

Self-evaluation – an inspiring dialogue

Quality has become an important issue in the education sector, no matter whether large formal education institutions or smaller, semi-professional or voluntary bodies working in the non-formal and informal sector are in the focus of attention.

Evaluation and self-evaluation are both seen as an important step to quality assurance and improvement.

Evaluation in general means to *“perceive, reflect, assess and use experience in teaching practice”* (Hackl 2005, p. 168). Most of the time evaluation is carried out by external experts.

Self-evaluation means that the evaluation process is self-initiated, self-regulated and organised by a certain group within the organisation. An individual trainer, a group of volunteers, the management team or the whole staff of the organisation wants to evaluate their own work or own role within their working context. Self-evaluation is seen as *„the **process of systematically collecting, analysing and exchanging data**, which relate to educational processes of individuals, groups or organisations (institutions, schools etc), to promote **learning among all parties**, in order to **base assessment and decisions on data** rather than on assumptions“* (Tilkin/Kerkhofs 2005, p. 8).

But what are the reasons for implementing a culture of self-evaluation in one’s own institution instead of being assessed by an external expert?

- Self-evaluation **empowers** since people are provided with knowledge about their own practice and can take decisions accordingly.
- Self-evaluation **fosters motivation and creates commitment** since people are actively involved in the evaluation process
- Self-evaluation **supports a dialogue** among all relevant stakeholders and helps to make different points-of-view visible and transparent.
- Self-evaluation **promotes learning and development processes** of all people involved.
- Self-evaluation **helps being conscious of one’s profession** and improve one’s professionalisation.

In the tradition of SEALLL, a European Grundtvig project that focussed on Self-Evaluation in Adult Life Long Learning (2005 – 2007), self-evaluation follows three main ideas: It is a learning process, a dialogue and inevitably linked to reflection.

Since self-evaluation is seen as a **learning process** it should be organized accordingly. That means that prior knowledge and experience are taken into account, goals and process are meaningful for each stakeholder and an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect is created. In this context it has to be emphasized that learning processes are never linear but mutual. Also they are social processes that involve emotions. Learning means change and improvement and helps to broaden one’s action repertoire.

Self-evaluation is based on **reflection** – the main aim is to receive feedback from as many perspectives and sources as possible on one’s own performance or progress in order to gain a new

understanding of one's own role and context. As a famous Austrian educational scientist and evaluation expert, Herbert Altrichter, (1994) said "*looking for reality that is partly hidden, means to be ready to step out of one's own situation and critically reflect it.*" For this reason, people who are involved in self-evaluation processes have to be prepared to

- reflect and become aware of their own feelings, attitudes and values
- try to observe rather than to interpret actions and
- cultivate constructive feedback

Self-evaluation is also seen as a **dialogue**, a dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, no matter if they are part of the institution or external partners or authorities. This interaction helps to broaden the scope and open up to various opinions and perspectives.

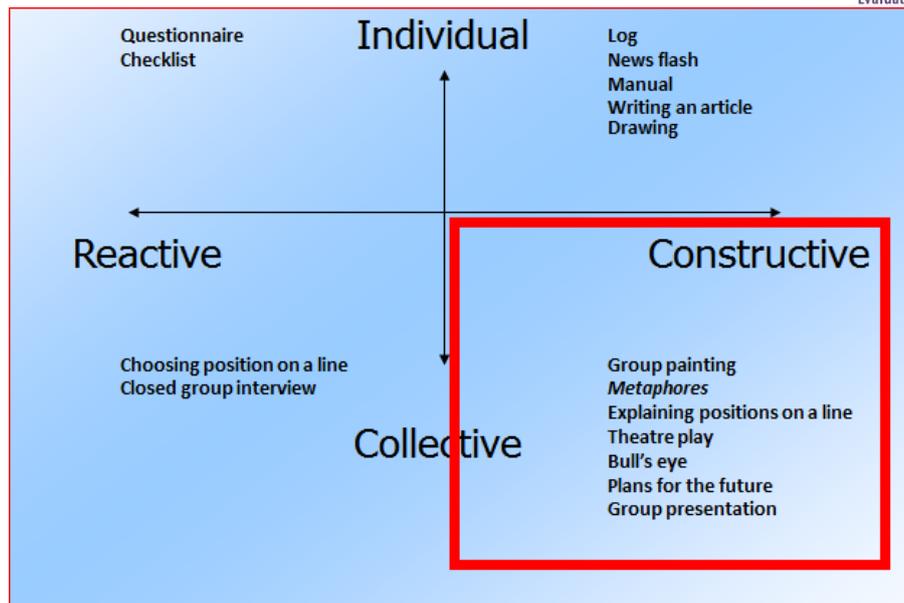
The self-evaluation process may aim at various fields and issues to be evaluated, like learning, teaching, a programme or a curriculum, single events, communication and cooperation. Moreover, input issues (like equipment or resources), the process (like communication and cooperation) or the output factors (like the quality of products, the satisfaction with a course) can be in the focus of a self-evaluation process.

Concerning the planning process the following steps should be undertaken:

1. Definition of the evaluation field
2. Description of the situation/context/ motivation
3. Definition of goals and target group/sample
4. Write down a concrete evaluation question
5. Identify relevant information needed and sources
6. Design and plan the process
7. Definition of indicators/criteria
8. Choose an appropriate instrument
9. Set up a timetable
10. Process data
11. Analyse data
12. Interpretation of data
13. Reporting
14. Transfer/draw consequences

A variety of instruments can be used to collect data. As shown in the figure below, constructive and collective instruments should be chosen, especially if the process is evaluated. For more information on instruments have a look at the SEALLL manual.¹

¹ http://www.sealll.eu/docs/manual/Sealll01_UK_web.pdf



The reporting is a communicative process and therefore the results should be reported completely, understandably and anonymously, as well as diplomatic and constructively, using transparent/reproducible conclusions and inspiring further analysis.

For more information on self-evaluation the following websites can be recommended:

- Self-evaluation in international projects – www.mice-t.net
- Self-evaluation for teachers – www.i-probenet.eu
- Self-evaluation in adult education – www.sealll.eu
- Project management und project monitoring – <http://qas.programkontoret.se>

So let's start your own self-evaluation project and don't forget: *Evaluation results are not only data, they should be turned into concrete agreements for consequences and actions!*²

² (Schmid-Waldmann, 2011)