

Education and training: preparing young people for work

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Let me open my presentation with a quotation of Saint Paul VI in the Basilica of Nazareth (6th January 1964) : “O silence of Nazareth, teach us recollection, reflection, and eagerness to heed the good inspirations and words of true teachers; teach us the need and value of preparation, of study, of meditation, of interior life, of secret prayer seen by God alone.”

“Teach us the need and value of preparation.” In the title that was chosen for our roundtable, I fully appreciate the emphasis that is put on preparation. The more the feature of work is changing in today’s society — and it certainly *does* change very quickly in the digital era —, the more we should underline the importance of preparation. However, I intend to question the subject of the preparation: “preparing young people for work” implies that teachers, scholars, universities are the main subject of an act of preparation, the object of which is the young people. It is not totally wrong, of course, because our responsibility is to offer a proper context for a proper preparation. Nonetheless, **young people themselves have to be regarded as the principal subjects of their own preparation, all the more so in the digital era** which is the main topic of this 7th consultation meeting by the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation. The digital revolution has increased the role of the young as subject of his or her own formation, as is the case for the adult within continuous formation. Worldwide and sometimes free access to information and to self-formation through MOOCs and on-line tutorials is the new context that we need to consider carefully. The relationship between teacher and learner has deeply changed, so much so that it induces a vocational shift that parents, schools and universities cannot ignore in exercising their own responsibility. In the Catholic tradition, it is not strange to envision **education as an alliance process** within the whole educational community. Catholic universities therefore have meaningful resources to retrieve. But the challenge is before us: new educational processes should accompany young people today, in order to offer them the means for an adequate personal and communal preparation that is open to the global needs of our planet.

We too often continue to believe that education consists in transmitting knowledge contents, and we tend to complain about the failure of transmission of values and contents. If we duly consider education as an alliance process, it becomes easier to see that **education consists in generating *with young people* new ways of living in a changing world**, an art of living that will enable them to face new situations, sometimes simple and sometimes complex, and to respond to them in a humane and just way. Most important is to instil in them a passion for learning and questioning oneself, the intelligence to learn from the mistakes one inevitably makes, the courage to set off again after all kinds of obstacles and failures, the humility to get up again after falling down the path. In a word, we must pass on to the youth a sense for a sustainable way of life: for them, for their communities and for the global world. Such demanding mission implies that educators remember how they have themselves learnt to take to the road or to take it again, thanks to the attention or the relevant word of an adult or a teacher.

When Pope Francis deals with the moral education of the young, as in chapter 7 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, he hardly extends himself to the transmission of contents or laws, preferring to emphasize the education of freedom, the formation of good habits, the importance of learning to postpone immediate pleasures and of being initiated by adults into the joy of life in society. The key to this educational strategy lies in the invitation to think in terms of processes rather than contents to be inculcated at all costs: “It is more a question of creating processes than of dominating spaces. [...] **Do we seek to understand 'where' [the young people] really are in their journey? Where is their soul, do we really know? And above all, do we want to know?**” (AL 261) For the Holy Father, the success of moral education depends on the ability of adults to interact with young people and to respect their trajectory instead of imposing obligatory passages at predetermined moments. The characteristic of the youth is that they are in the process of growing up. Educational skills must concentrate on accompanying the process, avoiding forcing or blocking.

Companies experience today that the digital era not only changes work, but also changes people, above all the millennials. Their main fear is to lose them, remaining unable to find the taskforce they need, or to be severely challenged by start-ups ran by millennials. If companies want to hire the young, they need to understand

“where their soul is”, as Pope Francis says. It is the same for **Catholic Universities**: if we want to get the millennials and thus have a chance of putting them in contact with the Social Doctrine of the Church (SDC), **we need to perceive their deepest aspirations as they manifest themselves in the digital society through behaviours, expressions, hopes and fears.**

1- The longing for connecting with different people

- a- Students choose a context for Higher Education that goes beyond the pure offer of a curriculum leading to a diploma: they want to find a path with meaning. Education and Higher Education have been partly commoditized by new technologies, distance learning... The youth do not seek knowledge, which they can find on Wikipedia. They want to enjoy a human, lasting experience: relationships, friendships, events, the joy of speech contests, the thrill of collective action — all things you cannot get alone on your screen.
- b- The longing for experiencing and fostering new forms of social life: student associations using the power of digital connexion but relying on alterity and togetherness. The experience of solidarity, the confrontation with the poor and the handicapped help them develop strong bonds.
- c- Practices that could regenerate democratic hopes (associations for the development of eloquence and political debate, a positive response to the great debate launched by the Government in France). Students are eager to be heard. Universities see the same trend as companies and more generally organisations: we must take the youth’s desires and ideas into account, otherwise they do by themselves, without the adults.

2- The longing for new leverage to counter the dangers of Anthropocene

- a- “Head, Heart and Hands” (Pope Francis): young people long for a sense of concrete commitment and concrete choices because they are more and more convinced that “everything is connected” (Laudato si’).
- b- They see their work in the future as connected with the cause of sustainable development. Young people have direct access to scientific data about climate and environmental changes. They see the effects of those changes in their lives, in the destruction of natural resources and beauties, on fragile communities.

They want to be part of the solution, and they increasingly refuse to contribute worsening the situation.

- c- The link between personal, communal and global sustainability. Young people are fully aware “there is no planet B”. The issues at stake are global, with local, specific impacts. There is a place for everyone who wants to act, but young people need to measure the impact of their individual action in a concrete group with a collective spirit.

3- The longing for truth in public life and individual stories

- a- Whistle-blowers (lanceurs d’alertes). Young people do not inherit a basic respect for institutions (States, journalists and the media, political parties, ...). Their heroes challenge and confront the establishment, and accept to put themselves at risk.
- b- The truth is not just about transparency. The youth know that truth is more than transparency, and that compliance with public rules of transparency does not guarantee telling the truth. Young people want coherence in their lives as well as in that of people in charge.
- c- Although young people fully know that today’s challenges differ from those of the past, young people need to share narratives between generations because they feel that experience matters to deal with complexity. In that respect, life stories tell more and prove to be more relevant than rules and principles. Success stories about entrepreneurship and social engagement drain attractiveness as long as they do not hide fragilities and failures, so that the youth may identify with their own desire for action, always mixed with anxieties.