



Education and Culture

**Leonardo da Vinci**

# **REFLECTIVE QUALITY DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS AND TRAINERS THROUGH SELF EVALUATION**



## **SECOND COUNTRY REPORT (DENMARK)**

*DEL- JØRGEN OLE LARSEN – OLE DIBBERN ANDERSEN  
THE DANISH INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL TRAINING OF  
VOCATIONAL TEACHERS  
(07/2007)*

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# 1 Introduction

Evaluation and Quality assurance is being conducted to an extent never seen before. A lot of money and resources are being allocated for that purpose and evaluation and Quality assurance measures often create discussions and even heated debates among teachers themselves and can even lead to conflicts between the management and the staff concerning how evaluation should be set up and how the outcome/results of the evaluation shall be utilised in the institution.

The Reflective Evaluation Tools has among other objectives the specific goal to approach the individual VET teacher, the team, the management and in the broad sense society. This was done by introducing and implementing the four dimensions in the tool, giving the user the option to view the different self evaluation areas from various perspectives.

Evaluation in a VET institution covers a diversity of activities having in common that you would like relate to something, a process, an outcome or a target. This can be:

The product of the learner

The competences of the students

The quality of a project or the materials used.

The planning of the team

Own and colleagues' performance and much more.

The Reflective Evaluation Tool has gathered some of these areas in one "spot" and in a context where you are additionally given the possibility to reflect on the process either alone or in your team or in dialogue with the management.

The diversity in evaluation and QA is not only a question of what you assess but also against which criteria the evaluation is made. It can be about the competences the students/trainers are supposed to achieve, the progress of the training, the degree of satisfaction of different stakeholders and other issues which are seen important for the whole performance of the institution.

The diversity is also expressed by the specific objectives laid down in an evaluation and how you implement this. The objectives of the Reflective Tool have the focus on both different areas and the process of involving all stakeholders in a productive dialogue.

Self Evaluation is in the majority of European Countries as one of the most important

components in the institutions' QA strategy. A European workshop defined the following indicators of quality:

sharp success criteria

change in relationship (between teachers and pupils, schools and inspectors?)

culture of self-evaluation

balanced trail of strengths and weaknesses

schools on the move.

The self-reflection tool can in many respects contribute to some of these indicators and especially by including different users and levels.

## **1.1 Context of testing**

Both the background for establishing the data base and the context of the testing was influenced by a number of trends that are seen as important for the whole evaluation culture in both Denmark and Europe.

The context of the testing of the tool was influenced by the general discussion of how evaluation should be seen and adhered to. On a very general level you can divide it into often contradicting perceptions:

One the one side self evaluation is primarily seen as summative and control based focussing on quantitative indicators as part of QA system as highlighted above. This is often combined with benchmarking exercises between school activities.

On the other side self evaluation is first and foremost seen as a development tools and process oriented.

The self evaluation was by the persons testing the tools seen as development tool both from an individual and collective perspective.

Our testing started in august 2006 and has been carried out on different kind of vocational schools in Denmark with a wide range of educational activities primarily in the field of health care and transportation. The testing was connected with more general interviews/discussions how the evaluation culture can be improved at the culture of evaluation. This also led to interesting conclusions that seem to be very general for the how self evaluation in Denmark is perceived. The reason for including them in report is that they have to be observed when you want to introduce and implement the tool into a wider context.

## 1.2 Background of testing

The self-evaluation scheme was presented to a number of respondents in The Danish VET sector. It should be highlighted that the Danish VET institutions for the time being are evaluated in many ways, both internally and externally. A lot of resources and time is spent on evaluation and this made it difficult to attract interest and attention from possible institutions being ready to test this instrument.

In our endeavour to persuade institutions to participate in the testing we stressed that this instrument could be a useful support to the institutions aims concerning:

Link the evaluation to the pedagogic mission of the institution

How this instrument could contribute to improve the learning of the institutions trainees and students.

How the self reflection presented in this tool support the connection between self evaluation and development of teacher competences.

How the different evaluation approaches can

Strengthen the relation between school and labour market

Improve the learning environment

In spite of all these good arguments it was assessed difficult to find institutions/teachers willing to test the reflective tool. As already mentioned this can mainly be explained by the fact that VET institutions for time being are overloaded with evaluation and QA activities.

## 2 Evaluation of Testing

When working with the reflective tool they formed a kind of context or a kind of benchmarking reference to which you could relate and assess the different possibilities and options, which the reflective tool constitutes.

It was by the majority of respondents highlighted that the tool seems to be a comprehensive instrument that covers a number of very relevant areas/issues, that can play an important role for the individual VET teachers and for the teams and groups.

At the same time it was underscored that it would be a problem to allocate the necessary time for self reflection in a context and environment where the school and society put some pressure on the individual teacher both in respect to deliver training, be assessed and assess by themselves according to the existing internal and external procedures either mandatory by law or being a part of the institution's QA routines. Still a number a number important areas/options provided by the self reflection tool was seen as important for the individual teacher's or group's access to evaluation. These are elaborated in the next section working with the self reflection instrument.

### 2.1 Working with a Self reflection Instrument

#### **Lack of concordance between time consumption and benefit from evaluation**

How can the self reflection instrument support?

Evaluation takes time and resources. Many schools have in response to the constant central growing demand and request for test and documentation of school deliveries employed QA staff responsible for carrying out the evaluation exercises. This can both be seen I a positive and negative perspective.

The "positive flip of the coin" is that QA and evaluation will be prioritised and systematised by hiring a responsible person for these activities. Hence you know that this important area will be attended to in a professional way and often according to a long term planning and action plan, that includes issues seen important and in compliance with governmental and board requirements.

The negative interpretation is that evaluation becomes to much a management affair thus excluding staff involvement and participation in decision taking. This can jeopardise the establishing the necessary link between both the organisational development of the school and the personal development of the teacher.

When it comes to the self reflection tool the fact that QA to some extent is looked after by and authorised to specific appointed person(s) can have the implication that there will not be the necessary time for the reflection and absorption that the tool provides and intends to explore. Some teacher proposed that self reflection tool could be used for purposes reaching beyond the individual practice. The tool could be seen as a part of the individual schools QA system, and could be exposed and discussed in a teacher gatherings and pedagogic workshops where the focus is teacher and trainer development.

### **Evaluation approaches and the pedagogic values are not always in harmony**

How can the self reflection instrument support?

Evaluation can be the source of conflicts between different values views.

The evaluation approaches applied to reflect a set of values which aren't always in harmony with the general mission/vision fundament of the school. The vision of the school might e.g. highlight that it wants to promote dialogue, participation and cooperation when reality often demonstrate that evaluations are planned and conducted with only a small inclusion of teachers and students. This can lead to value conflicts between the pedagogic objectives and the objectives of evaluation and thus reduce the dialogue and the coherence between these general areas.

A conflict concerning which approach to comply with in teacher evaluation was identified at one of the schools where the tool was tested. It is widely known that evaluation of teachers and especially to whom and how the outcome of such student satisfaction schemes should be published. The self reflection tool can be seen as the place where these (now and then conflicting directions) can meet especially in relation to the different dimensions that the tools encompass.

### **Evaluation of students and the teaching is often left to the individual teacher**

How can the reflection tool create more common discussions?

Evaluation of one's own teaching is obvious reasons often a very private matter. Teachers seldom talk with one another about the evaluation of their teaching conducted on an ongoing basis.

At the same time the teachers are often missing evident criteria for the evaluation they are supposed to carry out. Hence the foundation for and comparing of evaluation are often difficult to document and harmonise. This makes it difficult to exchange experiences of and follow up on the results of the evaluations of the students and the teaching.

In addition the teachers' right of self determination and own domain can have the implication the evaluation is carried out on a debatable foundation. The self reflection tool can be the place where experiences and methodologies in evaluation meet and thus become conducive for professional exchanges and improvement of the standards.

## **2.2 Feedback on the Tool Structure**

When working with the tool the participating persons were among other things asked to relate to the structure of the tool and more specific the four levels: system level, institutional level, tem level and personal level.

As it can be seen from below the participants mainly focussed on the how the tool can be used at the individual and team level.

### **2.2.1 System level**

It was the general opinion of the test persons that the questions/raised at the system level are relevant. Many of the questions reflect important and significant areas that often have big influence on VET teacher's working conditions and more specifically access to reflect on one's own professional development.

Anyway the test persons thought that the forum or arena for these discussions would normally take place within the context of the reflective tool.

### **2.2.2 Institutional level**

Management and teachers often have different views on the purpose and relevance of evaluation.

Many teachers hold the view that satisfaction assessment often concern issues that aren't very relevant to their own teaching. The teachers underscore that quite trivial points like the lack of chairs, the quality of the canteen or other things often are areas that you follow up on after having conducted evaluations.

The management wants to use the evaluation as a strategic tool that can be applied directly as inputs to their decisions to be taken and at the same time evaluations is also, as highlighted above, imposed "from outside". The teachers are often focussing on the close and near teacher/student relationship and hence see evaluation a quite different perspective.

It was assessed difficult to assess to what extent the management of the VET institutions will make use of the reflective instrument. As already mentioned the majority of Danish VET schools do adhere to either a self developed system or external systems like ISO etc. Some QA performance indicators are mandatory by law. This makes it difficult to foresee to what extent and in what areas the reflective tool will utilised as an integrated part of the institution's different approaches to development of the teacher and trainee competences.

### **2.2.3 Team/Interpersonal level**

Team work is playing a more visible role in the profession of modern VET teachers/instructors. A VET teacher of today is part of many teams as a kind of productive working group, where the members are supposed to be active and mutually dependent and share the same common goals.

The reflective tool can be the place where you exchange views and expectations on how a team should cooperate.

### **2.2.4 Individual level**

As already highlighted the test persons highlighted a number of areas where the tool can be supportive for the individual development:

Some teachers/trainers fear to be evaluated by others. Evaluation often creates anxiety. Working on your own using a reflective approach may make it easier for those being afraid of evaluation to face this in the future.

The tool has a holistic approach to reflection by covering so many areas. The tool makes it possible to cover the whole range of a modern VET teacher's/trainer's working field.

The tool can support the teacher/trainer in his self-development e.g. by giving inspiration on how to maintain and develop one's competences.

## **2.3 Six Transversal Quality Areas**

The tool contains six different ways of approach to quality. Each of them is a reflection or a response to a different aspect of quality and quality demands to modern VET institutions.

### **2.3.1 Values & Roles**

Some factors in VET teachers' working conditions are visible within the European context. Society changes which causes a shift from the society service to the information society.

Constant learning becomes the central process and a main challenge for individuals and communities. In a learning society, knowledge is produced in diverse situations, which requires networked structures.

This requires new demands for VET teachers' competences. VET teacher shall adapt to constantly changing education approaches and heterogeneous target groups.

The tool can serve a "rest place" where one can contemplate on the various values and roles linked to performance of a modern VET teacher.

### **2.3.2 Teaching & Learning**

The concept of learning has radically been changing during the last 20 years. The traditional ways of learning being implemented as lectures has been replaced by new approaches like:

- Learning to learn
- Experiential learning
- Project work
- Dialogue based learning

The area of teaching and learning in the self reflection tool can contribute to make the user contemplate on how he/she is addressing different target groups.

### **2.3.3 Self evaluation & Quality Development**

The concept of quality is both manifold and dynamic. The assessment of what to label as "good quality" is both linked to the general political objectives, which obviously are constantly changing and more specifically to the nature and aims of the individual education programme. This is in addition subject to changes in the course of time and in response to changes in demands from society. Finally the perception of good quality is depending on available resources.

The focus on quality has been high on the Danish political agenda during the last 10 years seen both from a centralised and decentralised perspective. It is in this respect characteristic for the Danish system that the quality concept hasn't been classified by general definitions but rather encircled by indicators and approaches to maintain and develop quality.

Key factors in the Danish perception of quality in the educational system:

The quality of the general and pedagogical management

Quality assurance mechanisms taking in the teachers and students

The pedagogical and didactical approach and the collaboration between teacher and student

**Inputs- resources – competences – standard of premises – facilities**

Professional and social environment in the institution is the fundament and source and prerequisite for quality maintenance and development.

The reflective tool with the different quality areas with 4 dimensions in each area will serve the purpose of providing different perceptions and point of departures work with quality.

### **2.3.4 Work conditions**

Working conditions for VET teachers are often overlooked because of all the attention created by assessment, evaluation, learning styles etc. The issues are approached from different perspectives in the tool.

### **2.3.5 Assessment & Recognition**

No comments to this topic.

### **2.3.6 Networking & Collaboration**

There is for the moment much focus on networking although. The new thing is that the approach to the concepts has been subject to research, systematically inclusion of work planning of both organisations and private persons and not the least has lead to a number of books and publications on this subject.

At the bottom of the whole thing one have the outspoken assumption that the existence of an effective and well functioning network can improve your relations to colleagues, friends, customers/students or other resource persons.

In most situations in modern life, it is necessary to co-operate with other people in order to produce results – communications skills, collaborative abilities, values and emotions that support co-operation are all valuable luggage to bring with into the knowledge society. It is for the school to ensure that such elements are covered in education – together with all the necessary subjects.

A modern VET school is experiencing the movement from teaching to learning. This makes networking and networking competences more and more important. For that purpose this section/component of the tool could be seen as an important remedy for both teachers/instructors to improve the quality of networking and collaboration.

## **2.4 Reflection Methods**

### **2.4.1 View of teachers and trainers**

The teachers tend to see the tool as an instrument for a long-termed and study-oriented work and not so much as an instrument to support and develop the reflections of the practical daily work.

The interviewed persons comment that they did not find any questions without relevance for reflection, but that this is depending of which situation the tool is used in. Some questions are found to be very little concrete and broad in their form and if they should be used in a practical evaluation in a group of teachers, it would be very much time-consuming to define the meaning of the questions.

The general point of view is that the use of the tool is so time-consuming – because of the way questions are set up – that teachers would tend not to use it – even if there is a lot of exiting materials and new options in the tool.

### **2.4.2 View of institutions**

The views of the institutions were neither positive nor negative. As already highlighted the evaluation culture in Denmark is very much influenced by the mandatory regulations and requirements. These are primarily quantitative and leaving no room for reflection exercises.

Besides the mandatory regulations institutions stick to their QA system often carried out as bench marking with other similar institutions. This is also an activity with very little reflection and self evaluation.

Hence you can say that the matter of self evaluation is often to a high extent the responsibility of the individual teacher/instructor rather than the institutions.

### **2.4.3 View of stakeholders**

No observations of relevance were made.

## **2.5 Reflection applications (pictures, video, audio)**

When the testing of the tool was taking place, only text questions were displayed. This makes it difficult to present an absolute valid and authoritative feed back on these questions.

### **2.5.1 Using pictures**

The teachers who were presented to the tool expressed the need for pictures to make the tool more appealing and thus draw more attention to the tool.

At the same time it should be mentioned that it is a balance between keeping a serious approach to the tool and attempts to “jazz up “the content in order to create more interest.

VET teacher most of all would like to make use of a tool that first and foremost can serve the purpose of providing a factual and professional purpose. If this can be combined with pictures, this will be seen as an extra quality of the tool.

### **2.5.2 Using audio**

The use of Radio wasn't seen as a very important issue.

### **2.5.3 Using video**

The teachers who were presented to the tool expressed the need for video to make the tool more appealing and thus draw more attention to the tool.

At the same time it should be mentioned that it is a balance between keeping a serious approach to the tool and attempts to “jazz up “the content in order to create more interest. Thus the use of video was only seen necessary when the use of video clips can promote and expose the meaning and purpose of the problem being addressed.

VET teacher most of all would like to make use of a tool that first and foremost can serve the purpose of providing a factual and professional purpose. If this can be combined with video, this will be seen as an extra quality of the tool.

## **3 Conclusions**

### **3.1 Recommended improvements for the tool**

The testing by the vocational teachers/leaders has shown that there obviously exists a gap between the formulation of the questions and the user's expectations towards a tool like this.

#### **3.1.1 Improving the layout**

The interviewed found that the graphic interface is nice and easy to overview, but they miss some explanations of the content of the circle or the "cake" introducing the tool.

Moreover they would like to have some more permanent text to explain how to move around in the materials and especially they found that the menus of the web-site are too poor. A more developed menu-function, giving an overview of the content in each theme, would enhance the quality of the tool.

#### **3.1.2 Improving the structure**

The teachers tend to see the tool as an instrument for a long-termed and study-oriented work and not so much as an instrument to support and develop the reflections of the practical daily work.

#### **3.1.3 Improving the content**

The outcome of this testing in Denmark calls for a revised way of putting questions – more in line with daily work experiences. Moreover the testing has identified a need for a more help to manoeuvre in the tool

The general point of the interviewed here is that the tool would be very "heavy" to use in the daily work, but the other way round could it have a positive role to play in a long-term, strategic development of teachers and vocational schools. If the tool should be used in the daily work as well, it is absolute necessary that the academic and abstract touch of the tool is replaced by a more linguistic clear and daily-life-oriented way.

### **3.1.4 Improving the methods for reflection**

According to the different views and perceptions concerning the tool no obvious methods for improving the reflections have been identified.

### **3.1.5 Improving the usability**

The following issues were raised by the users of the tool:

- Teachers in the primarily and secondary education could use the tool for quality development in their school and daily work
- Teachers and trainers in VET for young people could use the tool for evaluation and reflection activities to develop teaching and to establish and develop teams
- Teachers could use the tool for long-term education in teams
- Managements of schools could use the tool to initiate and frame further education of pedagogical staff

### **3.1.6 Improving the communication**

According to the different views and perceptions concerning the tool no obvious methods for improving the communication have been identified.

## **3.2 Help teachers and trainers reflect**

How can the tool help trainers and teacher to reflect? The issues and ideas presented here are the outcome of the discussions caused by and originated from the first testing of the tool.

**Evaluation is not only a question of satisfaction and criticism?**

The respondents perceived the instrument as conducive to cover other areas as the traditional user satisfaction test. The respondents also highlighted the various and extensive range of areas that can be included in a self evaluation exercise. This aspect was although as seen in a negative perspective.

**Evaluation must be meaningful and make sense?**

It was a general feed back that range of questions and dimension are advantageous both in the sense of creating a meaningful culture and in a sensible way. The abundance of subjects, perspectives and point of views can at the same time jeopardise the clarity of the instrument.

**Evaluation calls for attention and co-operation in the organisation/institution?**

The general perception was that the instrument first and foremost will be used on an individual basis and not as much as in a teamwork. Acknowledging the fact that time is limited and the tasks many for trainer team, co-operation in using the tool was seen as both problematic and time consuming. The same or even more prominent will be the case for co-operation in relation to other similar or congenial institutions. In general the tool was primarily seen as self developing instrument. The test persons liked the way that you can communicate with others both inside and outside the institution but had serious doubts to which extend this could take place.

**Evaluation is about being capable of evaluate and be evaluated**

The participants stressed first and foremost that the instrument can increase your ability to evaluate and most of all bring new dimensions in the evaluation culture.

**Evaluation establishes the fundament for maintenance and development of the quality in the institutions services?**

This aspect was by the respondent seen as very important and in this respect the tool can, if used appropriate and effective, generate and provide a lot of useful information and feed back that can be included in the institutions' QA policy and framework.

**Evaluation takes time and is useful?**

With all due respect to the potentials and abilities of the tools it was the general opinion that the tool can be time consuming in a way which will limit the using of it and hence decrease the potentials of it.

**Evaluation is something that you have to learn and develop?**

The test persons didn't have any problems in respect to the technical aspect. Most of them highlighted that there are too many "clicks". They had no problems in navigating and they also called for improvements in the graphic features of this instrument.

**Evaluation reflects a set of values and interacts with the pedagogical foundation and objectives of the school?**

You can have one's doubts to what extent the tool can and will be seen as the place where innovative ideas and initiatives can influence on the whole school management. This will first and foremost depend on how much impact this tool can generate.

## 4 Attachment

### 4.1 List of Tested Institutions

#### Institutions involved in testing:

Name of partner organisation	Period	Interviewed	Function/Profession
Social- og sundhedsskolen Diakonisse-stiftelsen, København	August 06	Ole Richter Anne-Grete Mølgaard	Head of educ. Dep. Vice principal
Skolen for Klinikassistenter, Tandplejere og Kliniske Tandteknikere, Århus	September 06	Bodil Birn Rie Bergquist	Head of School Quality Coordinator
SoSu, Greve	Oktober 06	Anders Sevelsted Eva Sørensen	Head of School Vice principal
SUHRs Seminarium, København	November 06	Lea Bergstedt Ole Pedersen Michael Wrangel	Quality manager Vocational teacher Vocational teacher
EUC Midt Viborg	August 07	Kim Dioni Munksgaard Niels Bruhn	Vocational teacher Vocational teacher