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An Integrative Approach to “QualiTraining”

Le projet CELV “QualiTraining – A Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education” a été mené sous la coordination de Laura Muresan, Frank Heyworth, Galya Mateva et Mary Rose.

L’élaboration d’un guide pour les formateurs et les multiplicateurs, sous la forme d’un livre, d’un CD-ROM et de ressources annexes, est le résultat de ce projet.

Le présent article explicite l’importance de la mise en place d’un système d’«assurance qualité» pour les établissements scolaires, mais aussi pour les enseignants et les apprenants. Comme l’indique la désignation de «guide de formation à l’assurance qualité», il s’agit de familiariser les enseignants et les formateurs en langues avec la terminologie de la gestion de la qualité. Une présentation générale des aspects-clés traités dans le guide ainsi qu’une sélection d’activités ont pour objectif d’amener le lecteur à s’interroger sur la manière dont les principes de l’assurance qualité peuvent être appliqués concrètement dans l’enseignement des langues.

En effet, il est nécessaire de sensibiliser tous ceux qui sont impliqués dans le milieu éducatif aux objectifs institutionnels et aux systèmes existants sur le suivi et la gestion de la qualité: tout un chacun a un rôle à jouer en faveur des apprenants, des enseignants et de l’institution dans son ensemble en tant qu’«organisation d’apprentissage».

An Integrative Approach to “QualiTraining” is based on the ECML project “QualiTraining – A Training Guide for Quality Assurance”, co-ordinated by Laura Muresan, Frank Heyworth, Galya Mateva and Mary Rose. The main project outcome is a guide for trainers and multiliars, in the form of a book and a CD ROM with additional resources, accessible also on-line on the ECML web site.

The article aims to show how the setting up of systems for improving quality is important not only for institutions but also for teachers and learners. The “Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education” was designed so as to make concepts and terminology used in quality management more transparent and relevant to teacher trainers and language educators. To illustrate the approach adopted in producing the Guide, the article comprises an overview of some of the key aspects dealt with in the Guide and a selection of activities, prompting the readers to reflect on how quality assurance principles can be applied to concrete language teaching and learning contexts. Thus the readers can experience the integrative approach proposed throughout the “QualiTraining Guide”: All those involved in the educational process need to be aware of the institutional goals and of the systems existing in the institution for monitoring and improving quality. More importantly, they all – management, teachers, learners, the administrative team and other ‘actors’ – have a role to play in the quality management process, to the benefit of learners, teachers and the entire institution as a “learning organisation”.

Why “QualiTraining – A Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education”? Why would it be relevant for classroom teaching? How could it influence our learners’ learning?

This article aims to show how the setting up of systems for improving quality is important not only for institutions but also for teachers and learners. After a brief description of the “QualiTraining” project and the approach adopted in producing the “Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education”, there is a selection of activities prompting the readers to reflect on how quality assurance principles can be applied to concrete language teaching and learning contexts.

The “QualiTraining” project

“QualiTraining – A Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education” has been a three-year project within the medium-term programme of the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz (2004 – 2007). It was intended as a follow-up to the ECML project on “Quality Assurance and Self-assessment for Schools and Teachers” (2000 – 2003), which had been finalised with a CD ROM on “Quality Management in Language Education”, addressing generic aspects of quality management and, at the same time, including a variety of case studies and practical examples from 22 countries from all over Europe. (Muresan, Heyworth, Matheidesz & Rose, 2003).

With such complex resource materials already in existence, why a second

ECML project on quality assurance? Despite the growing interest in national and regional contexts for standardisation in areas such as evaluation and approaches to quality control in education, *feedback* gathered at workshops and conferences on quality assurance indicated that this was a field still needing more awareness-raising among FL-professionals and language education institutions, as well as among decision makers. While introducing the CD ROM on “Quality Management in Language Education” in local FL teaching contexts, we realised that for cascading purposes, it needed an accompanying guide for trainers and multipliers, to ensure its effectiveness as an instrument for quality management. We also noticed an emerging interest in consolidating expertise in this field at local level, as well as a growing interest in several national and regional contexts in transferring quality concepts and best practice developed in ELT and the FL teaching/learning practice of widely taught languages to the teaching and learning of less widely used and taught languages.

The “QualiTraining” project was, thus, meant to take quality assurance aspects further, drawing on the resources developed for the CD ROM on “Quality Management in Language Education” and building on the network of professionals who participated in the previous ECML project. It capitalises on the expertise developed within EAQUALS – the European Association for Quality Language Services – and the institutions represented through the team members – the International Learning and Research Centre, UK, QUEST Romania and OPTIMA Bulgaria, as national quality associations. It also builds on the concepts and instruments developed by the Council of Europe in the field of self-assessment and standardisation of evaluation criteria, such as the *European Language Portfolio* and the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*.

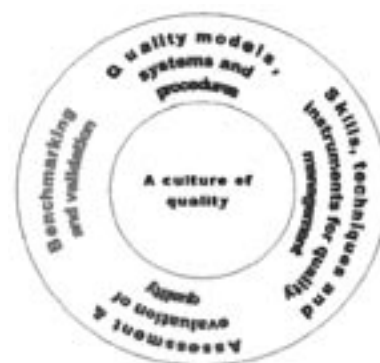
The project outcomes

The main project outcomes can be seen both in terms of ‘products’ and in terms of ‘processes’. The ‘products’ include “QualiTraining – A Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education”, available as a book, an ECML/Council of Europe publication in English and in German (Muresan, Heyworth, Mateva & Rose, 2007), which is accompanied by a CD ROM, comprising the full text of the Guide, additional resources (such as worksheets developed by the authors and case studies contributed by workshop participants), as well as the resources developed in the previous ECML project on “Quality Management in Language Education” (in English and French, with a few examples also in German). The entire “QualiTraining” CD ROM is available also on-line on the ECML web site – www.ecml.at.

The project events and ‘processes’ included regional training workshops for multipliers, a consultation meeting with experts, a central dissemination and training event at the ECML in Graz, piloting of the “QualiTraining Guide” with participants representing various educational contexts in Europe, followed by detailed *feedback* on all the chapters. To illustrate the implementation of generic aspects of quality management in concrete educational contexts, experts and workshop participants were invited to contribute case studies reflecting relevant developments in their own environment. An important aspect of the “QualiTraining” project has also been setting off a cascading process, through workshops run both by the authors and by participants in the ECML events, conference presentations, materials written and published in various local contexts, thus working towards consolidating a quality assurance culture in language education across Europe and beyond.

The “QualiTraining Guide”

What does it consist of? It comprises four units: (1) “Quality Principles and Basic Concepts” by Frank Heyworth, (2) “Quality and People” by Mary Rose, (3) “Systems, Processes and Instruments for Quality Management” by Laura Muresan, and (4) “Assessment and Evaluation of Quality” by Galya Mateva. These are designed to make concepts and terminology used in quality management more transparent and relevant to teacher trainers and language educators, thus leading to a better understanding of quality principles and how they work in practice.



The four units are followed by a glossary of key terms, a list of selected bibliography, and six case studies which illustrate the quality approach in practice in different educational contexts¹.

Throughout the Guide, there are reflective tasks and small-group activities meant to promote attitudes and approaches conducive to good practice and to build the skills needed for applying quality assurance in a language teaching and learning environment.

Examples of aspects under focus and sample activities

To illustrate the approach taken in the “QualiTraining Guide”, we will combine a brief overview of some of the

aspects and ideas presented in the four units with a selection of activities. The first unit (Heyworth, 2007: 4-16) examines some of the principles behind quality management and explains basic concepts related to five “models” of quality: (a) the “client satisfaction model”, (b) the “process model of quality”, (c) “quality based on results”, (d) “quality based on personal development” and, last but not least, (e) “value driven quality”. The readers are invited to explore how these models can be applied to language teaching and, moreover, to relate them to their own educational environment and personal experience. For exemplification purposes, we shall look at the “process model of quality”, according to which “all the processes involved in delivering a service – for example, a language course” – need to be analysed. The main phases of such a process are *planning*, *implementation* and *outcome*. In a quality environment, it is key to make sure that all the processes and, within a process, all the stages are carried out efficiently. The readers are invited to reflect on the processes involved in producing a sequence of language lessons and to fill in the table below with a few more components of the course delivery process:

| Planning | Implementation | Outcomes |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Setting learning objectives | Presenting and explaining language | Testing progress |
| Choosing materials | Managing activities | Assessing achievement |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Further questions may include: *Are all the stages of the process carried out by the same teacher? How is the process monitored to make sure there is coherence of approach?* Reference to the CEFR is brought in to illustrate the relevance of its coherent system of level descriptors for enabling

[...] to make concepts and terminology used in quality management more transparent and relevant to teacher trainers and language educators, thus leading to a better understanding of quality principles and how they work in practice.

“schools and curriculum designers to make learning programmes which have a logical progression and where each step builds on the previous one.” (Heyworth, 2007)

Unit 2 (Rose, 2007: 17-30) explores the role of people in a *quality culture*. It identifies some of the components of a quality culture and highlights the importance of *distributed leadership* and *capacity building*. A *quality culture* is defined as “a learning culture in which all members of the institution are involved; a self-critical, improving culture in which all staff are fully engaged. A culture which allows each individual to understand his/her contribution to achieving the shared vision and to answering the question ‘*what difference am I trying to make*

personally?’” (Rose, 2007)

Readers are asked to reflect on how their own institution responds to new thinking and offers a tool to help readers answer: *How do we know we have a culture of quality?* Key ideas explored in the unit are

brought together in a summary reflection task, prompting readers to consider questions such as:

- *What are my institution’s most significant skills and capabilities?*
- *What problems and challenges do we need to overcome?*
- *Looking back over the last three years what would I change?*
- *Are my perceptions of the institution’s culture shared by my colleagues?*
- *Would I recommend the institution to a friend - to work there or to study there?* (Rose, 2007)

The main themes of Unit 3 (Muresan, 2007: 31-44) are the setting up of internal systems for quality management, the steps and processes involved, and the instruments that can be used for quality assurance and improvement. This unit explores *institutional self-evaluation* - encouraging the readers to explore the link between individual and team self-evaluation - and *class observation*, which is presented with its multiple functions in relation to different contexts of use.

We are all familiar with class observation for training and assessment purposes. Unit 3 of the “QualiTraining Guide” exemplifies multiple roles of class observation as a key-component both of quality management and of professional development. From this perspective, there is a lot of scope for the sharing of good practice, e.g. through peer-observation, which benefits both the individual teachers and the institution. To gather relevant data about the teaching and learning practice in the school, class observation may also be linked to action research, for instance in order to see how ELP-based self-assessment is introduced and encouraged in various class contexts and how learner self-assessment compares with assessment by the teacher.

A small-group activity prompts readers to consider their own educational

context and to discuss the following:

- *In your context, what type of class observation is primarily used or relevant?*
- *Who carries it out and how often?*
- *What is the duration of a standard class observation in your context?*
- *How is feedback given?*
- *Is there any action taken as a result of the class observation process?*
- *Is the support provided before and after class observation adequate (in relation to the teachers' needs)?*

Unit 4 (Mateva, 2007: 45-59) discusses aspects of *evaluation* and *assessment* of quality processes in education, comparing and contrasting the two concepts and related terminology. The understanding of the two concepts is further clarified by presenting basic types of evaluation and assessment and relating them to various educational contexts. The unit also deals with aspects of quality assurance and quality control and the ways these are implemented in language institutions across Europe.

The section "Assessment of staff performance through appraisal systems" – selected here for illustration purposes – builds on the "learning culture" approach, examined in unit 2 above. According to this approach, "all members of the institution are active participants in the process of producing and assessing quality. In this sense, teachers, academic managers and administrative staff are all equally motivated to receive feedback on their performance and get engaged in professional growth activities. This is the main aim of the annual staff appraisals or reviews which assess the performance of staff against an agreed set of criteria." (Mateva, 2007)

The activities proposed by the author of the unit invite the reader to reflect on different ways of carrying out *appraisal interviews*, with a view to developing the skills and attitude needed for "an exchange of constructive feedback and realistic planning of activities aimed at personal, team

and institutional development." Here are some suggestions for group activities:

- *Devise some items for a self-appraisal questionnaire for teachers. Relate them to lesson planning, teaching methods, students' test results, etc. E.g.: What is the balance of attention given by me to different students? Are my teaching techniques equally effective with stronger and weaker learners? Are my lesson aims well defined?*
- *Prepare some questions and role-play an appraisal interview with a partner.*
- *Formulate some questions in the case of a mismatch between the results of self-appraisal and those of appraisal. E.g.: Why do you think that the new teaching materials did not work as planned? How do you interpret your students' feedback sheets.*
- *Give some examples of constructive vs. confrontational language in a post-appraisal feedback session (statements vs. questions, use of softeners like "a bit", use of past tense modals, of imperatives, etc.)*
- *What type of assessment scale would you consider more appropriate for the (self) appraisal questionnaire? Would you use numerical scales (1-3 or 1-5 or 1-10 point scales) or words (very useful, useful, fairly useful, not very useful)?*

As we can see, the approach promoted throughout the "QualiTraining Guide" is an inclusive one. All those involved in the educational process need to be aware of the institutional goals and of the systems existing in the institution for monitoring and improving quality. More importantly, they all – management, teachers, learners, the administrative team and other 'actors' – have a role to play in the quality management process, to the benefit of learners, teachers and the entire institution as a "learning organisation".

Footnote

¹ The case studies were contributed by Michel Boiron (France), Philip Dahl (UK), Svetla Dimitrova & Svetla Taschevska (Bulgaria), Stephen Hughes (Spain), Brigitte Ortner (Austria) and David Turrell (UK).

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