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Article of faith,

"buzz word", or

rational framework for action?

What is quality?

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.

Vroeijenstijn, T. (1992). External quality assessment, servant of two masters?The Netherlands university perspective.
Quality Assurance in Higher Education. A. Craft. UK, The Falmer Press: 109-31

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…".

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What do the 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?

- <u>Regulation</u>: compulsory or in adherence to professional norms.

- <u>Marketing</u>: reputation and differentiation.

- <u>Mission</u>: ethical commitment to fullfill promises and stakeholders´ reasonable expectations.

- "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...).

- <u>Intrinsic</u>: improve the unit in relation to itself.

- <u>Extrinsic</u>: compare the unit with peers.

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Concept of quality	*Examples*
Mission achievement	Best professionals Evangelisation Promotion of equality Personal and citizenship development
Perceptions of users and society	Student Surveys Reputational position, "web buzz"
Inputs	Teacher qualifications Technology Physical infrastructure Libraries
Processes	Class cancelations Teacher student ratios
Outcomes	Standardised tests Job placement

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Concept of quality	Definition of Quality	How measured?	Problem posed
Transcendent	Quality can not be defined but can be recognised	Perceived by those who are "sensitive". Cannot be measured	Unmeasurable, therefore not useable within rational management
Product-based	Quality as exceeding expectations	Unpriced attributes contained in each unit of priced attribute	What product or service does education offer and to whom? Whose expectations?
User-based	Fitness for purpose. The service achieves its stated aim and the customer is satisfied.	Degree of customer satisfaction	Who is the customer? What is the purpose of education?

Concept of quality	Definition of Quality	How measured?	Problem posed
Production based	Quality is seen in terms of consistency (focus on process as opposed to inputs and outputs)	Zero defects, getting things right the first time. Conforms to specifications	Is there an agreed process for achieving learning? Homogenisation of teaching styles is not best educational practice
Value based	Efficiency, productivity. Related to accountability of public expenditure	Cost per unit of product	What is the unit? What is the product? What is the process? Accountability to whom?

Concept of quality	Definition of Quality	How measured?	Problem posed
Transformation	Educating is an ongoing process of changing or empowering the student	Value added measures	Complex, multivariable, approach with qualitative dimensions and relatively little comparability
System	Fitness of purpose	Qualitative, political judgements on the purpose and priorities of education	Implies assessing potentially conflicting expectations of different stakeholder

- 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.

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• Managerialism and economicism vs postmodernism and diversity.

• Excelence 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 <u>customer</u> but also <u>provider</u> and <u>partner</u> and the "<u>product</u>" 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.

…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.

- 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

Than you for your attention

You are a high quality audience!

Quality is relative and dynamic not absolute and static