

**QUALITY AS A KEY
TO THE EDUCATIONAL MISSION
OF A COLLEGE
(1/2)**

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Preliminary note by translator: The writer of this article transfers the concept of Quality, as used in business circles to the realms of education. Business enterprises speak of "Quality, Control", a phrase which in the opinion of the translator could frequently replace the single word "quality" ("calidad") when used by the writer of the article.

Introduction.

It's fashionable to talk of Quality, but that's not why I'm going to speak about it. There are authors who write about it, but I'm not imitating them either, nor do I intend transferring to family and school situations the concept of Quality as understood by "Big Business".

But of course lots of aspects of Quality, as advocated by business administrators can be applied to education as well, and that is the theoretical basis for what I want to broach in this article.

I have already offered these ideas in various talks to educators and parents, because Quality is applicable not only to business, but more so, to the children and youth of today.

This matter of Quality in Education has been rather neglected, with the result that many aspects of it have not been approached with the wisdom they deserve and even less with the practice they warrant.

I. APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY.

Dictionaries define Quality as *"the property or group of properties inherent in a person or thing resulting in a better appreciation of that person or thing"*.

Let us comment on the three main elements in this definition:

1. **"Inherent properties"**. These belong to the person (or thing), and result in the latter being what he is and not someone else. We shan't mention that acquired properties

also add something to a person, whenever they improve his essence as person (or thing).

2. **The "person or thing"**. In education, we limit ourselves to "the person" who is the categorical imperative of Quality, - the reason for aiming at it -, because the person is a being or subject with rights and duties. To express this in philosophical terminology, the person "is a subject with a mission to undertake", "which gives meaning to that person's life".

For Kant "things have a price, but we persons have dignity"

The word **"Person"** derives from the Latin "per-sonare", to "sound loud" to "make a noise"; which in Roman times meant to have a definite voice in how things were run.

3. **"Resulting in better appreciation"**: The implication is that compared with others, a person has an intrinsic value, but extrinsically there are reasons for evaluating - appreciating - such and such a person as better. Appreciation also depends on who does the appreciating: the way he was educated, his cultural upbringing, his attitude to and acquaintance with the person.

From what we have just written, it would follow that "quality results from quality": the quality of children is the result of the quality of parents; the quality of students is the product of the quality of their teachers; the former and the latter are products of the quality of the College; we all result from the quality of our surroundings.

II. QUALITY IN AN EDUCATIONAL UNDERTAKING

The "sum total of the strengths of an organisation (school, educational community) make it possible to achieve the objectives aimed at in the realm of quality". The last statement is taken from A. Felgenbaum's definition of something else, but we apply it to quality in education with the following comments:

1. **"Sum total of the strengths of an organisation"**. This contains two elements: a community or organism, a working together on plans to achieve something.

You can't have quality in isolation; quality implies working, not in isolation, but in being affected by and for others, just as in a mould, where various elements combine into an alloy.

If, as according to some, "quality consists in continuous progress", one presumes that the common effort of the organisation should aim at quality.

2. **"Make it possible to achieve the objectives aimed at"**. Only persons, that is intelligent beings, those endowed with reason, can aim at objectives. They do this all the better and with higher quality, if the objectives aimed at are communal, part of the organisation, in our case, those of the school community or family.

Of course, for the objectives aimed at to be achieved with higher quality, they should have the characteristics of all objectives: they should be **clear, possible to achieve and possible to be evaluated**. This ensures that, after planning an educational project in matters of Quality, one can achieve the desired results.

III THE INTERMEDIATE OBJECTIVES FOR OBTAINING QUALITY IN EDUCATION

1. To "personalise" the process, for the person is the categorical imperative, the reason for aiming at quality and excellence.
2. To know and assist persons by our presence, to "accompany" all those who form the educational community, so that the process can be accomplished as a unit.
3. To ensure that all those forming the educational community are determined to take part in the achieving of quality.
4. To create and strengthen the general atmosphere and thus assist towards the entire growth of each person.
5. To maintain throughout the process, a clear and realistic view of the educational project which the philosophy of the educational institution has as its basis.

There is one thought which is at the basis of all these five objectives: *"An educational establishment educates for the future and the future is assured by future adults"*.

The objectives of Quality can be broken down into more specific goals, easier to reach, define and quantify and which should be used by the establishment for action planning.

For this purpose, these ideas should be presented by the Administration to the staff at the beginning of the academic year when the teachers are beginning work, as well as to parents and students early on in the term. Throughout the year they should be consolidated by reminders from the Administration, to encourage active and inventive sharing in order to achieve quality.

E. Gómez says that quality or continuous improvement should be a "survival strategy, supported by the commitment and sharing by the people".

IV PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING A POLICY AIMING AT QUALITY.

A **policy** is the key to theory; a **strategy** is the key to action.

Policies must be based on unchangeable principles which support the whole structure of any educational activity aiming at quality.

To my way of thinking these principles are:

1. **Quality is paramount**, therefore all the strategies of an establishment aim at quality objectives.

There is no objective without a purpose, no road without somewhere to go.

2. **The students are the reason for the existence of the establishment**, and the final outcome is not so important as the process. E. Gómez states that the *"actual working out of strategies for achieving quality is a continuous process presupposing constant change, not dependent on results, but on strengthening the processes."*

3. **Excellence is essential** for "it is an attitude of continually achieving results by means of small improvements", as M. Imai says, *"for we know that necessity ensures excellence"*.

An attitude of aiming at excellence should be injected into the life stream of an establishment so that the process is continuously improved.

4. **Sharing and accompanying** are fundamental means of any process aiming at quality.

"You learn to share by sharing"; to ensure that an educational establishment is a school for life, the students should learn how to teach, to share with others the processes aiming at quality.

Quality, as a process, and those sharing in it should be constantly observed, have someone by their side, for there will be times when the process has to be redirected, corrected, put on the right lines towards the goal.

A rather useful educational tenet is *"Don't give students responsibility without guidance and don't guide them without allowing them responsibility"*.

5. **Integrity should never be neglected**, because achieving quality should uphold what is fundamental to education; education which does not have integrity has no final objective.

We often have to go against what parents want, in our efforts to achieve that which, from an overall viewpoint, we consider better for their children. Many educational establishments have had to close because the owners of the buildings did not consider integrity their principle.

We regret that there exist certain colleges which sacrifice integrity and concentrate on commercially inspired education to satisfy the consumer, in other words the university or the enterprise.

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