How can ERO review the quality of education in centres if they don’t know what children are learning?

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- Related articles can be downloaded from the Unitec Research Bank
Crucial role of ERO

- Parents/Whanau rely on ERO as a check on the quality of ECE services.
- With growth of ECE, more of ERO’s resources have gone into reviewing centres (2011: $9.6m on ECE, $15.5m on schools).
- ERO’s new draft review guidelines – Aim to increase efficiency of review process.
New guidelines place greater emphasis on self-review


Self-review has been successfully used in schools (but schools have plenty of valid assessment data as evidence)

ERO’s 2009 review of self-review in centres. Apart from a few brief anecdotes, no evidence that self-review results in higher quality programmes.
Focus of this presentation is not on the processes of self-review but on the lack of valid information that centres have on the effectiveness of their programmes for enhancing children’s learning.

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Principles Underpinning ERO Reviews
- “informed by evidence” (p.4)
- “focuses particularly on the quality of provision” (p.6)
• ERO reinforces the value of Te Whāriki for guiding children’s learning.
• However, the generalised nature of Te Whāriki means it is of limited value for showing what children should be, or indeed are, learning in a centre.
• Learning outcomes in Te Whāriki can often apply to a child of any age.
• No info about typical developmental sequences.
Learning outcomes in Te Whāriki use phrases such as children developing “an understanding of ...” “a capacity to ...”, increasing knowledge about...”, and “familiarity with ...”.

The outcomes are indicative, not required.

Not suitable for assessment purposes.

ERO claims that “the focus on how well children learn is central to all ERO reviews” (2102, p.7).

If Te Whāriki does not provide assessable outcomes, how does ERO suggest that children’s learning should be evaluated?
EROr provides “Evaluation Indicators” to show what it considers to be important.

Categorised into 4 interconnected areas or Pou:

1. Pou Whakahaere (Governance and Management)
2. Pou Ārahi (Leadership)
3. Mātauranga (Curriculum and Assessment)
4. Tikanga Whakaako (Teaching and Learning)

Focus in this presentation on the indicators that ERO provides for assessment practices. - a subcategory of Mātauranga.
ERO Indicators of Effective Assessment Practices

- ERO claims that the indicators “are based on current national and international evaluation and research” (p.23).
- Twenty indicators are listed for assessment and planning (p.33).
- Mostly consist of general statements supporting existing practice of narrative assessment or Learning Stories.
- For example – “reflects a credit based approach that pays attention to children’s strengths, interests and dispositions”
Examples of assessment indicators (p.33)

“assessment information focuses on enhancing dispositional learning, as well as skills and ways of knowing”

“is available to the children so that they can revisit and share their learning with others.”

“Assessment builds children’s identity [sic] as a successful learner” and

“assessment processes support children to understand and contribute to decisions about their learning.”
Although ERO supports the use of Learning Stories there are problems with this technique:

- problems defining particular dispositions.
- a lack of rationale for the links between particular dispositions and the strands of *Te Whāriki*.
- a high level of subjective interpretation when describing and analysing a child’s learning.
- a lack of guidance on what learning areas to assess and when.
- a lack of evidence that Learning Stories are effective in showing changes in children’s learning and development over time.
Where does ERO’s support for narrative assessments come from?

- ERO claims the evaluation indicators are based on “current national and international evaluation and research. ... ERO conducted a wide ranging literature search on research related to early childhood education over the past 5-10 years. The search was broad enough to encompass diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives” (p. 23).

- Such a search should have alerted ERO to the limitations of narrative assessments and Learning Stories.
However, ERO goes on to note that “priority was given to New Zealand research in order to provide localised perspectives on best practice in early childhood education” (p.23).

Priority given to localised perspectives may explain why ERO appears to be unaware of much of the international research on assessment.

65 references listed for Mātauranga Pou (Curriculum and Assessment).

58 are New Zealand authors.

5 are authors from Australia, 1 from England, and 1 from Canada. No references from the United States.
• ERO has taken a very selective approach.
• International research on effective assessment of young children is largely ignored. No mention of concepts such as validity, credibility or reliability.

• No mention of developmental patterns in growth and learning and the importance of assessing key areas of learning (e.g., language).

• No textbooks on assessment in reference list.
ERO has promoted the evaluation indicators as “representing an in-depth look at best practice and research” (Bleasdale, 2012, p.3).

May represent existing practice in NZ but it is questionable that they represent best practice.

Need to move beyond a “localised” insular approach, and be willing to learn from international research evidence on effective assessment.