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Evaluation of adult education staff - evaluator's profile

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Introduction

The findings described in this text are the outcome of „in presence” training tutorships in a form of workshops organized by the Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University in Warsaw – the Polish partner in the international project named Evaluation for the Professional Development of Adult Education Staff (EduEval)¹. The workshops were run by the authors of this paper. The activities were scheduled for two whole-day sessions on Monday, June 15th and on Monday, June 22nd, 2015.

During the first workshop the participants followed the contents of Power Point materials presented by trainers. They went through the contents of e-learning units titled: External Evaluation, Audit and Self-assessment.

During the second workshop the participants watched and analyzed the video-lessons on the e-learning platform, to which they all had access through individual log in. The trainers went through the contents of e-learning units titled: Portfolio, Context Evaluation, Rubric and Site Visits. At the end of the course the delivery of the final questionnaire of the training contents and the evaluation questionnaire took place. Meanwhile, a reflective writing sheet was delivered at the beginning of the “in presence” session, with the idea of giving participants the opportunity to get familiar with the questions, and spending some time for this activity at the end of the meeting.

¹ The first part of research conducted for the EduEval project was presented in the paper titled Evaluation for the Professional Development of Adult Education Staff and published in “Studia z Teorii Wychowania”, 2015, no. 1, pp. 53-72.

Course aims and purposes

The trainers complied with the training course general instructions by expressing the most important course objectives from the extensive list. A particular emphasis was put on the EduEval evaluation model embracing three categories of **self-assessment, external evaluation and context evaluation**. The second strongly emphasized area was the development of a profound awareness of **the adult education staff evaluator profile** for which the evaluator's required and expected professional knowledge, skills and competencies have a crucial meaning. There were also stressed the following issues: the role of the adult education staff evaluator in the development of a given entity and its future, as well as understanding how data collection instruments can be successfully used. Finally, the emphasis was put on the complexity of the evaluator's work and activities, having in mind a broad spectrum of adult education contexts in present circumstances.

Description of the activities and the dynamics among participants

The activities carried out during workshop sessions were organized in a logical order so that they match with the session contents, but, at the same time, a considerable space of freedom was given to the participants. We were open to **discussions** on topics connected with their personal experiences and working contexts. We used **brainstorming**, because it combines a relaxed and a considerably informal approach to problem solving. It encourages people to come up with ideas enabling creative solutions. The individuals involved in brainstorming feel comfortable, spontaneous and unconstrained, when they avoid criticizing or rewarding opinions. **Writing activities** were not adopted to much extent, except for reflective writings completed at the end of the final meeting.

The group was recruited through the procedure of open call and selection. The age of participants ranging from 25 to 65 years was obeyed, as well as their role being consistent with the project target (evaluators of adult education staff, project evaluators, researchers involved in the evaluation of adult education). In spite of the fact that the trainees are employed by the Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University on the permanent basis or on the basis of collaborative agreements, they represent different professional backgrounds and experiences. Their age is relatively homogenous with the predominance of young individuals. As regards gender, female participants prevailed.

Description of the main contents

Preliminary remarks

As a starting point, the participants had a lively discussion about some contextual factors that affect the choice of evaluation design, implementation and use. They exchanged ideas about **the purpose of evaluation** in terms of different dimensions. Firstly, the purpose of learning and improvement of planned intervention during process, in order to improve the process itself – **the formative dimension** – was raised. Secondly, the purpose of accountability and judgement of the overall merit, worth, value and significance of completed programme – **the summative dimension** – was stressed. Summative evaluation can provide information and feedback for most important decisions about future actions. In addition to that, there were listed the following significant purpose dimensions: compliance with adopted program plan; impact of existing or potential achievement of the outcomes which may have strong effects on improved quality of educational services; adapting the evaluation intervention to a new context; adapting the existing activities to a major change; to help taking decisions about the allocation of resources for best alternatives; to help identify emerging problems and achieve consensus on its reasons and how to respond to them; to promote innovation. It was stated that different purposes of evaluation require the selection of different methodologies of restrictive rigours.

As it has already been stressed, the most significant attention was paid to the issues of **external evaluation, self-assessment and context evaluation**.

Another issue which draw particular attention of the audience was related with **the adult education staff evaluator’s profile** that is shaped by the acquisition of knowledge (basic, specialized and context-based), abilities (general and referred to specific evaluation work processes), and competencies (achieved in order to strengthen the professional role of adult education staff evaluators. The above-mentioned areas will be addressed in details in a separate section of this text.

External evaluation

As regards external evaluation, self-assessment and context evaluation, we enriched the contents from the e-learning platform by quoting **definitions** after Analytic Quality Glossary and other accompanied sources. For the term “external evaluation” we made comments on the core definition of: “1. a generic term for most form of quality review, enquiry or exploration; 2. a process that uses people external to the programme or institution to evaluate quality

or standards” (Analytic Quality Glossary, Internet). We found in the explanatory context that “meaning 1 of external evaluation is virtually the same as the generic term external quality monitoring. The only difference is that external evaluation may imply some form of explicit summative judgement where evaluation quality monitoring is more all-encompassing and includes any form of external review” (Analytic Quality Glossary, Internet).

In addition to that, the UNESCO definition implies a judgemental process. It explains that external evaluation is “the process whereby a specialized agency collects data, information and evidence about an institution, a particular unit of a given institution, or a core activity of an institution, in order to make a statement about its quality. External evaluation is carried out by a team of external experts, peers, or inspectors, and usually requires three distinct operations: i. analysis of the self-study report; ii. a site visit; iii. the drafting of an evaluation report” (Vlăsceanu, 2004, pp. 37-38).

External evaluation is routinely performed by someone who is or was not directly involved in the operation of the system being evaluated. On the one hand, an external evaluator has a number of advantages, providing – as it is expected – objectivity, lack of vested interest and the ability to observe matters from a fresh perspective. On the other hand, an external evaluator has a number of disadvantages – most of which concern relative value systems and the absence of involvement in project-related decisions. The staff may also feel threatened by the evaluator whose alien values may affect negative approaches being adopted.

Self-assessment

For the term “self-assessment” we made comments on **the core definition** of a process of critically reviewing the quality of one’s own performance and provision. We found in **the explanatory context** that “self-assessment may be undertaken on an individual basis or in the context of external quality review, on a collective basis. Self-assessment is used interchangeably with self-evaluation and self-study in the context of higher education quality. They all involve a process of self-reflection by the institution or sub-institutional unit being reviewed and the preparation of a document reflecting that self-reflection. Some commentators confusingly equate self-evaluation with internal evaluation” (Analytic Quality Glossary, Internet).

Internal evaluation is described as an activity performed by someone from the actual project team. On the one hand, this kind of evaluation has the advantage of understanding fully the thinking behind the development, together with the appreciation of any problems that may occur. Trust and

cooperation of the other staff members are highly desirable. On the other hand, internal evaluation may find it difficult or hardly possible to make any criticisms of the work that is carried out. It is due to the fact of being closely involved in the performance of the organization, which is not encouraging to suggest any innovative solutions.

However, for the purpose of the training course we adopted the explanation of self-assessment as an evaluation methodology aiming at the definition of strong points and elements to be enhanced within an organization by self-assessing the work of all actors who work in a given context. This kind of evaluation is also named “internal evaluation” due to the fact that it is carried out before an external evaluation.

Context evaluation

The concept of the context evaluation, understood from the perspective of its ever so complex nature, embracing **the processes, the environment, the activities and intangible factors of feelings and cultures**, was extremely well received by the audience. We strongly stressed the idea that those complicated and not at all homogeneous educational contexts and different features of institutional entities remain in a state of mutual interactions. We also put particular attention to the approach which considers three evaluation forms of external evaluation, self-assessment and context evaluation as coming into a mutual or reciprocal relationship. At the same time they cannot be conceived in a hierarchical order or separately, but they intertwine.

The emphasis was put on the issues concerning **local and national contexts** within which the evaluation will be implemented, such as: economic and political context, policy, legal and administrative context, the character of the organizations and agencies being involved; the aspects of natural environment; characteristic features and culture of the target groups; political and historical background; socio-economic context; values; needs and interests of stakeholders. It was stated that the outcomes and impacts of those broadly conceived contexts will be frequently affected by the above-listed factors – the factors that may bias or constrain the evaluation itself. That is why contextual analysis should be treated as a part of the evaluation design.

Actual products arising from the training course

The thirteenth product that was sketched upon our activity was the EDUEVAL triangular evaluation model, which our participants found as very attractive for the sake of project proposal writing activity. In Polish

circumstances the presence of such programmes as European Social Fund and Erasmus Plus is crucial for the development and change in the educational context. Therefore, participants found our model exactly fitting the needs of a proposal writing, where sometimes up to 30% of the evaluation is done on the basis of well-prepared and documented evaluation. Therefore, they consider the EDUEVAL model as a complete product for their project management activity.

Another important product that emerged from our training activity was the necessity of **creation and registration of a job profile of Adult Education Staff Evaluator**. In Poland, such profession does not exist so far, and our participants shared with us their problems concerning employment and recognition of their skills. Our training ignited the need for describing skills, competences and knowledge of Adult Staff Evaluator with regard to the professional job framework existing in our country. Implementing the job profile would support our participants with tackling their problems concerning recognition and professional development within this sphere.

Our training received positive response from the participants and many of them requested to incorporate it into our bachelor's and master's teacher degree programmes. As the evaluation is not well enough presented in the existing programme, such a programme on the EDUEVAL model could be a mile step towards the development of skills and competences of educators of the 21st century. **Therefore, the next product is potential integration of the course within the existing programmes at our university.**

The last but not the least product that was reflected upon by our participants concerns social services. As a part of our group consisted of social educators dealing mainly with social problems and groups of social exclusions (drug addicts, disabled, immigrants, etc.), **they found it very important to implement the EDUEVAL model as a part of supervision activities within social work and social service systems.** Such implementation would foster the development of formative role in supervision (educational role) providing possibility of the evaluation of educational content.

Description from shared reflective writings

The nature of reflective writings was often strongly influenced by specific, individual professional experiences of the participants. The usefulness of the entire training course was generally highly appreciated. In the light of the trainees' practical work routine combined with the information gained during the course, the profile of adult education staff evaluators should embrace: education and knowledge in the field of evaluation methods, current

legislation framework, evaluation tools (rubric, participant observations, among others), leadership forms, group management and the awareness of quality standards. A package of skills should consist of: expert communication, proactive ability and attitude, critical reflection, problem solving, implementing of good practices, case studies whose main goal is to reflect and describe particular arguments, acting in accordance with the principles of conduct that are considered ethically correct.

The trainees admitted that from the perspective of their individual work duties and commitments (i.e. being head of projects department), the course broadened their knowledge related with the types of evaluation, methods and tools. The mostly recognized value was the acknowledgement of the notion and contents of contextual evaluation that, being present in Western European countries, has not been used in Poland, so far. The course participants were not familiar with this innovative approach.

The pragmatic advantage of the acquired knowledge and information was also stressed in the sense of using them in everyday work activities, i.e. when preparing project documentation. A useful area for the implementation of the EduEval evaluation model is Erasmus +, launched in 2014 and replacing namely the Long Life Learning Programme (LLP). As it is aimed to increase knowledge, professional aptitudes, and to support the modernization of teaching and training systems, it should give strong importance to successful evaluation.

Participants also shared their experience in the domain of adult education and training, as they found it very complex to work in such a field in Poland. They wrote us about their feelings and problems which they face in seeking for the employment. Most of the employers do not know what competences should be met by adult education staff evaluators. Therefore, selection is usually chaotic as there are no regulations and principles in this field. Generally speaking, the evaluation of adult education field in Poland is a non formal activity and for the sake of formalization there is a need to create a job profile of adult education staff evaluator.

Our group also mentioned how surprising and new for them was the context evaluation which is not embedded in Polish cultural/historical context. In Poland, the most popular tools relate to the external and internal evaluation in the EDUEVAL model and they are mostly based on SMART indicators. Therefore, they do not take into account the position and views of the minority groups, especially those which are socially excluded. Some trainers wrote about their experience in teaching immigrants and they disliked the current evaluation system which does not take into account hardships

and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, most of our participants raised their interest in using the tool of contextual evaluation in their social educators and adult educators activities.

Evaluators mentioned also the specific situation in Poland with recently mushroomed various institutions in the adult education system including many so-called third-age universities. Although, they have many students, currently there is no educational supervision of their services and outputs. Our participants suggested that this course fits this niche and provides an opportunity to safeguard for the society the quality of educational services and education staff.

Description of the acquired experience, quality and usefulness of the training course

Participants highly valued the certificate of the training course which will enrich their professional portfolio and give them an advantage on the competitive labor market. They mentioned that this is the only course in the country that meets the demands of various non formal evaluators seeking for the employment in the adult education sector.

Evaluators viewed the course as useful, but its content was sometimes considered “too theoretical” – too many graphs, charts, definitions, etc. and much less “hands-on” information about the evaluation. Especially, they lacked the case-studies of adult education evaluation practices which could introduce them to real challenges of conducting different types of evaluation in the institutional perspective. Participants suggested that each type of evaluation in the triangle EDUEVAL model (internal/external/contextual) should be accompanied by one case study of best practice, thus visualizing the idea of the concept.

Especially when it comes to contextual evaluation, it was chosen as the most important lesson for our participants, as they had barely no idea of such a tool, and they agreed that it should be implemented in adult education evaluation in Poland. However, some of them raised the objections that current “project culture” in Poland within European Social Fund gives priority to SMART indicators in the evaluation (such as internal and external evaluation), meanwhile more complex approaches such as contextual evaluation can be underestimated.

The largest value of the project was its complete innovativeness. Many of our trainees said that they personally looked for the employment as adult educators, but no professional profile of adult education staff evaluator was registered in Poland. Therefore, this project answers a real need of the

growing market of long-life learning, which is to develop significantly in Poland, as the demand of supplementing skills in the lifespan rises and the country is required for the changes following the Flexicurity Model (one of its main 4 components is Long-Life Learning).

Profile of adult education staff evaluators by selected markers

In general, the participants agreed with the components of three packages under the categories named: knowledge, skills and competences coming from the training course general instructions and outlined as outgoing profile: adult education staff evaluator.

Education and knowledge

Adult education staff evaluators should show a **combination of education, training and experience** equivalent to a Bachelor's and/or Master's degree from an accredited college or university, and successful experience in designing and implementing educational evaluation, research, and/or assessment projects. Graduate degree from an accredited college or university with coursework in evaluation, research, measurement, assessment, and/or statistical analysis would also be desirable.

Knowledge can be described as theoretical and/or factual. Within a field of work knowledge should be comprehensive and specialized, and accompanied with the awareness of its boundaries. Advanced knowledge of a field of work needs to involve a critical understanding of theories and principles.

Evaluation knowledge, in particular, should give emphasis to the role played by the evaluation in diverse and not homogeneous contexts. This knowledge requires getting familiar with the evaluation theory and its complex approaches. It also calls for the awareness of the evaluation historical background and development trends. Evaluation knowledge asks for understanding the relationships with social sciences. It needs, as well, to show the relations with governance, policy and management environments in public and/or private sectors.

As regards **evaluation methods**, it is necessary to fulfil the following conditions: to adopt appropriate concepts and terms; to know how to design, structure and plan an evaluation; to understand the importance of different evaluation approaches; to adapt evaluation methods to specific contexts.

As regards **evaluation tools**, knowledge should embrace: data collection and analysis, indicators and scores, case studies, surveys, interviews, monitoring systems.

It is worth stressing **the impact of observation** as a frequently used method for judging job effectiveness and performance. Observation gives the evaluator the opportunity to observe the staff members in action and in their normal, and routine working environment. The employee should perform tasks and duties while disregarding the potential impact of the observation. Meanwhile the observer acts in a professional and non-threatening manner.

Skills

This category is usually described as a **cognitive** one, because it involves the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking, as well as a **practical** one, because it involves the use of methods and tools. A comprehensive set of cognitive and practical skills is required in order to be able to develop creative solutions to abstract problems. When we talk about solving complex problems and reacting to unpredictable situations in a specialized field of work, we have in mind advanced skills showing mastery and innovation.

Highly professional evaluators should be equipped with a range of **higher order thinking skills**, known as, simply, **higher cognitive skills** that are necessary for some types of mental procedures in which more cognitive processing is required. These are, first of all, skills involving analysis, evaluation and synthesis. They lead to the creation of new knowledge and they are considered as of a higher order in contrast with those used for learning facts and concepts. Higher order thinking requires complex judgemental skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving. The beneficial use of higher cognitive skills is mostly demonstrated in unprecedented situations or novel circumstances with which the evaluators are expected to be able to cope and find an appropriate and successful solution.

An efficient evaluator should collaborate effectively with various partners both in and outside of a given institution in planning, implementing, reporting, and using results of evaluation; identify and develop appropriate quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures and instruments for evaluation and research studies; analyze, summarize and report evaluation. In addition to that evaluators need to be able to communicate effectively in both oral and written form, as well as to develop and maintain positive working relationships with all persons contacted in the course of work.

Competences (specialized and multidisciplinary)

The skills and knowledge in any discipline evolve over time and they are influenced by changing environmental circumstances. Neither competences are static.

The context of competences can be described in terms of **responsibility and autonomy**. This approach takes into consideration the following components: the ability to exercise management in contexts of work or study activities where unpredictable changes occur; to review and enhance performance of the staff members; to select and manage complex evaluation techniques; to take responsibility for decision-making in novel situations; to understand their non- typical and non-uniform contexts, and, finally, to take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups of people.

Attention will be drawn in this section to some **reflective practice competencies** and **interpersonal practice competencies**. The first ones focus on the essential norms and values underlying evaluation practice and recognition of one's evaluation expertise and demands for growth. The second ones emphasize people skills, such as communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, collaboration and diversity.

A set of reflective competencies applies professional standards, acts ethically and honestly, respects all stakeholders, considers general public welfare, provides independent and impartial approaches, reflects on self as an evaluator in terms of knowledge, skills and dispositions, but also in terms of personal evaluation practice and the areas for competence increase.

A set of interpersonal competencies gives particular importance to written communication skills and technologies, and to a broad spectrum of: listening skills, negotiation skills, conflict resolution skills, facilitation skills addressed to individuals and group/teams, collaboration/partnership skills. In addition to that interpersonal competencies attend to controversial issues of diversity and culture, and present professional credibility.

Interventions domains

The EDUEVAL model will be an especially important intervention in the context of the absence of a job profile of Adult Education Evaluator in Poland. Intervention is necessary, as the spectrum of the services increases and different actors including non-formal education context and social education context are entering into the sphere.

In Poland, education of the excluded groups (social educators) of adults is not supervised and evaluated by any professional body, and there is no system for such evaluation. The EDUEVAL crucial intervention puts the question of the importance of creation of a job profile of Evaluator of Adult Education and its successful registration with appropriate bodies.

The existence and implementation of effective evaluation tools (such as EDUEVAL) and the evaluator's profile is crucial for the quality of services and professionalization of adult education in our country. The EDUEVAL model has done a lot of work towards reaching the aim of professionalization of this new job in education and social education, in particular.

Professional ethics

In the context of professional ethics, the main discussion between participants concerned the question who should be the evaluator of the adult education staff? Some of the evaluators raised the question, if the evaluator should come from the same institution as trainer or maybe he/she should be a person from a different educational organization or maybe independent body, such as Non-Governmental Organizations, NGOs.

In the context of the evaluation, objectivity and anti-discrimination approaches should be included, allowing excluded groups to bring its perspective into evaluation. Therefore, the course attendants and trainers agreed that Context Evaluation is a very good method to be implemented in Poland for the sake of more ethical treatment of the disadvantaged groups that are usually evaluated from the view of majority groups.

Conclusions

The evaluator of adult education staff has very demanding responsibilities aimed to tackle with performing tasks and accomplishing work duties. The broad outline of his/her expected education, knowledge, skills and competences focuses on **a profound evaluation knowledge, expert professional practice and desirable dispositions or attitudes**. The last ones uphold ethical and democratic values, ask for respecting public interest, encourage the independence of mind and appearance, and, finally, request continuous professional development. Evaluation competences remain, to some extent, conceptually related with social research competencies. Evaluation, being an autonomous discipline, provides analytical tools to other disciplines, but it also benefits from the methods and concepts of a variety of social science fields.

On the one hand, the evaluator's work requires knowledge and skills that are sharpened through **experience**. A basic comprehension of evaluation methods and a well-grounded understanding of the potential and limits of evaluation tools are related to the essential nature of evaluation excellence.

On the other hand, the evaluator who gained all the required knowledge may often fail to perform as an efficient and successful professional. High quality and/or master evaluation demands **interpersonal skills** strengthened

through experience. Evaluation is a difficult mission reserved to a distinctive mind-set that identifies independence of mind as a state that permits the provision of ideas without being affected by influences. It is not an easy challenge to act with integrity and exercise objectivity by enhancing in evaluators a set of special dispositions that make for evaluation excellence.

Evaluative activities invite to development. The developmental perspective means dynamic, future-oriented and interactive thinking. However, this specific invitation can be accepted or refused.

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The paper presents the outcomes of the studies on evaluation of adult education staff as a result of training courses for the purpose of the international research project EduEval launched by the European Commission. A brief description of the course aims and activities is followed by its detailed contents, such as: external evaluation, self-assessment and context evaluation. Particular emphasis is put on the profile of adult education staff evaluators by selected markers, among which education and knowledge, skills and

competences are of predominant importance. An innovative nature of the EduEval model in terms of quality and usefulness in Polish circumstances regarding the evaluation of adult education staff is strongly stressed, as well.