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The New Educational Review

Evaluation as the Tool to Initiate Changes and Development of the School

Abstract

The article is focused on the analysis of the essence, purpose and meaning (sense) of evaluation and self-evaluation processes in the school environment. It is an attempt to analyse the pedagogical evaluation as both a specific theoretical problem and a long-term, systematic process by means of which the school is able to reflect and evaluate its work quality in a critical way, to initiate changes and thus to improve and upgrade its quality. The above idea is based on an assumption that the development of the good quality school depends on its concept as an open, co-operative and learning institution focused on educational, cultural and public awareness objectives; and the systematic reflecting, checking and evaluating of its objectives, progress and results form an integral part of its (internal) culture.

Key words: *educational evaluation, self-evaluation, external, internal evaluation, autonomy, school culture*

Introduction

The key assumption for any considerations relating to schools and the school system as such rests in the necessity to raise questions about relevant and desirable objectives, tasks and missions which should be met by a modern school operating within present society. What are the expectations relating to the present school? Which concept should be adopted for the school preparing the mankind for the 21st century and society to become the "learning society"?

There is never-ending criticism relating to the need to leave the traditional schooling model and again and again to initiate and openly discuss the current

status and further development of schools, including universities. What is namely highlighted is the updating of educational needs which would reflect the current society status in all main aspects, e.g. cultural, social, economic and political ones, as the dynamics of changes has become an integral part of life of all individuals, whereby it becomes much demanding with respect to their mental and social capabilities of flexibility and adaptability.

The traditional school phenomena, such as the knowledge-based encyclopaedism and abstract logicism, overburdening children by useless facts and by underestimation of the creative development of pupils not only at cognitive but also at emotional, social and volitional levels, should be replaced by a more complex view of values and objectives of education, in the widest sense. The school should namely strive for complex development of opportunities and potentialities of every child, in its bodily, mental and moral dimensions, with the stress upon self-development and self-improvement as the key capabilities of a human being which become the tools for his/her life-time education (cf. Helus, 1991; Spilková, 1996; Kantorková, Langr, 1996).

The prerequisite to reveal, identify and solve problems occurring in our schooling system rests in the more complex and deeper understanding of a very complicated and complex unit represented by a school; moreover, to be able to solve the above – mentioned issues, certain specific approach is necessary and such a process will be rather long.

There are more and more frequent challenges pointing out the necessity to critically reflect and evaluate the quality of pedagogical phenomena, processes or institutions in the sphere of education and upbringing and the current pedagogical practice has thus been enriched recently by a new term: the pedagogical evaluation.

The term evaluation in educational theory

Evaluation ranks among the most frequently used terms which have appeared in pedagogical terminology.

The "evaluation" terminology has not been unified and widely used, yet (cf Průcha, 1996; Rýdl, Horská, Dvořáková, 1997; Průcha, Walterová, Mareš 1995). For more detailed clarification of the term evaluation, see the only original Czech publication by J. Průcha "Pedagogical Evaluation" (1996), then the Pedagogical Dictionary (Pedagogický slovník,1995) and the "Marketing of a School" (1996) by J. Světlík who writes about evaluation in the chapter titled the "Evaluation of a School". There is also a monograph by K. Rýdl – the *Way to an Autonomous School* (1996) and translation

of a book by Austrian authors A. Fischer and M. Schratz (1997) titled *School Management and Development* which pay some marginal attention to the term evaluation, though they bring about some important and thematically related ideas.

A simple translation of the English and French word 'evaluation' means in Czech 'assessment' or 'appraisal'. Of course, such a simplified definition would not be enough for our purpose, even if it brings about key terms which are essential for the specification of the evaluation term and its content in the educational theory.

Evaluation can be defined as an activity carried out in the final phase of the work with data obtained during research focused on educational processes, educational contents or educational results, effects or needs.

If we are to speak about evaluation with respect to pedagogical phenomena, we can also use the term pedagogical evaluation. Both terms are mixing up and for the evaluation of a certain educational phenomenon we can also use the term educational evaluation.

It is of secondary importance to decide which term to use as a priority; it would not tackle the key issue relating to the specification of clear and accurate content of a given term. A problem can appear in two cases:

1. If evaluation is defined in a simplified way, as an appraisal,
2. If the terms evaluation and assessment are separated and explained independently and not accepted as synonyms.

It is necessary to analyse the relation between the two terms in detail.

In the Pedagogical Dictionary (Pedagogický slovník,1996) the term evaluation means assessment, nevertheless it is defined (under the term of educational evaluation) as "…the identification, observation and explanation of data which are characteristic of the status, quality and efficiency of the educational system… and the term covers the evaluation of educational results, evaluation of textbooks, …" (Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 1995, p. 147). Evaluation is a general term for assessment, which is understood as quality assessment. The term evaluation does not mean only the final phase of data processing relating to a phenomenon under research; evaluation here also means the whole process of data collecting, analysis and interpretation.

We can find some disparities when clarifying the relation between the terms evaluation and assessment in the works by J. Průcha (1996) and K. Rýdl, V. Horská, M. Dvořáková (1997).

According to J. Průcha, the content of the term evaluation covers the theoretical approach, pointing out the necessity to evaluate all phenomena of the educational reality, e.g. the educational processes and programmes, educational results and institutions, further on the methodology of such evaluation as a set of research methods and techniques and last but not least, the process during which – through

the selected methodology – we realise a certain theoretical approach which, having selected a certain phenomenon from the educational reality, is implemented at the corresponding level of the educational practice; it can be represented by an educational programme of one individual school or by an educational system of one or more countries (cf. Průcha, 1996).

According to Průcha, the meaning of the term evaluation is closely related to science and research, whilst the term assessment is used in daily school practice. "Evaluation is a term introduced in the sphere of theory, science and research, whilst assessment is a term used rather by teachers, parents and non-pedagogical public" (Průcha, 1996, p. 11).

K. Rýdl (1997) defines evaluation quite clearly and accurately as "systematic investigation and observation of value and efficiency of a certain subject or phenomenon … Then in relation with a school we have in mind the assessment and evaluation of the education and work procedures offered by a given school. It is nothing new, anyway. One would evaluate one's success and failure every day, one would adopt some statement to one's own work and to the work of others. Compared to such a random-selection approach, here evaluation means a systematic, planned and controlled process of evaluation and assessment of the phenomena under research" (Rýdl, Horská, Dvořáková, 1997, p. 2).

The above-mentioned definitions by K. Rýdl, in my opinion, clearly explain a mutual relation between the terms evaluation and assessment. Attributes like systematic, planned and controlled in a targeted way, specify the distinct character of the term evaluation as an evaluation process; thus the dispute between the "scientific theory and school practice" becomes irrelevant.

Evaluation – scopes and objectives

Scopes and objectives of evaluation can be divided, as follows:
1. Evaluation as control and self-evaluation
2. Evaluation as the process of self-reflection, planning and further development
3. Evaluation as scientific research (cf., Horská, Dvořáková 1997)

We can say that the idea of evaluation as a process of control and self-evaluation still reflects traditional experience of teachers who themselves, together with their pupils, are subject to control by school inspectors who dictate the criteria and methods of evaluation and assessment.

There is an entirely different concept of evaluation, which is its specification as a process of self-reflection playing its role in the decision making processes and the

actions of planning and prediction of further development. The term self-reflection shows that evaluation in this case is carried out by its direct participants, which means that in the case of a school such participants cover the school management, teachers and pupils/students. The objective of such an evaluation concept then rests in the "extending of knowledge of one's own work and one's own school and having the opportunity to review the adequacy of one's own strategy of acting and of the organisational structure, as well." (Rýdl, Horská, Dvořáková 1997, p. 3).

Evaluation oriented towards scientific research aims at the evaluation of innovation processes and projects in pedagogical practice. Evaluation results serve to "… find out the extent of application of the investigated phenomenon within a broader system" (Rýdl, Horská, Dvořáková 1997, p. 3).

Evaluation research is defined as an "essential part of every educational research project" in the professional journal "Educational Research and Evaluation" published by the European Research Association in Education. In one of its issues from 1995 we can find a note on evaluation research as a new discipline which originated from the permanently growing interest in evaluation which plays a significant role in decision making processes (cf. ERAE, 1995). "Evaluation research brings about a complete set of proofs which illustrate values in educational programmes, products and technologies"(ERAE, 1995, pp. 36–37).

The term ´evaluation research´ is also used by Czech authors (cf. Chráska, 1995; Průcha, 1996). In my opinion, though, it is not possible to agree with M. Chráska who states that evaluation research is focused on the evaluation "or measurement of various educational phenomena, processes or effects" (Chráska, 1995, p. 44). In spite of the fact that J. Průcha (1996) speaks about a potential terminological connection of the terms evaluation and measurement or measurement as a basic procedure of evaluation research, we cannot limit the methodology of educational evaluation research by including only measurement-based one, e.g. quantitative methods and techniques. Evaluation research can be specified in detail as empirical evaluation research, the same as for instance the action field research, split according to its type, e.g. quantitative or qualitative research or according to applied methodologies.

Another key term appearing in relation to evaluation and assessment is the term quality, the significance of which should be explained a bit more, as well.

The term quality in educational evaluation

In a simplified way, evaluation is sometimes defined as quality assessment. If we evaluate a certain pedagogical phenomenon, we try to find out whether it meets the criteria which determine the fact whether a given phenomenon can be identi-

fied as a good "quality" one or not. The quality of a given phenomenon is then a set of its properties which are of high, desirable value for us. If we evaluate a certain pedagogical phenomenon, we evaluate whether it has become close or reached a given pattern (model), a given quality. "Evaluation activities in education are always connected with the fact that they are compared with some values, patterns (models), ideals,…, and it is high time to start a thorough analysis of what we want to understand as desirable values in education - today and for the future, as well. Without such an analysis and adoption of values, even the most perfect evaluation procedures would still remain technical parameters only." (Průcha, 1996, p. 152).

If we are to evaluate a given pedagogical phenomenon under investigation based on its quality, we should be able to define such a quality as accurately as possible and, at the same time, to identify the key assumptions which must occur to be able to determine the evaluated phenomenon as a good quality one. It means that we must identify the so-called quality indicators and immediately after that we should specify criteria for quality evaluation.

"In the research context the term "quality" equals the term "perfection", whereby we state that "quality" is related in some way to "value" and "evaluation" (quoted from Průcha, 1996, p. 27). Quality can be defined as a desirable, optimum level, a stage of perfection which is prescribed by certain requirements – the quality criteria. The quality thus defined then becomes a "normative category" and the investigated phenomenon is compared with that category.

Apart from the term quality we should analyse another important term which is effectiveness; this term often appears in the quality context.

The term effectiveness in educational evaluation

The Encyclopaedic Dictionary (Encyklopedický slovník) defines effectiveness and efficiency or the ratio between benefits of some activity and costs incurred, including the amount of work spent (cf. Encyklopedický slovník, 1993).

The terms effectiveness and efficiency bring about another dimension in defining of the quality criteria which cannot be based only on the relation between the objectives planned and results achieved (the so-called result-based efficiency); it is necessary to reflect the means, too, which were used to achieve a given results (the so-called process-based efficiency) (cf. Průcha, 1996; Fischer, Schratz, 1997). In the theory of effectiveness, quality is then defined as a general term which combines result-based efficiency (which shows whether the objectives planned have been met) and the performance rate or in other words the process-based effectiveness (which shows the means used in given process).

Process-based effectiveness often appears in literature as efficiency. Efficiency (which means HOW) "shows the mutual relation (ratio) between inputs and outputs. If the inputs are lower than outputs, the efficiency is positive"(Rýdl, Horská, Dvořáková, 1997, p. 7).

The mutual relationship of the meaning of the terms effectiveness and efficiency can be explained by means of the statement "from the orientation towards activity to the orientation towards an objective". The authors, Fischer a Schratz (1997), compare the aspects of both terms in the scheme shown below:

Orientation towards activity (efficiency)		Orientation towards an objective (effectiveness)
to do the things right		to do right things
to solve problems		to look for alternatives
to protect the means	⟺	to optimize the means exploitation
to fulfil the obligations		to achieve results
to reduce costs		to increase profit
Successful exploitation of things, tools and sources		**Successful approach to people and dealing with complex phenomena**

(Fischer, Schratz, 1997: 112)

If we are to define educational evaluation in an accurate way and find out the answer to the question ´why can it contribute to scientific research or the school practice´, we should analyse such areas of practice which are in the focus of evaluation, e.g. the evaluation subjects.

Subjects of educational evaluation and the role of evaluation in the school environment

"Evaluation, as a research subject or discipline, has been developed from the school testing, the priority purpose of which was to differentiate pupils by their dispositions to study. … .In our country an opinion often appears that educational evaluation equals the assessment of the educational results of pupils. … . At present, though, the above-mentioned concept has been overcome. The educational evaluation subject has been unprecedentedly extended and evaluation research is based on a different, more complex paradigm now. Such a new paradigm assumes that the purpose of educational evaluation is to provide evaluation information relating to the educational reality as a whole." (Průcha, 1996, p. 22).

Identification of the sphere of educational reality as a subject of the educational evaluation is a key task and it has no sense to doubt it. However, it is very difficult

to identify all areas which should represent the sphere of interest of educational evaluation.

J. Průcha (1996) provides two potential approaches to the above issue. As for the first one, he quotes from the work by an American scientist M. Scriven who has adopted the opinion of the so called general theory of educational evaluation; and based on this theory he specifies general issues, areas of evaluation, as follows:

Programme evaluation

Personnel evaluation

Performance evaluation

Product evaluation

Project, proposal evaluation

Policy evaluation

Meta-evaluation

J. Průcha finds the Scriven's identification of the educational evaluation subject as too general and proposes his own, more complex specification, as follows:

Evaluation of educational needs

Evaluation of educational programmes

Evaluation of textbooks

Evaluation of teaching methods

Evaluation of educational environment – atmosphere

Evaluation of educational results

Evaluation of educational effects

Evaluation of schools

Evaluation of alternative schools

Evaluation based on indicators

Evaluation of educational science (cf. Průcha, 1996)

When specifying the subject of educational evaluation we should reflect the fact that school is the place where practical the sense of evaluation is implemented and that school and its actors (stakeholders) need to know what to evaluate, which educational phenomena and processes should be reflected in a critical manner, to put into life the ideal of a "good" or "good quality" school on a continuous basis.

The subjects' specification of the educational evaluation of a school is analysed also in the study titled *Self-evaluation of School* by K. Rýdl, V. Horská and M. Dvořáková (1997). Their concept is based on the idea of the evaluation process as a natural and integral part of the educational process providing feedback to teachers; the feedback relates to the level of success of their educational efforts which are evaluated according to the actual performance of pupils/students, as well as according to changes in their value-based orientations and attitudes. The authors assume that the following attributes are important, too, e.g. the school atmosphere

as a whole, group links and inter-personal relationships among pupils and teachers. Such phenomena and processes occurring in the school reality are considered as those "which are still marginal as they are not generally known or are not considered as important… even though they are an integral part of education and of the social experience of pupils, too." (1997, p. 26)

Such educational results are considered by the authors as subjects of evaluation which indicate changes in personal features of pupils. Apart from knowledge mastered it is also "the enjoyment when working in a creative way, tackling of problems, the attitude to some topic or behaviour in new situation" (1997, p. 27).

The above-mentioned, intended targets include - apart from knowledge, skills, capabilities and experience, also values, attitudes and interests of pupils/students representing the qualitative framework of education which necessarily influences the selection and creation of the evaluation tools.

For successful evaluation of the target state achieved, the authors point out identification of all factors (variables) which have an impact on the target state. The above-mentioned study provides the following variables which should be evaluated in a systematic way:

- Sufficient financing of education
- Appropriate legislative framework for the school operation
- Concept of the personality of a pupil/student in various phases of school attendance
- Concept of the profile of a school leaver
- Concept of the education scope (individual educational areas, subjects, topics, etc.)
- Concept of methods and organisational forms of education
- Expected educational results in individual phases of school attendance
- Methods for continuous and final identification and evaluation of the school educational process
- Sociodemographic and a sociocultural characteristics of a class (including the capabilities and performance of given class)
- Sociodemographic a socioprofessional characteristics of the teaching staff (including teacher experience)
- Personality characteristics of a pupil / student (learning style)
- Personality characteristics of a teacher (teaching style)
- Work concept of individual teachers
- Work concept of the teaching staff as a whole
- Curriculum-based validity of the applied evaluation tool (e.g. the difficulty level of a test should be in compliance with requirements for the output quality of a pupil/student)

- Organisation of the school work
- Level of co-operation with other social partners
- Diversified situational variables
- Relationships at school, the school environment and many other, different variables (1997, p. 28)

One of the first key steps leading to successful realisation of the evaluation process rests, in our opinion, in most specific identification of the educational evaluation subjects, which means every target state and factors influencing such a state.

The evaluation standard of a school is, together with the cultural, social, curriculum, structural and administration standard, an intensification element which is irreplaceable and gives sense to the detailed structure of such a system, which the school undoubtedly is.

The cultural and social standard, as well as the evaluation standard influence all elements of the viable school organism, which helps to make the school system complex and supports the meeting of its main mission.

Now, let us focus upon a more detailed analysis of the frequently used term of self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation of the school

In 1989 the international organisation named CIDREE was established in Western Europe (Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe) which is a consortium of institutions dealing with the development and research of education in Europe. The CIDREE activities cover also the project "Self-evaluation in the Development of Schools", the aim of which is networking of entities operating in science and research and schools practice, as well, all those dealing with self-evaluation processes in school systems.

Co-operation of the above interested entities together with sharing of experience and information will bring about the following result: self-evaluation will become a more efficient and sensible accelerator of the school development also at the international level as the decentralizing trends, which go hand in hand with the increasing level of freedom and responsibility and thus with the new need and necessity to reflect the course and results of the school work; all those are attributes common in all Western European countries. "As a part of the decentralizing activities, national politicians have prepared certain steps to help the school to become an autonomous entity. … And it is the evaluation which is able to fill in the gap between the "autonomy" and "responsibility" of the school for the results of its work" (Schratz, 1997, p. 1).

The CIDREE project focuses on the preparation of theory and methodology for self-evaluation which is published in the form of instructive guidelines thus helping all those who are interested in the development of better quality educational institutions.

What does the self-evaluation of the school mean?

The term self-evaluation brings about many questions. How did such a currently more and more frequently used term appear? What does it mean, in fact and why should it become an integral part of the school life?

The term self-evaluation is used in the context of terms relating to self-assessment, of terms which relate to all processes and activities and by means of which the school itself and its actors (stakeholders) systematically evaluate their work. All processes by means of which the school management, teachers and in the best case also pupils and parents reflect and evaluate the feasibility and meaningfulness of the intended and planned target state and also the current, actual state, whereby they get the opportunity to make decision making processes easier, taking into consideration the future development, as well.

The terms self-evaluation and self-assessment are often mixed up but they are not identical. Similarly to the terms evaluation and assessment, there is a problem with the prefix "self-".

There is a distinct and illustrative explanation provided by K. Rýdl (1997) who compared the key attributes of both terms and showed them in the following table:

Self-assessment	Self-evaluation
As common assessment and reflection	As systematic (self-)evaluation
• Not planned	• Planned
• Not regular	• Regular activity
• Is based on impressions and opinions	• Is based on a broad database of diversified viewpoints
• Is based on individual, random experience	• Information is collected in a targeted way
• Assessment criteria are not clear	• Criteria are set up in advance
• Questions are not documented	• Clear questions are documented
• Subjective	• Relatively objective
Example: Dialogues during the break relating to immediate experience from the teaching process	**Example:** Self-querying of the whole teaching staff needed for further development and support

(Rýdl, Horská, Dvořáková, 1997, p. 6)

Whilst self-assessment is a not planned, not targeted and random process occurring in everyday school practice, self-evaluation is a process of planned, prepared and systematic evaluation which is to meet the planned objectives, by applying the criteria which are set up in advance. "By self-evaluation we mean the evaluation of objectives achieved by the school itself, where the purpose is to assure the quality of education within the framework of the school educational programme implemented. … Self-evaluation can also be understood as a mechanism for continuous self-regulation of one's own educational work of a given school as a whole and of individual teachers, as well, as a useful tool which makes it possible to identify strengths and weaknesses of the educational programme guaranteed by the state and implemented by the school. Self-evaluation thus provides the feedback relating to the standard and quality of educational results achieved and/or to expected target state" (Rýdl, Horská, Dvořáková, 1997, p. 18).

From the above definition of self-evaluation we can now derive its fundamental sense and basic objectives.

Sense and objectives of self-evaluation

Every school, as described in the introductory chapters, is an educational institution and thus an original and unique community of people participating, according to their individual tasks, in the standard and quality of its operation. The local conditions of a given school, professional and personal standard of teachers and schoolmasters, the sociocultural and personality-based, internal and external conditions for pupils/students and also their attitudes, all those more or less influence results of the school work and also specific problems occurring at school, which need specific solutions. In spite of all that, comparable results and a similar approach to problems are expected from every school.

Not all schools and not all teachers like the educational concept dictated by the state, e.g. the concept with too general and not clearly formulated objectives and profiles of school leavers (cf. Rýdl, 1997).

There are more and more teachers who, as they wish to have a good quality school, reject the routine, indifferent approaches and who look for the key and sensible values and objectives of education actively and in a creative way and try to meet them via individual educational programmes. And self-evaluation can help those schools and teachers to understand their own situation and to find the way to find solutions. "Self-evaluation provides an opportunity to look at oneself with one's own eyes, realising all problems and impacts which external observers may not notice. … Its main sense rests in the opportunity to identify the specific features

of the given school and to evaluate its real potential" (Rýdl, Horská, Dvořáková, 1997, pp. 21–22).

The key evaluation objective is to systematically reflect and evaluate the quality

- of intended and achieved objectives and contents of education
- of educational results
- and effectiveness of educational activities and all other activities relating to the educational
- work of the school

Self-evaluation enables the school to

- create tools for its development and upgrading
- identify and support the decision making processes
- strengthen mutual trust of all actors (stakeholders), e.g. schoolmasters, teachers, pupils and
- parents
- cultivate positive working culture
- become an open and respected educational institution with clear idea of its mission

The autonomous development of schools is a long-term objective and evaluation represents one of the ways leading to its achievement. The evaluation processes provide an opportunity to the school to be able to realise its mission and purpose of its existence and to reflect whether such objectives are met.

It is evaluation which can help the school to distinguish and identify areas of concern which need a change and thus to meet its development dimension. Such a dimension can reflect changes and participate in changing cultural and social values of the school and thus improve its overall atmosphere preferring open communication and co-operation of teachers, pupils/students and their parents. Evaluation enables the school to settle conflicts in an open way and thus to build a partnership organisation based on trust. It enables to make the school administration and management more efficient, to clarify its profile and open the school outwards, to become a place respected and accepted by its neighbourhood.

If teachers admit that it is necessary to continuously improve their work, to be open to changes and to "learn", then it is the unique opportunity for the school – to become a "learning institution" itself which is open to changes and willing to criticise itself and operate "on a thin ice" of potential loss of authority which, anyhow, can only be temporary if a sensible evaluation process is applied.

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