
“Time out” for Classical Studies? The Future of Italian Liceo Classico in the 4.0 world

“Tiempo fuera” para los estudios clásicos? El futuro del Liceo clásico italiano en el mundo 4.0

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Resumen: El texto analiza la actual enseñanza de los clásicos (lengua y literatura latina y griega) en las escuelas secundarias italianas. El reciente debate se centra en la supervivencia del “Liceo Classico” y el papel de las competencias y la innovación educativa. El autor propone, a partir de la literatura italiana e internacional, una tesis que integra los estudios clásicos con el mercado laboral actual y la “Industria 4.0”, también desde una perspectiva europea, mostrando las herramientas más útiles para modernizar los estudios clásicos.

Palabras clave: Clásicos, Cambio cultural, Nuevas competencias, Innovación educativa.

Abstract: The text analyzes the current teaching role of the classics (Latin and Greek language and literature) in Italian upper secondary schools. The recent debate is focusing on the survival of the “Liceo Classico” and the role of skills and educational innovation. The author proposes, starting from the Italian and international literature, a thesis that integrates the classical studies with the current labor market and the development of “Industry 4.0”, also from a European perspective, showing the most useful tools to modernize classical studies

Keywords: Classics, Cultural changes, New competences, Didactic innovation.

“It is not possible to fully understand modern world culture without appreciating its connection and its continuity with the heritage of classical culture” (Tullio De Mauro, former Minister of education, quoted in Cardinale y Sinigaglia, 2016).

PREMISE: ITALY, THE LAND OF CULTURE

The rate of foreign students in Italian universities was in 2014 around 5% (OECD, 2016), and there was 1 incoming student for 1,7 outgoing students, much more than the 2% at the beginning of the century, but a small percentage anyway. If we consider the higher education institution for arts and music (AFAM), the percentage was 4.7% and it is now about 12%: the total number of foreign students enrolled in AFAM has increased four times (ANVUR, 2016). Which is the reason why the arts higher education is so attractive, in comparison to university? Indeed, if Italians are widely renowned for their food, if they have such an exquisite taste in fashion, if they achieve so much success in design and architecture, it is because they are part of a great classical tradition from which they can draw inspiration. Among the 12 richest countries in terms of culture, as surveyed by UNESCO, Italy is the nation with the largest number of cultural sites which represent vestiges of both Greek (Paestum, Selinunte, Siracusa) and Latin (Pompeii, Herculaneum, Rome) classical antiquity.

Since the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance and to the modern age, Italian masterpieces have been inspired by the country's Greek and Latin heritage. Classical culture belongs to the heart of the European identity. To know Greek or Latin, to master their lexicon and their syntax, means not only understanding our history and our tradition but also preparing for our future, because they are the backbone of modern culture of the Western world. Yet this heritage is threatened. The educational model employed today in upper secondary schools to teach Greek and Latin is no longer appealing to young people, because it has never changed over the years. Likely, we are speaking not of “dead languages”, but rather of “dead teaching methods”.

As a consequence, the number of students enrolled in the “Liceo Classico” (*classical grammar school*) has been reduced by half, and young people can't see any connection between the languages of the past and today's reality. These trends have fostered a widespread debate in Italy on the relevance of classical studies, seen as reserved to a small minority, if not completely unnecessary, or important to safeguard tradition, and a tool for students to appreciate the enduring message of their history, developing in their minds the fundamental set of feelings, images and thoughts that comes from the familiarity with such a great culture. We have to

remember that in the Italian upper secondary school system, as reported by Eurydice, "The general path (*licei*) aims at preparing students to higher-level studies and to the labour world by providing them with adequate competences and knowledge, as well as cultural and methodological instruments for developing their own critical and planning attitude. Technical institutes have the general objective of providing students with a strong scientific and technological background in the economic and technological professional sectors"¹. Anyway Liceo Classico, for its tradition, is considered the most prestigious upper secondary school in Italian school system².

In order to preserve the culture of the classical world, for Italy and for Europe, it is necessary for students to develop a passion for these subjects, but doing so asks for a great change, from boring and mechanical learning to direct knowledge of authors and texts. As Austrian composer Gustav Mahler wisely puts it, "Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire".

THE ISSUE OF CLASSICAL STUDIES IN THE PRESENT AGE

On the website of an Italian company specializing in "inventory management" a section entitled "Modul life", would seem to indicate that the company in question is developing a shelving system for houses. But that would be wrong: Modul life, as stated by the same website, is a project developed with a group of researchers from the Department of Humanities of the University of Trieste, which "aims to bring humanistic knowledge to companies, typically considered the opposite of a place for languages, professional culture, organization and humanities". The website continues: "The general consensus underlying the project is that the supposed incompatibility of these two worlds is actually just a stereotype that not only can be overcome, but that should be demolished. Contrary to popular belief, the meeting of these two worlds can represent an opportunity for both parties. The project states that the role of humanities in education systems, through the development of critical thinking, creativity, analytical skills, etc., can be important in every context, and thus also in businesses. This calls into question the dominant paradigm that views corporate training totally focused on the bottom line and skewed towards completely functional of learning"³.

1 Eurydice, Secondary and Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education, online on: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Italy:Secondary_and_Post-Secondary_Non-Tertiary_Education

2 About the prestige of Liceo Classico see Cardinale y Sinigaglia (2016).

3 From the home page of Modul Life project official website: <http://www.modulblok.com/news/modul-life/languages>

This long quotation is justified in the context of a debate all over Italy⁴ on the survival of the Liceo Classico in a climate of “radical marginalization of classical studies” (Settis, 2004, p. 21). Accused not only of being useless, but also of reinforcing social class barriers, the Liceo Classico was traditionally seen, in fact, as the school of élites, due to its supposed superiority as a conveyor of “solid problematic and critical training suitable to reading reality in its synchronic and diachronic dimension” (decree 226/2005, “Moratti Reform”, Italy).

The title of this essay is deliberately provocative: in the world of web and video games, where profit is the dominant paradigm, is there still a place for classical culture or has it run out of time? What is the sense in keeping alive, with a sort of therapeutic obstinacy, classical high schools which in the last seven years have lost half of their students? In 2015-2016 students in the Liceo Classico were 5.8% of the total, in the majority women (68,8%). The following year the pre-enrolment data show a modest rise, to 6%, with the linguistic and scientific pathways losing both 0.1% (Ministero dell’Educazione, 2016). In addition, the strong selection after the first year causes a further reduction in the number of students that stabilizes only in the third year. The students leaving the Liceo Classico choose mainly the linguistic upper secondary, which in recent years has surpassed the size of the Liceo Classico registering nearly fifty thousand more students in 2015-2016⁵.

It’s simplistic to claim that the Liceo Classico is dying because Greek and Latin are themselves dead languages. Latin lost all practical value in the middle of the eighteenth century, and yet it survived in schools with dignity at least until the middle of the twentieth century. Schools without Latin were exclusively destined to provide professional training to the lower social groups (Waquet, 2008). Even scientific high schools, established in 1923, had limited success because, not offering Greek courses, they were considered a “bad copy” of the Liceo Classico. Latin was included in the curricula until the introduction in 2010 of the “applied sciences” option.

Even though teaching Latin is less and less frequent, Latin is still a mark of distinction. As stated by the former Education Minister Gentile, “classic culture is the highest form of culture, which feeds and nourishes pure thought” (D’Amico, 2010). Moreover, as noted by French philosopher Brague, the apparent uselessness

4 In some cities, Rome and Turin, there have been real “processes” for Liceo Classico where personalities of the Italian cultural and academic scene but also opinion leaders from business have been involved.

5 Stefano Quaglia (2007) notes that the popularity of scientific and technical high schools has not translated to an increase in the number of students enrolled in technical or scientific studies in university. Italy still has a percentage of STEM students lower than other European countries.

of classical language has a very important educational value: it teaches students that the most important things are almost always useless, while the things we need are almost always servile (Brague, 2010).

The real threat to the survival of classical studies can be found in the fact that, in a world increasingly open and oriented towards a knowledge society, the Liceo Classico is a school far from reality that doesn't value experimentation, job skills, laboratory training, or on-the-job training, negating the close relationship between Greek and Latin culture and politics, society and economy (Ball, 1990). There is no educational project that combines teaching and learning, thinking and action, theory and practice, inductive and deductive methodology.

Students are not trained in problem setting and solving. The learning process is informed on a repetitive and static model that confirms the impression that the Liceo Classico is far from reality and that its students are not able to connect tradition to life. It is the renunciation of the value of the Greek tragedy (and of the Shakespearean theatre) as interpretation of the present and as opportunities to take a leading role in everyday life.

A particular symptom of this distance is the lack of laboratories, whereas the present society is centred on a network-lab model and needs skilled humanists able to act as a compass to navigate the multitude of available information. As written by Elio Franzini (2014) quoting Paul Valéry, "our spirit is made of chaos, as well as a need to tidy up", and it is in the undeniable contrast between "constructive slowness and ephemeral speed" that it's possible to explain the present. In this context the classical knowledge transmitted by the Liceo Classico is asked to help the individual to reflect on the relationship between tradition and modernity and to build a bridge connecting the past and the present. For Franzini, the crisis of humanistic knowledge is a result of the fact that the concept of truth has been replaced by that of utility both in research and in the transmission of information. The explosion of information and communications, determined by the world wide web and by new information technologies, could provoke the collapse of individual and collective memory. As perfectly stated by Lyotard (1979), the multiplication of information processing machines has greatly affected the circulation of knowledge as it happened before with the development first of means of transportation (transport) and of means of communications (the media) thereafter.

The argument is not that the Liceo Classico is outdated because it doesn't offer students the skills to immediately find a place in the job market. In the "galaxy of language games" of contemporary knowledge, the humanities will be progressively delegitimized, if the main question is shifted from "is it true?" to "what

purpose does it serve?”. This change of attitude helps to strengthen the belief that only marketable skills are valid and worth pursuing. Teachers must be the first to understand that “humanities are no longer the heart of a unified body of teaching and research”, but that they remain an invaluable tool for the interpretation of reality. Unfortunately their training isn’t usually adequate to help them perform this delicate task. As a result, educators close themselves in an ivory tower that no longer exists (if it has ever existed) and the Liceo Classico stays firm in the conviction that it is only inside school walls that it is possible to learn⁶.

THE CHANGES OF OUR TIME

Modern school systems have been shaped as factory-like systems of mass education designed to meet the needs of manufacturing and heavy industry. They “processed people in batches, segregated them in age-related cohorts called classes or standards, taught them a standard course through teacher-centered methods of lecturing, recitation, question-and-answer and set work” (Hargreaves, 1994). The traditional organization of knowledge by disciplines is an example of how education systems have largely reproduced Taylor’s model of labor and production.

In a globalized society, the multiplicity of actors, the dissemination of knowledge and combination of educational and training processes “have made much less visible and much more unstable the distinction between the world of education and that of industry” (Carton y Tawil, 1997). Despite that, in Italy the educational policy only recently decided to combine traditional classroom-focused teaching with work-based learning practices. This transformation is accompanied by rapid and profound changes (globalization, migrations, disruptive technological advancements, digital revolution, ageing population, women’s empowerment), which generate “new levels of complexity and contradictions” (UNESCO, 2015) that deeply affect economy, society and politics.

Educational researchers reflect on the link between education and development, highlighting the need for schools to copy with the demands of contemporary

6 Except from a few experiences (like the project sponsored by Assolombarda – Milan, Monza and Brianza entrepreneurs organization – with some TLC enterprises) the Liceo Classico has systematically expelled on-the-job training from its teaching practice and it is unprepared to face the consequence of the latest education reform introduced by the law 107/2015. Furthermore, this attitude of the school system is accompanied by a prejudice on the part of students who don’t understand the added value of work-based learning. In general there is no sign of the skills-centered teaching method proposed by the European Qualification Framework, which, with all its limitations, reflects Europe’s perspective for the future.

society. There are four main topics up for debate: the dissemination of validation models, the connection between education and the labour market, the free determination of learning contents and teaching methods, and finally, the competition between public and private schools, and also among different public schools (Law 59/1997).

The systematic interaction between social change and education is analysed in a series of OECD reports called "Trends Shaping Education"⁷. The introduction of the reports called "The impact of trends on the future of education" states: "Have you ever wondered if education plays a role in countering the obesity epidemic that affects the OECD countries? Or what consequences increasing urbanization has on schools, families and communities? Or if it is true that new technologies are radically changing the way our children think and learn?" (OECD, 2016)

Schools cannot be reduced to mere facilitators of the adjustment required by change. On the contrary they can play an active role in identifying and guiding the transformations shaping contemporary society. Therefore, understanding how schools face these changes is essential in deciding whether or not to perpetuate the Liceo Classico. Usually classical high schools prefer to ignore, if not deny, changes, replying to the increasing demands of society with the undisputed axiom that the study of Greek and Latin masterpieces broadens the mind and helps students attain the highest academic achievements. In fact, the Liceo Classico (for lack of alternatives) has educated the majority of the Italian ruling class. However, in recent years, it has gradually abandoned its mission of preparing students for the challenges of reality. Influenced by the thoughts of the great Italian philosophers Croce and Gentile, the Liceo Classico has underestimated the value of scientific thinking. Yet modern students should not forget the warning placed at the entrance of Plato's school "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here".

It is not by chance that in the last edition of the OECD / PISA tests (2016) Italian students in the Liceo Classico had bad results. They had the lowest scores in mathematics proficiency, scoring 13 points less than students in scientific high schools, which means that they found it difficult to solve problems quickly. Even worse, they also performed poorly on the Italian-proficiency test, with a score of 67 points, whereas students in applied science scored 70 points, students in the traditional science courses scored 68.75 points and students of linguistic high schools scored 68.63 points. In TECO tests on basic skills, administered by the

7 The reports are published every two year. The previous edition have been released in 2008, 2010, 2013 and 2016. The reports can be viewed on http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/trends-shaping-education_22187049

Italian Agency for the Evaluation of Universities (ANVUR) to students in 12 universities, students coming from classical schools were behind those with scientific background, especially in technical and scientific faculties. As a result, the talented students, especially males, are discouraged from attending the Liceo Classico, and likely this is one of the reasons of the bad PISA results.⁸

In the Italian school system, and notably in the Liceo Classico, there is little awareness that theoretical knowledge isn't more valuable than practical knowledge developed in relation with reality. In 1399 Master Giovanni Mignot, a Parisian architect called to Milan to assess the progress of the construction of the cathedral, said “*Ars sine scientia, nihil est*” and it is a lesson that still applies today. *Mutatis mutandis*, skills-based learning, an open-minded attitude towards the contributions of entrepreneurs and other local stakeholders, digital learning with long distance interaction, virtual and smart schools, are all different facets of a new vision of the education system; open to innovation and ready to train students who can then succeed in the everyday challenges posed by work and life. This is a vision that embodies both the ideas of responsibility and efficiency in the promotion of human capital.

Although the Liceo Classico still “produces” brilliant and successful graduates, it is increasingly evident that at least part of this success stems from the socio-economic and cultural background of its learners. Nowadays the didactic paradigm of the Liceo Classico ignores skills and their educational significance. Competence, meant as the set of notions, skills, abilities and behaviours that individual brings in a working situation, is a complex concept, which has to be contextualized, since it is developed in relation to a specific social system and it depends on the way the interactions among the different actors are shaped. In general, the accepted approach of German and English pedagogy (although German researchers haven't yet agreed on a common definition of “Kompetenz”) emphasizes the training aspect of competence, which aims to develop skills and attitudes useful for work (Clarke y Winch, 2007).

For the Liceo Classico, however, it is better to consider Bernstein's work on education's contribution to the development of skills. Bernstein's model is creative and it identifies the purpose of education in promoting the development of all the capabilities of human beings, helping them to face the world. His remarks are applicable to any learning context not just vocational training or business training

8 Nevertheless, this is a controversial assertion: in 2016, a research by Almalaurea, a research network collecting data on university students in 73 universities, says that students coming from Liceo classico have better graduation marks in every faculty: 105 on average, compared to 103 from Scientific lyceum, and 99,7 from technical education.

(Bernstein, 1999). In his thinking, the concept of “competence” is explained in opposition to that of “pedagogy of performance”, via a comparison of the “competence model” and the “performance model”. Bernstein uses the concept of competence to clarify a particular type of pedagogical narrative, which refers to the natural development process and is based on the idea of “trust”, which has two sides. On one side you have the learner (the acquirer) who thinks that his teachers (the transmitters) trust him and have faith in him. On the other side you have the teachers who, for their part, think that the selected tasks and their demands are appropriate to the student’s abilities, and that they will help to develop his confidence and self esteem, encouraging further learning.

Actually, schools have different levels of effectiveness and the diplomas issued don’t always mirror the real abilities acquired by the students. These difficulties are especially evident in classical high schools. Not only the Liceo Classico does not pay enough attention to skills, it ignores the relation between theoretical knowledge and practical performance. It also can’t be bothered to develop the prerequisites that would guarantee students the ability to acquire these skills at a later time, instead entrusting this task to the universities⁹. In the Liceo Classico, the learning opportunities outside the school walls (extracurricular activities) are excluded, with serious repercussions to the school-to-work transition, even if the situation has been improved by the last school reform (Law no. 107/2015) which demands 200 hours (400 for technical and professional schools) of compulsory work-based learning in the last three years of high school.

The “ability to take action”, developed through learning by working and working while learning, is a concept mostly unknown in the Italian school, which unlike the majority of the other European school systems gives no merit to the educational value of experience and to on-the-job learning. Moreover, the labour market is giving more and more importance to non-formal skills acquired outside the formal school system, and in today’s fast paced world the jobs people hold no longer correspond to what they have studied.

REDISCOVERING THE REASONS FOR CLASSICAL CURRICULA

The dialogue between the Liceo Classico and Industry 4.0 cannot be started by denying the contribution and the insight that classical culture can still offer (Mc

⁹ The mismatch between the skills demanded by businesses and the ones trained for in schools is a problem of the whole education system and it doesn’t specifically concern the Liceo Classico. It could be solved with training, work based learning and the improvement of information systems.

Ginn, 1997). Indeed, if that were the case, the only reasonable course of action would be to close it or transform it into a school for a small number of classical culture experts. Disregarding the attempt of postmodern philosophies to deconstruct its founding values, the Western civilisation has reached, among many flaws and limitations, three main achievements, all related to the great Greek and Latin culture, three basic freedoms that the Liceo Classico curriculum needs to rediscover to develop a new relationship with reality

- The freedom to think (pluralism);
- The freedom to decide (democracy);
- The freedom to own (the free market).

Freedom of thought stems from the exercise of autonomous interpretation, not from the mechanical application of grammar rules. Freedom to decide starts with the awareness of the political value of culture and the freedom to own is the direct consequence of a specific view of the individual and of his place in the world. It is not a coincidence that during the Renaissance the revival of classical works was accompanied by the introduction of the double entry book keeping system.

The Liceo Classico doesn't need to become a mausoleum: it can revisit history, literature and arts with a critical and participative eye. Even in this age of never ending technological advancements, there are boundaries that the technology cannot and should not cross (let's just consider the great contribution of Heidegger on this topic) and it is eminently dangerous to restrain the enduring desire for knowledge because of companies' obsession with profit. The Liceo Classico can address these issues explaining the necessity of the "useless", reaffirming the value of the individual not only as "human capital" for the industrial sector but also on an ontological level, passing down the great spiritual values inherent in human nature. However, the first task of the Liceo Classico should be that of explaining, as stated by Xenophon in his dialogue "Oeconomicus", the necessity of the useful in light of the great values of classicism, freedom of thought and a high regard for the individual and his role in the world.

This endeavour should not be interpreted as an attempt to "adapt" the Liceo Classico to the current values of society but as an attempt to restore the original mission which inspired its creation. The Liceo Classico should still be considered one of the pillars of the "Open Society" as described by Popper, or in the tradition of the tolerance recommended by Aristotle, or of the biting comedy on the vices of the Greek society portrayed in Aristophanes' operas or of the tragedies of Aeschylus, such as *Suppliants*, to whom we can turn to understand the tragedy of the

migrations (Artusi y Quaglia, 2014). Nevertheless it's important to keep in mind that the classics no longer have a monopoly on humanism, or rather the concept of humanism has changed. There is certainly the literary humanism of Dante and Manzoni, which is a fundamental dimension of the Italian tradition, and it is unthinkable and detrimental for a student to learn advanced mechanics without having mastered the conjunctive tense.

However, alongside literary humanism there is the scientific humanism of Galileo, and the technological humanism of Leonardo (Gentili, 2007). Although Dante, Leonardo and Galileo enjoyed different epistemological interests and had distinctive area of expertise, each one was able to reconcile seemingly distant fields: literature and mathematics for Dante, painting and engineering for Leonardo, philosophy and astronomy for Galileo. It is to this synthesis that the schools of the future should aspire: they will be places both “humanistic and scientific, where Greek and Latin rhetoric will promote a passion for science” (Cardinali y Sinigaglia, 2016).

What should be avoided, however, is a Liceo Classico which merely preserves its identity and its purity against other kind of high schools considered less prestigious. Such an institution would lose its connection with the teachings of the great Greek and Latin tradition, whose rapport with everyday reality formed the principles and the foundation of theoretical elaboration: *De Rerum Natura* by Lucretius is just an example (Piazzini, 2009). In a world that is already “post-technological”, the Liceo Classico has become the last bastion of the Fordist paradigm in education since the knowledge it offers is the result of an artificial production-line process that puts single notions at the centre instead of students.

There is a strong debate about the link between the Liceo Classico and the Italian cultural identity. The debate was not just about the (unlikely) abolition but about the possibility of a stronger connection with the economy of the country. Against this approach, the philosopher Nuccio Ordine, author of the *L'utilità dell'inutile* (*The usefulness of the useless*)¹⁰, in his book and in some public interventions states that knowledge, especially classical knowledge, can't be based on an exchange where one loses (or sells) and one takes (or buys). The classic culture is based on the dialogue and mutual growth that enriches both the giver and the recipient: the teacher and the pupil. Instead Umberto Eco, during the “trial” to the Liceo Classico in Turin (November 2014) stated: “Thinking a balance means better teaching Latin, dialoguing in elementary Latin, introducing for five years at least one foreign language, and even the History of Art. Greek can also be changed by increasing the translations of the Greek of the koiné and what Cicero also spoke” (Cardinali y Sinigaglia, 2016). This

10 Ordine N. (2014). *L'utilità dell'inutile*, Roma: Bompiani.

could be better done through an unique high school, at the same time humanistic and scientific. The question to solve is how to move from the logic of utility to the logic of competence. Could the Liceo Classico offer skills that help the building of personality and the cultural and economic progress of society?

Back to the theme of skills development, I'd like to underscore a few methods in which the study of Greek and Latin can have beneficial effects, bringing the authors back to life, through an analysis both of the rhetorical and dialectical dimensions of language. The *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (the god man skilled in speaking) described by Cicero and Seneca should be educated with the study of Demosthenes, Cicero and Quintilian (rhetoric) as well as Plato's dialogues (dialectic). These skills are still essential for many of today's jobs as reporters, teachers, politicians, judges, lawyers, web designers, etc. Specialists such as philosophers, epistemologists, philologists cannot ignore the knowledge of the languages in which the cultural debate was held until 1700. In addition, the knowledge of ancient cultures is indispensable for those who want to carry out the conservation, promotion and study of the historical and artistic heritage.

In the past, only students from the Liceo Classico could choose any faculty in university. This possibility still exists, but just youth who want to study literature, law and politics attend the Liceo Classico, and this has weakened its appeal. To enroll in scientific and technical departments, students must pass rigorous admissions tests to be prepared to a graduate of the Liceo Classico must take expensive additional courses. Even where there are no preliminary tests, students in the first year have to work quite hard to fill in the gaps in their knowledge.

THE BEST PRACTICE OF LICEO CLASSICO VISCONTI IN ROME: TRAINING FOR LATIN AND GREEK

An innovative approach is experimented in the most ancient Liceo Classico in Rome, the "Ennio Quirino Visconti", cradle of the classical culture in Rome, but with a strong attention to arts and sciences (Comitato tecnico Liceo E. Q. Visconti, 2009). The structure of the building was changed with the construction of laboratories and equipped classrooms and a new location of the Museum of Art and Science. It's the ideal place to experience a new way of teaching "skills" in Liceo Classico since 2008, when the "alternanza scuola-lavoro" (work based learning in school) became part of the curriculum in the last year, aiming to emphasize the vitality of classical study (also of Latin and Greek).

A number of collaborations has been set up with publishing houses, marketing companies, museums, tourist agencies, libraries, cultural institutions. Both students

and host organisations have had mutual benefits from experimentation: students have improved their school performance thanks to greater motivation and had the opportunity to guide their future choices; host organisations have had the opportunity to compare themselves with the new generations and appreciate their skills, especially digital ones, even in non-technical and scientific fields such as publishing.

The main feature of the Visconti project was the focus on skills. The extra-school workplace was not simply a place where you could apply what was being studied in the classroom. It was instead a training place where skills, such as problem-solving and teamwork, had the opportunity to emerge and be, once back in the classroom, reported in the study of classics. The project has demonstrated the feasibility of work based learning for students at the Liceo Classico. A central role has been played by the “internal tutors” (the teachers of the school) who, in collaboration with companies and other institutions, have patiently built up training plans compatible with the rigid school curriculum. From school year 2015-2016, *alternanza* has become mandatory, and the Liceo Classico Visconti had no problem in extending the experimentation to many other classes and currently it represents a point of reference for all the classic upper secondary schools in Italy.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION TO RE-OPEN THE DEBATE

The current climate of uncertainty, individualism and ever-growing poverty, where short-term goals are prevalent, poses new challenges to education systems, forcing them to reconsider their traditional mission (Draghi, 2006). Writes Hargreaves (1994): “As schools move into the post-modern age, something is going to have to give. It might be the quality of classroom learning as teachers and the curriculum are spread increasingly thinly to accommodate growing demand... or it could be the basic structures and cultures of schooling, reinvented for and realigned with the post modern purposes and pressures they must now address. These are the stark choices we now face”.

The Italian upper secondary school system, and the Liceo Classico in particular, never think of their students as future workers. Indeed, students are not treated as customers and, in fact, they have neither the rights nor the power to change their curricula nor can they express any preference (Handy, 2012). However, while the number of students enrolled in classical secondary schools is decreasing, the curricula offered by technical and professional schools are becoming more and more general, as in classical schools. Following this trend, technical education has gradually renounced its methodologies of on-the-job training in favour of more theoretical teaching methods, which have in turn raised the number of dropouts.

Moreover, this prejudice has caused the homogenization of the different kinds of specialisations offered by secondary schools.

The distortion of the goals of the education system are evident in the fact that the mandatory years of schooling (*obbligo formativo*) correspond exactly with the number of years necessary to reach the lowest education level (*obbligo scolastico*). Nevertheless, there is no obvious correlation between education, measured in years of schooling, and productivity. Even the correlation between the education level reached and the level of employment depends mainly on social class conventions (Reyneri, 2002).

In our globalized society, there are no more long-term projects, no more “great storytelling”, and that has serious repercussions on education systems. While schools are asked to keep passing down the universal culture of tradition, they are also expected to support social movements based on the reaffirmation of localism and to help individuals to develop entrepreneurial skills of self-affirmation. The Liceo Classico is the main victim of this inconsistency. To limit its action to the mere transmission of theoretical notions lays the foundations for an uninformed and undiscerning society. A knowledge based society needs a workforce that can effectively support development and that is flexible enough to acquire the new skills required by new jobs that are emerging. It needs a wide range of people with high scientific and technical qualifications, as well as a small number of individuals equipped with sophisticated search skills, who can understand, spread and implement science and technology development.

Alongside cognitive and axiological rationality, there is a need for instrumental rationality. Every educated man, as such, has not only the capacity to know every single object within the realm of reality, but as *homo artifex*, he is also able to shape reality as he knows it. However, instrumental rationality cannot be the only goal pursued. We cannot limit innovation to the advancement of technology, negating the value of the organizational, financial, industrial and communication activities, which are at the heart of the “Liceo” pathway. The added value of the so called “Made in Italy” products comes from an immaterial dimension, defined by values like beauty or elegance, that are not a “superstructure”, à la Marx, but instead are a vital part of it the manufacturing process. They derive from research, which is a fundamental methodological aspect of education to be pursued in every subject area.

Before addressing the issue of the Liceo Classico, it’s necessary to strengthen education at the primary and secondary levels, especially in mathematics and science. It is essential, in fact, to provide young people with the cognitive prerequisites for further learning and with the ability to learn new things. The development

of general education encourages entrepreneurial spirit and increases productivity. General education can also identify groups in need of re-training, such as workers involved in industrial crisis; it can foster equity and ultimately is responsible for monitoring, through a careful analysis of the economic characteristics of different countries, the current state of affairs (McGinn, 1997). In parallel, it's essential to strengthen the educative role of enterprises. In fact, they can train students at a lower cost with the latest technological equipment and, since companies are more sensitive to market signals, up-to-date skills.

In 1972 the “Faure Report” commissioned by UNESCO introduced the idea of a learning society, a concept that was later developed by the Delors Report (1996) which recognized the need for lifelong learning. Nowadays, in order to maintain the ability to answer society's challenges, the Liceo Classico has to rethink itself starting from the messages included in the last education UNESCO report released in 2015: “The world is changing – education must also change. Societies everywhere are undergoing deep transformation, and this calls for new forms of education to foster the competencies that societies and economies need, today and tomorrow. This means moving beyond literacy and numeracy, to focus on learning environments and new approaches to learning for greater justice, social equity and global solidarity. Education must be about learning to live on a planet under pressure”.

The Liceo Classico likely is not a terminal patient but it is certainly ill. Its fate can be better described with the parting words of Socrates: “It is time to go, oh judges, for I die, you go on living. Who among us is moving towards a better fate, it is obscure to all but to God”. Actually, what should really “die”, or rather, what should be heavily altered, as I told at the very beginning, are the bad teaching practices that distance the Liceo Classico from the present. Quoting Quaglia (2007) who is in turn paraphrasing Garin, “the debate is not about the formative role of the study of Greek and Roman. What is controversial is the method employed to teach it”.

To effectively face the challenges of the future, the Liceo Classico needs to operate a healthy and intelligent reformulation of its teaching methods and re-discover its original mission of shaping “well-rounded” individuals and not just a “head full of notions” (Morin, 1999).

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