**Young people and work … at the beginning of the third millennium**

**A pedagogical perspective**

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**A provoking suggestion by Aldo Agazzi**

Our civil tradition contains the antinomy otium-negotium, liberal arts – servile works; classical-humanist contempt of manual work and strain and of biblical-Christian appreciation of work and technics: education must wholly correct and overcome that surviving opposition by giving everybody a humanist and work-oriented formation – of humanity and of work in all schools – until the moment of specialization and professional qualifications, when out of a general human formation (which comprises work, too) there emerges, chosen by the person, the proper intellectual, artisan, technical, manual profession, one of the activities which the human being has realized as his/her own (Agazzi, 1958, p. 224).

**Searching for professional values that can be shared**

In a lot of statements a social and cultural scenario is presented which is characterized by the complexity and the “liquidity” of a dominant culture which includes a sort of *paideia implicita*, which makes a *pedagogical paradox* evident: in it one tries to maintain in a united way the features of *social functionalism* and of *ethical and value-related individualism.* In such a scenario the rather frequent calls to a rhetoric of solidarity risk becoming neutralized by the combination consisting of profound messages pointing in completely different directions.

**Social functionalism**

Contemporary culture is inclined to finalizing formation according to the “requirements” of the world of work, so much that very often the choices of young people (starting from their proper studies) tend to bend themselves to criteria of a functional kind, which respond to the question: “What is more useful?”, taking into consideration a good and workable insertion in a profession. On the level of international recommendations, too, when the importance of education is emphasized (and sometimes the talk is expressly about lifelong education, not only about apprenticeship and further education), the “functional” character is affirmed which it can have for the inhabitants of complexity gone astray.

The European Commission has indicated some other Utopian idea: an educating society founded on acquisition, actualization, and use of knowledge. That is about three aspects which ought to be emphasized in the educational process. As the development of the “information society” is increasing the possibilities of access to data and facts, education should enable everybody to collect information and to select, order, handle and use it. [J. Delors (ed.), *Nell’educazione un tesoro*, Roma 1997, p. 19]

**Ethical individualism**

On the other hand, if you ask yourself what the most representative professional values are, among those which are proposed most often as an answer to personal expectations concerning work, there tend to emerge motivations of a pragmatic (economic) kind or personal (individualist) gratification. It seems as if meaning was being separated from the social function of work, from the contribution it could make to the construction of men’s city, to the realization of a common good exceeding the tiny horizon of subjective gratification of individual persons. Even research done recently confirms that double tendency. [M. Bortolotto, A. Porcarelli (2015), *L'orientamento tra identità personale e cultura del lavoro. Prospettive di ricerca sul ruolo della scuola in adolescenza*, in: CQIA Rivista, Formazione, lavoro, persona; nr. 13, March 2015, pp. 1-40,

<http://www00.unibg.it/dati/bacheca/1029/73612.pdf> ]

**Educational and formational strategies**

On the level of educational and formational strategies one could say a lot about the necessity of contrasting the functionalist tendency of academic formation, which, however, shows itself in some way in continuity with a utilitarian vision of studies, which often already grows in secondary schools.

Apart from that, it seems important to us to provide formative contexts with a view to appreciating, at an early stage, the educational and formational value of work, starting from a tender age. It would be important to elaborate articulate strategies of exploration of professions, where the children could experiment themselves in various professional contexts, putting to the test both the competences acquired at school and - above all – their proper sensitivity, their capacity of inserting themselves in those contexts and of working there with a profit and – why not – with pleasure and joy.

**A pedagogical and ideological discussion**

The discussion about the educational value of work is incited and lively today and doesn’t always end up simply in juxtaposing positions in their distances. There is he/she who attributes to work an educational and formational function, which can bear its fruits at the end of the age of evolution and thus intertwine itself with school courses, showing in an explicit way the possibility of realizing those same courses of secondary school education alternating with experiences of remunerated work, chosen in autonomy and responsibility. There is another one who sees in work a space of realizing oneself as an adult, but looks at it with mistrust in the age of evolution, evoking spectres of the past, because of the conviction that a possible proposal of alternating school and work “constitutes an authorized form of children’s labour, not remunerated and without rights for the students”, and that “one cannot believe that fulfilling the duty of school attendance by going to school is equal to fulfilling it by frequenting for example a course of a hairdresser’s apprenticeship or by working in a factory”. [R. Monteforte, *Obbligo scolastico: l’ultimo bluff Moratti*, «L’unità», March 25th, 2005, p. 9]

There returns in a paradoxical form the antique opposition of “otium” and “negotium”, in the Latin meaning, transferred into the discussion on the role of work inside school education.

**The formative value of work**

When the parents (I’m thinking e.g. of peasants in the Apennines) taught their children their own trade, they in reality chose the opportunity to include in that formation a true and proper “school of life”, too. Moreover, work is the place of personal duty, in which numerous personal and social virtues are practised, in which the capacity of engaging oneself with constancy and dedication matures, but also the capacity of acting in a loyal and correct way in the confrontation with colleagues, the employer, the other persons (citizens) with whom work brings us into contact. It is basically a true and proper “school of humanity”, which trains you by immersion in real situations, in which the possible (and often unavoidable) difficulties represent an added “value”: concrete challenges which we are called to answer to by mobilizing our best energies and by collaborating with the others, because of which – to say it in Agazzi’s words – “work is an apprenticeship and an opportunity of acquiring and of rooting oneself in a lot of virtues”.

Work is a fundamental dimension of human life, because it allows the person to measure oneself with tasks and problems that challenge one, to solicit one’s own human prerogatives in order to satisfy needs and wishes of others, to contribute effectively to the process of civilization, to acquire esteem and consideration, thus obtaining indications for getting to know oneself and for recognizing the talents one owns. […] Acting in work, all in all, is connected with a moral connotation of relationship: its utility is seen with respect to the value and thus to the advantage which it provides for the others and for society. It is a link between the individual world and the social world; it is discipline, imagination, connective tissue of society. (D. Nicoli, 2014)

Summing up we could say that for navigating in more or less stormy waters it is necessary – using a beautiful image by Baden Powell – “to be able to steer one’s own canoe, in the sense of not being dependent on others for deciding which direction to give to one’s life: steer your canoe yourself […] leave the rivulet of childhood for an adventurous journey; from there pass on into the river of adolescence; then flow into the ocean of adulthood in order to arrive at the harbour you are longing for”. [R. Baden-Powell, *The Way to Success*]