
Chapter 1

The concept of quality and its application in educational institutions

The concept of quality has evolved in stages that correspond to different organization scenarios in productive systems. In an INEM¹ study on quality and training the following three stages are suggested:

First: The beginnings of “non-quality” control, from the industrial revolution until the Second World War. In this, the concept of quality was linked to detecting and solving problems stemming from lack of uniformity in the product, that is to say to checking the characteristics of the final product and discarding defective items. Statistical checking procedures were introduced, which made for a consequent reduction in final inspection levels, and the concept of quality that predominated in the 1940s emerged, whereby quality was gauged by the degree to which the final product conformed to initial specifications.

Second: Quality assurance: from the 1940s until the 1970s. In this period the Japanese economic miracle took place and the Deming Model, whereby quality was linked to satisfying the demand of domestic and foreign customers, became widespread.

Third: The end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st. This has been the period of total quality management, whereby enterprises make organizational changes so that all their departments are involved in the design and execution of quality policies. In this case, quality means that all the members of the organization participate and share responsibility.

According to Domínguez and Lozano in the INEM study, “...*in fact it is very difficult to distinguish when one stage ends and another begins be-*

¹ The Spanish National Employment Institute (Instituto Nacional de Empleo - INEM), “Tendencias actuales y futuras de la calidad en la formación”, *Calidad y formación: binomio inseparable*, INEM Publicaciones, Madrid, April 2003, and Domínguez, Guillermo and Lozano, Luz: “El concepto de calidad y su evolución”, in op. cit. (the complete version of the extensive study (270 pages) is available at the ILO/Cinterfor and INEM web sites).

cause focuses and quality systems have not developed in a uniform way in different geographical areas, rather they have been adapted to economic and social development in different places in function of the cultural and organizational context in each separate place". While this is true, the evolution of the concept of quality can still be condensed into the emergence of three main conceptual focuses that have developed from control to assurance and finally to total quality management (this is explained in greater depth in the box below).

CONCERNING THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY

"... It is impossible to set out clearly delimited stages because each society, each culture, each economic system develops at a different rhythm and its demands and needs are also different, so the evolution and development of quality systems in each place have been formed at different times and in response to different requirements. However, if we simplify this panorama for the sake of clarity we can distinguish three conceptual focuses that can be associated with stages in the development of quality on a practical level.

*The first has to do with **control** or inspection of the final product, the second with **assurance** of the quality of the product through evaluating the processes involved in producing this good or service, and the third with the total **management** of quality, and this includes administrative management elements and the involvement of all the elements in the organization so as to establish a general quality system.*

*In the first stage, **control** or inspection was carried out either in the product preparation phase or when the product had been completely finished. The aim here was to rectify mistakes or reject defective products.*

*In the next stage, **assurance**, the emphasis was on verifying that production processes were efficiently managed. There was an effort to do things well from the outset so as to avoid having to reject finished products, and thus, as well as trying to save costs, there is a guarantee that the quality of the product is up to the required standard. External and/or internal audits were employed to standardize processes and verify that they were being carried out correctly. This is a reactive stance in that the producer merely reacts to the customer's demands.*

*In the last stage, which is **management**, account is taken not just production processes but all of the processes that take place in the enterprise. Quality management involves all the processes in the organization, or at*

least those that have to do with the requirements of customers. What is added in this new notion of quality is the conception of objectives and of continual improvement (a pro-active attitude). Being pro-active means fully understanding and anticipating possible future customer demands so as to be able to satisfy them adequately and in the shortest possible time.

What is more, in this stage it is not only quality department staff in enterprises that are responsible for quality management. This new conception means that everyone in the enterprise or organization is responsible for quality management and has a genuine role to play, with the managers taking the lead.”

Source: Taken from Domínguez, Guillermo and Lozano, Luz: “El concepto de calidad y su evolución”, Spanish National Employment Institute (INEM), *Calidad y formación: binomio inseparable*, INEM Publicaciones, Madrid, April 2003.

*“At the present time we find ourselves with, on the one hand, competition-type quality models which implicitly involve awarding prizes ... and on the other hand ... quality certification and assurance standards ... Both types have evolved and improved greatly, and this has made it possible to improve the concept of quality from models suitable for the needs of industrial society and manufacturing production to models from the information and knowledge society itself, in which services outweigh production”.*²

As we shall see in the course of this study, standards and models have been adapted so they can be applied in educational organizations, and this has not escaped a certain amount of controversy and debate. Some people think that many of these adaptations have been forced and “...do not take account the specific nature of the educational process or the complexity of the people involved in this process” and so educational organizations should “opt for a model that establishes flexibility as its basic virtue, and has a guiding, motivating and open character that will serve as a frame of reference for establishing the process of improving management”.³

In an analysis of the various routes to improving quality in education, the Uruguayan Training and Production Centre (CECAP) stated that “it is not

² Spanish National Employment Institute (INEM): “Tendencias actuales y futuras de la calidad en la formación”, in *Calidad y formación: binomio inseparable*, INEM Publicaciones, Madrid, April 2003.

³ INEM, op. cit.

*valid to consider the concept of quality in education as one single thing that is evident, universal and neutral... When the term "quality" is applied to education it can have different meanings and is indefinite and ambiguous. These characteristics give rise to a paradox in the approach to this subject, which is that there is agreement on general matters and disagreement about details."*⁴

In the Integrated Quality in Education Model (MICE - Modelo Integral de Calidad en Educación) proposed by the Inter-American Forum of Education Administrators (FAIE - Fórum Interamericano de Administradores de la Educación), "...*quality in educational institutions is a philosophy based on values, an organizational development policy and a way to put pedagogic principles into practice, geared to the permanent educational improvement of everyone involved in and committed to this, and under the best possible conditions*".⁵ Consequently, "...*quality educational instruction is instruction in which the necessary inputs, the processes carried out (especially as regards teaching-learning) and the results obtained are in line with a theoretical model that caters to the philosophical principles and aspirations of the community that the institution is committed to.*" (Lamas, A., 2002, quoted by Manes).

The Colombian National Accreditation Council (CNA - Consejo Nacional de Acreditación) has stated that "*quality in education has to do with a synthesis of characteristics which, on the one hand, allows recognition of the way that a specific academic programme or institution of a determinate type is fulfilling its mission, and on the other hand allows a judgement to be made about the relative gap between what is achieved and the optimum possible given its nature.*"⁶

This means that an examination of the quality of an educational programme or institution will have to include some reference to academic results, to the means and processes employed, to the infrastructure of the institution, to the

⁴ Uruguayan Training and Production Centre (CECAP - Centro de Capacitación y Producción), Uruguay: "CECAP Competencias y Evaluación, dos vías hacia la mejora de la calidad en la educación". ILO/Cinterfor, *Technical Office Papers No. 15*, Montevideo, July 2005.

⁵ Manes, Juan Manuel: "Modelo Integral de Calidad en Educación, MICE". Presentation by the President of the Inter-American Forum on Educational Administration (FIAE) at the "Foro Internacional de Modelos de Calidad y su aplicación en preescolar, básica y media", organized by CONACED, Bogotá, 2005 (file on CD).

⁶ Roa Varela, Alberto: "Acreditación de la Educación: el reto del aseguramiento de la Calidad". Presentation by the CNA at the "Foro Internacional de Modelos de Calidad y su aplicación en preescolar, básica y media", organized by the CONACED, Bogotá, 2005 (file on CD).

qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the services rendered, and to the conditions under which each institution operates.⁷

In Chile the National Training and Employment Service (SENCE - Servicio Nacional de Capacitación y Empleo), on a quality management programme for Technical Training Organizations (OTEC - Organismos Técnicos de Capacitación), produced a self-evaluation guide for applying the NCh 2728:2003 Chilean Standard. In this we find the following: *“Put simply, a product or service is said to be of quality when it meets the customer’s expectations, but in practice quality is more than this, it is what positions an enterprise above or below the competition, and what determines whether it will thrive or become obsolete in the medium or long term. Today quality is put forward as a synonym for good business management, and this translates into competitive products and services.”*⁸

In the conceptual grounding of the National Quality Award in Argentina we find an expression of an integrated conception of the various dimensions defined: *“... today we can establish certain attributes that, while not being exclusive, are characteristic of a quality organization. These are as follows: **Results** that fully and consistently satisfy everyone connected to the organization: clients, shareholders, employees, suppliers, and, in a general way, society as a whole; a **Management System** that ensures that these results will be maintained over time, and managers with a clear **Vocation** and a firm **Commitment** to continually improve results through constantly improving the management system”*⁹

Thus the evolution of the concept of quality management over time has led to the development of focuses, and later of models, that some people have understood and used as if they were exclusive. But after these were applied and evaluated many people now regard them as virtually complementary. We can sum up these developments in three key stages. First, the conception of quality as *“... ‘conforming to standards’, that is to say, how well quality conforms to the specifications established for a product. Later ... as ‘the satisfaction of customer demands and requirements’, which also includes concern for the quality not only of products but also of processes. ... Then came a move to replace this by the concept of excellence, understood as ‘the best possible’ in terms of combining the different dimensions of an*

⁷ Republic of Colombia, Law 30 of 1992, whereby the Colombian higher education system was organized.

⁸ SENCE, “Guía de Autoevaluación NCh2728 Versión 2003”, Santiago de Chile, 2003.

⁹ Taken from www.premiocalidad.com.ar

organization. ...These three stages can also be seen a complementary dimensions in approaching the question of quality, that is to say all three can be components of a single quality focus. This focus can involve attention to standards, catering to the customer, and also an emphasis on quality in the management not only of processes but also of products or results."¹⁰

Adapting these dimensions to the vocational training area makes it possible to identify three quality approaches that are already being applied by institutions in this field.¹¹

- ***Quality as conforming to standards.*** This makes it necessary for the trainer and for the training itself to have some indispensable minimum content and some basic techniques or strategies that should be an integrated whole and easy to assess as regards how well functions are discharged, coordination and teamwork, and the prospects for innovation and improvement. This area can include conforming to processes carried out in relation to a standard like the ISO 9000, which specifies the minimum processes needed so that, when these are carried out consistently and duly documented, it is feasible to expect that good processes will lead to good results.
- ***Quality as adapting to customer needs, expectations and motivation.*** When it comes to vocational training the “customer” is the various actors involved, that is to say the productive system, enterprises, organizations, the family, and the society into which the people who are trained will be inserted. Besides this, obviously the participants themselves with their own individual nature and needs have to be catered to, and also “internal clients”, i.e. the staff or teams in the training institution itself.
- ***Quality seen as a response to personal and social expectations and motivation through the creation of attitudes and knowledge.*** This level involves not only the intrinsic content of training but also management and organizational processes, so it includes the staff of the training institution working in a team and, above all, generating a culture that involves everyone in the organization in these processes and gives them responsibility, thus generating innovative ways of managing training.

¹⁰ ILO/Cinterfor, *Quality, relevance and equity, an integrated approach to vocational training*. Montevideo: ILO/Cinterfor, 2006. 95p. (Training features, 28).

¹¹ ILO/Cinterfor, *Quality, relevance and ...*, op. cit.

The practices in which many institutions in the region are making good progress in applying the quality focus basically correspond to the three models that currently enjoy the greatest international recognition. These are the ISO Standards, especially the ISO 9000 family, the programmes and institutions accreditation systems that have been developed particularly in the sphere of higher education, and the national and international quality awards, which in some cases include excellence prizes for school management. In the next three chapters of this book we will look in detail at the conceptual, methodological and functional aspects of each of these three models.