



EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE  
Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga

# Principles of Practice

Education Evaluation for Improvement  
in Schools and Early Childhood Services

October 2021



*Our evaluation insights  
are a catalyst for change  
so that every child  
achieves success as a  
lifelong learner*



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**Principles of Practice: Education Evaluation for Improvement in Schools and Early Childhood Services**  
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# Introduction

*Principles of Practice: Education Evaluation for Improvement in Schools and Early Childhood Services* is one of the suite of resources developed by the Education Review Office (ERO) to support education evaluation practice.

These *Principles of Practice* guide the thinking and practice of ERO evaluators as they work with schools and early childhood services in their external evaluation role and support the development of internal evaluation capacity. The concepts of Whakawhanaungatanga, Mahi Tahi and Poutokomanawa in ERO's internal strategy *He Taura Here Tangata*, guide how ERO evaluators undertake their education evaluation work.

The *Principles of Practice* can also be used by schools and early childhood services as a resource to support internal evaluation and their evaluation work with ERO evaluators.

Research evidence identifies key organisational conditions that support development of the capacity to do and use evaluation for improvement and innovation.

These include:

- evaluation leadership
- a learning-oriented community of professionals that demonstrates agency in using evaluation for improvement in practice and outcomes
- opportunity to develop technical evaluation expertise (including access to external expertise)
- access to, and use of, appropriate tools and methods
- systems, processes and resources that support purposeful data gathering, knowledge building and decision making.

*“The extent to which and the ways in which the organisation’s leadership values learning and evaluation, creates a culture of inquiry, has the necessary systems and structures for engaging in evaluation practice, and provides communication channels and opportunities to access and disseminate evaluation information will significantly affect not only if and how people learn about evaluation but also the extent to which evaluation practice becomes sustained.”*

*Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 445.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Preskill, H., & Boyle, S. (2008). A multidisciplinary model of evaluation capacity building. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 29 (4), 443–459.



# Principles of Evaluation Practice

ERO is committed to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand and the agreement that underpins relationships between Māori and the Crown. ERO's internal strategy *He Taura Here Tangata* reaffirms this commitment through articulating the actions required to become a bicultural, bilingual organisation.

ERO is also committed to promoting the achievement and success of all children and young people.

The principles developed to guide education evaluation practice in *Principles of Practice: Education Evaluation for Improvement in Schools and Early Childhood Services* are drawn from evaluation theory and research that show how evaluation supports and promotes improvement. In developing and enacting context specific approaches to evaluation ERO draws on Kaupapa Māori<sup>2</sup> and Western knowledges and perspectives.

Effective evaluation for improvement ensures purposeful interaction between internal evaluation and external evaluation. The evaluation process is collaborative, dialogic and action-oriented,<sup>3</sup> recognising and supporting the improvement pathways of a school or early childhood service.

At the heart of this approach is the use of a common set of evaluation indicators: in the school context, *School Evaluation Indicators:*

*Effective Practice for Improvement and Learner Success* (2016); and in the early childhood education context, *Te Ara Poutama – Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most* (2020).

A participatory and collaborative<sup>4</sup> approach to evaluation enables responsiveness to culture and the context, taking account of cultural values, knowledge and experience, and considering multiple perspectives and community within a sense of time and place.<sup>5</sup> Participants are directly involved in the co-construction of evaluation knowledge and understandings for use in decision-making,<sup>6</sup> contributing to improved evaluation outcomes and enhancing evaluation use.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Kaupapa Māori evaluation approaches are underpinned by Māori philosophies and principles and privilege Māori knowledge and ways of knowing.<sup>7</sup>

Evaluation that is focused on the right things and is technically rigorous is a mechanism for learning, supporting evaluative thinking,

2 Cram, F., Pipi, K., & Paipa, K. (2018). Kaupapa Māori evaluation in Aotearoa New Zealand. In F. Cram, K. A. Tibbetts, & J. LaFrance (Eds.), *Indigenous Evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation*, 159, 63-77.

3 Preskill, H. & Torres, R. (2000). The learning dimension of evaluation use. In V. Caracelli, & H. Preskill (Eds.), *The expanding scope of evaluation use. New Directions for Evaluation*, 88, 25-37.

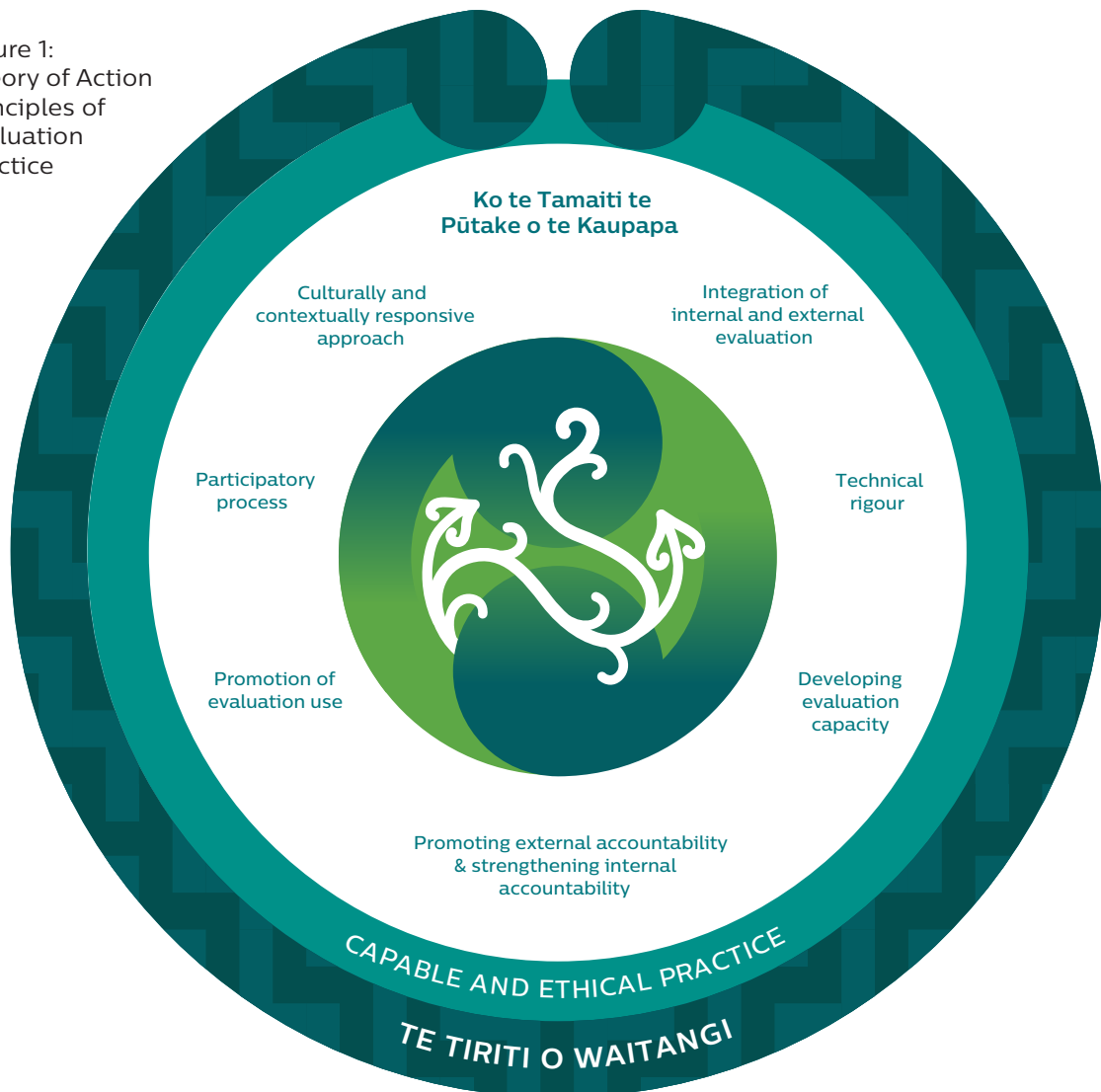
4 Schulha, L., Whitmore, E., Cousins, J. B., Gilbert, N., & al Hudib, H. (2016). Introducing evidence-based principles to guide collaborative approaches to evaluation: results of an empirical process. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 37 (2), 93-215.

5 LaFrance, J., Nichols, R., & Kirkhart, K. (2012). Culture writes the script: On the centrality of context in Indigenous evaluation. In D. J. Rog, J. L. Fitzpatrick & R. F. Conner (Eds.), *Context: A framework for its influence on evaluation practice*, *New Directions for Evaluation*, 135, 59-74.

6 Adams, A., Nnawulezi, N., & Vandenberg, L. (2014). "Expectations to Change" (E2C): A participatory method for facilitating stakeholder engagement with evaluation findings. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 36 (2), 243-255.

7 Cram, F., Kennedy, V., Paipa, K., Pipi, K., & Wehipeihana, N. (2015). Being culturally responsive through kaupapa Māori evaluation. In S. Hood, R. Hopson, & Frierson, H. (Eds.), *Continuing the journey to reposition culture and cultural context in evaluation theory and practice*, (pp. 289-311).

Figure 1:  
Theory of Action  
Principles of  
Evaluation  
Practice



reasoning and decision-making about the quality and effectiveness of education provision and outcomes.<sup>8 9</sup>

Engagement in intentional processes and practices that increase the motivation, knowledge and skills of individuals and groups to carry out and use evaluation, strengthen organizational capacity for improvement.<sup>10 11</sup>

The evaluation process promotes external accountability and strengthens professional accountability.

*At the core of accountability in educational systems is... learning... Internal accountability occurs when individuals and groups willingly take on personal, professional and collective responsibility for continuous improvement and success for all [learners]. External accountability [requires that] system leaders assure the public through transparency, monitoring and selective intervention that their system is performing in line with societal expectations and requirements.*

*Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo & Hargreaves, 2015, p. 4.<sup>12</sup>*

8 Labin, S., Duffy, J., Meyers, D., Wandersman, A., & Lesesne, C. (2012). A research synthesis of the evaluation capacity building literature. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 33 (3), 307-338.

9 Cousins, B., Goh, S., Elliott, C., & Bourgeois, I. (2014). Framing the capacity to do and use evaluation. In Cousins, J. B. & Bourgeois, I (Eds.). *Organisational capacity to do and use evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation*, 4, 7-23.

10 Labin, S., Duffy, J., Meyers, D., Wandersman, A., & Lesesne, C. (2012). A research synthesis of the evaluation capacity building literature. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 33 (3), 307-338.

11 Cousins, B., Goh, S., Elliott, C., & Bourgeois, I. (2014). Framing the capacity to do and use evaluation. In Cousins, J. B. & Bourgeois, I (Eds.). *Organisational capacity to do and use evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation*, 4, 7-23.

12 Fullan, M., Rincon-Gallardo, S., & Hargreaves, A. (2015). Professional capital as accountability. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 23 (15), 1-22.



# Education Evaluation: The Eight *Principles of Practice*

## 1 A focus on the learner and the equity and excellence of education outcomes

### In education evaluation we

- focus on equity and excellence of outcomes for learners so that education provision enables every young person to become “confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners”<sup>13</sup> and “competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society”<sup>14</sup>
- interrogate a breadth and depth of evidence related to the outcomes of the national curricula, in particular, outcomes for those groups of learners whose needs are currently not well met by the education system
- work in partnership with Māori to gather evaluation information that reflects Māori perspectives and aspirations
- seek and consider information from a diverse range of participants, including learners, parents, whānau, teachers and leaders, during the evaluation process
- identify the organisational conditions and practices that are supporting or inhibiting effective education provision.

## 2 The integration of internal and external evaluation

### In education evaluation we

- enable schools and early childhood services to purposefully engage with external evaluation and use it as an opportunity to review, develop and validate internal evaluation and identified improvement actions
- start by considering what the school or early childhood service knows from its internal evaluation about its own effectiveness in achieving equitable and excellent outcomes for learners and how well its organisational conditions support or inhibit improvement
- use the education institution’s internal evaluation of how well it is achieving equity and excellence of outcomes for learners to focus evaluation discussions, design and activities
- promote evaluation participants’ interpretation of, and evaluative thinking about, their progress and achievement data and other information
- evaluate the quality of internal evaluation processes and test the validity of internal evaluation findings
- evaluate the effectiveness of internal evaluation processes and improvement actions in ensuring responsive education provision and equitable opportunity to learn for every young person and the service’s or school’s capacity for sustained improvement
- use evaluation resources to promote the integration of internal and external evaluation.

<sup>13</sup> Education Review Office (2016). *School Evaluation Indicators: Effective Practice for Improvement and Learner Success*. p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Education (2017). *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early Childhood Curriculum*. p. 5.

## 3 A participatory and collaborative evaluation process

### In education evaluation we

- build relational trust through being transparent about our evaluation processes, analyses and reasoning, interpretations, decisions and conclusions
- encourage and negotiate the participation of a diverse and representative range of stakeholders, especially learners
- promote professional dialogue and understanding about equity and excellence of outcomes for every learner and the organisational conditions that support or inhibit the quality and effectiveness of education provision
- provide opportunities that enable participants to confidently contribute to the evaluation process and develop ownership of the evaluation findings and agency in responding to them
- facilitate and participate in collaborative sense-making towards determination of the evaluation findings
- communicate our evaluation information for impact so that it is accessible to a range of audiences and can be used for decision-making and action-taking for improvement
- seek and use feedback about our evaluation process, practices and products, and evaluate their influence and impact.

## 4 A culturally and contextually responsive approach

### In education evaluation we

- apply the principles of partnership, participation and protection inherent in the Treaty of Waitangi, and the articles Kawanatanga, Tino Rangatiratanga and Oritetanga in Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- establish, develop and maintain relationships that respond to cultural context
- seek to build an understanding of the cultural context in which our evaluations are undertaken
- seek, value and respond to participants' cultural viewpoints, understandings, knowledge and experiences
- build collective understanding as a foundation for taking action for improvement within the cultural context
- evaluate the quality of opportunities that diverse groups of stakeholders have to participate in, contribute to and influence what happens for learners/ākonga, giving particular consideration to the opportunities for Māori whānau to be involved in the process
- work in a culturally responsive way as individuals and teams.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Berryman, M., SooHoo, S., & Nevin, A. (2013). Culturally responsive methodologies from the margins. In M. Berryman, S. SooHoo, & A. Nevin (Eds.), *Culturally responsive methodologies*, 1-31. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

## 5 Technical rigour in evaluation design; data gathering; analysis, synthesis and reasoning; and the communication of evaluation information

### In education evaluation we

- gather evidence related to learner outcomes
- take account of cultural values, knowledge and experience, and consider the role of multiple perspectives and community in the validity of evaluation information<sup>16</sup>
- gather and use both quantitative and qualitative information from a range of sources, that are relevant and material to the evaluation
- ensure we have sufficient evidence to reliably substantiate our evaluative judgements
- consider the quality of the available data and instances of disconfirming evidence and outliers
- pay careful attention to the weighting of evidence
- systematically and iteratively analyse and apply evaluative reasoning to make sense of the evidence
- test our emerging findings with key stakeholders and ensure that the evaluative reasoning is known and understood
- engage in collaborative sensemaking that enables us to reach valid, credible evaluative judgements about the equity and excellence of learner outcomes and the conditions that support or inhibit these.

## 6 The promotion of evaluation use

### In education evaluation we

- ensure the evaluation focus is on learner outcomes (for these learners, in this place, at this time):<sup>17</sup> what is going on here? what does it mean? how do we know? what next?
- attend to the quality of both the evaluation process and results, using opportunities to promote evaluation use
- ensure our evaluation findings are based on a rigorous process that produces credible and valid findings that can be confidently used
- maintain a clearly articulated evaluation purpose and facilitate an adaptive and responsive evaluation process to promote organisational learning
- use external and internal evaluation findings to collaboratively identify actions for improvement
- identify and communicate evaluation information about effective organisational conditions that promote equity and excellence of outcomes for learners
- promote the use of evaluation information to influence education improvement.

<sup>16</sup> LaFrance, J., Kirkhart, K., & Nichols, R. (2015). Cultural views of validity. In S. Hood, R. Hopson, & H. Frierson (Eds.), *Continuing the journey to reposition culture and cultural context*, 49-72. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

<sup>17</sup> Schwandt, T. (2017). *The centrality of engagement and ethics to the task of evaluating for equity*. Keynote presented to the Education Review Office Professional Forum, Auckland New Zealand.



## 7 Developing evaluation capacity

### In education evaluation we

- build our capability and capacity for conducting and sustaining effective evaluation for equity and excellence of outcomes for learners
- use education and evaluation resources to develop effective evaluation processes
- continue to improve the cultural responsiveness of our evaluation capability and capacity building activities for diverse groups of stakeholders
- promote capability and capacity building for the purpose of doing and using evaluation as a key mechanism for achieving education improvement and innovation in institutions and across the education sector.

## 8 Promoting external accountability and strengthening internal accountability

### In education evaluation we

- seek assurance that legal requirements are met
- evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the systems and processes that enable legislative requirements to be met
- identify, report on, and respond to, issues of non-compliance with legal requirements
- are aware of, and respond to, emerging risks that require further investigation at all stages of the evaluation process
- identify areas for improvement and future action
- seek intervention by the Ministry of Education where the learning or wellbeing of children and/or young people is at risk
- direct our evaluation resources to areas of greatest need
- engage in follow up evaluation capacity building to promote external accountability and strengthen internal accountability.

## THEORY OF ACTION

### Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te kaupapa – The child is the heart of the matter

A focus on the learner and the education dimensions that have the most significant impact on learner outcomes is at the heart of our approach to evaluation. In undertaking evaluation for improvement, we promote external accountability and strengthen internal accountability.

A culturally and contextually responsive approach reflects our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and improves the quality and utility of evaluation information. The integration of external and internal evaluation ensures purposeful interaction between the internal evaluation undertaken by education institutions and external evaluation. Our evaluation design; data gathering; analysis, synthesis and reasoning; and the communication of evaluation information; demonstrates technical rigour. This rigour ensures that evaluative judgements about the equity and excellence of learner outcomes and the conditions that support or inhibit these are valid and credible. A participatory and collaborative approach to the evaluation process improves the quality of evaluation results and promotes evaluation use. This approach contributes to the development of capability and capacity in evaluation, both through the evaluation process and the use of education evaluation resources. Our evaluation insights are a catalyst for change so that every child achieves success as a lifelong learner.

## Ethical Considerations

In any education evaluation context, the values and principles of integrity, honesty, respect, social justice, equity and fairness are important considerations. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the ethical imperative of cultural responsiveness<sup>18 19</sup> in evaluation is critical and requires

*...an epistemological reframing of knowledge to ensure that Indigenous ways of knowing are valued, and [the] recognition of a relational model of ethics to underpin participatory practice in Indigenous communities.*

*Kendall, Sunderland, Barnett, Nalder, & Matthews, 2011, p. 4.<sup>18</sup>*

Schwandt reminds us that scrutiny of the evaluator's own culture is also required

*... for its distinctive norms that shape attitudes, values and practices and to assess how these understandings are built into their methodologies, as well as into the interventions, programmes, and policies they are evaluating that may be inhibiting a genuine understanding of stakeholders' perceptions of the value of an intervention, programme or policy.<sup>19</sup> (Schwandt, 2015, p. 137).*

The evaluation profession, collectively, and the evaluator individually, possesses a body of knowledge and expertise that must be used adaptively in a range of evaluation contexts. Ethical dispositions are a key characteristic of professions. In the context of education evaluation, ERO evaluators are required to be responsive, respectful, trustworthy, impartial and accountable, and act with a spirit of service to the community.

## Useful Evaluation Resources

Resources published on ERO's website [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz) provide more detailed information and guidance about education evaluation.

18 Cram, F. (2018). Conclusion: Lessons about Indigenous evaluation. In F. Cram, K. A. Tibbetts, & J. LaFrance (Eds.), *Indigenous Evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation*, 159, 121-133.

19 Schwandt, T. (2015). *Evaluation Foundations Revisited*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.



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