

Higher Education Quality and the world of work

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The economic and cultural growth and the ability of renewal are the fundamental objectives of every Country and they should be also for countries in development and transition. An important contribution to the attainment of such an objective can be brought by a suitable higher education quality that aims for the development of creativity and individual initiative, as well as to the acquisition of competences that improve the professional qualification of the teaching staff.

In contrast to the past, today the competitive advantage of a Country is found more and more on the wealth of human resources and less on the value of materials, capitals and technologies.

Such challenges the quality of the higher education has to answer in order to satisfy the individual cultural needs, and the needs of insertion in the world of the work.

For the students, and particularly for university students, it is not only important to attain a good cultural level from both a qualitative point of view with respect to content, but also to acquire one "higher education with a strongly practical character", as underlined by the various Resolutions of the Council of the Community European and first among all that of 5 December of 1994 (one very close to the reality in continuous evolution of the job market.)

To such intention, he ascertains that in the European and Italian economic world there are prefigured forms of organization - very different from those traditional and hierarchical – because today these are characterized by integration and strongly oriented to the communication.

Therefore it becomes essential to establish a quality higher education path that, exclusively overcoming the technical-operational dimension, offers interesting instruments to develop communication and the ability to work in groups, with the purpose of improving the relationships between different functions inside the student-

teacher bond.

In the last years, we are witness, especially in Italy, to multiple new university courses, however there are not able to provide the necessary "complementary" preparation to satisfy the expectations expressed in the market (also because some times to employ teachers not specifically prepared.) Moreover the market is polluted by parallel higher educational initiatives to the university institution, for example proposal by organizations of recent origin to know its substantial reliability. The excess of offers in comparison to the question produces confusion among the students and among the possible users of these courses (like enterprises, public corporate body, private) that are some times are disorientated and which often change directions or they prefer to abdicate.

In this picture it is possible to pursue excellence objectives also in higher education is not a fashion but is an authentic necessity to be competitive on the market and to have the concrete opportunities of work. Therefore the culture of quality has positive aspects in comparison to the development of a philosophy more directed to the users that in pure market logic he can be defined simply "customer".

Considering that for a long time the universities offered a service, they can make reference to the norm ISO 9001-2000 for the realization and the maintenance in the time of a proper quality control, that however should involve the whole scholastic community and not only the highest level.

However it will be necessary to have a periodic re-examination of the analysis of the perception that the student has some service furnished with the purpose to improve:

1. the performances;
2. the productivity and the costs;
3. the knowledge and the management of the needs of higher educational market.

Moreover it needs to be considered that such a norm, also usable like reference of certification, represents a complete model of the necessary requisites to build a quality system of higher education area, culturally projected toward the general principles of the "total quality". The adoption of a quality system can introduce some conceptual difficulties for the greater part of the higher education societies, often characterized by organizational structures "craft made", distant from the full awareness of the

qualitative requisite of the "higher educational product". But such difficulties do not have to be for the higher-level of higher education, that is for the university.

For instance if we consider the norm ISO 9000-2000, the quality it has defined as "The whole of characteristics of a product or a service that confers to it the ability to satisfy the express or implicit demands". From this interpretation it derives that a control of the quality of higher education will be effective if, and only if, the performances supplied assure the satisfaction of the expectations of the students and consequently of the world of the work.

The final outcome is the result of an organizational trial that must be planned and verified since the beginning, starting from the necessary cognitive activity to obtain student needs in comparison to the "higher educational product". In this case the university structure would have "to test" the sample "student" in order to locate, analytically, the qualitative requisites of the service, the input of the planning process.

The cognitive investigation must have effected considering that the recipients of the "higher educational products" can be divided in three large categories, correspondents to the different personal motivations:

1. acquisition of a culture and professionalism suitable to the expectations of higher educational market and complementary to a working world;
2. development of the competitive bases for a professional career "of success" after the attainment of the higher educational qualification;
3. necessity of bringing up to date higher educational in relation work activities.

Besides, the process of planning has to be preceded by a careful comparison among question and offers that underline the possible gap in comparison to the priorities dictated by the market of work. Among suppliers of higher educational services and students there are now more direct relationships for the search of new forms of equilibrium, between ability of innovation and the question of the market. The analysis of this last one has, in fact, shown the necessity of human resources with well defined characteristics. In short there are :

1. good training cultural general and specific;
2. spirit of initiative;

3. quickness of decision;
4. availability to accept responsibilities;
5. communication ability;
6. work group ability;
7. professional competences that improve the higher education quality also in relation to the world of work.

There is then the planning of the process of planning, to whose inside is distinguished different phases that go from the layout and elaboration of the "higher educational product" and consequent quality control and verification of the service distributing to the appraisal of the perceptible quality by the student that in turn, in the exercise of its profession will have to integrate himself in the world of work. A different line of this tendency exists to affirm of new organizational methods for the adoption of the keys of co-planning, are that it brings students and their future world of the work intersects and compares their respective professionalisms in order to arrive at joint elaboration of competitive solutions. (Figure 1).

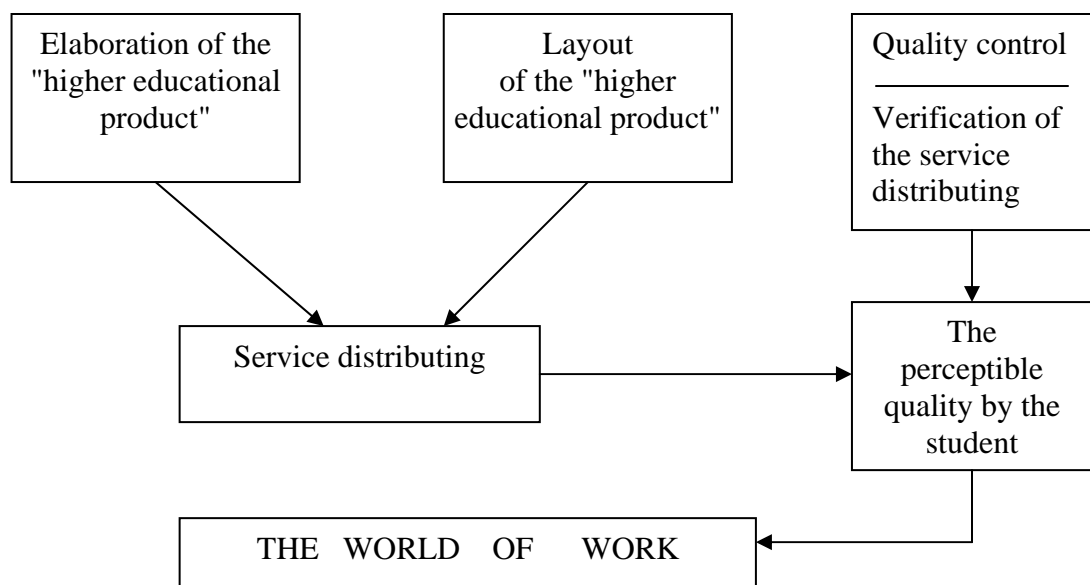


Fig. 1 - The planning of the process of planning,

The activity of verification can be effected measuring the qualitative level of learning of the subjects that receive higher education through evaluations (by means of questionnaires, tests of evaluation, exercises and practical exercises) from which one can derive preventive and corrective actions to eliminate the causes and the errors of not conforming in the progress of allocation of the higher educational service (Figure 2).

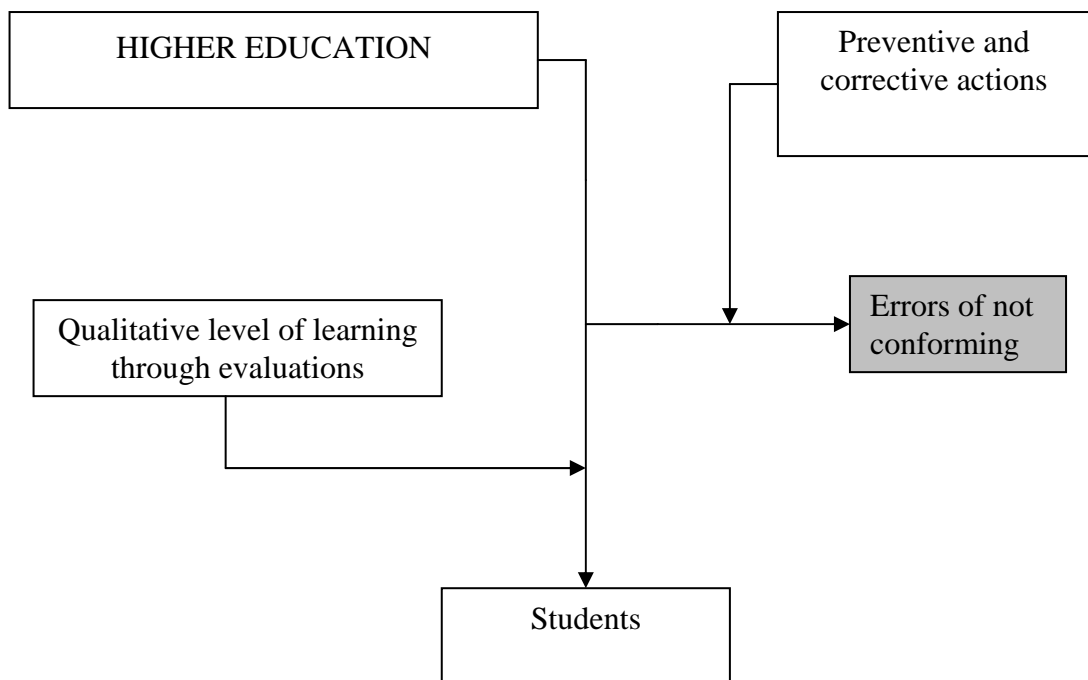


Fig. 2 -The activity of verification

The qualitative effectiveness of the "higher education product" depends conclusively on the human components of the teacher, in the first place, their behaviour, their competence and attitudes.

For behaviour we intend above all the availability to the self critical in comparison to the activity of teaching, the wish to collaborate and to listen to the students, the ability to cover the role of moderator of the classroom.

Particularly competence is expounded, through a theoretical knowledge and practice of the subject, as well as of the methodologies didactic / higher educational to facilitate its learning.

Nevertheless the specialized preparation of the teacher it is not enough if it is not accompanied by particular abilities of communication, inside which it's possible to distinguish characteristics like: the ability to capture the attention of the "students stage", the use of language suitable to the cultural level of the student, the attitude /wish to transmit one's own knowledge and to "to defeat" the natural resistance of the students and in general of individuals "to listen" to new subjects.

In the planning of a university higher education course, but not only, it is, therefore opportune, to define the profile of the human resources and the roles (teacher, tutor, etc.) necessary to carrying out the activities didactic/higher educational (Figure 3).

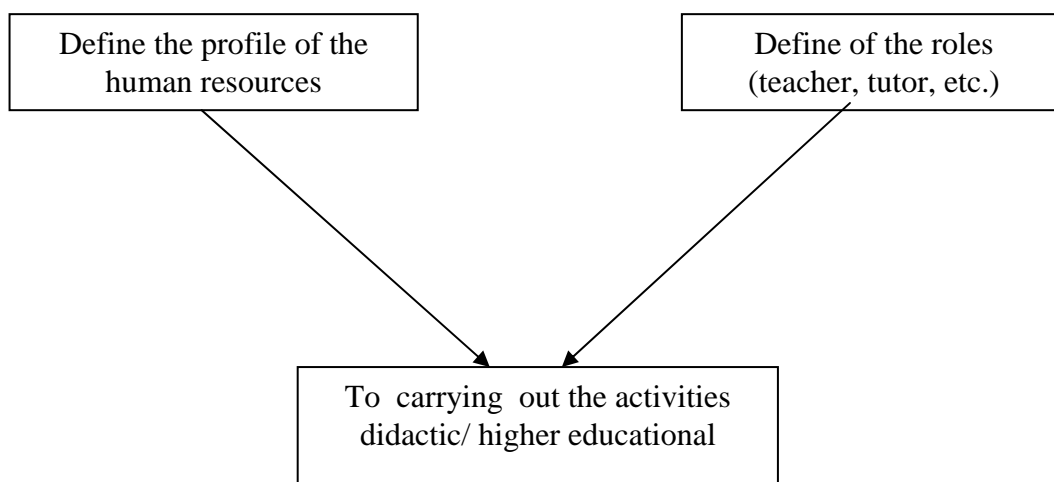


Fig. 3 - The planning of a university higher education course

In didactic activity, the teacher can use methodologies that facilitate the transfer of knowledge and facilitate learning. The theoretical lessons can be for instance assisting from transparent, dispensations, photos, film, graphic representations and

demonstration of software products, without skipping practical exercises, in groups or individually (Figure 4). The teacher does not have to have an exclusive preference for a theoretical approach, to avoid the risk that the student assumes a passive role and that the communication which results is notably compromised. Learning also directed to practice, allows instead a driven discovery of the subject and a reduction of the possible differences between transmitted contents and real situations of work. In the work group, besides it is possible to overcome the students reticence to speak from fear of appearing ridiculous in case of error.

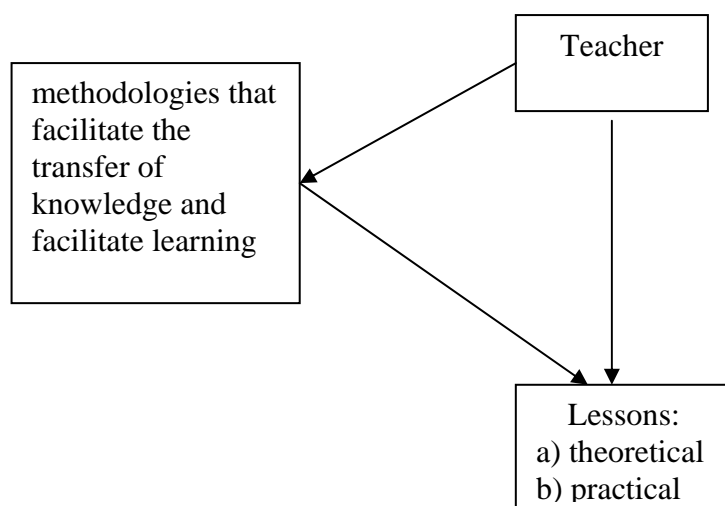


Fig. 4 - Didactic activity

The work group has to use techniques and tools (matrixes, brainstorming, diagram of affinity etc.) in order to the discussion and increase the objectivity of the results, allowing it to overcome the limits, to the increase the availability of psychological limits to the comparison and to win the preconceptions toward other people's ideas without penalizing creativeness.

The higher education quality, further to have as objective the exaltation of the characteristic of human resources has to neglect training in comparison to the technical aspects. Moreover in the planning of a course it is beneficial to program the activity of

training according to a run of articulated learning in forms, for each of which the subjects and the times of carrying out must be identified (Figure 5).

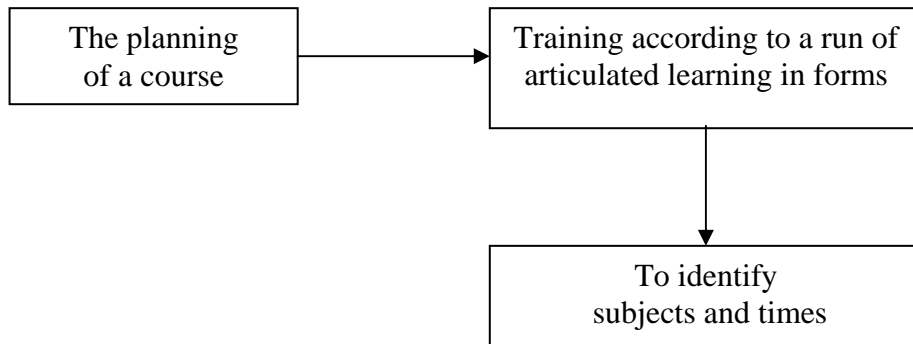


Fig. 5 - The higher education quality

To the purpose of an effective result it is essential to define the conditions of sharing, individualizing the profile of the student and the formalities of selection (Figure 6).

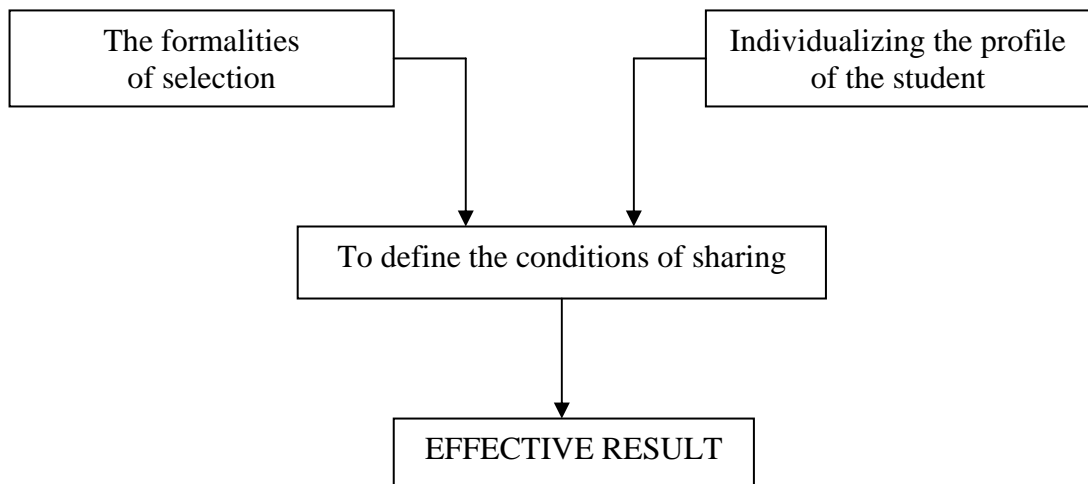


Fig. 6. – The result

It is opportune to confirm that in the view of the quality, any higher educational course has to be projected on the base of the different needs of the student and at the same time of the work market. Nonetheless it must be structured in a flexible way, so as to be able to adapt to every possible change. The verification of the qualitative effectiveness above of a university higher educational course is immediate, in how much contemporarily to the disbursement of the service the answer of the student is evaluations. In conclusion the criticisms do not have to be considered an index of failure, but instead of improvement for future projects.

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