**Young people and work: which pedagogy for the generation of uncertainty?**

**Sofia Corradi**

Full Professor emer. of “Permanent Education (lifelong learning)” at the Italian State University “Roma Tre”, Director of its “Laboratory of Lifelong Learning”

I anticipate the conclusion at which I want to arrive: The pedagogy for the generation of uncertainty is *lifelong learning.* We must learn to learn. To be simple and short, I abundantly lean on a text which I still today consider very topical, to be exact, on the manifesto on *Permanent education* by Paul Lengrand (1910-2003), according to whom the educational process of everybody must basically be one of an “autodidact” in the strictest meaning of the word. Lengrand even states as the objective of education “to make of every person an autodidact in the most comprehensive meaning of the term”, i.e. one who takes his intellectual, moral, and spiritual destiny in his own hands. That is a long way which each of us must travel through. He continues, one will never insist too much on the fact that “there are ENVIRONMENTS which favour and environments which hinder the development of the personality”, but what always remains essential and indispensable is the original personal effort, unique in its direction and its manifestations, which every human being “must make on his/her own account”. Thus education is not “added to life, like something coming from outside”, on the contrary it is identified with the human being, “it, therefore, doesn’t belong to the sphere of *having*, but to the one of *BEING”*.

The personal educational course sees everybody profiting from any occasion of growing, in the various historical and familial contingencies, it sees him/her “exploring the new fields given to him/her and the new crops offered to him/her”. It is developed (lifelong learning) in the great educational laboratory of life (compared to which school is a rather small laboratory). We intend this course to be a true lifestyle, a scientific method which is not only applied in the vertical meaning, during the span of the life of a person, but even *lifewide learning,* in the horizontal meaning: a phenomenon as vast as life itself in its objective meaning.

Coming back to our meeting of today of persons who are teachers, one could consider it an encouragement to cultivating one’s natural talents better in order to accompany one’s pupils in the best professional way possible in the development of their natural potentials.

During the bygone centuries the changes happening from one generation to the next one (teachers – pupils) were modest. On the contrary, nowadays one knows for sure that the world in which our pupils will live and work will not be at all like the world of today. One must, therefore, admit honestly that WE DON’T KNOW for which world, for which work we must prepare them and, moreover, one knows well that at the beginning of an educational relationship frankness is certainly preferable to a lie referring to itself.

Perhaps the only prediction which one can make with certainty is that everybody will have to earn his/her money by his/her own work. Saint Benedict would add “like our ancestors and the apostles”. Not even the sons of kings or very rich or very powerful persons will be able to escape from that. That is of course valid both for men and women. The idea of marriage as a “solution” for women is already anachronistic in our days.

Thus it is necessary to prepare oneself for a future one doesn’t know. It’s necessary to prepare oneself considering that it is even possible for an exceptionally brilliant scientist in Sanskrit literature to have good chances of finding work, that on the other hand it is advisable for the young people to orientate themselves towards professions which have no geographic or linguistic boundaries (such as *Law* or *Literature*).

Everybody will have to SEARCH for his/her work. That IS NOT an unexpected event which comes to you unforeseen at the end of your course of studies. Thus you must prepare yourself for the SEARCH for your work, too, EQUIPPING yourself opportunely and EXERCISING doing it. One result is that it is a difficult experience to feel yourself valued by an employer with regard to whom you don’t have any right.

Often the youngster SEARCHES for his/her work when he/she reaches the CONCLUSION of his/her studies (diploma, doctorate, licence) or when he/she NEEDS it. It is evident that it is better to make that exercise “with a security net”, i.e. as long as he/she can still count on the support of the family (if he/she is lucky), i.e. as long as the refusal of a workplace or a dismissal are not too painful.

Pragmatically speaking: What today is indicated as “alternative school/work” must be considered a measure which must belong necessarily to the EDUCATIONAL process of every individual. That’s hardly a case of recalling that, as much as the “work of miners” is inhuman and detrimental to the development of an individual, it is in a similar way profitable to provide for a youngster (from childhood on) the EXPERIENCE of what it means to have “genuine work”.

Nor it is banal to say that the education of young people must necessarily include GOOD OPERATIVE knowledge of the English language and informatics. Your pupils are certainly more skilful than you and me in learning how to use the computer: We must become at least as skilful as they are. Nowadays the young people seem to manage spontaneously to provide themselves at least with alphabetisation in informatics.

In what concerns the English language, we must remember that what they need is GOOD and OPERATIVE knowledge. The expression “school English” is a failure not only for the school but also for the individual: I don’t succeed in understanding how there can be so many young people today who DON’T KNOW English, at a time when the EU allows us to go working in Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland.

One cannot ignore that the present economic situation of the world provokes shocking percentages of unemployment: In parts of the world unemployment reaches unprecedented percentages. It’s not only the educators alone who can find remedies, but certainly it’s a duty of the educators to find and realize possible instruments directed at providing the youngster at least with “technical consultation” in order to enable him/her to “swim in the waves of life”. In what Anna Lorenzetto has called an ecosystem of permanent education, the teacher finds him/herself as being a “facilitator of learning”, a “technical counsellor”. Every human being is born possessing the basic human right to education and the youngster must at least receive “technical consultation” BEFORE dying by drowning. That is to say that the youngster cannot repeat, in the course of his/her individual life, the whole course which has, during millenniums, taken mankind to the level of knowledge of today.

We must resist the temptation of thinking that it will be us who will make the young people swim in the waves of life: It will be they themselves. We will not be there. It will be up to them to do it, using their capacities or personal resources which we have helped them to develop. Therefore, for the generation of uncertainty a kind of pedagogy must be adopted which has as its method CONFIDENCE in the pupil.

In this future, which now nobody can even foresee, we, the teachers of today, WILL NOT BE THERE: Our pupils of today will confront the problems of that present.

An important positive element is that the human beings have been made to survive. Our pupils are the descendants of SURVIVORS of the natural selection of millions of years.

As I have already said, I share the school of thought which sees the role of the teacher as a “facilitator of learning”, of a kind of learning whose protagonist is he who learns (learner), not he who teaches (teacher). That school of thought is now widely shared and it draws a lot of glorious pedagogical experience from what is called “adult education”. That’s where the general category known by the name of *lifelong learning* was born, which now has been enlarged in the concept of *lifewide learning*, i.e. a kind of learning which draws on the very vast reality of life, with regard to which, as I have already said, school appears to be A VERY SMALL educational laboratory.

We must certainly do away with objections which would only make us lose time. School is not only not superfluous, but it is absolutely necessary, at least in order to provide organisation for casual or incoherent learning. CONTENTS are certainly necessary: There is no doubt that a medical doctor must know anatomy, physiology etc. perfectly and that he/she must dedicate a lot of time and work to learning them. And the same is true of an engineer and any other work activity. But what one must fight against energetically, is the (stupid) question (concerning teachers) if it is more important for them to know their subject in the strict meaning of the word well, or that they know how to encourage the autonomous development and the growth of their pupils. In my opinion that is an arbitrary question, for it seems evident that BOTH elements are indispensable.

Perhaps nothing is left but adopting a VERY HIGH concept of the function of the teacher. All the world knows well that influential theological schools conceive the creation of the world not as something that was achieved or finished in a faraway past, but rather as a permanent work of God, a piece of work which is continuing even today. In his impenetrable project God attributes to every person being born different characteristics and talents. I like to think that the task of the teacher is in principle facilitating the development and the growth of the innate potentials of every pupil, in order to make them blossom out better.

I beg your pardon for my extreme brevity in such elevated concepts, but the time makes it necessary. Therefore I try now to make some suggestions to you, that is to say, I put myself in the role of a “facilitator of learning” or a “technical counsellor” vis-à-vis teachers, in order to indicate to them ways they could travel through nowadays to cultivate (and to make blossom better) themselves and their professionalism.

Far from suggesting measures that have a high economic price or that depend on future decisions of some persons different from us (Parliament, Governments etc.), I recommend to you on the contrary to be pragmatic and to look around you in order to use the resources which reality offers you and of which I will give you an example in the interest of your personal growth. In other words, the teachers of today will do something very useful for their pupils, if they dedicate themselves to cultivating themselves.

First of all I would like to make evident an important positive element: All those who are present at this meeting have already done what is most important, they have made their way to this international meeting. It is indeed my first suggestion to participate in meetings that are international. None of us knows exactly in advance WHAT he/she needs, but getting near the window, looking at other cultures can only do something good. Perhaps the future will be hyper-technological, but it is also possible that there will be famines, a pure fight for survival, a future where the ability of cultivating an orchard can be useful. That is to say, for adolescents living in a town it would be very educating to go to work in the country for some months, but it must be genuine work, not a holiday in tourism in the country. We, the human beings, are extraordinary learning machines and as soon as we happen to see something that arouses our interest we grasp the opportunity to learn it in a flash.

Being interested in fields of knowledge or experience which are DIFFERENT from one’s own is an ever useful practice, it’s a habit to be taken up as soon as possible and to be maintained throughout one’s whole life: Those who are professors in a school, ought to visit factories, or even better, ought to go working there at least for some weeks. Those who study technical or (natural) scientific subjects ought to visit art museums. If there is a university in your town, go to lectures or meetings which are as a rule open to the public. Instead of complaining about too little curiosity for learning in our pupils let’s cultivate OUR curiosity for learning. We must teach our pupils to GO SEARCHING for knowledge, even STEALING it. School is a curious environment, almost unique, where he/she who possesses knowledge is ready to renounce to having the monopoly on it, in favour of the pupil who is curious enough to learn and who succeeds in doing it. But he/she who does not possess curiosity, will not succeed in teaching it.

During the last years numerous Open Universities have come into being. Some allow only those who have registered and have paid their respective fees to enjoy their courses. But there are others which have less desirable timetables or use second-class channels and broadcast their courses without fees in order to become known, and anybody can see them gratuitously at home, on his TV set. Payment is only demanded if one registers for *tutoring* and exams for achieving the diplomas.

Confronted with an uncertain future, it is very evident that one will be better off if one cultivates and develops in oneself all the characteristics which enable one to adapt to unforeseen circumstances and contexts. I allude to creativity and critical thinking. According to what I have said, it is in my opinion evident that a kind of pedagogy for an uncertain future does not only have to create “professionals” in a strict meaning, but rounded personalities who – being robust – can also be flexible if the case falls due. In order to avoid all misunderstandings, I would like to confirm that excellent technical competence in one’s sphere of work is an indispensable condition of being able to cope with and compete in a now globalised world, in which even competition is globalised.

I want to concentrate on an educational instrument which in my opinion goes exactly in the desired direction: i.e. the Erasmus Programme of the European Union. It is certain that in the EU almost everybody knows it, that’s why I am going to recall the essential features to the benefit of non-members of the EU. Finally I’m going to finish by drawing your attention to the development and the latest enlargement of the Programme. Since 2013 the Erasmus Programme has been extended, has had a new impulse and has been refinanced in the Erasmus Programme Plus. The financing, granted by the European Union for the seven years from 2014 to 2020, has been raised by 45 % and amounts to 15 milliards of euros, equalling 16 milliards of dollars.

Erasmus is today considered as the first great campaign in history which promotes dialogue and peace between peoples. Since its launch in 1997 a good three millions of university students have finished one or two semesters of studies abroad and two hundred thousand are making the same experience during this academic year. Now every EU citizen knows what Erasmus is, the educators know it well and even among the “strangers to work” there is now no more European citizen who doesn’t have a relative or a friend who “has done Erasmus”. But as I had thought before, it today happens to interest even the inhabitants of other continents outside Europe and therefore it is advisable to say something about the general structure and the objectives of the Erasmus Programme. That also interests the Europeans who feel being “cosmopolitans”, who are interested in reaping the possible extra-European fruits of the Programme.

The essential connotation of Erasmus consists in the fact that, *before* going to study at a university abroad, the student receives from the university where he/she is registered the assurance that the studies finished abroad and the respective credits will be wholly recognized and calculated as parts of his/her individual Study Plan for obtaining the final diploma in his/her mother country (the “Laurea” for Italian students).

At the university which receives the student he/she is evaluated by the teachers according to the regular modalities practised for the students of the country, and the marks are “translated” on the basis of predefined parameters.

The Erasmus student pays the university fees only at the university from which he/she comes and at the university receiving him/her he/she has the right to enjoy the available resources (canteen, lodging etc.) in the same way as students of the country.

Erasmus is not aimed only at learning foreign languages or their perfection; the most important feature is the experience of “full immersion” in a different culture: That’s an experience of life in a different environment. The student finds him/herself living the precious experience of being a “member of a minority”, but making that experience in an environment which is not hostile he/she reaps its fruits without suffering.

The primary educational feature of the Erasmus Programme consists in the experience of living for a period of some months immersed in a culture different from one’s own, in direct interaction with persons of the same age and the same cultural level. What you acquire is acquired DIRECTLY FROM EXPERIENCE Erasmus without intermediating logical or theoretical categories. The most remarkable projects lie in the field of personal growth, especially leadership; the sense of personal responsibility, the ability of communicating, of working in a group and of solving unforeseen problems by means of creative or innovative solutions.

Nowadays the greatest political and spiritual authorities basically agree on wishing the renewal of a culture of dialogue rather than a culture of commitment. Erasmus creates a genuine mentality of “dialoguing” which becomes a permanent general feature of the individual and which therefore functions vis-à-vis any culture which one comes into contact with.

The result of the Erasmus Project has not been producing individuals who have a purely intellectual knowledge about dialogue, but forming three millions of persons who relate themselves with others by means of the dialogue.

On December 5th, 2013 the European Parliament (which is now co-legislator) has definitely approved the continuation and the enlargement of the Erasmus Project in Erasmus Plus, which has been operative since 2014 and which aims, in addition to the well-known mobility of students, at the mobility of teachers, scholars, managers, entrepreneurs, voluntaries, too.

Of course, in our days you can find all the possible information on the internet, continually updated in the “Guide to Erasmus Programme Plus”, presented in several languages.

My personal suggestion to institutions, organisations, associations which have not yet made previous experiences is to begin their own experience in the role of an “associated member” in a project coordinated and managed by an institution which has already got experiences in other European projects. In the role of associated member the learning and the enrichment of cultural and scientific nature are basically the same as those of the coordinating institution, but the charges of organisation and administration are really very little.

As a conclusion I give you some examples of possibilities which according to Erasmus are not only open to all Europe, but also to the countries of any part of the world.

* *Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees*
* *Strategic Alliances in the Fields of Education, Vocational Training, and Youth*
* *European Voluntary Service* etc.

My bilingual text in Italian and English on “ERASMUS and ERASMUS PLUS. International mobility …”  has been edited, published by the Laboratory of Lifelong Learning of the state university “Roma 3”.

The text on paper is not on the market, but I have been assured that they will send one copy gratuitously to institutions, libraries, magazines as long as available on demand to the email addresses s.corradi@lifelong.it, or sofiacorradi.roma@gmail.com.

Starting from July 2015, it will be possible to download the whole text in Italian and English gratuitously from the websites [www.lifelong.it](http://www.lifelong.it) and [www.lifelonglab.it](http://www.lifelonglab.it).

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Sofia Corradi has been Full Professor of “Permanent Education” at the Italian State University “Roma Tre”, Director of its “Laboratory of Lifelong Learning” and of its “Postgraduate Course in Theory and Practice of Lifelong Learning”.

Graduated in Law (cum laude) from the University of Rome “La Sapienza”.

As a recipient of Fulbright and Columbia Fellowships, she studied at the Graduate School of Law of Columbia University in New York City, earning the Degree of Master in Comparative Law.

 As the sole winner of the Ninth Prize of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, she attended as Head of the Italian Delegation all the sessions of the Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations, concentrating on the right to education as a fundamental human right.

She also studied and did research work at The Hague Academy of International Law (on a fellowship of the Dutch Government) and at the London School of Economics (on a fellowship of the Italian National Council for Research, CNR), doing research on the educational value of students’ mobility.

For years she was scientific consultant of the Standing Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities.

In 1980, she became Associate Professor of Adult Education at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”.

She was Member of the Steering Committee and Italian Representative in the “Placement Project” (1988-90) funded by the European Union, by which the EURES network was founded (1993) for the intra-European placement of workers.

For three terms (1993 – 2000) she was an elected Member of the Academic Senate of the State University “Roma Tre.” In 2002, she was elected member of the Board of EAEA, the Brussels-based pan-European Association for the Education of Adults.

She is fluent in English and French.