

WCCES 2010 Symposium proposal

Theme: Demystifying Quality in Education

Researching quality across borders: the EdQual experience

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International collaboration for researching education quality involves reaching across literal and metaphorical borders. It opens up the black box of the school and classrooms, bringing researchers into the territory of practitioners at the same time as bringing researchers together across national borders, both North-South and South-South. These border-crossings and the multiple contexts with which researchers engage raise challenges for conceptualizing and researching education quality. EdQual, a consortium of six universities in UK and Africa, has been researching education quality in sub-Saharan Africa over the last five years. Taking the empowerment of practitioners and learners as agents of change to be an element of quality led to the use of action research, in contexts in which it is novel methodology. Understanding issues of quality as embedded in broader historical, socio-economic, political and cultural contexts located knowledge for research leadership within those contexts. Presenters will set out a framework for conceptualising quality, its methodological implications and reflect on the extent to which EdQual was successful in creating new possibilities for research partnership.

Researching the Quality of Education in Low Income Countries: Issues of theory and method

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Abstract

This paper considers the theoretical and methodological challenges involved in researching education quality in low income countries with particular reference to the work of *EdQual*. Starting assumptions of the programme included the need to articulate a clear values basis; to locate issues of quality within a broader consideration of context; to understand the role of education in both perpetuating and overcoming inequalities; to ensure that an understanding of quality is rooted in the local realities and perspectives ; and, to be reflective about our own role as researchers. The paper sets two mainstream approaches to researching quality - the human capital and human rights based approaches. Each focuses on different aspects of quality but neither was sufficient for achieving *EdQual's* aims and values. Hence, we are developing a third approach that brings together Sen's capabilities approach and Fraser's three dimensions of social justice (redistribution, recognition and participation). Adopting a social justice approach in the context of *EdQual's* work, however, also poses real challenges for theory and method and these will be critically discussed. In this respect it will be argued that *EdQual* has only been partially successful in realising the possibilities opened up by such an approach.

Action research in researching quality: rhetoric and reality

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Abstract

The use of action research approaches in educational contexts has been evolving over the last sixty years. Many variants have been developed and applied in many countries in both North and South. Many claims are made for the power of action research to bring about sustained and sustainable change influencing both policy and practice. The relationship between action research and teacher professional development is strong and the potential for action research to change and improve classroom practice is particularly stressed.

With the variety of different approaches to action research come a range of different value-systems and ideological perspectives on how it should be conducted. However, there are still some common goals to which most action researchers would aspire, which might include genuine collaboration ('research-with' not 'research-on'), ownership by participants and clear practice-related outcomes.

This paper considers the use of action research in two projects forming part of the EdQual Research Programme Consortium (www.edqual.org) which have taken place through collaboration between UK and African partners. It considers the extent to which aspirational goals for action research have been met in practice and some ways in which the paradigm needs to be interpreted in different cultural contexts.

[196 words]

New possibilities for research leadership within international collaborations? Reflections on EdQual

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Abstract

International research collaborations that have North-South partnerships very often have an objective of institutional capacity building for the Southern partners and sometimes also for the Northern partner. The literature on north-south research partnerships, suggests that historically much research funded from the North has also been intellectually led and owned by the North, with the Northern partner leading the bid for funding, designing and writing up the research. The Southern partner's role is largely that of collecting and analysing data. The research programme consortia (RPC), funded by the UK Department for International Development, were expected to break this pattern, making the research more directly relevant to policy makers and practitioners in the South and at the same time developing capacity to conduct and use research in the South. The RPC for Implementing Education Quality in Low Income Countries (EdQual) established a decentralised model of project management with the intention of given Southern partners a leadership role that started from the research design phase onwards. This paper reflects on the extent to which this was achieved and how EdQual contributed towards institutional capacity building within its constituent institutions.