



# Approaches to Quality Assurance

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# Quality and quality assurance

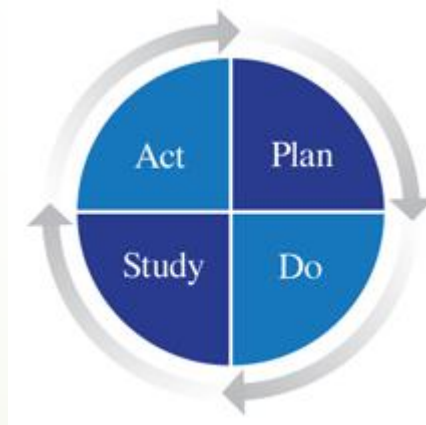
- ▶ The starting point for quality is always descriptive (latin *qualis?* means «*what kind of?*»)
- ▶ Quality assurance is impossible if it's not based on a coherent description of content and purpose
- ▶ The CEFR is the most comprehensive document we have to describe «language learning, teaching and assessment»

# Models of quality assurance

- ▶ There are lots of different approaches to quality assurance. Here are a few possible models:
  - ▶ the goals and specifications model;
  - ▶ the resources input model;
  - ▶ **the process model;**
  - ▶ **the satisfaction model;**
  - ▶ **the legitimacy model;**
  - ▶ the absence of problems model;
  - ▶ and the organizational learning model (Cheng & Tam 1997)

# The process model

- ▶ Originates in manufacturing industries
  - ▶ Analyses all the different steps in the process of producing something or delivering a service (e.g. for teaching – curriculum design / syllabus / lesson planning / assessment)
  - ▶ Proposes a systematic procedure for putting the different elements of the process into practice (the DEMING CIRCLE)



# The process model (2)

- ▶ Deming (who was an initiator of the process model) maintained that the process model worked best if those carrying out production were given responsibility for quality assurance (so «*quality circles*» instead of *inspectors*)
- ▶ Among his 14 «commandments» were:
  - ▶ Cease dependence on inspections
  - ▶ Continually seek out problems
  - ▶ Eliminate exhortations
  - ▶ Institute education

# The satisfaction model

- ▶ It views quality as a feature of the **relationship with the client**, whose satisfaction is the measure of the quality achieved, and 'exceeding clients' expectations' as the goal.
- ▶ Typically the relationship is based on **guarantees** or **charters** – which **promise** the standards of service to be provided
- ▶ It establishes dialogue between the participants – in a teaching context it can encourage **contracts** between learners and schools or universities, where students are encouraged to set objectives and self-assess progress
- ▶ Instruments like **European Language Portfolios** are examples of applying the model in language education

# Problems and objections

- ▶ Neither model fits educational contexts perfectly:
- ▶ There are problems in applying notions of client satisfaction to education. It is
  - ▶ an '**experience**' good, one whose quality can only be assessed after it has been experienced.
  - ▶ a '**credence**' good – one whose long-term value cannot be immediately identified even after it has been experienced.
    - ▶ In most educational settings there is relatively little choice of institution for learners (except in the case of language schools and even here courses are paid for in advance).
    - ▶ There is a fundamental mismatch between the concept of students as customers, requiring short-term satisfaction, and the long-term aims of education.

# Problems with process models

- ▶ Teaching and learning are not linear processes and education is not a factory production line
- ▶ Process approaches are effective for eliminating defects, less so for generating creativity, originality..
  - ▶ Tend to be topdown
  - ▶ Applying systems can be rigid
  - ▶ They don't always reflect the complexity of learning and teaching, human differences...



# Legitimacy

- ▶ In educational contexts, the concepts of fitness **of** purpose and fitness **for** purpose have been applied
  - ▶ Fitness **of** purpose asks the question «*are we doing the right things?*»
    - ▶ and leads to an examination of principles, and aims (not part of process or satisfaction models)
  - ▶ Fitness **for** purpose asks «*are we doing things right?*»
    - ▶ and includes management of process and procedures and the relationship between the institution and the learners
- ▶ It is intended to reinforce the **legitimacy** of educational endeavours

# Efficacy

- ▶ Whatever the approach, it's essential for quality management to assess the **effect** and the **outcome** of what you do
  - ▶ This is relatively easy for concrete, specific **output** , such as mastery of CEFR «can do» statements
  - ▶ It's more difficult to assess the long-term educational and personal outcomes which the CEFR promotes, like inter-cultural skills, openness to others and tolerance
    - ▶ These need longitudinal studies, in-depth questionnaires etc.
- ▶ However, **will it work?, is it working?, has it worked?** are key issues

# Conclusion and questions

- ▶ No one model for QA provides a complete solution and an eclectic set of approaches probably works best
- ▶ Applying QA approaches to the use of the CEFR means addressing questions like:
  - ▶ What are the aims and purposes of using the CEFR – assessment, autonomy, efficiency, conviviality.....??? Are our aims valid educational aims?
  - ▶ How can we ensure that the processes (like the matrix) we develop leave room for improvisation, learner involvement, creativity....?
  - ▶ What provision will our work make for involving all the stakeholders in order to **«institute education»**?