**Promoting evaluation use in schools and kura - a complementary, capacity building and culturally responsive approach**

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**Introduction**

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss ERO’s evaluation approaches which are designed to promote the use of evaluation in schools/kura, their communities and the wider education sector. ERO’s aim is to contribute to building New Zealand’s capacity to improve learning outcomes for diverse students.

The presentation features one case study of a small, isolated school on the West Coast of the South Island, which demonstrates how ERO’s methodology made a positive impact on a school experiencing difficulty, and one case study of a Māori immersion early childhood centre which outlines the key features of an indigenous evaluation methodology and its implementation and impact on young Māori learners.

The key underpinning concepts of these evaluation approaches are the complementarity of external and internal evaluation; building evaluation capacity; and working in partnership with diverse communities, with a specific emphasis on being culturally responsive, particularly in Māori contexts.

These underpinning concepts are integrated into a cohesive evaluation framework that enhances the use and impact of evaluation within schools and across the wider education sector. The concept of complementarity foregrounds the value of the school/kura’s and stakeholder’s knowledge of their unique situation and context, and ensures that this is considered in the light of a broader external evaluation[[1]](#footnote-1). This process supports schools/kura to build their internal evaluation capacity assisting them to more effectively direct, drive and sustain their own improvement. Through partnership with diverse communities, specifically Māori, ERO’s evaluation approaches aim to respect and promote the educational outcomes valued by Māori and other diverse groups.

ERO’s evaluation approaches enable reviewers/evaluators to respond flexibly to the unique circumstances and contexts of schools/kura that are high performing and those that are experiencing difficulty. These approaches also enable ERO to provide evaluation information about critical government education priorities. ERO is thereby able to significantly influence and shape education policy and contribute to promoting success for Māori.

Over the last three years ERO has redesigned its evaluation methodology to increase its influence on schools, the education sector and government policy. ERO aims to use evaluation to positively influence the education sector’s capacity to address New Zealand’s major education challenges which include:

* improving the performance of schools that are experiencing difficulties
* addressing inequity of achievement within schools
* supporting the system’s capacity to promote educational success for Māori as Māori.

In response to these challenges, ERO now designs its evaluations for schools/kura on the basis of their overall performance, self review information and capacity, and the extent to which there is equity of educational opportunity and outcome within each school. In doing this, ERO targets its reviews and resources more responsively and is focussing more intensively on schools that are experiencing difficulties.

Where schools are in difficulty, ERO works alongside the school over a period of between one to two years. The review process with these schools includes a review and development planning process and ongoing self and external review. This helps the school to identify relevant priorities for improvement, plan and act strategically and use its self review to sustain, monitor and report progress.

# Case Study: West Coast School – a review of a school experiencing difficulty

#  Backgound

Arotake Paetawhiti (ERO’s Māori name for reviews of schools experiencing difficulty) were developed in response to ERO’s evaluations historically having a low success rate (50%), or influence, on improving and helping schools that were experiencing significant problems. ERO’s new approach is more responsive to the school’s needs and builds on the school’s own capacity for self review over time.

The review has 3 phases (1) co-constructing a review and development plan (2) action and self reviewing phase (3) concluding and public ERO report.

The principles of Arotake Paetawhiti include:

* building trusting relationships with all stakeholders over a 1-2 year period
* giving ongoing and timely feedback – developmental and responsive
* being open and transparent throughout the process – high levels of communication
* building capacity within the school and community
* linking internal evaluation with external evaluation
* identifying support to be provided by other agencies.

### Context - March 2010

* Primary/elementary school - roll 148, low decile in a small, isolated township
* 10 year history of underperformance
* April 2010 board disestablished and commissioner appointed (board unable to manage issues)
* Principal on sick leave
* Falling roll
* Three beginning teachers not receiving good advice and guidance
* A large investment in buildings with little benefit to students.

**Key issues identified in May 2010 ERO review**

* Lack of professional leadership at many levels
* Low quality of learning and teaching
* Poor community perception
* Low expectations for performance of teachers and students
* Low levels of achievement particularly at senior school and with Māori students
* Curriculum concerns
* Lack of self review.

**ERO’s process**

ERO was asked by the appointed commissioner to use the school as a Paetawhiti pilot school. ERO worked alongside the school from April 2010 over 12 months using the new Paetawhiti methodology, rather than the traditional review methodology that consisted of only one onsite review within 12 months.

ERO also worked with all the staff building evaluation capacity and linking the school in with other agency support. As part of this process ERO had a one-day workshop with all the school staff to begin writing a review and development plan to identify and work on their key priorities. The plan consisted of 5 main goals around student achievement, curriculum development, school culture, leadership and governance practices. This was the school’s plan - not ERO’s plan.

**Progress the school made through the Paetawhiti review process**

The following changes/improvements occurred during the 12 months:

* The commissioner has begun the process of re-establishing a school board of trustees to take over responsibility for governing the school
* Changes in personnel, along with the work of the commissioner, have been central to bringing about overall school improvements
* Overall patterns of student achievement are improving
* The principal and teachers have collaboratively developed school curriculum guidelines
* Teachers make good use of these guidelines to provide students with a wide variety of learning opportunities
* Review processes have enabled ongoing reflection.

**Quality of Teaching**

* Notable improvements in the overall quality of teaching and the engagement of students in learning and other aspects of school life
* Reviewers observed students consistently involved and engaged in learning activities in all classes
* The new principal has established a bilingual unit to meet the needs of its Māori students.

**School culture and community relationships**

* Clear evidence exists that there have been significant improvements in the school culture for students and staff
* Increasing evidence of positive relationships between the school and its community
* Parents are now more actively involved in the day-to-day life of the school.

 **Leadership and professional development**

* Significant improvements in the quality of leadership and management.

**Governance**

* The commissioner’s work has resulted in improvements to governance and management practices and promoted school development. The school is now in a good position to elect a new board.

**Self review**

* Greater evidence of the monitoring of action plan implementation and critical reflection about school programmes and practices amongst leaders and teachers. For instance reporting to ERO on the achievement of milestones and the implementation of review and development plans has helped school staff to monitor improvements and clarify immediate priorities.

**ERO’s influence**

**Outcomes of ERO’s new methodology linked to three ‘levels and mechanisms of evaluation influence’ (see Henry and Mark, 2003)**

**Individual**

* Student achievement shows improvement: improved teacher practice led to ***behaviour change*** at all levels
* Higher levels of student behaviour and respect , school values imbedded and understood –involved ***attitude change***
* Professional leadership and self review – example of ***skill acquisition – development of new abilities.***

**Interpersonal**

* Core of high quality teachers driving change and improvement – example of ***minority group influence***
* Improved relationships at all levels – example of changed ***social norms***
* Commissioner drove policy and procedural change – example of ***key change agent.***

**Collective**

* Positive school culture, involved  *community influence and improved community perception* ***–*** example of ***agenda setting***
* Development of local personalised curriculum **–** example of ***agenda setting*** and ***policy change***
* Increased level of support from other agencies – example of ***policy oriented learning***
* Focused governance **–** example of ***policy and procedural change***

**Summary**

ERO’s intervention over the last 12 months has resulted in continuous and sustainable improvements, as detailed by the commissioner’s feedback on the process:

*“I especially liked the approach taken by the reviewers to the situation at school “A”. The meetings that were held where staff members, the Acting Principal and me were involved in joint planning exercises were excellent. This process was incredibly useful for all of us in understanding just where, based on the findings of previous reviews, we needed to go, what we needed to do to get there and what the picture would look like once there. The ongoing contact with the reviewers has been helpful in keeping us on track and in evaluating our actions and making any necessary adjustments.*

*I hope that ERO continue to work with Boards on improving their governance self-review processes and encouraging trustees not to re-invent the wheel”.*

**A culturally responsive approach using an indigenous evaluation framework**

**Background**

A particularly important feature of EROs approach to improving its influence through evaluation has been the establishment of Te Uepū-ā Motu, an indigenous evaluation unit within ERO. The unit employs Māori staff who work in a cultural context and implement an evaluation methodology that has been developed in partnership with Māori. These staff work in mainly Māori immersion kura (schools) and kohanga reo ( early childhood language nests).

The New Zealand Government’s Māori education strategy *Ka Hikitia Managing for Success: Māori Education Strategy 2008-2012* and ERO’s *He Toa Takitini: Outcomes for Māori – Strategy and Implementation plan* offer a trajectory for improving educational outcomes for Māori children and their whānau. ‘Ka Hikitia’ means to ‘step up’, to ‘lift up’, or to ‘lengthen one’s stride’ and ‘He Toa Takitini” refers to the collective strengths of all individuals in the pursuit of shared visions, aspirations and goals.

The foundation of ERO’s work is the proverb ‘*ko te tamaiiti te putake o te kaupapa: the child at the heart of the matter”.* This ensures that during education reviews the quality of education for children is paramount.

The evaluation methodology presented today responds to the notion that Māori children and their whānau have potential and cultural advantage by virtue of who they are; that evaluation processes are negotiated and transparent; and there are agreed outcomes and recommendations developed by the whānau.

**Context**

**He anga arotake: An indigenous approach to evaluation**

The constructing of culturally responsive methods and protocols for evaluation is powerful and sensible given the political change taking place in Aotearoa New Zealand. According to Mataira (2010, p. 3) Maori must be more actively engaged in the design, planning and carrying out of evaluations… there is the need to balance technical expertise and cultural skill. This approach draws on these skills and knowledge. This discussion will focus on processes that have been utilised to carry out reviews in a Māori immersion early childhood centre.

There is a significant amount of stress for whānau when education reviews are carried out. Because of this, we as Māori evaluators are guided by our cultural values, beliefs and practices. These protocols must be followed regardless of context. Whanaungatanga or meaningful relationships based on familiar connections or genealogy is critical to the entire evaluation process. Each point of contact or discussion must be based on this concept. Following are the processes used to set up a review

**Ngā whakahaere - process**

**Ngā whiringa arotake - Negotiated review process.** The key steps and processes are summarised below.

**Initial contact.** The use of the mother tongue, or te reo Māori, is the first step to easing the stress inherent in the review. An email highlighting areas of conversations and a review plan is sent to whānau. Lines of communications remain open at all times.

**Pōhiri or official welcome.** On arrival, an official welcome that observes Māori protocols is carried out. This is not negotiable. This is where the whānau control the process. Within this process they are able to make connections with mutual ancestors or iwi[[2]](#footnote-2) associations with the reviewers and vice versa. Immediately after the pōhiri eating together is the next part of this practice.

**Whakamarama.** As Māori evaluators, it is always important to talk the whānau through the process and what ERO is doing, in plain simple language. An emphasis on positive outcomes for children is reinforced

**Ngā ara mahi - Gathering information.** At all times whānau are kept informed through a nominated person who sits alongside the reviewers during conversations, observations and reading of documents. Through this process ERO is able to seek clarity. Ongoing feedback and feed forward is provided throughout the review.

**Ngā whiringa korero – Synthesis.** Synthesising all findings and identifying emerging judgements is carried out collectively by ERO and whānau members. It is important for whānau to understand what informs the final judgements. If there are recommendations for improvements, whānau are able to clearly identify how these came about. They then become part of the solution.

**Case Study: He anga arotake - an indigenous evaluation framework in a Māori immersion early childhood centre**

The evaluation framework presented here emerged during the actual review. This framework is based on an education paradigm that is familiar to many Māori researchers and educators in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Mōhiotanga.** *What influences what children know and how they behave?* It was important that the reviewers understood the geographical, historical and traditional contexts of the service. This information was critical to informing reviewers of why certain rituals, celebrations and activities occur and how these impacted on what children know their interests and the ways in which the service operates. Prior knowledge is important. This information sets the context for the review.

**Mātauranga.** *What counts as knowledge within this service and how is this transmitted to children?* Staff qualifications and ongoing professional development provided valuable information on how teacher knowledge and skills influenced the ways in which their children learn and grow. Local history and where their centre was situated (close to the bush, river and sea) impacted on the curriculum. Children were encouraged to explore all aspects of their environments. They learnt chants and songs relevant to who they are. The role of Kaumātua (elders), the sharing of knowledge and their relationships with the children was paramount to this centre.

**Maramatanga.** *In what ways do whānau demonstrate a commitment to ongoing development and improvement?* Clear strategic goals and self review processes were evident. Charter statements, centre philosophy, policies and procedures, compliance and accountability systems were underpinned by a strong commitment to whānau development and the revitalisation and maintenance of te reo Māori. They viewed their children as leaders of the future and their role was to nurture that leadership. Capacity building and sustainability were apparent in all aspects of operations and practice.

This framework for evaluation is credit based. It enabled us to focus on the strengths and influence the iwi had on the education of their children, in particular the shared wisdom of the Kaumātua[[3]](#footnote-3) and the stories and narratives of their history and traditions in shaping who they are. These would not have been illustrated to this extent had we not used this approach. Le France and Nichols (2010, p.18) state:

*from an Indigenous perspective, for evaluation to be true and useful— that is, a good evaluation—the evaluator must have an understand­ing of the self-determination that fuels the goals and aspirations of Indigenous communities to preserve, restore, and protect their cultures and ways of doing things*.

*What are the benefits for children from this centre?* The evaluation process identified the following benefits for children:

* These children are confident, capable and connected learners who are supported by their community
* They have a strong sense of cultural identity, are aware of their innate abilities which stem from their history and traditions and are surrounded by passionate, motivated, competent adults
* This community have cultural advantage by virtue of who they are andbecause their children have access to this legacy.

**Summary**

The history of low academic achievement for Māori children in Aotearoa New Zealand has prompted the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office to ‘step up’ and ‘take action’. The need for Māori in ERO to be involved in the development of performance indicators and methodologies is critical to these challenges. The approach utilised for this review was deemed useful and meaningful to the whānau. This influenced the way in which the review was conducted and the outcomes.

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1. For a full discussion of the concept of complementarity in ERO’s evaluation methodology see, *Complementary evaluation: The development of a conceptual framework to guide Education Review Office future directions*, Dr Carol Mutch, Senior Advisor to the Chief Review Officer, Education Review Office, New Zealand. Contact info@ero.govt.nz [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Iwi are large tribal groupings from specific geographical settings [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Kaumātua are the respected elders of the community [↑](#footnote-ref-3)