

Quality teaching matters: perspectives on quality teaching for the modernization of higher education. A position paper

Importanza della qualità dell'insegnamento per la modernizzazione della formazione universitaria. Un position paper

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ABSTRACT

This position paper attempts to ground the discussion on improving the quality of teaching in the context of Higher Education (HE) in order to take concrete directions toward what in the scientific literature is identified as a culture of quality in education. This concept implies an approach to continuing monitoring, reflection and change toward innovation through main stakeholders' engagement. The paper will hence briefly introduce the policy context and research background at international and national level, in order to analyze the opportunities of implementing a culture of quality regarding teaching at the University of Trento. Furthermore, it will make a number of recommendations for the concrete implementation of the approach. The document is hence divided into the following parts:

A first part, introducing the policy context regarding agenda for the modernization of HE in Europe and at international level. In this context, the issue of quality teaching is focused as key element towards better quality of Higher Education.

A second part, regarding the importance and forms of innovation in pedagogical approaches in Higher Education, as well as the conditions of professional development in academic staff regarding better teaching.

A third part, consisting on the research carried out by our research unit within the University of Trento, regarding the issue of quality in Higher Education.

A fourth part is devoted to introduce recommendations for the implementation of concrete measures and interventions at institutional level.

Questo position paper intende definire la posizione del nostro gruppo di ricerca per ciò che riguarda la discussione in atto nel nostro paese relativamente alla qualità della didattica universitaria, con lo scopo ultimo di fornire concrete indicazioni per l'innovazione e per arrivare ad una diffusa cultura di qualità della didattica accademica. Tale concetto, emergente nella letteratura europea, implica un approccio di continuo monitoraggio, riflessione e cambiamento verso l'innovazione attraverso il coinvolgimento degli stakeholders. Si parte da una breve introduzione sul policy context, il contesto nazionale ed internazionale di programmazione politica per il cambiamento dell'Università e la necessità che ne consegue di implementare una didattica di qualità; seguito dalla presentazione delle ricerche più significative sulla tematica. Tale contestualizzazione è la base necessaria per comprendere le opportunità e le necessità d'intervento. Infine, sulla base delle nostre pregresse ricerche, formuliamo alcune raccomandazioni per la concreta implementazione di un approccio verso la costruzione di una cultura di qualità della didattica. Il documento si compone pertanto da:

Una prima parte, che introduce il contesto relativo all'agenda di modernizzazione dell'Istruzione superiore a livello internazionale ed europeo, mostrando come la tematica della qualità in generale, e la qualità relativa alla didattica universitaria in modo specifico, risultino essere elemento fondamentale della suddetta agenda.

La seconda parte, che riguarda il background di ricerca scientifica relativamente alle forme di innovazione nella didattica universitaria considerando gli sviluppi della ricerca educativa negli ultimi 40 anni.

La terza parte, che illustra il lavoro di ricerca condotto nell'ambito della tematica qualità e insegnamento universitario nel nostro gruppo di ricerca, denominato labINDIA-Laboratorio Innovazione Didattica Accademica, presso l'Università di Trento.

La quarta parte, che introduce le raccomandazioni per l'implementazione di concrete misure e interventi a livello istituzionale con riguardo alla qualità della didattica universitaria.

KEYWORDS

Higher Education, Quality, Teaching, Position paper.
Istruzione Superiore, Qualità, Didattica, Position paper.

1. Quality in Higher Education

1.1 *The agenda for the modernization of Higher Education at international level*

It is universally recognized that universities are key players for the future and for the successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society but also that this crucial sector of the economy and of the society needs in-depth restructuring and modernization. There is agreement in recent studies in North America and Europe (EURYDICE, 2012) (European Commission: 2006, 2011a, 2011b) about the drivers of the necessary change.¹

A US paper focusing on the HE trends introduces the question as follows:

The world of post-secondary education remains unsettled, driven in part by the economic turmoil, but also by the realities of continuing changes in political and business interest in an educated workforce. While it appeared that the economy was slowly turning up in the US, the Japanese tsunami and earthquake, continued debt crises in Europe, and a weaker than hoped for recovery have stalled hopes of significant increase in employment. It remains to be seen how this recession will further the globalization and reordering of higher education. Meanwhile, demographics, technology and research on learning push institutions to change. (Grummon, 2012 (8) 1)

In the case of European policy papers, we read that:

Modernisation of Europe's universities, involving their interlinked roles of education, research and innovation, has been acknowledged not only as a core condition for the success of the broader Lisbon Strategy, but as part of the wider move towards an increasingly global and knowledge-based economy. The main items on the agenda for change have been identified² and given added momentum by the European Council: at the informal meeting at Hampton Court in October 2005, R&D and universities were acknowledged as foundations of European competitiveness; the 2006 Spring European Council agreed on stronger action at European level to drive forward this agenda in universities and research, which should be implemented by the end of 2007 in the context

- 1 Note of authors. While this paper is the result of collaboration and agreement between the authors, the specific contributions have been made as follows:
Patrizia Ghislandi supervised the whole article structure and rationale. Furthermore, she wrote the following paragraphs: § 3. Our research focus: the quality of the academic teaching and learning process, § 4.1. Our Proposal in four points and two steps; § 5. Conclusions.
Juliana Raffaghelli curated the final paper version and wrote the following paragraphs: § 1. Quality in Higher Education, § 2. Innovations in HE pedagogical approach for quality, § 4. Scaffolding Pedagogical Quality Cultures in higher education: some recommendations.
- 2 "*Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy*", COM(2005) 152 of 20 April 2005 and Council Resolution of 15 November 2005- Creating an Innovative Europe, Expert Group chaired by Mr Aho, European Commission, January 2006.

of the renewed partnership for growth and employment³. In the National Reform Programmes based on the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs⁴, Member States refer generally to these issues, but few address them as a national priority. Yet these changes are necessary to regenerate Europe's own approach, not to replicate any imported model. They are equally necessary in order to reinforce the societal roles of universities in a culturally and linguistically diverse Europe. (European_Commission, 2006)

The Erasmus LLP programme policy priorities for 2012⁵ aimed at supporting Member States' reforms of their HE systems, stresses the need of making them more coherent and more responsive to the needs of the knowledge society. The priorities in fact indicate that: «[Member states] should enable higher education institutions (HEI) to play a decisive role in the 'Europe of Knowledge' and make a strong contribution to support the strategic framework ET 2020⁶ and the EU 2020 Strategy⁷, in particular its headline target to increase the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education (or equivalent) to 40% in 2020. Out of the seven EU 2020 Strategy's flagship initiatives the following are most relevant for higher education policy: "Youth on the Move", "An Agenda for new skills and jobs" as well as "The Innovation Union"» (*LLP Strategic Priorities*, 2012).

Consistently, the last Eurydice report on HE (EURYDICE, 2012), produced in the context of the Bologna follow-up group, attest that:

The Higher Education landscape in 2012 has been transformed by the Bologna Process. All countries have made significant changes that have enabled the European Higher Education Area to emerge, and which have laid the ground for Higher Education that is serving an increasing range of societal demands. Higher Education structures have been changed, quality assurance systems developed, mechanisms to facilitate mobility established, and a range of issues for the social dimension of Higher Education identified. The scale of a project that, on the basis of voluntary cooperation, agrees and implements common objectives for the Higher Education systems of 47 countries is unprecedented. (Eurydice, 2012:2)

The paragraphs above introduced underline that HE institutions are going through great changes relating to the requirements of today and tomorrow society. However, the institutional changes are difficult and slow, depending on many variables (internal and external to the institutions) that need to be taken into account.

3 Conclusions 1 777/06 of 24 March 2006.

4 COM(2005)141 final of 12.04.2005.

5 LLP Programme Strategic Priorities 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/education/llp/doc/call12/prior_en.pdf

6 Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), (2009/C119/02): <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF>

7 European Strategy 2020: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

According to the above-considered literature and the policy context (European Commission, 2006; 2012; Eurydice 2012), the challenges for HE regard the following issues:

- Break down the barriers around universities in Europe;
- Make HE more inclusive and accessible;
- Allow flexible pathways of learning;
- Ensure real autonomy and accountability for universities;
- Provide incentives for structured partnerships with the business community;
- Provide the right mix of skills and competencies for the labour market;
- Make funding work more effective in education and research;
- Enhance interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity;
- Activate knowledge through interaction with society;
- Reward excellence at the highest level;
- Collaborate with other institutions to affirm the own role within the lifelong learning.

This European and international scenario is corroborated by the Italian debate on the role of universities. The reform launched through the law n. 240/10⁸ introduced regulations for the Italian HE change, based on the need of universities re-engineering to promote quality in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, as well as innovation and internationalization, in line with the European and international reform context.

This process of reform raised debate about the process and form of implementation. The CUN (National Universities Conference), in one of the most recent documents⁹, declared the urgent need of re-analyzing a reform that was put into practice without initial piloting and progressive introduction, as a massive and somehow superficial approach (CUN, 2013).

The CRUI¹⁰ considers that the call for reform, within the resolution of the European Parliament on the contribution of the European institutions to the consolidation and progress of the Bologna Process¹¹ should be slower and meditated. Taking into consideration the CRUI and CUN positions mentioned above, the construction of a framework for qualifications; the need of boosting students and teaching staff mobility; the dissemination of lifelong learning; the reinfor-

8 Law n. 240/10 of December 30, 2010 (Norme in materia di organizzazione delle università, di personale accademico e reclutamento, nonché delega al Governo per incentivare la qualità e l'efficienza del sistema universitario; Regulations regarding the organization of universities, teaching staff and recruitment, as well as delegation on the Government to boost the quality and efficiency of the university system) <http://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2010-12-30;240!vig=>

9 The Declaration of the CUN for the University and research "*The emergences of the system*" (regarding the University system). January 2013. http://www.cun.it/media/118417/dichiarazione_cun_su_emergenze_sistema.pdf

10 Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane / National Conference of Italian University Rectors.

11 European Parliament resolution of 13 March 2012 on the contribution of the European institutions to the consolidation and progress of the Bologna Process (2011/2180(INI)) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2012-0072+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

cing of the dialogue between university and society are just but some of the complex issues that require careful negotiation within institutions, as well as funds available at the national level and for institutional budgets.

After two years of debate and progressive changes across the national HE system and in every university, and due to the situation of youth unemployment, there is a plea to the university system to be open and prompt to re-address the own activity toward the compelling needs of the socio-economic context. This is the case of Law Fornero 92, of June 28, 2012, which claimed for a university that is to be more integrated in the territory system, open through organizational, research and pedagogical innovations to new forms of learning in line with the transformation of society and the new jobs.

1.2 Defining Quality in the European and Italian context

The whole modernization of higher education is strongly based on the quality of the system organization, research and pedagogy.

This emphasis was already clear within the Bologna Process activity by 2005; in fact, during the Bergen meeting (2005), the European Ministries engaged approved the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, a document elaborated by the ENQA (European Association for the Quality Assurance in Higher Education). The activity of the Bergen meeting led to the recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in HE¹²

More recently, the European resolution 3/2012 states that:

... the role of higher education is to provide a learning environment, open to everyone without discrimination, promoting autonomy, creativity, access to quality education and the broadening of knowledge, and to this end it is essential to guarantee the involvement of the academic community as a whole, particularly students, teachers and researchers, in developing the various stages of university education» (*European Parliament, 2012, op. cit.*)

And a more concrete point is made regarding the consolidation of processes aiming to the EHEA (European Higher Education Area), through this statement:

...Asks the EU, in order to guarantee mutual trust and facilitate recognition of academic qualifications through the implementation of EQF [European Qualifications Framework] in each Member State, to consolidate a system of quality assurance at both European and Member State level; asks Member States to implement their national quality assurance systems according to the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance (QA), while respecting the diversity of courses and approaches among universities in terms of content and modes of learning; en-

12 OJ L 64, 4.3.2006, p. 60. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:064:0060:0062:EN:PDF>

courages QA agencies to apply to the European Quality Assurance Register and support their European cooperation and exchange of best practices also through the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)» (*European Parliament*, 2012, op. cit.)

In the specific case of Italy the mentioned context of political debate generated a strategic moment to implement quality assurance processes in HE; the impact of ENQA recommendations, the Bergen recommendations and further European framework for quality in HE, were crucial at the time of creating the own system. In fact, the quality culture is introduced in Italy through accreditation and internal evaluation processes, promoted by the implementation of the ANVUR (National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes) a body which was mentioned in the 240/10 law and is also based on the former national regulation, i.e. the DPR n.76, February 1, 2006.¹³ The ANVUR role is to support the processes of innovation through concrete operations of internal and external evaluation that allow, hopefully, reflection and engagement of key stakeholders in the university system, toward a significant and authentic process of change.

From its settlement in 2011, the ANVUR has been undertaking an intensive activity consistent on the three point illustrated below.¹⁴

Evaluation of Quality in Research (Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca, VQR). The very first concern of ANVUR was the implementation of a project of evaluation for the quality in research in the whole Italian HE system, covering the period 2004-2010. The VQR was established by the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Research (MIUR) Nr 17 of July 15, 2011. It launched a process of evaluation of scientific productivity in 14 disciplinary fields, on the basis of the following quality criteria: relevance, originality/innovation, internationalization. These criteria lead to the ranking of scientific productivity as Excellent, Good, Acceptable, Limited. This evaluation is integrated with the analysis of institutional capacity to attract external resources in research, in-coming and out-going academic and researchers' mobility; advanced training organized by institutions; institutional own resources devoted to research. The participating institutions (Universities and National Research Centers) will be hence classified taking into consideration their scientific productivity. The first report and connected rankings were released by June 2013.¹⁵

National Certification for the academic/scientific activity (*Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale*, ASN). Connected to the VQR, the article Nr. 16 of the Law 240/2010 put the basis for the following Decree of the President of the Italian Republic, number 222, of September 14, 2011 which established the criteria for the selection of candidates entering in the academic profession. The ASN has implied the analysis of requisites of productivity (during 2011-2012) as well as the

13 National Decree of the Italian President, Regulation regarding the structure and functioning of the National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research System (Agenzia Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca – ANVUR). <http://www.anvur.org/sites/anvur-miur/files/gazzetta-anvur.pdf>

14 Elaboration on the basis of information published at ANVUR official site, www.anvur.org

15 To see the entire report, consult: <http://www.anvur.org/rapporto/>

implementation of a first process of selection of candidates (2012-2013). The effort has been consistent for the several disciplines and had different parameters to consider scientific productivity. Therefore, there was an intense analysis of types of publications with a consequent classification of quality publications, that determined “indicators and median of scientific productivity” for the first time in Italy. Furthermore, the selection criteria implied the organization of international committees of evaluators. The shortlist of candidates, applying in July 2012, has been recently published and the first selection undertaken by December 2013.

System of Self-Evaluation, Periodic Evaluation and Accrediting (*Sistema di Autovalutazione, Valutazione Periodica e Accreditamento, AVA*). Also based on the Law 240/2010, it was established by the Legislative Decree of January 27, 2012. It encompasses the creation of a system for analyzing the quality of academic courses as well as the course’s institutional context of implementation; b) improve the efficiency of educational outcomes in terms of students’ retention, satisfaction and placement; c) strengthen the institutional capacity for self-evaluating the quality of pedagogical approaches and research. The AVA system was implemented from 2013 onwards. To that regard, initial informative meetings with several universities requiring it; as well as national meetings to illustrate the system are being organized.

In spite of this clear policy context, the sense of “quality” in education has been a matter of controversies as well as the focus of research and policy recommendations at international level. Every international body working in the field of education, like UNESCO, OECD, the European Commission, as well as every state have promoted definitions and frameworks to conceptualize and implement quality in HE. The ongoing discussion in the field criticizes the dominating culture of “quality” linked to the industrial production, mostly based on rationalization and conformity to pre-defined standards, that requires the collection of massive quantitative data, with major interest on educational outputs as a vision of system’s productivity (Ehlers & Schneckenberg, 2010). Instead, quality of education requires reflection and deep understanding of complex contextual elements, interactions and relational dimensions that are essential and often invisible to traditional assessment tools.

According to our own analysis of literature in the field of educational research (Ghislandi & Raffaghelli, 2012), authors exploring the concept have in fact raised a myriad of definitions (Adams, 1993) that drive conceptions and practices (Harvey & Green, 1993). The recent advances in the study of educational quality have emphasized the need of a multidimensional approach where elements like learners’ characteristics, the teaching and learning processes, the learning outcomes as well as the socio-cultural and institutional context supporting education intervention are to be taken into account (Harvey & Green, op.cit). Consistently, in the European approach, quality is considered through the different values and perspectives (producers, deliverers, users of education), and the different levels of the educational process (Ehlers & Schneckenberg, 2010). Furthermore, the trends of research emphasize the notion of quality as a participatory process, where the learners and users vision are fundamental, as part of dialogue within an organizational and learning process (EFQUEL, 2007) that support the generation of a “quality culture” and of “peer reviewed” quality (Auvinen & Ehlers, 2007). As we can see, the latest definitions emphasize the idea of a constructivist approach where the several perspectives of participants do generate the final definition of quality, through a participatory process.

These research approaches were thoroughly adopted by the ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in HE)¹⁶, in the elaboration of an European framework for quality, but their implementation along the several national quality systems and within the single institutions could encompass discrepancies, based on the organizational values and interests.

The broad meaning of quality adopted by ANVUR goes in line with EU debate, where quality means the ability to reach goals settled by the institution itself, in a national context of institutional development. The idea is to overcome the “customer satisfaction model”, to locate the own institution into a framework of continuing processes and systems productivity control at national level. However, the emphasis on the need of establishing inner institutional goals, methodological approaches to reach them, and to control the levels of development and achievement, should be equally accompanied by measures of institutional building, in order to promote a participatory culture. While the framework of intervention is set out, the processes seem to be less clear.

In fact, with regard to the specific focus of educational services, promoting a quality culture means great responsibility for the single universities, that have to set up the internal basis to analyze the own research and educational performance, constituting units devoted to this complex task. As it can be foreseen, the approach requires training and dialogue within the institutions and at the national level (ANVUR and national coordination bodies like CRUI and CUN) in order to effectively implement the system. The ANVUR has launched a process of training for academics as well as technical/administration that is yet to be considered too much focused on accreditation of courses procedures and guidelines. Analyzing the communications and training activities, there is still little space for more specific dimensions of quality, and particularly quality teaching.

Whether this approach lead to genuine engagement and representation of several perspectives within the university is a matter of controversy. The new system was contested by many as a form of control on the autonomy to select the own means and products as part of the own vision of productivity; other argued that the evaluation frameworks is difficult to adapt to the different disciplines, due to the fact that the forms of productivity may differ very much between the fields of math or natural sciences and social sciences or humanities (CUN, 2013; *op.cit.*). The CUN has claimed that the system appointed does not cover in a thoughtful way a conception of evaluation as process that should enhance and improve practices, that is, a formative mission of evaluation beyond the evaluative mission focused on judging and ranking institutions to distribute resources (CUN, 2013; *op. cit.*, p.19).

The lack of specific and evidence-based knowledge, would take the evaluation exercise to serious risks and pitfalls, with the consequent lack of impact of performed evaluations and course redesign with regard to the urgent innovations attended from HE institutions.

However, the generation of rankings of universities according to the criteria of quality for research and education, should be considered as an opportunity if properly adopted and wisely read. As Andrea Ichino puts (2013), rankings are often criticized by those that would avoid a system based on merits as well as taken for granted by those that believe that a ranking is useful anyway. Instead,

16 <http://www.enqa.eu/>

Ichino invites the rankings' producers to be transparent in the categories adopted to evaluate, since different users may have different perspectives and interests on the quality issues identifying an institution. Indeed, while there are universities offering generally good services and courses, other would emphasize excellence in some specific courses that are part of the tradition within the institution. Therefore, rankings should offer a variety of information that cover both the methodological approach for the evaluation as well as partial results. This seems to be the case of ANVUR first VQR report (report on the quality of research).

1.3 Macro-Meso-Micro levels in HE quality

Until here our focus has been the context and definition of quality on the international and national policy context and at the institutional level. However, our focus of contribution and concern is the level of pedagogical practices, that are to be placed in the mentioned context.

In fact, as elaborated by Ehlers (2013), and further developed by our own research group, quality should be understood as a concept that encompasses macro-meso-micro levels of analysis.

In line with this idea, a quality system aligned to a shared vision and encouraged from the top, bottom, and middle is most likely to be successful in achieving educational quality. To this end, a quality system could be afforded through three important nested levels of support (as illustrated in Figure 1), namely:

- *policy/government* – vision, influence of assessment, essential conditions, sustainability;
- *organization/institution* – shared vision, coaching, adaptive quality system, learning organization culture, staff development for the sustainability of the own approach;
- *individual teacher professional responsibility* – shared vision, teaching strategies, career-long learning, engagement in professional learning communities, mentoring.

Our focus regards the issue of quality at the individual level, that is the base for the quality system. Even if individual quality is not possible without the context of higher policy support at institutional level, it implies the engagement of the single teacher in understanding the debate and applying it to the own professional practice and development.

Furthermore, considering that the academic quality systems are composed by organization, research and education processes and services, our aim is to focus the challenge of quality teaching, that regards the many activities undertaken within a course with the aim to improve learning effectiveness and to support the achievement of key professional and transversal competences, necessary for the future students' employability.

However, it seems that although teaching is a relevant issue within the quality systems it is given secondary importance compared to organization and research (Henard & Roseveare, 2012).

As stated by OECD (2010, p. 9),

As higher education systems grow and diversify, society is increasingly concerned about the quality of programmes. Much attention is given to public assessments and international rankings of higher education in-

stitutions. However these comparisons tend to overemphasize research, using research performance as a yardstick of institutional value. If these processes fail to address the quality of teaching, it is in part because measuring teaching quality is challenging.

Quality teaching must face challenges that start from learning outcomes but go beyond this, regarding the development of Higher Education Institutions as stakeholders in a territory and within expanded institutional networks.

Quality teaching in higher education matters for student learning outcomes. But fostering quality teaching presents higher education institutions with a range of challenges at a time when the higher education sector is coming under pressure from many different directions. Institutions need to ensure that the education they offer meets the expectations of students and the requirements of employers, both today and for the future. Yet higher education institutions are complex organizations where the institution-wide vision and strategy needs to be well-aligned with bottom-up practices and innovations in teaching and learning. Developing institutions as effective learning communities where excellent pedagogical practices are developed and shared also requires leadership, collaboration and ways to address tensions between innovators and those reluctant to change.» (Henard & Roseveare, 2012, p. 3)

Quality at the pedagogical level is a key part of the chain of HE efficacy.

The very recent constitution of a EU high level group denominated “*train professors to teach*”¹⁷ as one of the working groups for the modernization of HE agenda makes clear that the issue of teaching can no longer be left aside. In June 2013 this group produced a first and extremely important report¹⁸ analyzing the problem of quality teaching in EU universities and making a number of recommendations. According to such report,

«...Teaching is a core mission and therefore a core responsibility. Quality teaching is a sine qua non of quality learning culture. That teaching mission should appear as resounding priority throughout every institution involved in the delivery of higher education — a daily lived priority and not just worthy words in a mission statement. The truth about that daily lived reality, however, is an embarrassing disappointment. For research shows that serious commitment to best practice in the delivery of this core teaching mission is not universal, is sporadic at best and frequently reliant on the enlightened commitment of a few individuals...» (EU High Level group, 2013, pp. 13-14).

17 According to the EC Press Release High level group to focus on quality and excellence in teaching, European Commission - IP/12/976 18/09/2012.

18 High Level Group (2013) “Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe’s Higher Education Institutions”. Report to the European Commission. Retrieval at http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/modernisation_en.pdf, accessed August 2013.

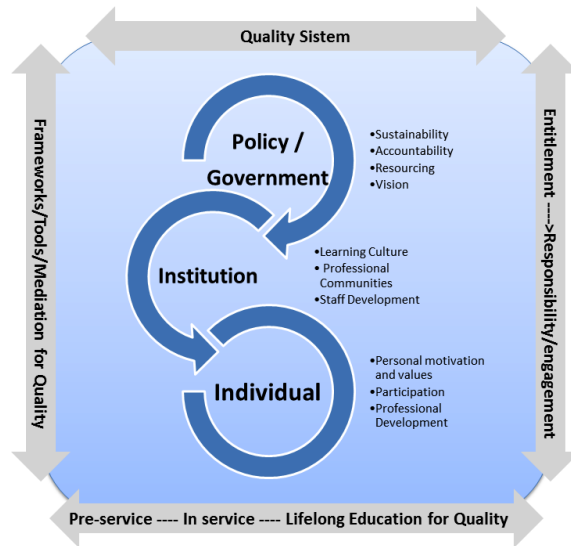


Fig. 1. Multilevel system of Quality

In the Italian case, the issue of quality teaching has been given relevance mainly from an evaluative point of view. In fact, the ANVUR (2013) mentions forms of teaching evaluation by students and by the same professor integrating the general dimension of quality of educational services (pp. 40-41). However, the emphasis on course and institutional accreditation as some important criterion should encompass attention to quality teaching as well as pedagogical innovation, a fact that is only briefly mentioned in the document. The attention given to the quality of teaching is embedded in a general system of quality evaluation. Curiously, when speaking about eLearning the document focus much more the issue of pedagogical approach, underlining the importance of students engagement and collaboration, as well as the participation of other professionals of education like the eTutor (pp. 34-35). This seem to mean that networked learning and the use of educational technologies could have a “pushing” effect in rethinking pedagogy in HE for quality.

The problem raised here is that the lack of concrete professionalism and evidence-based practices addressing quality teaching will surely block (being a proxy dimension of learning effectiveness, Hénard, 2010; Laurillard, 2012) the necessary innovations that facilitate to reach the envisaged learning outcomes.

In the following paragraphs, we will focus the research background on the field of quality teaching, in order to show the emerging issues that require attention in a changing system pursuing quality.

2. Innovations in HE pedagogical approach for quality

As we introduced in the previous paragraphs, the issue of quality in teaching practices is connected to a growing interest in the agenda of development of Universities as key players in societal change. However, very frequently teaching is assumed as an “art” where excellent research generates as immediate consequence excellent teaching.

The research in teaching profession, particularly in primary and secondary education, has already reached at least four decades of discussion. More recent is the interest of research on university teaching, with a critical mass of articles giving birth to a field of research in the last 20 years, among which the pioneering work of Ramsden is to be highlighted (Ramsden, 1992). The advances in this field show that quality teaching is not rewarded, pushing the interest of scholars away from teaching to focus on research (Boyer, 1997). Moreover many academics are attached to traditional conceptions and personal experiences and very few professors apply evidence based criteria to teaching (Hakel & Halpern, 2002). If teaching wants to generate significant learning (for a professional activity and for life) policies and practices to foster quality teaching should be guided by the understanding of learning and teaching processes emerged from research in the field (Henard & Roseveare, 2012). The more recent teaching and learning paradigms in higher education imply innovations to the traditional approach based on lecturing; and these innovations promote better learning (as demonstrated in educational research), being therefore connected to quality. It is to be highlighted that the fact of innovating in pedagogical approaches does not suffice to achieve quality. Quality is based in continuing reflection on processes and results, and the stabilization of elements that are proven effective. But innovating is a key piece of quality for it encompass the search of continuing improvement of concepts, approaches and practices (Ghislandi, 2005). In the following list some of the most important pedagogical innovations leading to effective learning, studied in the last 30 years of educational research, are described:

- Re-designing of curricula, on the basis of the interdisciplinary skills development. Particularly, design a curriculum that leads to the achievement of competences, i.e. skills displayed in real professional or social situations. (UNESCO, 1998), (Aronowitz, 2001), (Barnett, 2000)(Trilling & Fadel, 2009)
- Bridging teaching and research more intensively (Healey, 2005), (Brew, 2006). Research generates the base of content and examples that “feed” the disciplinary thinking, as well as methodological problems and the findings defining professional expertise. However, teaching can also generate the base to “validate” research knowledge in the sense that a semantic structure has to be generated to communicate research effectively. Particularly, socio-constructivist and other innovative, participatory approaches to teaching allow students to collaborate with the scholars in collecting data, elaborating them and contributing to the development of the research field with epistemological and deontological discussions.
- Re-thinking of student workload and teaching load (Hakel & Halpern, 2002). In order to achieve key competences for professional and lifelong learning, it is crucial to rethink classroom settings and learning processes. The typical classroom setting is no longer appropriate in this sense; due to this, the learning achieved in informal situations could be of value in the student’s trajectory. Consequently, the student could search for more independent learning situations, and the focus of the teaching staff could be more on feedback and evaluation than on the delivery of content.
- Continuous upgrading in pedagogy, use of technologies, assessment models aligned with student-centered learning, (Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Hodgson, & McConnell, 2012) (Laurillard, 2012). Learning experiences can be gained in many different forms of learning environments, not to be limited to auditoriums and classrooms. Learning happens also outside the institution and also from a distance.

- Creating of innovative learning platforms (Conole, 2012). To this regard, there are several ongoing experiences regarding the adoption of: ICT; content and learning management systems; social media; personalized learning environments with specific platforms or transmedia in the Web 2.0; augmented learning environments with mobile learning technologies; data mining & learning analytics to assess students learning. New and wider range of communication and collaborative working tools through learning platforms are also available, towards interdisciplinary collaboration (Smith, 2001) (Healey, 2005) (Kreber, 2009).
- It is of particular interest the evolution of the so called OER -*Open Education Resources*, based on the opportunity given by technologies of generating content that can be freely shared, re-mixed and applied across different educational context. In line with this the more recent developments are exploring approaches based on technological environments and the massive presence of students across the world: the MOOC-*massive open online courses* (Knox, Bayne, MacLeod, Ross, Sinclair, 2012; Sheets, Crawford, Soares, 2012).
- Providing tutoring to students with new means and methods (Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Hodgson, & McConnell, 2012). There is consistent evidence that learning in social and open contexts, as proposed above, require innovative types of intervention from teaching staff.
- Provide the support of instructional designers to the teaching staff that want to approach the innovative technologies and pedagogical strategies
- Assessing impacts and documenting effectiveness of the teaching delivered (Ehlers & Schneckenberg, 2010).

These research findings are cristallized in the recommendations of the very recent EU report of the High Level (op.cit, pp. 64-67):

- Public authorities should ensure sustainable, well-funded framework to support higher education institutions efforts to improve quality teaching.
- Institutional strategies to support the improvement of quality teaching should be considered giving teaching due partly with research.
- Student feed-back on teaching should be encouraged.
- By 2020 all staff teaching in higher education institutions should have received certified pedagogical training.
- Academic staff entrance, profession and promotion decisions should take account of an assessment of teaching performance alongside other factors.
- Institutional leaders should recognize and reward HE quality teachers. Curricula should be developed and monitored through dialogue and partnerships among teaching staff, students, graduates and labor market actors, drawing on new teaching and learning methods, promoting key skills for employability.
- Student performance in learning activities should be assessed against clear and agreed learning outcomes, developed in partnership by all faculty members involved in their delivery.
- Higher education institutions and national policy makers in partnership with students should establish counselling, guidance, mentoring and tracking systems to support students into higher education and beyond graduation.
- Introduce and promote cross-trans and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, helping students develop their breadth of understanding and entrepreneurial and innovative mind-sets.
- Higher education institutions (with the help of public and EU funds) should promote the adoption of online and other forms of teaching and learning

- opened up by the digital era, exploiting the opportunities given by technology to improve quality.
- Higher education institutions should develop and implement holistic internationalization strategy as part of their mission and functions.
 - The European Union should support the implementation of quality teaching promoting: innovative teaching and learning methodologies and pedagogical approaches; guidance, counselling and coaching methods, improved programme design taking into account the latest research on human learning; professionalization and development of teaching staff; mobility and academic exchanges; systematic data collection on issues affecting quality.
 - The EU should support the establishment of a European Academy for Teaching and Learning led by stakeholders, and inspired by the good practices reflected in this report.
 - Researchers supported by Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions should integrate professional qualifications for research with teaching skills.
 - Member States, in partnership with regions, are encouraged to prioritize the adoption of EU Social Funds to strengthen the development of pedagogical skills, the design and implementation of programmes to social and labor market needs, and to partnerships between higher education, business and the research sector.

In Italy, there has been growing concern on the university teaching, along with the general debate of quality and innovation of pedagogical practices (“didattica”) as a key issue to modernize compulsory education, at all levels. However the discussion of quality and innovation on teaching at the university level has been frequently overlapped with the evaluation of educational services and its management, an issue that in Italian, confusingly, is defined with the same word: “didattica”. This term in fact in Italian stands both for

- the overall educational services management, from the course of studies to the students’ engagement and external, professionalizing activities, against the term “research” (ricerca) that stands for the activity of research carried out by the universities
- the teaching and learning process within a module or course (“insegnamento, in the Italian case”).

This situation ended up in sparse efforts of research and the lack of integration of the second aspect in the quality systems programmed, letting alone the single scholar in the decision if and when to implement innovative teaching practices. This situation is extremely different in other contexts of excellence, like US, North America, UK, France and Germany, where teaching is supported through specific centers (Centers of Excellence for teaching) devoted to make research and provide tools and feedback on teaching piloting experiences and general practices.

The early documents of Galliani (1993, 1996), Xodo (1997), Frabboni and Callari Galli (1999) addressed the issue of distance between the modernization of the university and the actual teaching practices. In the studies of these authors the traditional lecture, as transmissive pedagogy, was found to be the more diffused system of teaching, connected to rigid, final assessment aimed at “producing” grades. The same authors claimed that issues like laboratories, seminars, contact with experts, use of technologies, group working as forms of pedagogical approach as well as formative evaluation connected to self-assessment, peer-asses-

sment and portfolio where little adopted. Galliani (2009) indicated that a genuine research on the issue of pedagogical approaches in HE has not been implemented in Italy and mentioned, as one of the few examples, the “Biennale Internazionale della Didattica Universitaria” (i.e. International Biennial of HE) organized by the University of Padua, which from 1996 has granted room for scientific research discussion on the issue. The contribution of Semeraro (2006), with a national project devoted to reconsidering the evaluation of didactics in higher education, encompassed an important debate and research works regarding the quality of teaching. More recently (Damiano, con Giannandrea, Magnoler, & Rossi, 2013) have represented a complete panorama of teaching in higher education, including the powerful influence of social media.

It is to be highlighted that, the pervasive entrance of educational technologies within educational systems (where the university was not an exception), cast out research focus and results on the specificities of teaching and learning in technology-enhanced environments. This in time opened debate on the pedagogy of eLearning and as such, on the quality of teaching in HE in the specific case of eLearning. The debate in this field brought important contributions, emphasizing for example the issue of asynchronous students’ collaborative learning and teacher’s feedback in the teaching/learning process. The University of Trento, jointly with other research units and within national research projects of relevant interest (PRIN), worked intensely on the connections between traditional teaching settings and eLearning as part of quality approaches in HE. In this context Ghislandi (2005) made a contribution regarding pedagogy and teaching in HE that was one of the first complete review of literature as well as a set of instruments of intervention at Italian level.

3. Our research focus: the quality of the academic teaching and learning process

Having introduced the international context of research on the issue of quality pedagogical innovation and eLearning, we would like to focus now on the work our research unit carried out in the field, at the Trento University, Department of Psychology and Cognitive Sciences.

The work of the unit started in 2000, with the implantation of an experimental laboratory to support the introduction of new educational technologies in higher education, following the last educational research developments on technology enhanced learning environments . One of the research focus was the introduction of innovative pedagogical approaches via the technologies “affordances”,¹⁹ as part of HE new models (Ghislandi, Calidoni, Falcinelli, Scurati, 2008). This important approach was institutionalized through the creation of DOL (Didattica Online), a rectorship special project that aimed at supporting faculty of the whole Trento university in technological and pedagogical innovation, and that made important contributions to bring the advances of eLearning. DOL introduced the adoption of Learning Management System MOODLE²⁰, as support

19 The term “affordance” is used in the literature (from its early definition by James. J. Gibson in 1977) to mention the possibilities given by an object, in this particular case, the object of technological environments and tools. An object can in fact allow certain actions performed or imagined, and block others.

20 Moodle is a Course Management System (CMS), also known as a Learning Manage-

to several institutional projects, from the undergraduate to the post-graduate level; it customized this LMS and studied the integration of web technologies (particularly, in the recent years, with the explosion of web 2.0 tools) to offer teachers personalized services. Regarding pedagogical innovation DOL elaborated several strategies: information on new technologies and their application across the different disciplinary fields to improve teaching; coaching to teachers interested in implementing eLearning modules; reorganization and delivery of educational resources to students; innovation in the assessment system. DOL became an institutional department of the Trento University in 2005, establishing since then an institutional strategy to support pedagogical innovations and quality with the adoption of technologies (Ghislandi, Mattei, Paolino, Pellegrini, Pisanu, 2008).

DOL was in tight connection with the research activities undertaken by our research unit (at that time named *labINDIA*-Laboratorio Innovazione Didattica Accademica) along several PRIN and FIRB projects (2003, 2006, 2009), in an interaction among base research, development and implementation of innovations.²¹

One important concern emerging during the initial years of introduction of technology enhanced learning models, which was analyzed by the group, was how the traditional teaching tended to shape online learning environments. In fact many eLearning experiences were rather based on the transmission of knowledge and on the download of (textual) documents, with a very limited use of other multimedia resources and particularly environments that allowed collaborative and dialogic pedagogies. (Ghislandi, 2007)

The *labINDIA*'s activity was also addressed by the emerging evidence that new pedagogical approaches, aiming at student collaboration, co-construction of multimedia materials, intensive forum use, would need the support of new professionals in the field of education, like instructional designers, eTutors, webmasters and web editors, community developers, etc. (Leo, Maragliano, Falcinelli & Ghislandi, 2009)

As a result, an important part of the preliminary innovation work was aimed to prepare a group of instructional designers that could help the faculty in designing innovative, from the pedagogical and technological point of view, eLearning courses (Ghislandi, 2002)

This was based on another important, transversal topic, which is the analysis of key elements supporting the Quality of eLearning courses, in order to demonstrate how technology enhanced learning could be a first choice option.²²

During four national level research projects (see annex 1) the research goals were:

- To better understand what quality eLearning is at the different level (University, faculty, course) and for the different stakeholders (university managers,

ment System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). It is a Free web application that educators can use to create effective online learning sites. www.moodle.org

21 Annex I introduces the research activities from the period 2000-2013 in detail. We further attempt to highlight the main results and their connections with the issue of quality teaching and how eLearning can contribute to this quality.

22 This topic was based on early works of Ghislandi regarding the CERFAD Commission for the quality certification of open and distance learning set up by the Emilia-Romagna region (1995-2003), and the CRUI's (Italian Rectors' Conference) Commission for eLearning quality.

dean, teachers, students). It was adopted the 5 pillars Sloan-C model, exploring particularly the pillar of “learning effectiveness”, considered a crucial (if not the most important) factor in the quality of HE and educational interventions in general.

- To build/validate/promote specific tools to help the teachers in designing more effective eLearning (Ghislandi, 2012) as key dimension of quality. Particularly, it was identified as key part of the process of quality, the design / re-design of a university course (insegnamento) where the teacher implements the knowledge of the own discipline and research through an approach that allows the acquisition by students.

This important finding led the group to work on the elaboration of simple but thorough criteria for the evaluation of quality teaching – the *adAstra* tool- which should constitute a tool for self-assessment and scaffold in the quality design / redesign and monitoring of a university eLearning course. *adAstra* is in continuous redesign and development following our research achievements.

The research group was working till the October 2013 on a PRIN project (“Evaluation for the improvement of educational contexts. A research involving University and local communities in the participatory development of innovative assessment models”) coordinated by the University of Verona, with the participation of the Catholic University of Milan, the Milan-Bicocca University, and the Pavia University.

The University of Trento research work is currently focused on how quality is perceived and evaluated among the several key stakeholders, and particularly within the teaching staff (including eTutors and other technical collaborators to didactics). The research was implemented in two phases: an exploratory phase devoted to understand practices and beliefs; followed by a transformative phase, which is *design based* and analyzes the results of an intervention on HE courses.

More precisely, and taking advantage of the UNITN research group’s previous experience about the quality of eLearning courses, the goals that led the deployment of research activity were:

- to analyze and **foster the quality of online learning courses** (both pure and blended) of a degree program, through the generation of a “quality culture”.
- to **build tools that can facilitate** the improvement of the teaching quality within eLearning courses;
- to **encourage teachers** and learners to consider eLearning as a positive instrument to improve the general quality of academic courses.

In our exploratory work on the beliefs/personal positioning regarding the quality of HE, we found a number of tensions and contradictions in several stakeholders, beyond teachers and students. This led the group to re-conceptualize quality, not as a determined, top-down system, but as multiperspective and extremely contextualized “culture” that emerges from meaning making processes between stakeholders engaged in practices.

To this regard, we observed that the practices could be based in specific beliefs, more or less guided by awareness on the external policy and research context. Therefore, the group elaborated an approach denominated of “mediated quality”, where the aim is to support and reinforce stakeholders reflection on the quality culture imagined and practiced. This support is concretely based on tools (concepts, models, techniques and technologies) that mediate the process of reflection (Ghislandi & Raffaghelli, 2012).

The transformative phase instead, based on a participatory approach, intended to intervene on an undergraduate course. In fact, the exploratory research led to the conceptualization of some phenomena and the design of an experimental activity to engage stakeholders (students) in a process of building a *quality culture*, testing some of the assumptions emerged during the exploratory phase. One academic course was examined in a collaborative research involving researchers, teaching staff and students. This part attempted to show how a new evaluation (participatory) model had a positive impact in the process of generating a *quality culture*, on the basis of key process that were conceptualized as *becoming insider of a quality culture*, *achieving quality literacy*, and *scaffolding learning processes to achieve quality literacy*.

4. Scaffolding Pedagogical Quality Cultures in higher education: some recommendations

This fourth part is devoted to introduce recommendations for practical activities to be undertaken in the situated context of our Psychology and Cognitive Science Department at the Trento University, to spread a pedagogical quality cultures among the different stakeholders (teachers, students, government, administrative bodies).

As expressed before, the ENQA system (and in the national context, the AVA system) is mainly based on ensuring processes, hypothesizing that main stakeholders have the basic tools and access to specific knowledge in order to perform self-evaluation.

Our position here is that the practice of teaching in HE, consisting mainly in the knowledge transmission based on the research in the own discipline, does not suffice to ensure proper self-evaluation and consequent re-design operations, when necessary.

In fact, we contend that quality teaching in higher education (as in other levels of education), requires the point of attention listed in the following paragraphs.

Seasoned academics and researchers at the beginning of their careers should be expected to acquire and put into practice different skills and competences not only regarding research, but also pedagogical practices and management of teaching projects. At this point it is to be considered that teaching is the primary activity of science divulgation in society, a fundamental piece of scientific research. Therefore, in a phase of recruitment, the academic profile should be measured in terms of communication and teaching skills, beyond the specific research skills.

Faculty needs training and support in teaching, that is, the possibility to participate in professional communities of practice devoted to the discussion of quality teaching strategies and to reflect on the own teaching improvements, when piloting new practices. For all this activities faculty have to be rewarded (not necessarily in economical form) for quality improvement in teaching.

University professors have to reconsider critically their own implicit (and sometimes naive) pedagogical beliefs and knowledge. This implies room to discuss with colleagues and deconstruct myths about good teaching that are linked on-

ly to the own personal experience, usually given in a very different institutional and historical moment (less students, different requirements of professional knowledge at the end of the University, etc.). Implies also to reconsider crucial challenges of the changing HE institutions.

Teaching have to be based on evidence-based practices, that is, teaching is based on pedagogical theory and research. We wish to extend the “evidence” concept to both qualitative as well as quantitative approaches to educational research, as part of complex, ecological models of research in social sciences and humanities.

Design and teaching practices have to be supported by well-designed tools, to help teachers self-evaluate their own courses *ex ante* and *in-itinere*, and not only *ex post*.

Design and teaching practices have to be contextualized, particularly taking into account, in adopting certain pedagogical approaches and technologies, the discipline specificities and constraints.

Collegiality for a scholarship of teaching and learning in HE. The academic staff must be trained from the early years of its career (during the doctoral studies) to good teaching; however, a lifelong learning approach should be implemented, with several spaces and tools supporting new practices and reflection. Furthermore, the possibility to collaborate and discuss with other colleagues about quality teaching strategies should be promoted, in order to support collegiality, that is, a community of practice for the continuing improvement of teaching and learning processes in HE:

Faculty have to participate as key stakeholders in the process of evaluation (in the Italian case, the implementation of AVA). It is fundamental that the teaching staff can have access to the results of students’ evaluation; external experts evaluation; results/feed-back on self-evaluation, in order to analyze them and implement concrete modifications to the own courses. There must be institutional support to proceed in that direction.

Students have to participate in the process of evaluation, also defining the parameters of evaluation. Not only students are key informants about quality, but, as emerged in our own research, they are also *builders* of a culture of quality. Their participation and engagement in curriculum design, services to students, the adoption of technologies and networking activities with the territory play a key role in defining the quality of educational services. Students should also be aware of the University results in national evaluations processes as well as in internal evaluation.

Criteria for the teaching activity have to be introduced in the professors’ evaluation. The introduction of evaluation standards and parameters on the research activity could lead finally to the introduction of criteria for pedagogical activity as well, being the teaching activity one of the more time consuming professors’ task in the today universities. There is today a high risk of underestimation of teaching as crucial activity within a quality higher education system. The quantitative criteria adopted to simplify the evaluation of teaching, as well as the lack

of incentives and professional development, has traditionally left teaching as secondary role, or even worst, as simple obligation to accomplish. Beyond over simplistic evaluation systems (like questionnaires administrated to students), teaching should be considered as complex activity with a specific impact on the whole quality system, with specific evaluation practices that lead to knowledge, engagement and innovation as basis of quality. Evaluation criteria should moreover take into consideration the disciplines of knowledge and the typologies of learning modules: basic learning or advanced learning, optional or central in the curriculum, professional skills or theoretical knowledge, and so on. The students' skills, their profiles and numerosity should be also carefully considered. In the case of the researcher, at the beginning of her career, the development goals should be negotiated with principal/experienced researchers that have the obligation to introduce the young researcher into the institutional context. The objectives should take into account the discipline, the team work or unit where the researcher is going to take part, the principal investigator availability to supervise teaching activities.

Qualitative evaluation have also to be considered in the general evaluation plan. The above reflections push toward a scheme of evaluation that is based on qualitative approaches in terms of individual plan of development, within an institutional context that is linked to clear objectives that can be rationally achieved. The quantitative standards put at risk the nuances of a team workplan where the teaching activity acquires specific sense. Which is worst, it could be pushing teaching standards to the minimum level in order to obtain good scores in the evaluated areas instead of generating a space to reflect on quality. Connected to this, the lack of freedom and independence originated by the rigid system of evaluation, which imposes also strict task scheduling within teaching activities, could be highly limiting for the teaching staff professional development. Clearly, in the case that it was decided to go into the direction of innovative/ constructivistic forms of evaluation (like the ePortfolio, peer-reviewing on syllabus, teaching resources, learning outcomes) that would also encompass qualitative research methods like deep interviews with students and focus groups with teaching staff, the institution should also implement specific tools and strategies, like a unit devoted to intervene to give support to teaching and career development in the field of teaching. The basis for this activity should be educational research, tightly connected to the European and international landscape of pedagogy in HE.

The commitment should lead to a continuing improvement of teaching quality as specific field contributing to the overall system and to the management of the learning processes like tutoring, guidance, learning design, networking with engagement of other stakeholders.

The institution that would consider the above qualitative possibilities and decide to integrate existing standards and procedures —based on students' questionnaires, final students' grades, level of success within the learning module as well as drop out— would lay the foundations for a whole picture of quality in higher education, a solid *culture of quality*.

The qualitative approach would put the basis for reflection and understanding of evaluation practices toward a complex picture of quality in HE. The continuing improvement of quality of teaching as specific field could emerge as clearly contributing to the overall system. Furthermore, quality teaching should be conceived as specific but also connected to the management of the learning process, like tutoring, guidance, learning design, networking and demonstration with engagement of other stakeholders.

4.1 Our proposal in four point and two steps

Having analyzed the set of problems and possible solutions toward a culture of quality teaching, we would like to make the proposal of an approach based on:

1. **Quality Knowledge:** Understand and know the policy of the context with regard to the quality of learning and teaching in HE, based on educational research. This implies good information instruments and processes, as well as understanding that the quality is not a “one-man-show” approach, but the result of multiperspective, multilevel approach.
2. **Quality Experiences:** To promote and support an intentional use of tools along the courses design, delivery and evaluation.
3. **Quality Evaluation:** to generate qualitative and quantitative evaluation practices, spaces for best practices sharing, communities of practices for participatory reflection of the results collected in the second phase, in order to promote debate about the key dimensions, processes, tools to support the quality culture within the specific context of University of Trento.
4. **Quality Innovation:** to develop, pilot and analyze innovative practices as the result of the participatory evaluation processes implemented in the 2nd and 3rd phases. This implies a process of continuing improvement of teaching and learning strategies.

This approach could be implemented as follows:

First step, based on existing resourcing

- The generation of web spaces and communities of practice that support concrete information on the policy context and the research advances in the field of teaching and learning. This activity can be based on the existing area space managed by the DOL unit, today called “CELIRIDD” (Centro Linguistico e Risorse Digitali per la Didattica; Center of Languages and educational Resources for Pedagogy). In this sense, the web repositories with useful resources, case studies, exemplar material, constitute the first step of a Center of Excellence for Teaching at University of Trento (CET@unitn).
- The adAstra tool could be made available and supported online within the above mentioned web spaces. These would allow professors to monitor the own quality of courses, from the design to the evaluation

Second step, based on new resourcing

- The establishment of an observatory (CET@unitn) regarding learning and teaching practices, that should support the work of the Deans and the Rector, in understanding the state-of- the-art of designing for quality teaching within the own university and in the Italian / European and international context.
- New research and development would be coordinated within the CET@unitn which would network both inside the institution, mainly with CELIRIDD, and outside the university, with several key stakeholders locally and nationally, as well as at European and International level.
- The research activity would be the base of coaching to establish forms of professional development within the academic staff. To this regard, we suggest:
 - i. Initial formal training aimed at researchers and academic staff entering a teaching activity at undergraduate level.
 - ii. Engagement in a professional community of practice open to all the academic staff for the innovation and quality of pedagogy in HE. This would

encompass particularly the integration of new learning pathways, laboratories of learning design, proposals to integrate formative assessment, adoption of educational technologies as well as eLearning, generation of open educational resources, participation in MOOC-massive open online courses as teaching staff.

- iii. Additional training for PhD students regarding pedagogical approaches in higher education to achieve concrete skills for quality teaching.
- iv. Support to piloting of innovative pedagogical practices and further evaluation of impact.
- v. Forms of reward to the best practices as well as for the continuity of quality approaches in teaching, based on concrete results in learning outcomes, mainly based on peer and self-evaluation. This approach would reinforce the climate of collegiality and professional community necessary to support authentic quality in teaching and learning within a *culture of quality*.

5. Conclusions

Within the international context of economical and societal change Higher Education is called to play a key role. To that regard, universities cannot do *better* what they already know: they have also to transform practices. The HE Modernization Agenda put the basis for such a radical change; within it, the role of quality teaching has crucial importance. In spite of many excellent practices and innovations for quality, new teaching approaches promoting flexible and learner centered strategies are rather the exception than the rule. As it has been commented here, quality teaching is given a secondary role within the organizational strategy of higher education institutions, far behind the importance assigned to research. As a result, academic staff is well trained and induced to achieve research skills; whereas teaching skills are often intuitively and informally achieved; based on the own professor values and beliefs instead than on a consistent research based approaches to teaching.

This situation must change, if a genuine process of modernization is to be implemented, reconsidering the quality of higher education institutions on the light not only of researching but also of teaching. In this position paper, we introduced both the policy context and the research background explaining key concepts (like educational quality and pedagogical innovation) as well innovative practices. Furthermore, we collected and synthesized a number of recommendations already circulating in international European and Italian documentation. We further introduced our own research regarding the problem of quality in higher education and particularly in the field of eLearning, attempting to underpin an approach to quality teaching that could be considered complementary to the (Italian) national and European strategy. From our primary attempt of raising awareness on the issue at institutional level, providing also concrete tools for intervention, we hope our approach could be considered by several other pioneer educationists, policy makers and researchers whose efforts go in the direction of achieving a new vision of quality for Higher Education.

As stated in the European Report of the High Level Group on the Modernization of Higher Education, *teaching matters*. Moreover, in a culture of quality, *teaching matters as much as research matters*. The latter feed the former, but it also provides the basis of good dissemination and use of research results (a crucial part of research according to an ethical conception of research and development) through the development of key skills in learners. Teaching is part of a cir-

cle of activity in HE; if is not considered, the circle is broken, so preventing Higher Education to fulfill its own role within our changing and complex contemporary society.

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- CTE Center for Teaching Excellence - Maryland University* <http://www.cte.umd.edu/>
- Centre for Excellence in Teaching - University of Southern California <http://www.usc.edu/programs/cet/>
- MOODLE - www.moodle.org/
- European Network for QQuality Assurance in higher education - ENQA - <http://www.enqa.eu/>
- Agenzia Nazionale per la Valutazione della Ricerca e la Didattica - National Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Didactics - <http://www.anvur.org/>
- Conferenza Nazionale dell'Università - CUN - <http://www.cun.it/>
- Portal of the European Union - <http://ec.europa.eu/>

Annex I

The Trento research Unit track-record about the topic of quality in HE

Project	Description	Main publications
PRIN Project "eLearning in higher education. Criteria for quality in teaching /learning models" 2003-2005	Trento Unit's topic: "eUniversity. Information and Communication Technology as a factor of change in the Italian Universities" ref. 2003114525_005	P. Ghislandi (2004) Criteri di qualità dei sistemi eLearning. Le risorse In Guida alla qualità dei sistemi eLearning Unione Europea, Ministero del Lavoro e delle politiche sociali, Cerfiad- Commissione regionale per la Certificazione dei materiali didattici e dei servizi per la Formazione a Distanza, Regione Emilia-Romagna, ISSN 1722-361X, pp. 34-49
National Project leader: University of Lecce	Project Leader of the Trento's Unit (University of Trento, Catholic of Milan, Sassari, Perugia): Patrizia Ghislandi	P. Ghislandi (2005) Didattiche per l'università Trento, Editrice Università degli Studi di Trento, Dipartimento di Scienze della Cognizione e della Formazione, ISBN 88-8443-111-5, pp. 306 C. Scurati, P. Ardizzone, M. Parricchi, F. Falcinelli, P. Calidoni, P. Ghislandi (2007) eUniversity. Modelli di innovazione didattica a confronto in N. Paparella (a cura di), "Ontologie, simulazione, competenze", Amaltea Edizioni, Lecce, ISBN 88-8406-093-1, pp. 139-171 P. Calidoni, F. Falcinelli, P. Ghislandi, C. Scurati (2007) Verso la eUniversity. Una lettura trasversale delle ricerche qualitative in quattro atenei italiani. Towards eUniversity. A cross-case of the qualitative research in four Italian universities. in P. Ghislandi (a cura di), 2007. "Verso la eUniversity. Contributi per una nuova didattica universitaria, Towards eUniversity. Contributions for innovative teaching/learning in higher education" Editrice Università degli Studi di Trento, Trento, ISBN 978-88-8443-214-8, pp. 255-319 P. Ghislandi (a cura di), (2007) Verso la eUniversity. Contributi per una nuova didattica universitaria. Towards eUniversity. Contributions for innovative teaching/learning in higher education, Editrice Università degli Studi di Trento, Trento, ISBN 978-88-8443-214-8, pp. 628 P. Ghislandi, P. Calidoni, F. Falcinelli, C. Scurati (2008) eUniversity. a cross-case study in four Italian universities. "BJET-British Journal of educational Technology", Vol 39 N°3/2008, ISSN (versione elettronica): 1467-8535, ISSN (versione cartacea): 0007-1013, pp.443-455 http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0007-1013&site=1

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- P. Ghislandi, A. Pedroni, (2009) Comunità di apprendimento distribuite e qualità della didattica *Distributed learning communities and quality of the teaching/learning process* in T. Leo, R. Maragliano, F. Falcinelli, P. Ghislandi (a cura di), "Digital collaboration: some issues about teachers' functions", Editore ScriptaWeb, Napoli, ISBN 978-88-6381-067-7, pp. 87-130
- Ghislandi, P. (ed.) (2011), *Comunità di pratica per l'educazione continua in sanità. Contributi al dibattito*, Edizione Erickson, Trento, ISBN 978-88-6137-953-4, pp. 303
- Ghislandi, P. (2011), Dal progetto eFOSS alla comunità di pratica, in Ghislandi P. (ed.), *Comunità di pratica per l'educazione continua in sanità. Contributi al dibattito*, Edizione Erickson, Trento, pp. 145-164.
- Trento unit research topic "Learning community for higher education in open source environment" ref. 2006111870_002
- National project leader Università di Roma 3
- Project Leader of the Trento's Unit: Patrizia Ghislandi
- FIRB Project "Net@ccessible: teaching-learning for one and all in a lifelong plan". 2009-2011
- National project Leader: University of Roma Foro Italico
- Project Leader of the Trento's Unit: Patrizia Ghislandi
- prot.: RBNE07WBKL_004
- Project Leader of the Trento's Unit: Patrizia Ghislandi
- PRIN project "Evaluation for the improvement of
- University of Trento research theme: Cultura della valutazione partecipata nell'elearning accademico
- Ghislandi P. (ed.) (2012), *eLearning: theories, design, software, applications*, InTech - Open Access Publisher, ISBN: 978-953-51-0475-9, Rijeka, Croatia, pp. 248.
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educational contexts. A research involving University and local communities in the participatory development of innovative assessment models"

prot. 20094E7SMX_004

Project Leader of the Trento's Unit: Patrizia Ghislandi

National project Leader: University of Verona

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Raffaghelli, J. **Education Openness: Steps towards quality teaching and learning in Higher Education**, SIREF (Società per la Ricerca Educativa e Formativa) Winter School. Università degli Studi Niccolò Cusano, 21-23 Marzo, Roma.

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Upcoming

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Annex II Locandina Webinar



LA DIDATTICA UNIVERSITARIA. IL RUOLO DELL'eLEARNING

QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION. THE eLEARNING CONTRIBUTION

Mercoledì 20 novembre, ore 15.00-18.00

Webinar, Palazzo Istruzione
Dipartimento di Psicologia e Scienze Cognitive
corso Bettini 81 - 38068 Rovereto (TN)

Il seminario aperto/webinar "Qualità della didattica universitaria. Il contributo dell'eLearning" intende riflettere su come una ricerca scientificamente fondata che si occupa di insegnamento e apprendimento a livello accademico può contribuire al dibattito nazionale ed internazionale su questo tema, oltre che alle pratiche didattiche. Si propone inoltre analizzare quale specifico contributo realizza l'eLearning (e più in generale dell'Open Education) al rinnovamento delle pratiche didattiche, alla riduzione delle barriere di accesso, all'apertura dei contenuti della didattica e della ricerca verso la società, attraverso percorsi di lifelong learning non soltanto formali, ma anche non-formali e informali.

Agenda

- 15.00-16.00 Apertura
Daria De Pretis, Rettore, Università di Trento
Paolo Collini, Prorettore vicario e Delegato alla didattica, Università di Trento
Fabio Casati, Delegato per l'innovazione, Università di Trento
Remo Job, Direttore del Dipartimento di Psicologia e Scienze Cognitive, Delegato per la scuola, la formazione e TFA, Università di Trento
- 16.00-16.20 *La qualità e l'innovazione della didattica Universitaria: un progetto di ricerca*
Patrizia Ghislandi, Università di Trento
- 16.20-16.40 *Un master sulla didattica accademica: collaborazione Venezia-Trento*
Umberto Margiotta, Università di Venezia
- 16.40-16.55 *Oltre la ricerca: supportare la qualità dell'eLearning nella pratica didattica*
Daniela Paolino, Università di Trento
- 16.55-17.10 *La qualità della didattica: il caso della Scuola di Studi Internazionali*
Kate Riley, Università di Trento
- 17.10-17.25 *La voce agli studenti*
Luca Artesini, Rappresentanti degli Studenti, Università di Trento
Christian Stroia, Scuola di Studi Internazionali, Università di Trento
- 17.30-18.00 Dibattito: *Quali i trends da sviluppare nel nostro contesto? Quale il nostro contributo?*
Chair: **Juliana Raffaghelli**

Coordinamento scientifico: **Patrizia Ghislandi**

Coordinamento tecnico: **Antonio Mattei**

Chair del Webinar: **Juliana Raffaghelli**, Università di Trento

Il Webinar avrà la sede principale presso il Palazzo Istruzione, Corso Bettini 84, Rovereto (TN).

Sarà possibile partecipare:
in presenza a Palazzo Istruzione (60 posti)
online in modo interattivo (150 posti)
online in modalità streaming (senza limite di posti)

Per iscrizioni, seguire il link "formulario" dal sito del Webinar: <http://www.unitn.it/evento/webinar-didattica-accademica>
Per lo streaming: <https://connect.unitn.it/elearning-quality>
Per informazioni: 0464 808306

con il patrocinio della
SieL - società italiana eLearning, www.siel-it

Questo seminario è possibile grazie al contributo del Progetto PRIN2009
La valutazione per il miglioramento dei servizi formativi. Una ricerca Università-territorio per la costruzione partecipata di modelli innovativi di assessment, Coordinamento di Luigina Mortari, Università di Verona.
L'Unità di Ricerca di Trento, che si occupa della Didattica Universitaria, è coordinata da Patrizia Ghislandi.