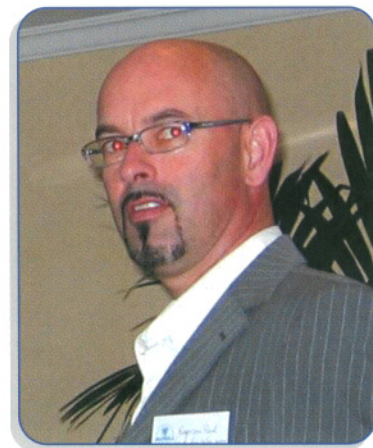


WHAT IS QUALITY IN A LANGUAGE SCHOOL?

by Paul Rogerson*



What is it about an institutional supplier of language services (the school) which makes it stand out as quality? What follows is an attempt to answer this question; the list of attributes is by no means exhaustive but, I believe, without them quality remains a fleeting and abstract achievement.

1. Evaluation and Assessment

Placing students at an appropriate level, monitoring their progress and evaluating performance at the end of their course are of fundamental importance. Accuracy and transparency are vital. The student/client should be aware of the criteria for assessment and should have access to feedback. Setting goals and objectives in conjunction with the student/client and monitoring their attainment are defining characteristics of quality educational management. Critically, performance should be measured against objective scales of reference (in our field the Common European Framework).

2. Written Standards and Procedures

It is not enough to profess good intentions; all aspects of the educational process in a language school should be written and accessible. Expectations, obligations, services, procedures for transfer or complaints should be clearly and systematically integrated into the supplier – client dialogue. In a sector where personality and preference are dominant, the rigour imposed by written standards and procedures can help to unify and

standardise approaches.

3. Training and Development

No matter how streamlined, expert and efficient the administrative management of a school, a commitment to teacher development and coordination is a sine qua non of quality. Whether the teaching is done on-site in the school, or off site in the clients' premises, the homogeneity of the educational experience can only be guaranteed by shared approaches worked out and thought through in discussion, workshops and seminars. Ultimately, in any provider of language services, what counts is the quality of the teaching and this should not be left solely to the whims and discretion of the individual teacher.

4. Monitoring the Service

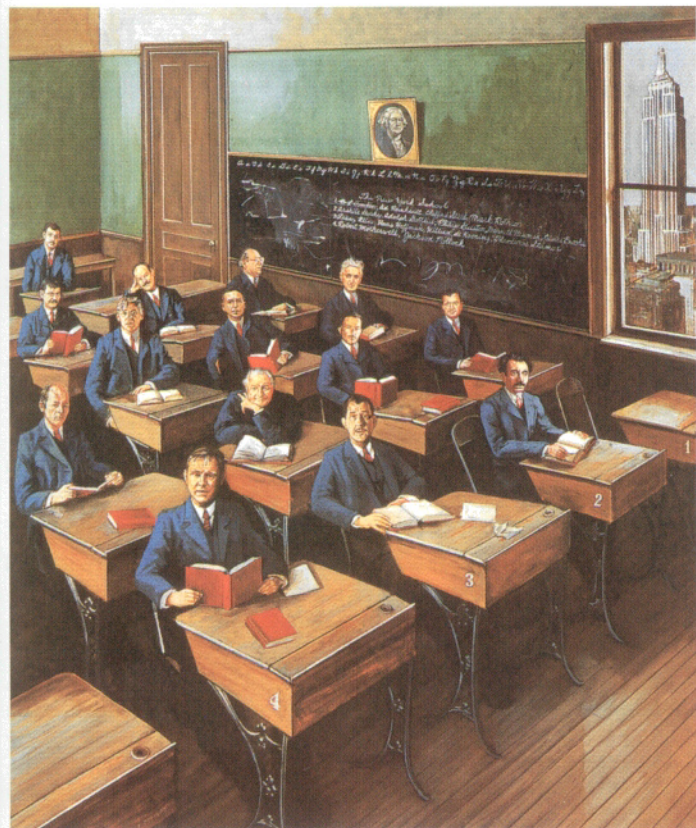
Hand in hand with a commitment to training and staff development is close control and evaluation of the “end product” or, in this case, what goes on in the classroom. This should take the form of establishing shared standards and approaches, implementing them in practice and monitoring them through observation by the academic management. Tutorials, questionnaires, feedback sessions with student/clients should also be used to check how the services are perceived and experienced.

5. Veracity and Transparency

Only make truthful statements about the services offered. Statements which are grounded in fact regarding performance, expectations, objectives and credentials. Avoid confusion and false hopes. Call an hour sixty minutes. Never mislead through claims in advertising. Ensure that contractual relationships with clients and staff are clearly explained and understood. Establish trust through open and consensual dealings.

6. Promoting Excellence

Schools and providers of language services should have a commitment to raising awareness of and promoting educational standards and best practice. Commitment here is to sensitising the public to what they should expect from suppliers of language services; promoting the asking of the “right” questions. In a broader sense the school should give something back to the community it operates in (community defined in terms of both geography and target population); organising or promoting activities which enrich the culture and experience of language learning.



George Deem, *The New York School*, 1989.

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