World ORT National Directors Forum
Centre for European Studies
Harvard University

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Educational Quality

Article of faith,

“buzz word”, or

rational framework for action?
When you try to say what quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes poof! There’s nothing to talk about.

Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance

It is a waste of time to try to define Quality.

What is quality?

• UNESCO: The concept of quality of education is still much debated and a clear definition has proven elusive.

• Danish Ministry of Education: “... it is not possible to say anything definitive and universal about quality in an education system. It is neither possible nor desirable to authorise one specific concept...”
What do these terms, usually used in juxtaposition to "quality", mean?

- Assessment
- Assurance
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Improvement
- Productivity
- Accountability
- Accreditation
- Control
- Evaluation
Are we systematic about quality?

Do we set standards of teaching, learning and logistics?

Do we define indicators of success?

Do we systematically gather and evaluate indicator data?

Do we use the results to document and improve educational quality?
Why is quality important?

• **Regulation**: compulsory or in adherence to professional norms.

• **Marketing**: reputation and differentiation.

• **Mission**: ethical commitment to fulfill promises and stakeholders’ reasonable expectations.
Why is quality assurance important?
An example from Australia

• “To protect our educational reputation.

• For public accountability purposes, particularly to satisfy the taxpayer that it is getting value for money.

• To inform student choice.

• To promote and improve quality processes and disseminate good practice, leading to overall system improvement”.
• Quality and equality. Is it zero-sum?

• Quality and reputation. Which fuels which?

• Quality and quantity: Is there a confusion between “measurable” and “important”?
Unit of analysis

- Teacher.
- Program.
- School.
- National system.
- Cross national (Mercosur, Bologna, Pisa...).
Focus of analysis

• **Intrinsic**: improve the unit in relation to itself.

• **Extrinsic**: compare the unit with peers.
### Dimensions of Quality in Education

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<th>Concept of quality</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<td>Mission achievement</td>
<td>Best professionals</td>
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<td>Evangelisation</td>
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<td>Promotion of equality</td>
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<td>Personal and citizenship development</td>
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<td>Perceptions of users</td>
<td>Student Surveys</td>
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<td>and society</td>
<td>Reputational position, “web buzz”</td>
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<td>Inputs</td>
<td>Teacher qualifications</td>
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<td>Technology</td>
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<td>Libraries</td>
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<td>Processes</td>
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<td>Teacher student ratios</td>
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<td>Outcomes</td>
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<td>Job placement</td>
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## Concepts of Quality in Education from the TQM perspective (1)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept of quality</th>
<th>Definition of Quality</th>
<th>How measured?</th>
<th>Problem posed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transcendent</td>
<td>Quality can not be defined but can be recognised</td>
<td>Perceived by those who are “sensitive”. Cannot be measured</td>
<td>Unmeasurable, therefore not useable within rational management</td>
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<td>Product-based</td>
<td>Quality as exceeding expectations</td>
<td>Unpriced attributes contained in each unit of priced attribute</td>
<td>What product or service does education offer and to whom? Whose expectations?</td>
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<td>User-based</td>
<td>Fitness for purpose. The service achieves its stated aim and the customer is satisfied.</td>
<td>Degree of customer satisfaction</td>
<td>Who is the customer? What is the purpose of education?</td>
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<td>Production based</td>
<td>Quality is seen in terms of consistency (focus on process as opposed to inputs and outputs)</td>
<td>Zero defects, getting things right the first time. Conforms to specifications</td>
<td>Is there an agreed process for achieving learning? Homogenisation of teaching styles is not best educational practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value based</td>
<td>Efficiency, productivity. Related to accountability of public expenditure</td>
<td>Cost per unit of product</td>
<td>What is the unit? What is the product? What is the process? Accountability to whom?</td>
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<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Educating is an ongoing process of changing or empowering the student</td>
<td>Value added measures</td>
<td>Complex, multivariable, approach with qualitative dimensions and relatively little comparability</td>
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<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>Fitness of purpose</td>
<td>Qualitative, political judgements on the purpose and priorities of education</td>
<td>Implies assessing potentially conflicting expectations of different stakeholder</td>
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• Quality as consistency in meeting specifications.

• Quality as "customer satisfaction”.

Customers’ “professionalism” or moral judgement. Parents or students choosing madrassas, home schooling or creationists approaches to teaching.

• Quality as transformation.

Education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of the transformation of the participant. The measure of quality would be the extent to which the knowledge and skills of a student have been enhanced. Through the learning process students are empowered for life.
Can industrial quality management methods be applied to education?

- Who is the customer? What is the product? What is the purpose of education?

- In industry the product and the customer are usually agreed and homogeneous. In education these concepts are contested. The source of his divergence of opinion arises from philosophical differences concerning the purpose(s) of education.
The purpose of education as part of the "culture wars"

- Managerialism and economicism vs postmodernism and diversity.
- Excellence vs access.
- Meritocracy vs equality.
- “Fitness for purpose” is contentious. Within this model, quality products are those that do what they claim to do. The quality of a guillotine, is judged by its ability to, er, behead things. The extent to which decapitation is seen as a worthwhile social activity is not brought into discussion.
Who are the customers?

Those who attend and will be affected i.e. the students?
Or those responsible for them i.e. the parents?
Or those who need them i.e. the employers?
Or the state who in some cases pays for the service?
Or society at large who need educated citizens?
Or all of the above?
The student as customer paradigm

- The student is **customer** but also **provider** and **partner** and the "**product**" itself.

- The concept of students as customers is inconsistent with the expectation that educational systems meet the needs of industry and society.

- Quality in education is determined by the learner's actions, i.e. learning, not by the actions of the provider of education.
Who are the “customers”?:
Multiple stakeholders

...quality is a relative concept, ....different interest groups or ‘stakeholders’ in education have different priorities and their focus of attention may be different. The best that can be achieved is to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality, and for these competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken.
Where do we go from here?

• Highly contextualised approaches are best suited for improvement.

• Specification approaches are best suited for accountability and comparability purposes.
Never mistake motion for action.

Hemingway

Quality is never attained; it is constantly being sought.

Harvey and Green
Thank you for your attention

You are a high quality audience!
Quality is relative and dynamic not absolute and static