Differing Systems Perspectives on Educational Quality

Thomas J. Smith (UM College of Education & Human Development School of Kinesiology)

Quality means different things to different people. This presentation profiles a number of different systems perspectives on the concept of educational quality. Each perspective specifies different sets of criteria for assessing what organizational and/or educational quality means. Perceptions of, and decisions about, educational quality thus are context specific [15] – there is no generalised ‘recipe’ for achieving educational systems quality (one size does not fit all). Responsibility for educational quality consequently should be left to individual schools and school districts.

Key Conclusions:
(1) Seven different perspectives on assessing systems performance quality are addressed; (2) Five of these perspectives are directly relevant, and two indirectly relevant, to assessment of the quality of educational systems performance; (3) Quality performance criteria specified with these perspectives are categorized into input factors (influence on educational and performance of educational systems) and output factors (longer-term effects beyond educational systems); (4) No two perspectives introduced here specify closely comparable sets of quality performance criteria; (5) There is thus no general ‘magic bullet’ for achieving educational quality; (6) Responsibility for quality performance should be placed primarily on individual schools and school districts.

Introduction
1. What does the term ‘quality’ mean?
   - We all know what quality when we experience it, but describing and explaining it is a more difficult task [1] (defining pornography confronts the same challenge).
   - Many people find quality an enigmatic concept. It is perplexing to define and often difficult to measure. One person’s idea of quality often conflicts with another’s and, typically, experts often come to different conclusions when discussing what separates schools from a lower quality school, college or university [1].
   - Nevertheless, a number of perspectives on the quality of education and educational systems can be cited. A selective sample of these perspectives are reviewed, followed by some general conclusions.

2. Categorization of Educational Quality Perspectives
   - Educational quality factors specified in the different perspectives addressed here are grouped into three categories.
   - Input quality factors comprise those elements of educational quality that influence how well the educational levels are performed in educating its students, or in terms of operational effectiveness.
   - Output quality factors influence longer-term outcomes beyond performances of the educational system itself — i.e., quality outcomes for student careers such as trajectories across the lifespan, for communities and societies, and for social, regional, and national economies and governance, and for other modes of sociotechnical systems performance.
   - Process quality factors [17] refer to such factors as access to, participation in, and progression through school, transition from school to work, or the learning environment and organization.

3. Educational Quality" Categorization: SystemsPerspectives
   - Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in Education [3]
     - Most prestigious quality system in U.S.
     - Since 2001, the Baldrige program has conferred nine educational awards at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels.
     - Criteria for a Baldrige National Award in Education focus on performance quality results of an educational system (input quality factors) in six areas: student learning outcomes; customer satisfaction and engagement; product and service outcomes; and process efficiency.
   - ISO 9000 Total Quality Management Standard [1,8,9]
     - Most widely adopted quality system, with over a million organizations certified to the system worldwide, and 25,101 organizations certified in the U.S.
     - Customers for this standard are production systems, not educational systems (I am unaware of any educational systems certified to ISO 9000).
   - Educational input, output, and social responsibility.

4. Educational Performance Indicators: SystemsPerspectives
   - Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in Education [3]
     - The Baldrige criteria address almost 100 different factors; each based on state law and policy.
   - The Top 100 Educational indicators from the Baldridge National Quality Award, i.e., quality outcomes for student learning.

5. Educational Quality: SystemsPerspectives
   - National Core Content Standards [10-12]
     - The Common Core Standards are mandated by all states.
     - Four domains of learning: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies.
   - Education outcomes: Grade point average; attendance rate; drop out rate; graduation rate; college attendance rate; college drop out rate; and college completion rate.

6. Magnetic Schools of Excellence Standards
   - Focus on: student academic achievement; curriculum and teaching; physical environment; professional development; community involvement.
   - Some key performance indicators:
     - Student achievement: 100% of grades 7-12 students score at grade level in math and reading.
     - Community involvement: 100% of schools have a partnership agreement.
     - Teacher achievement: 100% of teachers are National Board Certified Teachers.

7. Principles of Useful, Effective Instruction
   - The report specifies three sets of instructional design principles, which address the following three different functions of instruction:
     - Memory (supported by six instructional design principles)
     - Induction (supported by five instructional design principles)
     - Understanding (supported by 11 instructional design principles)

8. References