

Total Quality in the Classroom

How to Achieve Continuous Improvement in Adventist Schools

Elizabeth Jones teaches in a private secondary school. Every year, about 90 students pass down her “conveyor belt.” She sees her job as presenting information and making sure the students meet certain standards.

Ms. Jones thinks she is doing a very good job. She sees tests and grades as the way to ensure that her students meet the minimum requirements set by the state. Every year, about 20 percent of the students at her school fail, while about 10 percent excel. Ms. Jones feels confident that she is making a contribution to society, although she knows almost nothing about her students outside of the classroom. She knows little about their backgrounds (home, elementary school, other classes besides her own) and has no idea whether they can apply their knowledge to their future lives and work. Her major concern is that they meet minimum standards before they leave her classes. Students who do not meet the standards are “scrapped” or “re-worked,” while those who measure up are passed and continue down the educational “assembly line.”

The classroom situation described above is typical of many educational institutions, including Adventist schools. Unfortunately, in such a system, some students are doomed to fail. While schools claim that their primary mission is to educate every student, in practice, many concentrate their resources on a few high achievers, thereby eliminating the possibility that every student, given enough time and support, can

Picture Removed

**Quality is now defined
as meeting or
exceeding customer
expectations.**

measure up to some prescribed standard of excellence. But what if administrators, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders developed a process that would help all students excel and graduate? What if all students not only met the minimum standards but also surpassed them? Imagine a school where administrators and teachers believe that every student wants to

succeed. The contagious energy created from such a belief would compel everyone in the institution to reach and persist until success is achieved.

Redefining Quality

If quality is to be managed, it must first be defined.¹ Quality has

traditionally been seen as a property that is absolute and universally recog-

B Y B E N A M A G U A D

nizable (i.e., "You know it when you see it").² In recent years, however, a new approach to defining and managing quality has evolved. Quality is now defined as meeting or exceeding customer expectations. According to this philosophy, the people who make use of or benefit from the work of providers are the ones who define quality. In education, customers (stakeholders) fall into two categories—external and internal. They include faculty, staff, students, applicants, alumni, vendors, administrators, employers, donors, church constituencies, the media, the government, and the society at large. The ultimate goal of total quality is satisfaction of all these customers.

Quality Concepts in Education

Quality has traditionally been defined as providing a product or service that is unique and outstanding, one that bestows special status on the owner or user. Over the years, the term *quality* has come to be defined in many ways:

- Conforming to specifications or standards;
- Fitness for purpose;
- Effectiveness in achieving institutional goals; and
- Meeting customers' stated or implied needs.

In 1995, William H. Bergquist³ proposed four sets of criteria by which educational quality could be defined and assessed: input, output, value-added, and process-oriented.

- The input criteria focus on the nature and level of resources available to the institution: the characteristics of incoming students, credentials of faculty, size of library, structure and availability of physical facilities, and the financial reserves.
- The output criteria stress the nature and extent of institutional products, characteristics of graduating students, success of alumni, research and scholarly publications, and public service.
- The value-added criteria look at the differences an institution has made in the growth of its members: intellectual, moral, social, vocational, physical, and spiritual.
- The process-oriented criteria assess the level and manner of participation by all appropriate constituencies in the institution's educational, administrative, and governance processes.

A comprehensive definition of quality that takes into consideration all four sets of crite-

ria is proposed below:

Total Quality is the extent to which an institution successfully directs adequate and appropriate resources (input) to the accomplishment of its mission-related outcomes (output). Its programs are created, conducted, and modified (process) in keeping with the mission and values of the institution, and make a significant and positive difference in the lives of people associated with it (value-added).

Implementing Total Quality in the Classroom

Two complementary approaches are needed to achieve total quality in the classroom. The first is empowering students to engage in continuous improvement for the betterment of their classmates. The second is engaging each student in a personal continuous-improvement process. Managing quality in the classroom within a Christian environment consists of the following vital elements:

Christian Leadership

The Christian teacher's role is to foster critical thinking and empower students, thereby changing traditional classroom practice through ongoing dialogue, questioning, researching, and evaluation. To do this, he or she must exercise self-discipline, radiate a relaxed confidence, maintain a keen interest in learning and questioning, and respect his or her students' opinions. The quality teacher functions as a coach and cheerleader. As coach, he or she guides students and reinforces their goal setting, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement, and self-motivation. As cheerleader, he or she provides encouragement and rewards for their progress along the continuous improvement journey to success. He or she encourages them to engage in teamwork and collaboration to solve problems of increasing difficulty and provides the necessary tools for them to do their job. Students are not penalized for making or correcting mistakes; rather, mistakes are seen as a natural path to

growth and continuous improvement. The quality teacher approaches the subject matter with a sense of humor, challenge, and creativity. He or she understands that making learning fun will minimize discipline problems.

Moreover, the Christian educator, as servant-leader, models what he or she teaches. This requires a constant pursuit of knowledge and the continuous cultivation of Christian virtues. Establishing a regular pattern of goal setting in his or her spiritual, personal, and professional life makes the teacher a positive role model for students in their quest for excellence and inspires them to pursue a lifetime of learning.

Strategic Quality Planning

Strategic planning for quality begins with

Picture Removed

a firm commitment from both teacher and students to include everyone in the transformation and to maintain a trusting and open environment. The next step is to establish class and personal goals that are directly related to the mission statement of the class. A specific time frame should be set for achieving each goal. Students and teacher map out strategies, using systematic diagrams or other suitable tools. Students are encouraged to think about their futures and to imagine what they want to accomplish. They are given training in goal setting and mapping and are encouraged to set challenging goals.

Information and Analysis

Collecting data is the first step in identifying classroom problems. A group of students, parents, and teachers can be selected to help identify the root causes of problems and to

create an action plan. After deciding which problem or problems to address, the group collects data and organizes it into tables and charts to aid in identifying and understanding root causes. They seek a consensus about the causes of the problem and develop an action plan to resolve it. After the plan is implemented, the results are monitored. This is the first phase of the cyclical plan-do-check-act (PDCA) process of continuous improvement.

The continuous improvement process employs a number of tools that help the school to improve its procedures, systems, quality, cost, and outcomes. Working together to remove the causes of problems in the system inevitably leads to higher quality and productivity. The use of a structured problem-solving process using graphs and charts informs educators where they are, where variations exist, which problems need immediate attention, and what effects these changes have had on them and their institutions.⁴

Quality tools can be used for different purposes in various stages of the problem-solving process. They can be used to identify problems, analyze them, and provide and implement solutions. The following list of tools for quality improvement is not exhaustive. Some of the tools that have been used are: bar graphs, brainstorming, cause-and-effect diagrams, check sheets, control charts, the Crawford slip method, flow charts, force field analysis, histograms, nominal group technique, Pareto charts, pie charts, run charts, scatter diagrams, and stratification. For a detailed description of these and other tools, consult a standard text on the application of quality management in education or *The Memory Jogger for Education*, published by GOAL/QPC.

Human Resource Utilization

Quality institutions help people understand their role in the organization and empower them to do their best work. Teachers who feel valued, who understand the importance of their job, and who have the freedom and tools needed to perform well will be committed and motivated to do great work. Students who feel valued, who understand the importance of learning, and who have the freedom and tools to learn will also be motivated to excel.

The quality teacher gets his or her students involved in a vigorous program of education and self-improvement. This is critical to producing quality work. He or she removes

barriers that prevent them from doing their best work, and provides challenges that require them to stretch their limits.

The quality teacher promotes team building, a concept that is just as important as process improvement. The synergy developed within effective teams in terms of relationships, trust, and support can exceed the original expectations of the team. To maximize team involvement, cohesiveness, and effectiveness, the teacher must create an ideal environment built on trust and understanding.

Quality Assurance of Products and Services

The main vehicle for ensuring a quality product or service is process management, which "is mostly about the prevention of errors" and waste. In education, "waste" includes dropouts, individuals retained in a grade, and students who fail to achieve subject mastery. Classroom processes, such as ineffective or inappropriate teaching methods and an inadequate disciplinary system, contribute to waste. Students should be empowered to focus on the classroom mission and goals and to suggest changes in systems and processes within a non-coercive, non-judgmental environment.

As trust and teamwork develop, students can be allowed to evaluate one another's work. As they interact and politely discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their peers' arguments and answers, they will learn to evaluate their own thinking, thereby enhancing their own skills and the class's knowledge base. Such cooperation increases the overall achievement of the group.

The total quality approach makes the teacher less dependent on inspection to achieve quality. In the traditional classroom, homework, standardized tests, and teacher-constructed final exams form the basis for de-

isions about promotion or graduation. Students who perform poorly in their areas are often left behind. In many cases, teachers fail to reflect on the

reasons why things went wrong, assuming that a certain level of student failure is "normal." They therefore miss the opportunity to eliminate the causes of poor performances in their classes.

Students, too, need to take responsibility (with support and guidance from the teacher) to recognize problem areas and find ways to improve them. When students learn to resolve their own problems, they develop increased self-confidence and become eager to do more.

The quality teacher senses a responsibility for improving the system. He or she helps colleagues to understand the principles of total quality by sharing his or her experiences with them. He or she also collaborates with other faculty, adopting an inter-disciplinary approach to learning. In the new millennium, there is an increasing need to educate with a global perspective, utilizing all possible cross-curricular approaches. Where possible, linkages with other schools should be encouraged.

Quality Results

The improvement process begins with analyzing the adequacy of current classroom functioning. After changes have been made, the teacher should collect data again. He or she can also compare his or her classroom to the best examples of similar classrooms (same grade level or same subject matter

Picture Removed

The quality teacher functions as a coach and cheerleader.

taught) throughout the state, region, nation, or the world. The teacher can visit these classrooms and network with other institutions and professional organizations at the local, state, national, or international level. Benchmarking one's classroom with a "world-class" equivalent provides an excellent indicator of progress.

Customer Focus and Satisfaction

The ultimate goal of total quality is customer satisfaction. This is the real measure of whether the mission and goals of the classroom are being met. The quality administrator does not rely on hunches or hearsay as evidence of classroom satisfaction, but designs an instrument to measure specific criteria, then uses it to collect data from various stakeholders. A teacher committed to world-class quality will work diligently with students and other customers to anticipate their future needs and then analyze methods to help students meet the goals.

Students are entitled to a quality education, which includes the following:

- Development of a variety of skills, such as job readiness, critical reasoning, and technological proficiency;
- Caring teachers, administrators, and school staff;
- Assistance with special needs;
- Interpersonal skills training, including collaboration and cooperative learning;
- A safe learning environment;
- Preparation for service;
- A well-rounded curriculum, including the arts and intercultural understanding; and
- Preparation for the school of the here-after.

If students drop out because they are not getting quality education, if they lack marketable skills when they leave our schools, if they are harmed by verbal or physical abuse from educators or fellow students, or if they are unprepared for the technological world of the 21st century or the school of the here-after, then the ultimate goal of Christian education is not being met.

The Quality Challenge for Adventist Education and Educators

Encouraging Adventist administrators and educators to adopt the total quality concept is a daunting task. After all, many claim they already practice quality on their campuses. Who needs new principles not directly revealed by the pen of inspiration or developed

by educators themselves? How can commercially based management principles be applied to education—which serves a different purpose? The problem does not lie in the theory, but in its practical application. Adventist institutions can unleash that positive energy by combining their wholistic philosophy of education (guiding principles—harmonious development of physical, mental, and spiritual powers) with a wholistic philosophy of management (implementing principles, methods, and tools—managing for quality) anchored in Christian values, which stress the dignity of the individual and the power of community action.

A close examination of the management structure of many Adventist institutions reveals a striking similarity to the multi-layered, top-down, bureaucratic structure of traditional secular organizations. Over the years, while scores of organizations have evolved to meet the changing requirements of their environments, a vast number have retained traditional management systems. Their outmoded bureaucracies are incapable of meeting the demands of today's complex, dynamic, and hyper-competitive environment.

Adventist institutions can no longer ignore the quality revolution. If we claim to be "for" quality, while in many eyes we do not "do" quality, we fail to fulfill the gospel commission. It's time to re-examine our definition of quality and make the necessary changes to show the world that Adventist education is the true "total quality" education. ☞

During the process of writing this article, Dr. Ben A. Maguad served as Associate Professor of Business Management at Caribbean Union College in Trinidad, West Indies, and Associate Professor of Management in the School of Business at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

REFERENCES

1. Peter Likins, "The Many Faces of Quality in Academia." In William J. Petak, ed., *Quality and Higher Education in the 21st Century* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1992), p. 9.
2. John MacDonald and John Piggott, *Global Quality: The New Management Culture* (San Diego: Pfeiffer & Company, 1993), p. 83.
3. William H. Bergquist, *Quality Through Access, Access With Quality* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publ., 1995), pp. 36-45.
4. *The Memory Jogger for Education: A Pocket Guide of Tools for Continuous Improvement in Schools* (Methuen, Mass: GOAL/QPC, 1992).
5. Christopher W. L. Hart and Christopher E. Bogan, *The Baldrige: What It Is, How It's Won, How to*

Use It to Improve Quality in Your Company (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992), p. 152.

Bibliography

- Bonvillian, Gary, and Terry L. Dennis, "Total Quality Management in Higher Education: Opportunities and Obstacles." In Serbrenia J. Sims and Ronald R. Sims, eds., *Total Quality Management in Higher Education: Is It Working? Why or Why Not?* Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1995, pp. 37-50.
- Cyert, Richard M. "Universities and U.S. Competitiveness." In William J. Petak, ed., *Quality and Higher Education in the 21st Century*. Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1991, pp. 13-16.
- Gates, Elmer D. "The Entering Freshmen: Key to Quality in Higher Education." In *ibid.*, pp. 43-46.
- Green, Diana. "What Is Quality in Higher Education? Concepts, Policy and Practice?" In Diana Green, ed., *What Is Quality in Higher Education?* (Bristol, Penna.: Open University Press, 1994), pp. 3-20.
- Juran, Joseph M. *A History of Managing for Quality: The Evolution, Trends, and Future Directions of Managing for Quality*. Milwaukee, Wisc.: ASQC Quality Press, 1995.
- Lewis, R. G., and D. H. Smith, *Total Quality in Higher Education*. St. Lucie, Florida: St. Lucie Press, 1994.
- McGee, C. "Total Quality Management in the University: Creating a Laboratory for Learning About Quality." In Petak, pp. 81-85.
- Rinehart, G. *Quality Education*. Milwaukee, Wisc.: ASQC Quality Press, 1993.
- Schargel, F. P. "Total Quality in Education," *Quality Progress* 26 (October 1993), pp. 67-70.
- Seymour, Daniel. *On Q: Causing Quality in Higher Education*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992.
- Spanbauer, S. J. *A Quality System for Education*. Milwaukee, Wisc.: ASQC Quality Press, 1992.
- Tenner, A. R., and I. J. DeToro, *Total Quality Management: Three Steps to Continuous Improvement*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1992.
- Tuttle, Thomas C. "Is Total Quality Worth the Effort? How Do We Know?" In Daniel Seymour, ed., *Total Quality Management on Campus: Is It Worth Doing?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994, pp. 21-32.
- White, Ellen G. *Education*. Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1903.