The use of self-evaluation in teacher training

by *Kari Smith*

Background

Recent trends in education favour the humanistic approach which puts a strong emphasis on the learner as the central core of the teaching-learning process. According to this view the learner (in our case – the trainee) is taken into consideration when the planning of the course takes place; the trainee's needs and interests and personal learning strategies are important during the course, and the trainee together with the trainer evaluates the course formatively and summatively. The trainee has become a responsible partner in the learning-process; not only by having to do what other people tell him/her to do, but also by stating his/her opinion when decisions have to be taken. The trainee ought to take over part of the responsibility for what and how he/she is learning. Knowles claims that

> "Active learners taking initiative learn more things and learn better than do people who sit at the feet of their teachers." (1975:14)

This responsibility is, however, not always used or taken seriously when it comes to the evaluation of the trainee him/herself. In most learning-situations the teachers and/or external evaluators have the final word regarding the assessment of the learner and his/her work during the course. The lack of responsibility in the evaluation-process stands in contradiction to the belief that the trainee is an equal partner in the learning-process, and the purpose of this article is to argue that the trainee is capable of taking on the responsibility of the assessment of his/her own learning and achievements, provided that he/she has been directed in how to do so. If he/she is not the only evaluator, the trainee should at least be at the same responsibility level as the trainer and any eventual external evaluator.

Various uses of self-evaluation

Self-evaluation has been found useful in various fields and for various reasons; for example, in situations where trainees are going to be future trainers and often also evaluators. It is based on the belief that in order to become able evaluators of other people, one must first be capable of evaluating oneself. This technique is often used by organizations like the army in training courses for future trainers of various jobs within the army; e.g. the training of future instructors of pilots. The trainees are provided with a detailed list of criteria decided on by the trainers as the minimum criteria for passing the course. The trainees have to relate to this list during and after an assignment. The detailed list helps the trainee to focus attention on the important parts of the task, and to disregard unnecessary details. Evaluation is simplified when the goals of the assignment are clearly started. When the trainee finishes evaluating her/himself, the form is left for the trainer who can accept or change the self-evaluation grade. No official data has been collected on the correlation of the grades given by the trainees/trainers, but the overall impression is that there is a high correlation, and grades are not often changed by the trainers. A tendency is found among the weakest trainees to over-evaluate themselves, and the reason is believed to be fear of being removed from the training course. This type of evaluation is used as formative evaluation taking place several times during the army course (personal communication).

However, not every teaching/learning situation lends itself to an approach of listing and grading criteria and goals. It is difficult to assess attitudes, an important part of teaching and other human relations professions. An attempt to solve this problem is found in the way self-evaluation is used in administration as an integral part of training and development programmes for people whose occupation is in management, sales and negotiations. Self-evaluation is used together with evaluation by others, and each source of evaluation provides important insights into the evaluation task. It is recommended that neither of the two types should be used by itself if the picture to be received should be a true one (Cooke, Rousseau and Laffert, 1987).

Self-evaluation in teacher training:

A similar type of self-evaluation is used in teacher-training courses. McQualter (1985) argues in favour of the use of self-assessment in collaboration with tutors to explore and understand the personal view each student teacher has of teaching. The discussion sessions that ought to follow a self-assessment

questionnaire might reveal important information for the tutor and also for the student-teacher. Doff (1988) has included a self-evaluation questionnaire after each unit in his training course for future foreign language teachers. The purpose of the questionnaire is to encourage the teachers-to-be to reflect on their own teaching-practice after each training session. A similar questionnaire has also been used by the writer of this article in her own training courses of teachers. The future teachers are, at the end of each session, encouraged to discuss the session, their own input and the outcome of it. Towards the end of the year, before their final grade in the course is given, they are asked to fill out a detailed self-evaluation questionnaire which forces them to reflect on their own work throughout the year (see Appendix 1.) This questionnaire is then used as the basis for tutorials with the teacher-trainer, who has, in the meantime, filled out a similar questionnaire about the trainee. The trainee's course-grade is then decided on during the tutorial. The correlation between the trainee's and the trainer's assessment is usually surprisingly high. This might be explained by the fact that the future teachers have become familiar with self-evaluation throughout the course.

In-service training of teachers is an area whose importance is unquestionable, and self-evaluation is of greater value for self-understanding and instructional improvement (Carroll, 1981). The people who are always in the classroom to assess the teaching are the teachers themselves (and the pupils of course). Most teachers assess the lesson and their own teaching informally when they leave the classroom. In a more formal evaluation-situation with an inspector or supervisor present in the classroom, a guided self-report instrument will help to focus the evaluation of teaching, and it has a higher level of agreement with the supervisor's evaluation than global self-evaluation has. The accuracy of the teachers' self-evaluation increases when the process is repeated (Koziol and Burns 1986), and this speaks for a formative use of self-evaluation and the importance of teaching the learners how to evaluate themselves. Williams (1989) describes a questionnaire developed for this purpose (see Appendix 2), and which has successfully been used by the writer as an external reference point for pre and post observation tutorials.

Practical uses of self-evaluation in teacher-training
A book I have found very useful while training my students to evaluate their own teaching is Janine Pak's books: Find Out How You Teach. As it says in the foreword:

> "This handbook is designed to assist classroom teachers increase their awareness of what is happening in their classrooms. The advantage of the techniques is that they allow teachers to carry out their own analysis without having outside observers in the classroom." (p.ix)

This is in fact one of our ultimate aims as teacher-trainers; to enable our trainees to evaluate themselves when they leave the safe framework of a training-course with a tutor at hand to observe their lessons and to provide constructive feedback. When working independently the trainee-teachers are asked to record their lessons on audio cassette or on video cassettes, and then to analyse their own lesson with the help of whichever questionnaire in the Pak book is relevant to that lesson.

Whichever self-evaluation questionnaire is to be used, whether my own, Williams' or Pak's, my usual procedure is to have a short tutorial with the trainee before I come to observe her/his lesson. In this tutorial the trainees are asked to think of what they feel needs to be improved in their teaching; lesson-planning, the content of the lesson such as vocabulary, reading etc., techniques such as giving instructions or organizing classroom tasks, class organization such as pair/group work, use of resources such as the board, or classroom interaction such as student-student interaction. The trainees are then asked to write a detailed lesson-plan having this in mind, and a copy of the plan is given to me before I observe the lesson. The trainees are told that they are free to change the plan on the spot if the need is felt while teaching. They must, however, be ready to reason why they did so.

In the tutorial that follows the lesson that I observe, the trainees are presented with the self-evaluation questionnaire relevant to the specific lesson, and they fill it out by themselves while I am doing the same. Afterwards we discuss the answers, finding out where and why we differ in our responses.

The next stage is to ask the trainees to work with the self-evaluation questionnaire without me observing the lessons, but they should record their lessons and hand the recording and the filled in questionnaire to me before the tutorial.

The last stage is to ask the trainees to work with the lesson plans, the recording and the self-evaluation questionnaire independently of me. By this I hope to make the trainees aware of the importance of evaluating their own teaching, hoping they will do so when they are out in the "jungle" all by themselves.

The aim is to make the trainees realize that a good teacher is constantly striving to improve her/his teaching, and that objective self-assessment is the best tool they have for doing that. Therefore they must become familiar with the technique during their training so they will use it with confidence while working independently in the future.

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APPENDIX 1
Self-evaluation questionnaire Oranim

Name:

1.
I have been present in all the lessons   Yes/No

2.
I have contributed a lot during the sessions   10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
I have contributed little during the sessions   1

3. I have handed in all the assignments   10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
I have handed in no assignments   1

4.
I have handed in all the assignments on time   10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
I have handed in all the assignments late   1

5.
The level of my assignments is very high.   10
(papers)   9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
The level of my assignments is low   1
(papers)

6.
I have read at least 5 books from the   10
reading list   9
8
7
6
5
4
3
I have read nothing from the   2
reading list   1

7.
I have been of great help to my peers   10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
I have been of no help to my peers   1

8.
I have done very well in teaching at school   10
and during practice teaching at Oranim   9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
I have done poorly in my teaching practice   1

9.
All the lessons I taught were well prepared   10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
My lessons were poorly prepared   1

10.
I have progressed a lot during the year   10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
I have not progressed during the year   1

11.
I think I am going to be an excellent teacher   10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
I think I should not become a teacher   1

12.
Based on this, my grade in practice
teaching should be:

       10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Suggestions for improving the course for future
students

13.
Based on this, my grade in methodology
should be:

       10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Signature:

Appendix 2

Figure 2: Second classroom visit: self-evaluation form

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Before the lesson ask your self:

1. Is your activity at an appropriate intellectual level to stretch and challenge children of this age? Is it too easy/difficult? Is it interesting, motivating? Is there enough opportunity for the pupils to talk?

2. What meaningful language will it promote?

3. Where will there be opportunities for pupils to give their own ideas?

4. What is the place of the activity in your scheme of work? What preceded it? What will follow it?
    Show this on your lesson plan.

5. Show how it might involve/lead into reading, writing, grammar, etc.

6. What might the pupils learn? Write the aim of the activity and the language aims on your lesson plan.

7. What provision have you made for pupils who finish quickly/slowly?

During and after the lesson, ask yourself:

8. What evidence was there that the pupils were interested/not interested?

9. Who was not involved? Why?

10. Write down on paper some language that pupils used. Was it meaningful or meaningless?

11. What will you do next to follow up this lesson?

12. Which of your aims were achieved? Were other things achieved instead?

13. When did pupils give their own ideas?
    Did you accept their ideas? Did they have a fair share of time to talk or did you dominate the discussion?

What have you learnt? Write down how you would like to develop your teaching in the future.