.R. from Montesca and included in his primary school programs⁶⁶ that he might be considered to have anticipated the modern notion of *outdoor* education as related to an educating community. Rather, the aspect of interest today is the new image of the school envisaged by L.R., with the pupil as protagonist; a school adaptable to an integrated educational network in which the environment, natural and anthropic, indoor and outdoor, has a role of primary importance⁶⁷. The challenge is one of building an integrated education system – not altogether present, not even in these post-Covid times when one would expect to see a search for new spaces and new educational horizons – to study and implement solutions that are truly formative, seeking the good of the educand and of society.

Nature, says L.R., is scented in the fluidity of life; it involves overcoming the strictures of a mechanistic school-and-educational activity marked by positivism, preferring, in particular, the lively interplay between educator and educand, in which the environment certainly plays a meaningful part, but acknowledging the personalized pathway that each student follows. Hence, the possibility of adopting an active and outdoor method in a flexible way is plain to see. As Philippe Meirieu observes in the present day, the true active school does not trivialize manual work, be it outdoor or indoor, inasmuch as manual and mental work go hand in hand, «from *bricolage* to *opération mentale*»⁶⁸. There are indeed many ways to be active, in the sense of mobilizing children to acquire elements of knowledge and coordinate them. The materials available are many and various: texts, data, objects, within and outside class. It is a case of setting up «an elaborate system of resources or constraints, so that action will cause the subject to grow intellectually»⁶⁹ and help the pupil to learn «a) by working on materials; b) in response to instructions; c) so as to originate models»⁷⁰.

The legacy of L.R. can therefore be of relevance when reflecting on the criteria and the 'pedagogical motivations' that are behind a reorganization of spaces and of the school environment dictated by social distancing and health concerns, but by other factors too. The school envisaged by L.R. exists primarily to uphold the value represented by the person of the student, living in a society of persons: all of whom have the right to

achieve personal fulfilment based on the principles of social justice and personal freedom.

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¹ Giorgio Chiosso writes: «We do not have any need at this time for discussions marred by vested interests: for example, the out-and-out defence of rights by those hoping for a rapid return to the previous normality, or at the other extreme, acceleration toward a digital scenario driven by the enthusiasm of recent weeks and above all by the accompanying economic interests. Neither do we have any need for makeshift reforms, based on transient fashions, born of improvisation and not validated, let alone by the scientific community, but by simple common sense» (G. Chiosso, *Un libro per volta*, «Nuova Secondaria», XXXVII, 10 (2020), p. 8).

² Cf. U. Bronfenbrenner, *Ecologia dello sviluppo umano*, il Mulino, Bologna 1986.

³ H.A. Cavallera, *L'inattuale attualità di Giuseppe Lombardo Radice*, in University of Rome, Teaching Faculty, Institute of Pedagogy, *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi per il centenario della nascita (1879-1979)*, (28-29-30 September 1979), edited by I. Picco, Edizioni del Gallo Cedrone, L'Aquila 1981, p. 412.

⁴ Flores d'Arcais, examining the letter sent by L.R. on 12 May 1926 to Elisabeth Rotten, director of an activist-inclined journal, identifies three elements marking out L.R. as a supporter «of activism, indeed educational activism, rather than of theorized activism, or activism theorizable in pedagogy»: the vision of a master who does not so much teach as suggest, stimulate and learn from the pupils; the position of prominence assumed by the environment, including the local, folkloric neighbourhood, in the educational action; the total confidence in the vital and constitutive forces of the child. «However much these three elements may perhaps be put forward, on the theoretical level, using idealistic language, it is undoubtedly the case that they constitute the fundamental theses of the *new education* Ms Rotten was attempting, through her own efforts and that of her journal, to coordinate at international level» (G. Flores d'Arcais, *Intorno all'attivismo di Giuseppe Lombardo Radice*, in University of Rome, Teaching Faculty, Institute of Pedagogy, *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice*, quote, pp. 393-394).

⁵ F. Cambi, *Manuale di storia della pedagogia*, Laterza, Bari 2005, p. 278.

⁶ G. Catalfamo, *Giuseppe Lombardo-Radice*, La Scuola, Brescia 1966, p. 49.

⁷ *Ibi*, p. 36.

⁸ *Ibi*, p. 39.

⁹ *Ibi*, p. 23.

¹⁰ F. Cambi, *Manuale di storia della pedagogia*, quote, pp. 298-299.

¹¹ Cf. G. Bertagna, *Reinventare la scuola. Un'agenda per cambiare il sistema di istruzione e formazione a partire dall'emergenza Covid-19*, Studium, Rome 2020 (e-book).

¹² G. Lombardo-Radice, *L'ideale educativo e la scuola nazionale. Lezioni di pedagogia generale fondata sul concetto di autoeducazione*, Sandron, Florence 1916-1922, pp. 79-146.

¹³ R. Mazzetti, *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice tra l'idealismo pedagogico e Maria Montessori*, Edizioni Giuseppe Malipiero, Bologna 1958, pp. 104-105.

¹⁴ *Ibi*, p. 98.

¹⁵ *Ibi*, p. 100.

¹⁶ Cf. Z. Bauman, E. Mauro, *Babel*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2015.

¹⁷ G. Lombardo Radice, *Educazione e diseducazione*, Bemporad, Florence 1923, pp. 142-143.

¹⁸ Even today, when using the term *outdoor* in conjunction with 'education', 'learning' and 'teaching', there is a need for disambiguation, given that depending on the schools of thought by which it is adopted, it allows the enactment of diversified educational opportunities, identifiable along environmental, or psychoevolutional or social lines. And if this is always going to mean experiential learning, and therefore active schooling, it is in any case essential to draw on educational intentionality as the platform for channelling *outdoor* experiences (Cf. O. Zanato Orlandini, *Outdoor Education. Riflessioni su alcuni paradigmi che la rappresentano*, «Studium educationis», 1 (2020), pp. 9-18).

¹⁹ G. Lombardo Radice, *Educazione e diseducazione*, quote, pp. 143-144.

- ²⁰ G. Cives, *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice. Didattica e pedagogia della collaborazione*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1970, p. 160. «The State is concrete; it is the community of citizens with their constitutive character. The community, writes Lombardo Radice, is the “living unity of souls” desirous of collaboration. So, in the field of education, the initiatives of individuals also coincide with the directives of the public initiative, as long as they are not in radical contrast with the public view, and indeed they often prefigure and prepare it» (*Ibi*, p. 161).
- ²¹ G. Catalfamo, *Giuseppe Lombardo-Radice*, quote, p. 87.
- ²² L.R. quote in *Ibi*, p. 88.
- ²³ G. Chiosso, *Novecento pedagogico*, La Scuola, Brescia 1997, p. 149.
- ²⁴ *Ibi*, p.151.
- ²⁵ G. Lombardo Radice, *L'ideale educativo e la scuola nazionale, Lezioni di pedagogia generale fondata sul concetto di autoeducazione*, quote, p. 86.
- ²⁶ *Ibi*, p. 96.
- ²⁷ *Ibi*, p. 103 et seq.
- ²⁸ P. Mottana, *Introduzione*, in P. Mottana, G. Campagnoli, *Educazione diffusa. Istruzioni per l'uso*, Terra Nuova, Florence 2020, pp. 11-12.
- ²⁹ G. Gobber, *Diritto all'istruzione e obbligo scolastico con il Coronavirus*, «Nuova Secondaria», XXXVII,10 (2020), pp. 3-4.
- ³⁰ G. Bertagna, *Il Ministero dell'istruzione Willy il Coyote e la realtà Beep-Beep. «Modeste proposte» per non sfracellarsi sulle rocce*, «Nuova Secondaria Ricerca», XXXVII, 10 (2020), p. 7.
- ³¹ Cf. Ministry of Education, *Piano scuola 2020-2021. Documento per la pianificazione delle attività scolastiche, educative e formative in tutte le Istituzioni del Sistema nazionale di Istruzione*, Ministerial Decree n° 39 of 26 June 2020, pp. 6 and 7.
- ³² G. Lombardo Radice, *Didattica viva. Problemi ed esperienze. Pagine scelte e coordinate da Ernesto Codignola*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1951, p. 79.
- ³³ G. Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale*, Sandron, Florence 1973, p. 38.
- ³⁴ Cf. G. Lombardo Radice, *Didattica viva. Edited by Elisa Frauenfelder*, La Nuova Italia, Scandicci 1993, pp. 102-103.
- ³⁵ G. Lombardo Radice, *L'ideale educativo e la scuola nazionale*, quote, p. 91.
- ³⁶ G. Bertagna, *Il Ministero dell'istruzione Willy il Coyote e la realtà Beep-Beep*, quote, p. 8.
- ³⁷ G. Lombardo Radice, *Educazione e diseducazione*, quote, p. 16.
- ³⁸ *Ibi*, p. 73.
- ³⁹ *Ibidem*.
- ⁴⁰ G. Lombardo Radice, *Didattica viva. Pagine scelte e coordinate da Ernesto Codignola*, quote, p. 95.
- ⁴¹ G. Lombardo Radice, *Educazione e diseducazione*, quote, p.119.
- ⁴² *Ibi*, p. 108.
- ⁴³ *Ibi*, p. 117.
- ⁴⁴ G. Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale*, quote, p. 74.
- ⁴⁵ G. Catalfamo, *Giuseppe Lombardo-Radice*, quote, p. 105.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibi*, p. 131.
- ⁴⁷ G. Lombardo Radice, *L'ideale educativo e la scuola nazionale*, quote, pp. 160-161.
- ⁴⁸ D.A. Schön, *Il professionista riflessivo. Per una nuova epistemologia della pratica professionale*, Dedalo, Bari 1993. Cf. also G. Bertagna and C. Xodo (edited by), *Le competenze dell'insegnare. Studi e ricerche sulle competenze attese, dichiarate e percepite*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2011.
- ⁴⁹ M.-C. Michelini, *Fare comunità di pensiero. Insegnamento come pratica riflessiva*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2016.
- ⁵⁰ G. Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale*, quote, p. 75.
- ⁵¹ G. Bertagna, *Reinventare la scuola*, quote, para 5.3.
- ⁵² G. Lombardo-Radice, *Il problema dell'educazione infantile*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1948, p. 173.
- ⁵³ Cf. E. Frauenfelder, *Introduzione*, in G. Lombardo Radice, *Didattica viva. Edited by Elisa Frauenfelder*, quote, p. 4.
- ⁵⁴ G. Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale*, quote, p. 55.
- ⁵⁵ G. Lombardo Radice, *Educazione e diseducazione*, quote, p. 74.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibi*, p. 143.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.
- ⁵⁸ G. Lombardo Radice, *Didattica viva. Problemi ed esperienze. Pagine scelte e coordinate da Ernesto Codignola*, quote, p. 62.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibi*, p. 63 and p. 65.
- ⁶⁰ D. De Salvo, *Educare alla ruralità. Le scuole elementari a sgravio di Montesca e Rovigliano*, «Pedagogia oggi», XVI, 1, (2018), p. 279.
- ⁶¹ G. Lombardo-Radice, *Athena fanciulla. Scienza e poesia della scuola serena*, Bemporad & figlio, Florence 1924, p. 29.
- ⁶² G. Lombardo Radice, *Didattica viva. Problemi ed esperienze. Pagine scelte e coordinate da Ernesto Codignola*, quote, pp. 86-87.

⁶³ G. Lombardo-Radice, *Athena fanciulla*, quote, p. 20.

⁶⁴ *Ibi*, p. 53.

⁶⁵ Cf. L. Montecchi, *Alle origini della «scuola serena». Giuseppe Lombardo Radice e la cultura pedagogica italiana del primo Novecento di fronte al mito della scuola della Montesca*, «History of Education and Children's Literature», IV, 2, (2009), p. 336.

⁶⁶ *Ibi*, p. 321.

⁶⁷ *Ibi*, p. 324.

⁶⁸ P. Meirieu, *Pedagogia. Dai luoghi comuni ai concetti chiave*. Edited by Enrico Bottero, Aracne, Canterano 2018, p. 27.

⁶⁹ *Ibi*, p. 43.

⁷⁰ *Ibi*, p. 47.