

A Literature Review on Concepts and Implications of Quality Teaching

Mohammad Sakarneh*

Department of Special Education, Princess Rahma University College, Al-Balqa' Applied University,
P.O. Box 371, Marj Al-Hamam, 11732 Amman. Jordan

* E-mail of the corresponding author: msakarneh@gmail.com

Abstract

This article provides an overview of the research findings concerning quality teaching. It shows that the concept of quality teaching has different meanings in different contexts. Researchers have noted that the concept of quality teaching is illusive and complex, with the discussion and the practices of quality teaching and learning revolving around context. The concept and practices of quality teaching can be only discussed, and can only function, within a specific context. This context, as the literature suggests, has three main sub-contexts: education policy, the school, and the classroom teaching and learning practices. This paper started with the definition of the concept of quality teaching and then moved to discuss the context of quality teaching and learning. This review does not claim to be comprehensive or definitive but is intended as a guide to the most important and influential research findings on quality teaching.

Keywords: quality teaching, literature review, classroom practices, education policy, the context of teaching and learning.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the term 'quality teaching' has emerged as a key concept in public debate. 'Quality teaching' has become an analytical, critical, and evaluative goal for education systems and governments, with the meanings and applications of the term occupying a significant place in their respective agendas. This phrase forms the central concept for evaluative processes and has acted as a justification for educational reforms in several countries. The debate about the quality of teaching and teachers at the micro-level and about the quality of education at the macro-level is the result of an education reform movement in part propagated by international agencies (Berkeley, 1991; Carr, 1989; Hargreaves, 1996); it has been dominant in many countries around the world.

The education reform movement includes a call from policymakers both for public education to produce citizens able to meet future social and economic demands and for schools to act as social stabilizers (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Carr, 1989; Corrales, 1999; Crebbin, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003). As a result, politicians have looked to schools and teachers to remedy social and economic problems. It is remarkable that in most nations undertaking this type of micro-reform any perceived failures in the social, economic or political arenas sees blame sheeted home to schools and teachers. Perhaps more pertinently for the situation in the volatile Middle East, if a nation loses a war, sees its economy collapse, or sees unemployment and/or social problems increase, then the school system is held responsible (Massaad et al., 1999). When other agencies and strategies have failed to solve pressing economic and social issues, then the education system is considered the last resort (Hargreaves, 1994, 2003). In other words, responsibility rests on public education to be the saviour of society and the economy.

One important aspect of education in this time of increased demands on school systems and system accountability is quality teaching. This emphasis on quality teaching refers to the key stakeholders' interest (namely governments and, in some cases, international agencies) in investing in human capital growth. Despite the debate and the different interpretations and understandings displayed by "politicians,

economists and employers” (Carr, 1989, p.3) of the concept of quality teaching, classroom teachers remain the most numerous and most direct participants involved in shaping the nature of quality teaching. Therefore, teachers should be considered first, and their views counted in any education reform process, rather than being ignored and/or having their roles undermined. If reform is imposed by authorities from the top-down, rather than from the bottom-up, it will be a difficult and slow, and, possibly forever, an incomplete process; and there is plenty of evidence of these results in the profession’s long history (Alshurfat, 2003; Beeby, 1966; Fullan, 1982, 1993; Wood, 1990). In part, since global education reformers have given some recognition to a constructivist approach being appropriate for developing the education systems’ potential, there have been calls for research into quality teaching in its context. This paper is a response to these demands.

2. Review Process

The examination of quality teaching is a relatively new area of education research. Research articles were initially collected for this review using different educational databases. The databases differed in the exact search terminology, so a variety of terms were used such as quality teaching, quality learning, school context, education policy, effective teaching, effective learning, effective school and students’ achievement. All English sources, including peer-reviewed articles, books dissertation abstracts and reports were screened to determine the concept of quality teaching and its implication. After locating a number of sources related to the quality teaching, the articles were screened to decide whether they directly addressed the concept of quality teaching. Because of the scarcity of peer-reviewed articles the researcher decided to include other literature such as books, dissertation abstracts and reports. First, the researcher began by reviewing the literature related to the definition of quality teaching. Second, from the reviewing, the researcher discussed the context of quality teaching. Third, three main factors influencing quality teaching were classified.

3. Results

3.1 Defining Quality Teaching

It is important to begin by attempting to define ‘quality teaching’ and the attributes of the ‘quality teacher’. The word ‘quality’ has engendered controversy, debate, and interpretation of the illusion of the meaning. However, “quality”, as an adjective, means something that is “good” or “excellent” and it can refer to “a trait or attribute” (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1989, p. 27-28). As an extension to this, Downey, Frase and Peters (1994), define quality as “meeting, exceeding, and delighting customers’ needs and expectations with the recognition that these needs and desires will change over time” (p.8). The meaning of the word ‘quality’ depends on the context in which it is used: “quality means different things to different observers and interest groups; not all share the same perceptions of priorities for change” (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1989, p.15). When the word ‘quality’ is used in relation to commercial dealings, it means the product and/or service meet customers’ expectations; this is, sometimes, entirely transferable to its usage in an educational context. Despite the prevalence of this concept in education, the meaning of ‘quality’ remains unclear and no definition can cover it completely. In other places, quality teaching has been defined carefully and understood as being context-dependent and affected by various exogenous factors. Crebbin (2004) transformed the field of debate over the term by focusing on the context of quality teaching: “In presenting a variety of potential meanings, I am arguing that any definition or practice is not free from the social, cultural, historic, and power contexts in which they have been formed” (p.80). Crebbin went further to say “there is an increasing complexity in defining concepts like ‘quality teaching’ and ‘quality learning’ is not the same as saying that all definitions have equal authority to influence, or carry equal explanatory power, to shape teaching and learning” (p.80). In any case, quality teaching has to be measured and defined on the basis of the quality of learning, because we cannot make an assessment of teaching unless we can see the product in the form of ‘quality learning’. Quality teaching must be determined by context, if the worthiness of teaching activities is to be judged as ‘good teaching’ and if the outcomes of these activities can be described as ‘successful teaching’ (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005, p.186). “When teaching in the task sense is done well, we

called it good teaching. When teaching results in learning, we called it successful teaching, when teaching is both successful and good, we can speak of quality teaching” (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005, p.192). Hence, the meaning of quality generally and quality teaching specifically comes from different backgrounds. These perspectives and backgrounds use the phrase in different ways so that it can serve the contexts where it is supposed function. In this research, however, different terms will be used in different places in the thesis and all these terms mean quality teaching in its educational context.

3.2 The Context of Quality Teaching

Quality teaching does not occur in a vacuum. It occurs in a physical space and this cannot be removed entirely from the related contexts. The whole education system contributes to the teaching – learning process and, if one section or part of the education system is isolated from the other parts, then students’ achievements may be affected. With this understanding, Wang and Walberg (1991) reviewed the professional literature and surveyed experts in instruction and learning to develop an understanding of the variables that influence learning. Their analysis of these categories for effective learning environments showed that variables linked to the program design possessed the greatest importance, followed by the context outside of the school, then classroom climate and instruction, and then variables linked to the students. Variables linked to the school and district or state ranked as the least important overall. In the mentioned study, the variables relating to the classroom and teaching still have a high rank or influence in the quality of the learning environment.

For a long time, there have been debates and questions about which factors influence students’ achievements. Some researchers attribute students’ achievements to the school, while others indicate that the school has little impact on academic outcomes. Other researchers indicate that the effective teacher plays the main role in terms of student progress. From the wide range of factors examined by extensive research, and the fact that this research makes claims that most of these contextual factors have at least some impact on student learning, it may be presumed that all contextual factors, such as the teacher, school context, classroom context and school community, contribute something toward student achievement. Some researchers highlight further factors that may influence the teaching-learning process, including school reform, community dynamics, teacher attitudes, curriculum, school location, and student abilities and socio-economic backgrounds (Maxwell & Ninnis, 2000b; Paterson, 2000). Quality teachers by themselves cannot work effectively and productively unless they are located in a supportive environment. There are different factors influencing quality teaching: the policies of education, the school, and teaching-learning practices. In the current investigation, the researcher acknowledged that an extensive range of variables relate to each of these factors influencing quality teaching, each of which contributes to building a comprehensive contextual framework for quality teaching.

3.2.1 The Influence of the Policy of Education

There is an interaction process between politics and the education system. Therefore, the relationship between the politics of education and the teaching-learning process is a fundamental issue. The inevitability of this relationship in modern government-run education systems needs to be examined to ascertain the nature of this influence. Taking into account the presumption of the influence of politics on the education system, there is ongoing debate about the type and degree of influence political decisions have on education. Some researchers see such influence as mainly operating through a financial relationship that moves in cycles affecting educational reform at the state and school levels (Codd, Gordon, & Harker, 1998; Maxwell & Ninnis, 2000b). Others see it as a more direct and directive intervention in the education system and consequently in the teaching-learning process (Harber, 1989; Thomas, 1983; Windschitl, 2002).

As mentioned above, there has been major debate about the influence of the political system and its impact on the education process, especially through the provision of increasing, stagnating or decreasing funding. Governments fund or otherwise intervene in local education systems in two ways: to support what they consider to be locally practicable and legitimate, or, when foreign governments and aid agencies direct local education interventions, it is usually to apply their agenda for dealing with what they perceive to be the needs and demands of ‘poor’ countries. Such intervention can strongly influence the provision of

education in the recipient country and potentially neglect or disregard the special circumstances of these countries.

The current perception amongst policymakers of a world changing from traditional communalism to capitalism has provoked calls for reforming aid-recipients' education systems to make them more 'practical', 'purposeful', and marketable. It is been argued that 'The whole world is being swept by a realisation that markets have tremendous advantages over central control and bureaucracy' (Chubb & Moe 1992, p. 46 quoted in Grace, 1997, p. 311). Lauder (1998) concurs with Chubb and Moe by establishing a false dichotomy between 'policy' (or governments) and 'markets': "So long as education is politically controlled rather than determined by market forces it is likely to produce less than optimal outcomes" (p.383). Beyond this dichotomy, of course, lies the real 'politics' of parent, teacher, and student participation in school decision-making regarding learning and curriculum. However, encouraging this type of politics does not seem to be a major priority for any government or aid agency. In the teaching-learning practice, community involvement can act in a vital way for students to encounter 'real-life' situations beyond the classroom (Harber, 1989). For one particular international agency, the OECD (1994), a particular set of policies can actively promote quality teaching by giving attention to teacher education in different concepts, particularly teacher training before and during service, and supporting educational processes financially and professionally. For these policies to work, the OECD assumes that the relationship between educational stakeholders is built on an acceptable level of trust, loyalty, and honesty. The political-policymaking process can influence and affect the teaching-learning process insofar as educational provision is operating in a more-or-less centralised, systematic and institutionalised way. This influence can reveal itself in the curriculum, teacher training and support, mentoring and assessment, new regulations and the school environment.

3.2.2 The Influence of the School

School have existed for a long time. They have catered for people of all ages, everywhere, and they all have carried out various roles and tasks as well as teaching subjects. The schools of the 1960s differed in purpose from the schools of 2013. Schools have had multiple and complex roles and challenges. The goals of schools have changed and adapted throughout their history, depending on the demands and needs of the social context in which the schools are located. The contemporary school focuses more on economic and market issues and the needs or demands in the area of "globalisation" which is; according to Bagnall (2007) "...about power and how that power is distributed. It is about culture and the way that some cultural groups have more power than others. It is about money and how freely it flows between borders as if there were no such things as nation states. It is about the way that education is influenced..." (p. 297). Therefore, schools are asked to produce workers with high intellectual abilities, as human capital, to be competitive in the age of the "Knowledge Economy" within the "Knowledge Society" (Hargreaves, 2003, p.3).

The first research on 'effective schools' appeared in the 1970s, but because it was precipitate, it was basic and ambiguous (Owens, 1998). Nevertheless, Owens (1998) mentions the following characteristics of a quality school: effective leadership, a strong belief in students' outcomes, focusing on key skills, the organization of the teaching environment, regular student evaluation, and giving enough time to teach the tasks. Consequently, factors related to the school can influence students' achievement. These factors can be: professional leadership, the learning environment, high expectations, positive reinforcement, monitoring students' progress, and parent-school cooperation (Adas, 1980; Ayres, Sawyer, & Dinham, 2004; Bentley, 2000; Dinham, Cairney, Craigie, & Wilson, 1995; Harris, 1999; Owens, 1998; Zammit et al., 2007). The school as an educational institution has its own issues that influence the quality of teaching in various ways. Strinfield and Teddlie (1988) conducted a longitudinal study at a school in Louisiana, USA. The aim was to examine the conditions that influence students' achievement. The categories targeted were teachers, principals, and students. The sample had 76 schools from 12 districts and included 250 teachers and 5000 students. They found that conditions relating to the school had a significant effect on student achievement, more so than the performance of teachers. It was also found that the socio-economic conditions, and other school and teacher factors, could influence students' achievement. Meta-analysis of the research into the influence of schools and teachers on students' achievement has been done by Marzano (2000). It was found

that student achievement was influenced by three main factors: those relating to the school, those relating to the teacher, and those relating to the student. The factors relating to the school were: effective leadership, an orderly and safe climate in the school, providing the students with the opportunity to learn basic skills, a high expectation that students would gain a high achievement level, frequent monitoring of students' performance, and cooperation with parents. In short, quality schools do make a difference to students' achievement and to the performance of the school's staff. Therefore, the following characteristics of quality schools may demonstrate that we may find a significant level of teacher quality: professional leadership, sharing vision and goals, school culture supportive of high expectations, teaching and learning environment, and a positive relationship with the community.

Including students with disabilities in the mainstream has made it essential to look at the quality school from this angle. In the quality school, students with disabilities are able to find an accepting and welcoming environment; inclusive education based on professional knowledge is an important characteristic. Ainscow (1991) regards the quality school as having effective leadership and staff who are able to deal with all students and their needs, are optimistic that all the students can progress and develop their abilities toward successful achievement, have a willingness to support each other by meeting their needs, ensure that the curriculum meets all the students' needs, and frequently engage in effective school reviews of programs. Successful teachers challenge the students' abilities by setting good quality tasks, providing students with opportunities to choose their tasks, varying learning strategies, and providing facilities that contribute to student learning (Ainscow, 1991). The trend of inclusion raises significant considerations about the characteristics of teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms. Research in this area suggests the effective teacher's characteristics in the inclusive classroom as: efficient use of time, good relationships with students, providing positive feedback, having a high student success rate, and, in general, providing support for the students with and without disabilities (Larrivee, 1985). Larrivee (1985) reported that students with special needs demonstrated a greater level of achievement in the mainstream classrooms when the teacher: used the time efficiently, had a good relationship with the students, gave the students positive feedback, established a high rate of success for learning tasks, and responded to all students positively. In contrast to the students who achieved highly, the students with the lowest achievement were in classrooms with a high degree of off-task actions or behaviour and time wasted in transition processes, and where the teachers criticized students' responses, and were poor at intervening with behavioural problems (Larrivee, 1985). Quality teaching occurs when the climate in the school and the classroom is welcoming, comfortable, safe and productive. It is also clear that physical facilities, such as resources, funds, and infrastructure play a major role in facilitating the teaching-learning process. It is unfair to compare countries such as Australia or the United State of America with, for example, Nepal or Jordan in terms of education funding and infrastructure. School infrastructure is based on school funding or budget and the school fund or budget is provided by the government, especially for public schools. The process is linked to government policy and how much the policymakers consider education needs and demands (Karmel, 2000). Classroom and class size are obvious examples of school infrastructure. Class size can influence not only the quality teaching process but also the teachers themselves and so ultimately student outcomes (Biddle & Berliner, 2002; Finn, 2002; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Nye, Hedges, & Konstantopoulos, 1999). Scarcity of funding generally impacts on the infrastructure of the school and the classroom which will ultimately, influence the quality teaching process.

3.2.3 The Influence of Classroom Practices

One of the most important hubs in the teaching-learning process is what occurs in the classroom, the interaction between teacher and student. This is specified as constructivism in teaching and learning. The elements of these actions in the classroom will be discussed in the following sections.

3.2.3.1 Teaching Presentation and Teacher's Task Orientation

There is ongoing debate about the nature of teaching. Students tend to do better at any intellectual assessment when taught by teachers who understand how their students learn, how they learn to think, and how the teachers focus on teaching thinking skills (Newmann, 1991). The current debate within education

systems is over the call for teaching to focus more on student reception than teacher transmission, which is teaching that encourages students to use their minds rather than treating them as passive receivers. This is then about creating a method for teaching that allows students to use their intellectual abilities to reach a high standard. To achieve acceptance for this view/concept, educators need to show the “new approaches to pedagogy are grounded in high intellectual standards” (Newmann et al., 1996, p.282) and adherence to those standards enhances students’ achievement. In this teaching-learning process, we have students as thinkers and teachers as facilitators. The process of interaction has to take into account students having “prior knowledge” and a “social context of values”, from which students will have formed a way of thinking about the world and through which they will apply the information they have been “taught” by teacher-managers (Newmann et al., 1996, p.285).

A quality teacher uses the students’ prior knowledge, giving the students the opportunity to be thinkers and for them to gain a deep understanding of the information they have been taught. Students acquire multiple ways to express the information they have learned. Teachers are meant to encourage and facilitate student learning, while simultaneously establishing a good relationship between the students and the teacher in order to reach the aim of intellectual quality (Newmann et al., 1996). Teaching approaches have been developed or explored progressively by researchers through history. Effective teaching approaches have been the general focus of “teacher effectiveness” and “school effectiveness” (Killen, 2005, p.6) and the phrase has been developed and understood over time in terms of the relationship between teaching and learning. It is been described as “good teaching”, “effective teaching” and recently “authentic pedagogy” and “quality teaching” (Killen, 2005, p.6). Newmann and Associates (1996) define authentic pedagogy or authentic academic achievement through three criteria: “construction of knowledge”, “disciplined inquiry” and “value beyond school” (p.33). Construction of knowledge means that “learners are required to use or manipulate knowledge by using cognitive processes such as analysis, interpretation, synthesis, and evaluation, rather than just [to] remember and produce knowledge in the forms in which others have expressed it” (Killen, 2005 p.8). Disciplined inquiry means that “teachers help students to focus on gaining in-depth understanding of limited topics, rather than superficial acquaintance with many topics. Students are encouraged to use sophisticated forms of communication to learn and to express their understanding” (Killen, 2005, p.8). Value beyond school means “learners are required to produce performances, discourse and products that have personal, aesthetic, or [have] social significance beyond just demonstration of success to a teacher” (Killen, 2005, p.9). Newmann, Marks and Garmoron (1996) studied 24 schools intensively, observing mathematics and social studies teachers. They found that across elementary, middle and high schools there was a strong relationship between authentic pedagogy and authentic academic performance. As well, the achievement effects of authentic pedagogy could be distributed fairly among students from different social backgrounds. Furthermore, authentic pedagogy could decrease the existing inequality in achievement in mathematics and science between students from different socio-economic groups (Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1997).

But how are such effects quantified to assess a pedagogical procedure that challenges the effectiveness of teaching towards reductive quantifiable tests? Newmann, Bryk and Nagaok (2001) assumed that the standardized test in Chicago gave a shallow picture of students’ intellectual performance. They, therefore, categorised Years 3, 6 and 8 students’ work on tasks in writing and mathematics under specific dimensions: higher-order thinking, deep knowledge, deep understanding and substantive communication. They found that the students scored poorly on these dimensions, mainly because of the types of tasks provided and work expected. Nevertheless, there was a direct relationship between teaching higher levels of intellectual quality and the authentic work demonstrated by students.

In the same field, Newmann et al. (2001) found, in a study investigating Years 3, 6 and 8 classes, that there was a strong relationship between the quality of the teachers’ tasks and the students’ achievement. Students’ work in reading and mathematics, when presented as authentic tasks, meant they did better at the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) than students taught at a lower level of authentic tasks. They were guided in their research into authentic teaching by the three main criteria: “construction of knowledge”, “disciplined inquiry”, and “value beyond school” (p.14). They also claimed that ‘knowledge becomes most powerful

when students can use information to gain deeper understanding of specific problems (p.15). Further, “participation in authentic intellectual activity helps to motivate and sustain students in the hard work that learning requires” (p.30). With teacher and student interaction, Smith, Lee and Newmann (2001) found that interactive instruction plays the main role in students’ learning and has a strong relationship with the intellectual quality elements they defined in reading and mathematics. “Interactive instruction” means that “the teacher’s role is primarily one of guide or coach. Teachers using this form of instruction create situations in which students encounter knowledge in ways that provoke them to ask questions, develop strategies for solving problems, and communicate with one another” (Smith et al., 2001, p.12).

To encourage students to demonstrate their abilities by constructing knowledge or using challenging tasks is both productive and increases students’ performance, not only for those performing at average levels, but also for those with disabilities. King, Schroeder and Chawszczewski (2001) found that students with disabilities taught by teachers using a high level of authentic pedagogy performed at the same levels as students without disabilities whom receiving a lower level of authentic pedagogy. This is a controversial finding because students with some disabilities may have more limited intellectual ability when compared with students without disabilities, so teaching for deep understanding may need extra time and more effective and special strategies. Nevertheless, the results of the research means that disabled students may perform or progress significantly when authentic pedagogy is employed. However, it should be emphasised, the achievements were no better than for students without disabilities. In other words, authentic pedagogy is proposed as a general teaching strategy, not one specifically directed towards students with special needs.

To further address issues around students with low prior achievement and displaying work with low intellectual quality, Newmann et al. (2001) re-examined students’ work from previous studies, especially from students who had low prior achievement. They compared classrooms displaying high intellectual quality with those displaying low intellectual quality. They found that both high and low achievers benefited significantly from high intellectual quality teaching. This means that authentic intellectual tasks are useful and productive not only for special groups of students, but also for all student groups and abilities in the classroom.

One of the key procedures of authentic pedagogy and associated tasks, if they are to be defined as quality teaching, is requiring that received knowledge be presented as problematic. “Presenting knowledge as problematic involves an understanding of knowledge not as a fixed body of information, but rather as being constructed, and hence subject to political, social and cultural influences and implications” (University of Queensland, 2001, p.5). This requirement has implications for teacher-student interactions and language use. It is clear that the interaction process between teachers and students needs basic communication skills, relying fundamentally on all uses of language: writing, reading, speaking and listening. For students to receive appropriately authentic teaching of the dilemmas associated with received knowledge, language use must move to centre stage. The University of Queensland (2001) report states that “students should be taught a vocabulary for talking about language, that is, a comprehensive and consistent metalanguage, to make instructional practices and assessment expectations explicit, and to enable students to ‘name’, deconstruct and critique forms of spoken language” (University of Queensland, 2001, p.7). Such a method gives students the ability to vocalise and investigate dilemmas both within and outside the classroom.

The social interaction between teachers and students, and students with each other, in the instruction process is conceived in authentic pedagogy as giving the teacher the role of scaffolder. This scaffolding is the cornerstone of Vygotsky’s theory, which is mainly devoted to building “zone of proximal development” (Driscoll, 2005, p.254). “Each zone stretches from the student’s current level of competence to a level requiring greater understanding, which he can shortly reach with the help of other people and learning aids” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p.130). In this process, the quality teacher guides their students by presenting the lesson or the subject in a clear and meaningful manner, using words that allow students to talk and to express their internal thinking, which also help them to develop their conceptual learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997). In this sense Meier (1995) stated that “teaching is mostly listening and learning is mostly telling” (p. xi).

One of the most significant developments in the teaching-learning process in the last century was the influence of the concept of constructivism. According to this theory, quality teaching occurs when the teachers “structure learning environments and activities to help learners construct understanding rather than just absorb knowledge” (Killen, 2005, p.7). As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, the learning process is influenced by different factors. According to constructivists, these factors can be: “the student’s prior knowledge...; the social context of values, expectations, rewards, and sanctions in which the information is initially communicated and later expressed by the student; and the student’s self-monitoring in the process of learning. In short, the students are constantly working to make sense of what they encounter” (Newmann et al., 1996, p.285). To facilitate such learning processes, teachers are supposed to take into account the students’ prior knowledge. As long as the students have different ways of thinking, the teachers should give them an opportunity for higher-order thinking rather than converging the body of information in a superficial way. Teachers should give students various opportunities, to express themselves, such as by writing or conversation. The teacher is considered to be a ‘coach, facilitator, guide, or mentor in a “cognitive apprenticeship” who inspires and nudges the student to do the active work of learning’, and, teachers and students are supposed to “exemplify norms of collaboration, trust, and high expectations for intellectual accomplishment” (Newmann et al., 1996, pp.285-286). Constructivist-based lessons have been described as lessons that “are designed and sequenced to encourage learners to use their own experiences to actively construct meaning that makes sense to them rather than to acquire understanding through exposure to a format organized by the teacher” (Steffe and Gale, 1995 cited in Borich 2000, p.201).

3.2.3.2 Engagement

The other important factor for authentic pedagogy is the nature of student engagement. Engagement has been defined as: students making a “psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote” (Newmann, 1992, p.12). Furthermore, it has been argued that engagement in the learning process means that a maximum amount of time is spent by students on the learning task. Borich (2000) suggests some strategies for keeping students engaged in the learning process, such as establishing rules by which students can regulate their activities and their behaviour themselves rather than constantly relying on the teacher, using resources that help the teacher keep the students engaged most the time, and making the teaching-learning process more enjoyable. However, it is essential to indicate that not all kinds of engagement can be productive. For example, some students who are low achievers may engage physically or emotionally or behaviourally but not intellectually in the teaching-learning process. Authentic productive engagement leads to an acceptable level of achievement and benefits for students in real life and produces quality work displaying intellectual application (Newmann, 1992). Engagement, like any other human action, can be influenced by context. Such influence can be internal or external to the student. The internal factors include students’ subject-specific interests, which may be engaged and extended by teachers presenting material in a particular way (Newmann, 1989). Another internal factor is the degree of dependence of students on others’ work rather than their own. This can be overcome by giving them the opportunity to produce individual knowledge (Newmann, 1989). External factors, such as social support from teachers, parents, peers and the community outside the school, can show that engagement is valued and that academic achievement is worthwhile (Newmann, 1989). Student engagement can be reinforced by a suitable environment of social and cultural support in the classroom. The three main indicators of cultural support are teachers paying attention to the students, students building friendships in the classroom regardless of the diversity of their backgrounds, and students respecting each other (Adas, 1986; Alton-Lee, 2003; Marks, Doane, & Secada, 1996). At the classroom level, the three key social supports are building an atmosphere of cooperation between students in their intellectual work, cooperation between students and the teacher in intellectual tasks, and the teacher having an expectation that all students work productively (Marks et al., 1996).

Insofar as the teaching-learning process is construed as an interactive process occurring between teachers and students, then every component of the school-community has to be engaged in this process. Most

importantly, the teacher is required to be involved and engaged fully with their students through “planning and developing lessons and the curriculum, and teaching through describing, explaining, helping, listening, reflecting, encouraging, and evaluating” (Louis & Smith, 1992, p.120).

3.2.3.3 Students’ Self-Regulation, Direction, Knowledge and Instructional Variety

Students displaying self-regulation would mean that the teacher spends the least time possible in regulating students’ behaviour. Giving students opportunities to regulate their behaviour provides them with a sense of responsibility for their behaviour, rather than letting all responsibility rest with the teacher. Some scholars believe that students have both the ability and willingness to control their behaviour and that the teacher’s role is to have students gain satisfaction from regulating their behaviour when performing their learning tasks (Glasser, 1986; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998). Therefore, the teacher’s role is to make the tasks interesting, enjoyable and engaging so they meet students’ internal demands. But there are also external demands influencing self-regulation. Some students, for example, work hard because they want to be a remarkable individual in the community or because they want to keep their parents pleased with their achievement. Nevertheless, these external factors probably become internalised to some degree and may therefore be considered internal psychological factors.

Learning by the students can occur independently. Students can direct their learning at both external and internal levels. Learning can be regulated by external and internal factors, but when students feel they have some control over those factors they may associate this sense of control with their achievement (Zimmerman, 1989). McCaslin and Good state that ‘a curriculum that seeks to promote problem solving and meaningful learning must be aligned with an authoritative management system that increasingly allows students to operate as self-regulated and risk-taking learners’ (McCaslin & Good, 1992, p. 4 quoted in Groundwater-Smith et al., 1998, p.233). Quality teachers can enhance student self-regulation by getting students to reflect about the learning process by varying their teaching methods, using different kinds of questions, using different ways to present information, using different teaching materials and tools, and using different types of reinforcement (Killen, 1998). Killen (1998) regards teaching methods that produce successful achievement motivate students by increasing self-esteem and promoting positive attitudes to school, and this “success encourages further engagement in learning” (p.10). The traditional role of the teacher has been to dominate and determine students’ activities in the classroom so that the teacher would be considered the only person who could decide which activities were engaged and when and how students would function in the classroom. This mode of teaching remained a common way of teaching, as mentioned by most teaching studies (Goodlad, 1984). Growing opposition to this meant that a new perspective came to dominate teaching studies: that the students as learners should have the responsibility to determine their own learning (Biggs, 1991). The quality teacher has to question themselves constantly about the time spent on directed learning, as against asking questions and encouraging students to think independently (Borich, 1999). One of the aims of the educational process is to connect the students’ background knowledge with new knowledge or information (Bruner, 1960). From a cognitive point of view, quality teaching and learning occurs when the teacher uses and highlights students’ background knowledge as a basis for teaching new knowledge. This is called “scaffolding” (Rosenshine & Meister, 1992, p.26).

An important element in terms of teacher-students interaction is cultural knowledge. This element emphasises the extent to “which non-dominant cultural knowledges are valued in the classroom” (University of Queensland, 2001, p.23). A quality teacher in a diverse classroom presents knowledge as problematic, teaching students that there are different cultures in the world, including cultures of gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, disability, language and religion (University of Queensland, 2001). But more ‘pragmatic’ cultures also need to be understood, such as “...schooling needs, ... interests, ... economic needs, ... politics” (Nakata, 1995, p.49). Students from different groups have different perceptions, views and experiences. These elements should be taken into account by the teacher and the curriculum in order to give different groups opportunities to contribute to and access decision-making processes at the school level or in the other levels of the education system (Connell, 1993). Making the students’ cultural knowledge accessible to, and understood by, teachers necessitates cooperation between the home and the school, whereby the teachers can meet the parents frequently and discuss issues relating to the students’

cultural background (Delgado-Gaitan, 1996). This interaction will ultimately be a positive influence on the process of quality teaching.

In any teaching-learning process the knowledge across subject areas should be integrated to make learning meaningful for students. A quality teacher makes sure that whatever they teach is integrated into a bigger picture and helps students to connect what they learn with other subject areas or aspects of their lives (Beane, 1993, 1995). This curriculum integration allows students “to integrate learning experiences into their schemes of meaning so as to broaden and deepen their understanding of themselves and their world” (Beane, 1995, p.616) and allows them to use the knowledge in the “context of problems, interests, issues, and concerns at hand” (p.616). In summary, the quality teacher helps students to achieve specific skills, provides them with relevant knowledge, and helps them to work towards planned purposes (Killen, 1998).

Including all students in the mainstream classroom, regardless of their abilities and socio-cultural backgrounds and giving them an opportunity to participate in classroom activities, is an important factor or element in the quality teaching process (Jorgensen, 1998; Thomas, Walker, & Webb, 1998). Classrooms that include an obvious diversity of disability, race, gender, sexuality, and/or ethnicity (Malin, 1995; Smyth, Hattam, & Lawson, 1998) are reported to have a positive influence on students’ academic and social outcomes (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939).

Connectedness runs in concert with inclusiveness, focusing on how the students’ knowledge acquired in the classroom is connected to the world beyond the classroom and with the utility of this knowledge for the students in their present and future pursuits. Such teaching strategies have been emphasised in Dewey’s and Bruner’s work (Bruner, 1960; Dewey, 1916). Smith, Lee and Newmann (2001) also found that interactive teaching methods that include connectedness, along with other intellectual factors, have a significant correlation with learning in mathematics and reading. All this can be seen as dealing with a long-running concern with the way teachers present their subjects; that this has to be more attractive to hold students’ attention, especially when dealing with the core knowledge and skills of the subject. In some cases a quality teacher has to teach their subject as a narrative, that is, in a story-telling mode. In the teaching context, the teacher shares both; their own and their students’ stories about learning, taking note of events, contexts, actions or experiences related to the focus of the topic being taught at any point. Such a technique enhances learning and increases the understanding of ideas, concepts and/or situations as an unfolding story (Hymes, 1996; Luke, 1988). Egan (1988; 1997) argues that teaching through story telling is an important strategy for learning and can be effective in both the sciences and humanities, but it means not simply selecting curriculum content for narrative form, but also developing an interactive and participative relationship in the classroom in developing the narrative. Narrative can play the central role in teaching specific groups of non-mainstream learners. For example, indigenous children are thought to learn better through storytelling, especially when the narratives have connections to their communities and their moral and oral traditions (Christie, 1985). Therefore, to make teaching more interesting and enjoyable, quality teachers need to teach knowledge and skills simply and effectively, and approach this as a contextualised form of storytelling that connects closely with and is familiar to students’ daily lives and experiences. Also the quality teacher works as facilitator and guide for their students and encourages them to regulate and direct their learning and actions.

3.2.3.4 Evaluation

Evaluation or assessment has an important role in the teaching-learning process. Teachers in the classroom need to evaluate or assess what they have been doing and planning and whether their planning has been successful. Evaluation gives ‘information and insight’ about the students and the lessons presented. Administrative matters, such as ‘staffing and school organization’ also need to be equally assessed and evaluated. This resultant information can lead to ‘adjusting and modifying, accepting or rejecting’ plans and organization (Groundwater-Smith & Nicoll, 1980, p.1). Assessment or evaluation can be qualitative or quantitative, but its importance is twofold. Firstly, it gives students’ parents information about their children’ progress, and secondly it gives the teachers good feedback about themselves, about their teaching methods and the extent of the effectiveness of their teaching strategies (Pollard & Tann, 1993). An effective

school monitors and evaluates both the inputs and the outputs of the teaching-learning process, allowing judgements about the usefulness and applicability of teaching methods. Monitoring and evaluation are regarded as the main determinants in a school's effectiveness and improvement. In schools that have high standards, teaching and learning are frequently evaluated by focusing on the students' progress and needs. Many kinds of assessments and scales are used in education to give feedback to the teachers, administrators, principal, and the parents, that is, to all those who are involved and concerned about the students' learning and performance. Walker and Murphy state that effective schools have "frequent in-class monitoring [around curricular objectives]...tied to immediate direct feedback to students ... [preventing] students from falling behind" (Walker & Murphy, 1986, p.81). The students are shown that what they learn is important and staff can use the tests for "instructional and curricular planning" (p.81). Accountability is enhanced when staff, students and parents are integrated into the assessment procedures. There is no doubt about the important role of assessment or evaluation in the teaching-learning process. But there is debate and the controversy is about what sort of assessment. The considerable debate about assessment developed from the work of Nemmann and others; they called for "authentic assessment" (Killen, 2005; King et al., 2001, p.1; Newmann et al., 2001). Authentic assessment requires deep knowledge rather than using superficial assessment, such as "true-false, multiple choice, or short answers" (King et al., 2001, p.3). Newmann and Associates. (1996), in their research on mathematics and social studies teaching, called for assessment tasks from teachers to determine students' understanding and mastering of the subjects being taught. They asked for the assessment tasks to be written work and "teachers provided tasks that asked students to write opinion essays, explain solutions to mathematics problems, synthesize research data, draw maps and mathematical diagrams, and complete short-answer tests" (Newmann & Associates, 1996, p.28). In conclusion, evaluation is important not just for students but also for teachers and parents and for the education authorities. Whichever method teachers use for evaluation, it will contribute and reflect positively on the quality of the teaching-learning process.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the review shows that the concept of quality teaching has different meanings in different contexts. The concept of quality teaching is illusive and complex as the concept and practices of quality teaching can be only discussed, and can only function, within a specific context. This context, as the literature suggests, has three main sub-contexts: education policy, the school, and the classroom teaching and learning practices.

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