

ED 373 443

EA 026 054

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 TITLE Quality Management as a Response to Educational Change.  
 PUB DATE Apr 94  
 NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).  
 PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS \*Educational Change; \*Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; National Curriculum; \*Organizational Change; School Choice; School Effectiveness; \*Total Quality Management  
 IDENTIFIERS \*United Kingdom

## ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the driving forces behind the restructuring movement in the United Kingdom and examines how quality-management approaches are being adopted by some schools as a response to this change. Key elements in the 1988 National Education Reform Act include a national curriculum, a national system of testing and assessment, formula funding of schools based on pupil numbers, site-based management, and limited school choice. Concepts that define quality are that it is defined by customer needs, defined in terms of fitness for purpose, achieved through continuous improvement, managed through prevention, and measurable. In the educational context, quality is holistic; stresses values, the customer, and continuous improvement; and uses a range of techniques for evaluation. The main areas of activity include mission, leadership, customer focus, and quality assurance. It is concluded that although some schools in United Kingdom are utilizing many of the components of total quality management (TQM), the traditional hierarchical definition of quality facilitates the possibility of failure. A complete paradigm shift to TQM is needed, rather than a limited and partial response. One figure is included. (LMI)

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# AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

## 1994 ANNUAL MEETING

NEW ORLEANS 4 - 8 APRIL 1994

**QUALITY MANAGEMENT AS A RESPONSE TO EDUCATIONAL CHANGE**

Session 30.13

*John West-Burnham and Brent Davies*

# Quality Management as a Response to

## Educational Change

John West-Burnham and Brent Davies

### Introduction

This paper will outline the driving forces behind the restructuring movement and then move on to look at how quality management approaches are being adopted by some schools as a response to this change. It will then outline possible future developments.

### Contextual driving forces: the 1988 Education Reform Act

The implementation of the 1988 Education Reform Act has introduced a series of dynamic forces that are restructuring the education service in the UK. Key elements in this can be summarised as:

- (i) A National Curriculum;
- (ii) A national system of assessment and testing;
- (iii) Formula funding of schools based on pupil numbers;
- (iv) Site-based management in the form of Locally Managed Schools (LMS) or Grant Maintained (GM) schools;

- (v) Choice of school by parents - limited by capacity in the school system.

Early in the reform implementation it was difficult to identify how schools were responding to the many changes enforced upon them. However, the mists are now clearing and certain factors can be identified. Choice by parents of their children's schools generates income for the chosen school in the form of formula funding. In such a system parents make choices about the perception of the quality they are "buying". The way that parents perceive the quality that they are buying depends on a series of overt and covert performance indicators.

In the overt area, the implementation of a national curriculum and an associated assessment process is an attempt to define the key elements of the educational product and to provide a series of benchmarks for measuring the quality of that product. The National Curriculum lays down detailed programmes of study in the 10 core and foundation subjects which form the 'entitlement' for each child. A national series of assessments at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16 provides a national benchmark of student achievement. Each school in the UK has these benchmarks published together with other quantifiable measures such as attendance (truancy rates). A series of covert performance indicators is used such as pupil attitude, dress and client relationships. When combined with the overt indicators,

this provides a powerful picture of the dynamic environment in which the school operates.

The reforms have changed the traditional relationship between the suppliers of education (the schools) and the receivers or clients (pupils and their parents). On the one hand, the reforms have encouraged and fostered increased client expectations and on the other hand they have led to an increased emphasis on marketing by individual schools often in fierce competition with their neighbours.

The nett result of these changes has been to challenge established methods of managing schools or, more accurately, to compel the introduction of appropriate management roles, structures and processes. A caricature of historic models of school management is dominated by the headteacher as 'leading-professional' working with autonomous professionals in a collegial environment. The changes described above led in some schools to a radical shift with headteacher as 'chief-executive' managing employees in an essentially hierarchical culture concerned with systems and control. The academic was replaced by the managerial, or they co-existed in an uneasy alliance.

We would argue that both of these approaches are inappropriate and unhelpful in the context of an education system still coming to terms with profound,

externally imposed, changes. Central to these changes is a profound shift in the notion of accountability and an increasing emphasis on the concept of quality.

Quality education and quality educational institutions that provide it are therefore a much sought after product. But what do we understand by quality and how are schools using the quality approaches previously used in industry to rethink the way they operate?

### **The nature of quality**

What concepts can be established to define quality? The following six ideas help to shape our frame of reference. Firstly, quality is defined by customer needs. This is part of the consumer revolution where monopoly suppliers no longer determine production but where the power of consumers is the dominant driving force. Hammer and Champy (1993) see customer expectations as one of three revolutionary forces driving through the economy. The problem that we encounter in education is that what educational customers really need and what they perceive that they want are not always the same thing. The management task is quite often aligning the two.

Secondly, quality is defined in term of fitness for purpose. What are the requirements of a good product or

lesson? Do we deliver them every time or are 25% of our lessons below standard?

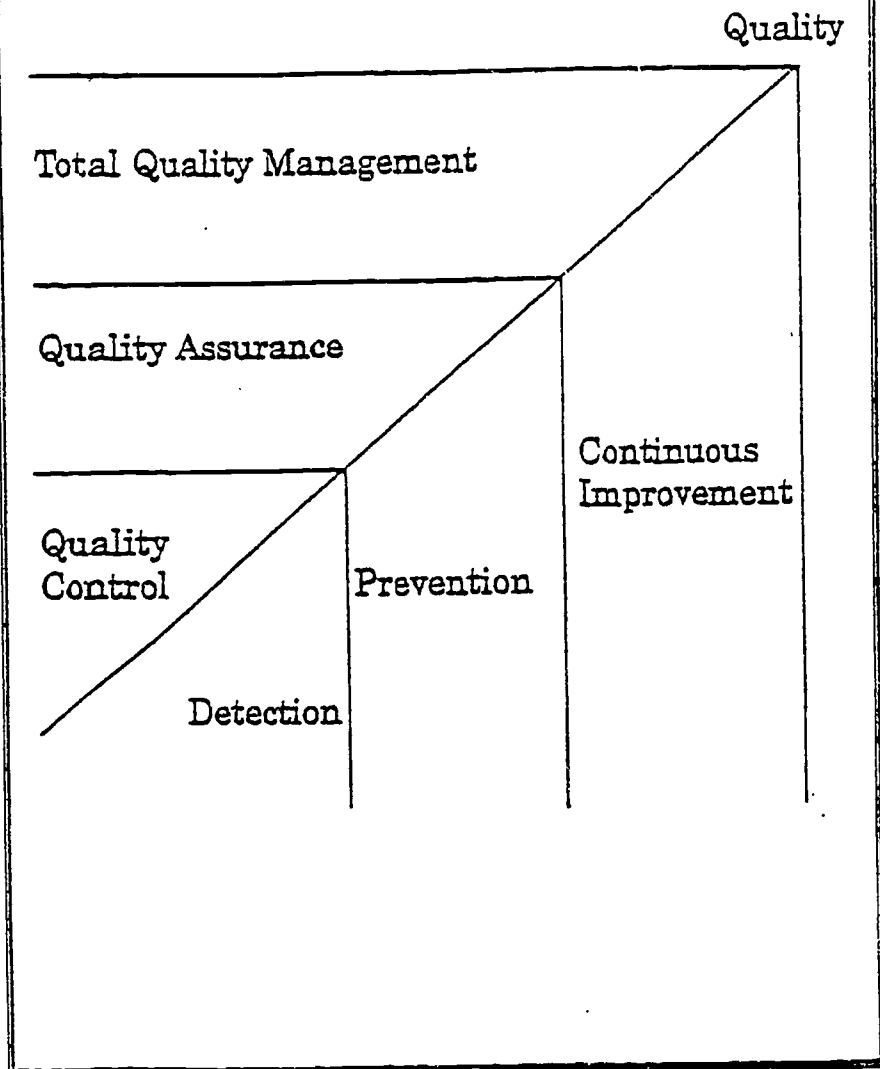
Thirdly, quality is achieved through continuous improvement. This year's quality product is improved upon and the 'customer is delighted' by having his/her expectation exceeded year by year. This moves the thinking away from 'acceptable' to 'always improving'.

Fourthly, quality is managed through prevention not detection. This is achieved by empowering the work force to take responsibility for quality and not relying on 'checking up on them'. This is a very important concept in education where traditionally the culture has been concerned with professional autonomy. Fifthly, quality is about 'getting it right first time' and eliminating variation in terms of sub-standard performance. The early quality gurus were drawn from the manufacturing sector and focused on 100% accuracy first time. These concepts have now been transferred to the service sector.

Finally, it is important to realise that quality can be measured. Levels of consumer satisfaction in terms of lessons taught can be measured just as well as levels of satisfaction with a new car!

A useful way of considering the move towards quality is provided by the following diagram:

## THE FLIGHT PATH TO QUALITY



### Traditional ways of considering quality in education

How has quality traditionally been considered in the school sector? The following provides a useful list:

1. Comparisons with the past. There lies in the mythology of the older generation the idea that there was a 'golden age' of education where things were much better and standards were higher. This



'golden age', is usually assumed to exist some time before Elvis Presley corrupted the youth of the western world! However, the content, skills and knowledge base of current education is significantly different so that comparisons of this type are of little value.

2. Comparison with other schools. This sort of 'benchmarking' has its value in that it provides a reference point for assessing quality. However, being better than the next school does not, of itself, make the school very good.
3. Level of quality needed for continued existence. This may be a useful definition in highly competitive markets. However, some schools find themselves in semi-competitive or non-competitive markets. Where there are captive markets in terms of geographical location and where a standard curriculum has to be taught, then market forces and choice and diversity may be limited. In this environment the level of quality necessary to remain in operation as a school may not be very high.
4. Defining quality in terms of the skills and competencies that students need and how they can be continually updated and improved. This seems to be a more appropriate definition of quality. It is the most useful way forward in that it incorporates the

concepts of fitness for purpose, customer needs, measuring outcomes and focusing on continuous improvement.

The next section considers how schools are operationalising concepts of quality in the current environment.

### Quality and Education

One of the most significant problems facing the educational system has been to produce a definition of quality that can be managed. Historically British educationalists have worked on a platonic notion of quality which equates it with truth, goodness, beauty or with value or perceived relative significance. This view is reinforced by the notion that understanding quality is the preserve of an elite few (Plato's philosopher kings) who define and interpret the concept. This results in an educational hierarchy which is manifested in social status, resourcing and the creation of a dependence culture. The practical implications of this are expressed in age-weighted pupil funding, the marginalisation of special needs, the subordinate status of vocational education and the limited recognition of social needs in funding.

These problems in managing quality are exacerbated by a paradox: increasing institutional autonomy in 'economic' terms with greater central direction in the content and organisation of the curriculum. It is as an attempt to manage this change that an increasing number of schools and colleges in Britain are locking to the principles and components of total quality. The definition of total quality in the public sector generally, and education specifically, remains problematic and a great deal of work needs to be done in evolving a model of quality management appropriate to schools and colleges. However, a number of features of total quality do appear to be valid in an educational context:

1. the holistic nature of total quality, i.e. an integrative approach to managing all aspects of a school's work, ending the artificial dichotomy between managing and learning. This has practical implications for the role and perceived status of teachers and managers, non-teaching staff and students.
2. the emphasis on values, i.e. education is not a content-free process and total quality offers the possibility of value-driven school management in which moral imperatives are to the forefront.
3. focus on the customer, i.e. the emphasis on the provision of services to customers as the

organisation's raison d'etre. The problem of defining the customer in education is probably more semantic and conceptual than operational.

4. continuous improvement, i.e. the commitment to the enhancement of services. This is intimidating in management terms but axiomatic in terms of student development and learning.
5. 'The Quality Toolkit', i.e. the range of techniques for measuring, analysing and understanding so as to improve decision-making and working relationships.

### Quality Initiatives

These broad principles have been translated into a range of practical initiatives although there is, as yet, limited evidence about their impact on educational processes and outcomes. The main areas of activity, largely initiated by the need to respond to the changes outlined above, include:

1. **Mission:** many schools have moved from aims to mission statements. The change is more than cosmetic in a number of respects,
  - the involvement of the whole school community in the generation of the mission;

- the integration of the mission statement into strategic and development planning;
- the use of the mission statement in staff appointments, training and development and monitoring and review;
- a focus on the mission as the benchmark for evaluation.

2. **Leadership:** there is awareness of a movement in the perception of the role of headteacher moving on a continuum from leading professional through chief executive to leader of learning. This change is reflected in:

- greater emphasis on team structures and processes;
- the use of mentoring and coaching;
- the development of middle managers into subject leaders;
- greater involvement in the management of teaching and learning processes;
- more time spent on review and evaluation.

3. **Customer focus:** although ideologically problematic schools have become more sophisticated in responding to a 'consumer democracy':

- improved communication between school and home;
- greater involvement of parents in the learning process;

- wider use of surveys and reviews to formulate policy;
  - increased awareness of the importance of social as well as learning processes.
4. **Quality assurance:** the concept of prevention is probably the most elusive in the educational context
- a significant number of children still fail.
- Evidence of attempts to minimise wastage include:
- the use of ISO 9000, although it appears expensive, bureaucratic and focused on systems rather than processes;
  - the use of 'Investors in People' a British standard for the management and development of staff which is proving significant;
  - the development of cognitive and social skills enrichment programmes;
  - the use of performance indicators as benchmarks;
  - the introduction of competences for effective management.

## **Conclusion**

There is limited evidence that many of the components of total quality are being used by schools to enhance their capacity to respond to 'multiple innovations'. This is not surprising as many of the features of total quality

appear in different guises in other contexts, notable the concepts of 'the effective school' or the 'improving school'. However, we have little evidence of schools that are working to maximum effectiveness. The hierarchical nature of commonly used definitions of quality institutionalises the possibility of failure. In this sense the limited and partial responses to change will continue to reinforce the need for a management system that addresses the needs of all members of the school community all the time. The continuing evidence of dysfunction - teacher stress and burnout, truancy, failure to achieve, racism and violence, many require the paradigm shift in management offered by total quality.

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