



# GAME! Consultancy Newsletter

Governance and Management in Education

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## Evaluation within Schools

With regard to the support it has offered to schools over the last couple of years, GAME Consultancy is becoming clearly focused on an 'evaluation within schools' model. Evaluation within schools is viewed differently from evaluation of schools. Schools are beginning to see GAME Consultancy as an invaluable and independent information gathering source. Impartial data gathering, combined with analysis and report writing, is viewed as a new and important support for school leadership in better understanding what is going in their institution. GAME consultancy is being used deliberately to provide an unbiased perspective on ways to improve the quality of the school's operation. It also has the added benefit of helping to alleviate the workload of those traditionally vested with the responsibility to fulfill this function.

This role has taken various forms:

- Auditing school documentation
- Appraising principals and senior management teams
- Inducting leadership into a model of self review
- Assessing the effectiveness of individual programmes

Schools are no longer relying on the arrival of ERO to determine the strengths and weaknesses in their operations. Those on 4-5 year returns, and who perceive the importance of external reviewing, also see the benefits of utilizing outsiders to provide new perspectives. Those on early ERO returns similarly seek to employ outsiders to better understand the concerns expressed by ERO. Increasingly external advice is seen as an effective way to improve school operations that centre on the achievement, progress and engagement of students.

Self review, through independent intervention, has become hugely important in developing greater understanding about what is going on in schools and what can be done to address areas for improvement.



"I purchased this great book on time management, but with my schedule I don't have the time to read it."

## Manage your own ERO Review

Too often schools adopt an understanding of ERO reviews that they are something that is done to them. Principals and boards are often seen to be second guessing what ERO wants and, in doing so, contorting themselves to ensure that before they arrive all bases are covered. Although at times stressful and time consuming, this is not altogether a poor strategy. After all ERO gives quite a bit of information to schools as to what is required and expected of them and it makes common sense to follow their direction.



However everything that they tell you is not the full story. Ask those who have been along to one of those ERO pre-review meetings. The guidance and advice they provide is often generic and suitable for a much wider audience. Never do they warn you of the idiosyncratic nature of review teams and the variations of process involved in actual investigations. What you get is the party line.

This year particularly has seen a significant shift in the way ERO wants to involve principals at different stages throughout the review. You are now invited to be part of the synthesis meeting at the end of the review where the important conclusions are made about the school, and there is evidence that principals are more informed about the preliminary findings emerging within the review.

The trend towards greater openness suggests an opportunity for principals to be more proactive in determining the parameters of your review. Helping ERO put together the timetable for their investigation is a good starting point. For example there are many things that you are particularly proud of that, during the limited time available to the reviewers, you may feel they will not give due deference to. (eg. the quality technology programme, the stunning teacher in Room 4, the Enviro-Schools project). There are other areas where you may wish they saw less of (eg. the teacher in Room 5's PE programme, the dysfunctional board, the behaviour of the Year 4 autistic boy). By your taking a positive stance is determining where they go, what they see, who they talk with and what they read will enable your school to be presented in the most favourable light.

There are many ways for you to 'help' ERO see the best of your school but you need to be confident in suggesting ideas. It starts with the initial visit of the lead ERO reviewer. Insist that you want to see him / her before the review rather than simply have a phone call. When the lead reviewer arrives present them with a timetable of meetings and class visits that you would like (really like) them to consider. For most schools, ensure that it covers the period from 10.00 on the Monday through to Wednesday lunch. Find out about the review team. Ask the lead reviewer about the strengths and background of

the reviewers. Make it very clear that you are very interested in ensuring that the great things going on in your school are acknowledged and that the reviewers have the skills and time to discover these for themselves. Make them feel that their practice will also be under scrutiny.

When the reviewers arrive make it clear that you would like to talk to the lead reviewer at least twice a day to get some early impressions. Suggest a 'friend of the school', a trusted professional who would have the respect of the ERO and who knows your school, spend an hour with the reviewers at the start of the review advocating for the successes of the school. Remember that first impressions count so try to promote your positives as strongly as possible from the outset. If you can afford the time, follow them into classes to watch them do their observations. At the end of each day record your feelings about how effective and thorough you think the reviewers had been that day. These reflections may well be useful in the event of an appeal later on. Insist that you are present at all meetings, including the staff meeting and the synthesis meeting at the end of the review.

When the reviewers feed back to you at the end of the review (often Thursday afternoon) don't accept anything that you know is untrue. It is easier to change things at this time than when the draft report arrives. Be pedantic around the wording of findings. Remember that the draft that is presented to you at this meeting is as close to final report as is possible.

If you are unhappy with the conduct, competency or rigor of any one of the reviewers let the lead reviewer know and, if serious enough, pass on your thoughts in an email to the Regional Manager.

About a month after the review you will receive the draft report. If there are surprises in the report or the return date is not what you had expected make it clear to the Regional Manager that you are going to appeal. If it is an early return (ie. 1-2 years), and you want to show positive intent, you may want to submit with your appeal a programme of development that seeks to address those areas that you accept were lacking.

Remember ERO does not have to be something that is simply done to you. ERO itself talks about this process being a collaborative endeavour. Ensure that their accountability is part of your understanding of a reciprocal relationship.

### Self Review that Satisfies ERO

For the last two years I have been offering a course that looks at Self Review in the context of ERO expectations. The design of the course is primarily based on "ERO's six dimensions of good practice - *Evaluation Indicators for School Reviews (Draft) June 2010*". During the course these dimensions are discussed in light of the international research literature on school self review. The practical implementation of this is then introduced through the quality programmes of governance and leadership as seen in many successful Wellington schools. For reasons that have surprised many, the topic has been highly popular with more than 120 school leaders and trustees having attended the 6 courses offered throughout the North Island in Term 2. So why the high level of interest?

You might have thought that the schools most interested in attending were those that had had early ERO returns or who had ERO recommendations for improvements in school self review practices identified in their last reports. Although it is true that many do fall into this category, many do not. Last term there were a significant number of schools who had attended that were on extended ERO review dates (ie. 4-5 years). As we know, one characteristic of successful schools is that they are very interested in improving ways to better understand themselves. This course did this for them and gave them the confidence to both continue with what they were doing and the license to introduce new ideas. In the isolated world of education in which we find ourselves reassurance is under-rated and in short supply.

For those schools in which self review is only in its early stages of development the concepts discussed have been illuminating. The feedback from all participants has been that they have come away with new ideas to implement and, frequently, new understanding on which to continue to develop their school. The course is facilitated in such a way as to allow participants to learn off each other. We all know that there is a wealth of knowledge in each of our schools that when shared become meaningful comparisons of reference for our own developments.

If you get the opportunity next year come along to Mana Resource Centre and see how you can develop policies, practices and procedures that will enable you to better understand your school.



**"For the next hour, hold all calls.  
I'll be practicing tumbling.  
I have to learn how to roll with the punches."**

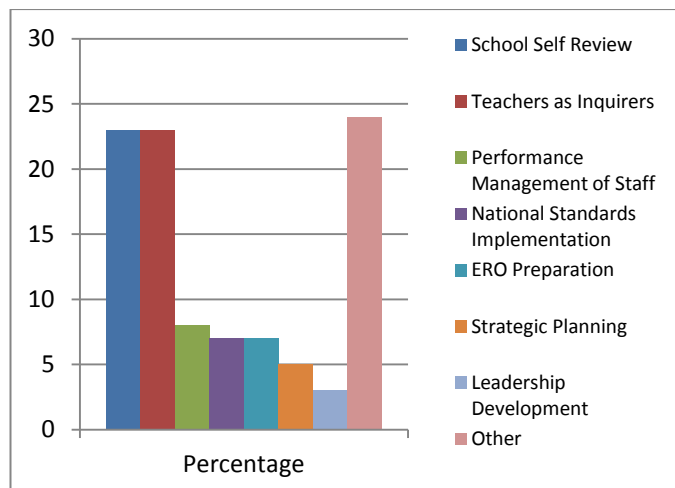
### Principal Appraisal ... What are principals wanting to focus on?

The appraisal of principals continues to be the cornerstone of the work of GAME. In its first year (2010) 15 principals from around our region were appraised, in 2011 this had increased to 30 and in 2012 this was limited to just 25 (including 6 college principals). Of these principals a number have been appraised more than once. The demand has been high.

During GAME's involvement, principals and board chairs have increasingly demanded that the developmental aspects of the process are seen to be as important as the attestation and compliance requirements. This has meant that the model has needed to develop and evolve to include a greater support and advisory role of the appraiser. Outside of the Professional Standards, this has led to more clearly focused personal appraisal goals. What is seen now, as compared to two years

ago, is the development of bigger and fewer goals. The goals now being chosen require a great deal of principal commitment. Frequently these are linked to his / her own sabbatical inquiry and in many cases require relationships to be developed with other school principals. However, inevitably the basis for goal selection is derived from strategic plans, ERO reports, new Ministry directives / initiatives and personal interests. This year no principal has identified more than 3 areas for their development, and most have chosen only one. In some cases this 'one' has consumed the principal for 2 years.

So what are principals, with the help of their boards and the consultant, choosing to focus on? They remain very diverse with the exception of the two big areas of 'self review' and 'teachers as inquirers'.



#### Self Review goal

When a principal chooses to develop his / her understanding of Self Review they often couch their performance goal in terms of:

*'Review the school's Self Reviewing processes and documentation and make modifications to ensure that they fulfil the requirements of a successful school.'*

Most of these schools have developed various self review practices that were focussed on the improvement of student achievement and engagement, as well as the ongoing efficiency of school organisation, governance and administration systems. To satisfy the requirements of a quality school these practices are to be reviewed to ensure their intentions are clear, relevant, robust and comprehensive. It required of the principal to closely scrutinise the existing reviewing model and then to develop documents and practices that address any identified weaknesses or deficiencies. The criteria for effectiveness will be based on the impact that the self reviewing was having on the enhancement of student achievement and engagement.

By the end of the year, with the assistance of the consultant, trustees and staff, the review and modification of the self review practices would have been complete. Gaps would have been identified and, where appropriate, remedied. The progress of the initiative would have been regularly reported to the Board.

#### Teaching as Inquiry goal

For those principals wishing to implement 'Teaching as Inquiry' often their goal would look like this:

*'Develop a model of professional development for teaching staff based on action research and "Teachers as Inquirers"'*

Their intention was to provide a model for teachers to critically examine their own professional practice through the support and encouragement of peers. Referring to classroom based student achievement information and levels of student engagement, professional development opportunities and resources would be introduced aimed at specifically improving the standard of teaching throughout the school. The identification of children's emerging learning needs would dictate the direction and pace of teacher development and the adoption of new teaching initiatives. This would be developed as a research and development programme designed to have an ongoing responsiveness to implementing changes in pedagogy based specifically on individual teachers needs.

By the end of the year it was the principal's intention that teaching staff would view improvement in their teaching practice through action research as an ongoing priority. The outcomes of professional dialogue, based on enhancing student achievement and engagement, would dominate classroom and school decision making.

#### Other goals

Among those areas of development listed under 'Other' included:

- ICT implementation
- Redevelopment of school organisation and management systems
- Introduction of e-portfolios
- Improving the senior management team effectiveness
- Implementing a new SMS system
- Developing the Catholic Special Character
- Reviewing the effects of the Schooling Improvement Project
- Improving staff relationships
- Identifying leadership sustainability practices
- Improving the PB4L model
- Implementing Te Reo and Tikanga Maori programmes
- Fostering community relationships
- Examining the effectiveness of the Inquiry Learning programme
- Developing the school's social capital

The appraisal model has become a very principal specific process. Although there are common areas of development and accountability for all principals, most fall within the Professional Standards requirements. It is the personal goals that are the really interesting part of the process, and the areas in which the principal, by far, gains the most professionally.

