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Self-review in Early Childhood Education:
“What’s it all about?”

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Abstract

An increased focus on self-review in early childhood education (ECE) in New Zealand has been influenced by the educational and political context of the past 15 years. The requirement for early childhood services to undertake internal review has been a feature of the regulatory framework since 1998 (and the requirement to undertake programme review has been in place since 1990). The Education Review Office (ERO) has given more emphasis to self-review through changes to its external review methodology since 1998, and self-review has been an area of national interest in all early childhood education reviews since 2005.

Through the analysis of a sample of ERO reports, this research seeks to understand how external review has shaped and influenced thinking and practice associated with self-review in ECE services. The analysis of ERO's findings about self-review, as reported in accountability review reports (undertaken between 1998-2002) and education review reports (undertaken in 2005), revealed a complex milieu of activity that spanned everything that those who are involved in early childhood education services do as part of the operation of their service.

This research also examined the political and educational contexts in which self-review understandings and practices have developed in early childhood services. The review of the literature illuminates how self-review has been defined, researched and practiced. The educational reforms that introduced charters and concepts of accountability and self-management to education in New Zealand in the late 1980s and early 1990s were a feature of the early childhood education landscape that gave rise to expectations of improved quality and increased accountability.

This research explored the shifts that have taken place in ECE services as reported by ERO and discussed in the context of the time. The relationship between self-review and external review is identified as needing revisiting and substantive discussion to explore ways that these two evaluative processes can be truly complementary.

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Abbreviations

ERO	Education Review Office
ECE	Early childhood education
DOPs	Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices
ECa	Education and care services - accountability review reports -1998- 2002
ECb	Education and care services- education review reports - 2005
Ka	Kindergartens - accountability review reports -1998- 2002
Kb	Kindergartens - education review reports - 2005
Pca	Playcentres - accountability review reports -1998- 2002
Pcb	Playcentres - education review reports – 2005
Reg.	Regulation(s)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Self-review has been likened to “a fragile plant with great potential” (Austin, Parata-Blane and Edwards, (1997), “a hot topic” (Wansbrough, 2003) and “a concept replete with paradox and ambiguity” MacBeath (2004). This paradox and ambiguity is captured well by MacBeath who states:

It suggests a spontaneous impulse but connotes a political mandate. It posits an individual act of self-reflection but is a meaningless notion without some social reference point. Its application maybe personal, social or institutional, its purpose summative or personal. It may be interpreted as either a product or a process (p. 87).

Self-review is a term and concept that has become part of the educational landscape, and linked with accountability, evaluation and improvement. But just what it is all about, what it involves and why it should be undertaken sparked my interest in researching the topic. I also had a strong interest in both internal (self) and external review as a result of my professional work over the last 10 years.

The context for my research is educational and more specifically focused on the early childhood education (ECE) sector in New Zealand. My involvement in ECE for nearly 30 years has provided me with an opportunity to observe and reflect on the significant changes in the ECE sector. Change has been driven by attempts to unify the diverse ECE sector, improve the quality of educational provision and make ECE more accessible for all young children. This has seen the government’s role in ECE change with increased accountabilities for ECE services.

My personal and professional interest in investigating self-review in early childhood education was informed by several key factors. These factors included my professional roles as a reviewer working for the Education Review Office (ERO) for seven years and as a team leader for a Ministry of Education project to develop self-review guidelines

for ECE services over a three-year period. Hence my interest in self-review and in ERO's role in relation to self-review underpinned this research.

My research adopted what Anderson, with Arsenault (1998) refers to as an individualised approach which follows an interest resulting from researcher experience. The research is constructivist in its nature and sought to understand how self-review has been constructed by various stakeholders in ECE in New Zealand. According to Greene (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) "constructivist inquirers seek to understand contextualized meaning, to understand the meaningfulness of human actions and interactions - as experienced and construed by the actors in a given context" (p.986). In this case the contexts are educational and political. The actors are the key stakeholders who played a role in the development, understanding and practice of self-review. These stakeholders included the government, government agencies and the people and associated services that comprised the ECE sector.

1.2 Background

The ability of ECE services to develop and implement effective self-review practices has not been well established through research. New Zealand-based research related to self-review in the context of early childhood education has taken a case study approach and focused largely on professional development to support the implementation of the Ministry of Education's resource *The Quality Journey: Te Haerenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1999). There is very little in the way of relevant international research that has looked specifically at the development, understandings and practices associated with self-review in ECE. Many studies related to quality improvement systems that were accreditation based and relied on some form of external validation.

The Education Review Office (ERO), a government agency with responsibility for external evaluation in education (pre-tertiary) in New Zealand, has increasingly focused on self-review through its external review processes. Since ERO's establishment in 1989, two Ministerial reviews have reiterated the need for the development of self-review processes in both the school and early childhood education sectors (Austin et al. 1997, Rodger, Holden, Millar and Smith, 2000). These Ministerial reviews of ERO

emphasised the development of self-review processes as a way of promoting accountability and educational improvement.

1.3 Overview of methodology

This research investigated how self-review practices have been reported on through the analysis of a sample of ERO reports on a range of early childhood education services in the period between 1998 and 2005. This period was chosen for two reasons. Firstly as noted, the Ministerial review of ERO, *Achieving Excellence: A Review of the Education External Evaluation Services* (Austin et al.1997) had just been completed in 1998. This review had as its guiding theme: self-management, self-review and self-improvement. Secondly ERO's review methodology changed to accountability reviews in 1998. This methodology placed an increased emphasis on self-review.

This research study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), "involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials...that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives (p.3)." Denzin and Lincoln likened the qualitative researcher to the maker of quilts, the bricoleur who assembles images into montages. They noted "the quilter stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together. This process creates and brings psychological and emotional unity to an emotional experience" (p.5).

In this research, documentation provided what Hodder (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) referred to as 'mute evidence'. The documentation included a sample of ERO reports for a range of ECE services, Ministerial reviews of ERO, ERO's Annual Reports, Departmental Forecasts and Statement of Intent documents, Ministry of Education publications and other relevant publications. All documentation was publicly available material.

1.4 Research problem

The research problem relates to the development of understandings and practices associated with self-review in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand. Licensed and chartered ECE services have been obligated to undertake formal internal (self) review since the promulgation of the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs)* (1996) that came into force in 1998.

The problem concerns the extent to which external evaluation (undertaken and reported by ERO) has influenced and shaped thinking and practice associated with self-review in ECE services.

1.5 Research questions

The research questions were generated from the topic and focused on examining the role of external review in the development of thinking and practice associated with self-review in ECE, the theory and research underpinning self-review, and the political and educational contexts in which self-review has been constructed.

The first research question is broad and is largely responded to through the literature review. I asked:

How has self-review been defined, understood, practiced and evaluated in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand, as viewed through the relevant literature and sample of ERO reports?

The second research question focuses on exploring the educational and political contexts that have informed self-review thinking and practices of those involved in ECE services. This question asked:

In what ways have the political and educational contexts of the past 15 years informed self-review understandings and practices?

The third research question is responded to through the analysis of a sample of ERO accountability and education review reports. It focuses on the impact of external review on self-review. I sought to find out:

How external review (through ERO's accountability and education review reports) has positioned self-review and reported on its development in the early childhood education sector?

The research questions are used as a framework for the discussion of the findings.

1.6 Limitations of the research

This research study has a number of limitations. It does not explore self-review from the perspective of the ECE services in the sample of ERO reports. The research does not include the views of the ERO reviewers who undertook the reviews and wrote the accountability review and education review reports. It did not involve interviews or observations. The documents analysed and discussed are all publicly available through the internet (World Wide Web), Massey University library or in my own collection of books acquired through my professional and academic interest in review as a method of evaluation.

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

The literature review in chapter two provides an overview of the educational and political contexts in which self-review has emerged as a means to improve quality in education. It examines the educational reforms, internationally and in New Zealand, that have led to increased accountability and pressure for improvement of standards, quality and outcomes in education. The literature reviewed here primarily sets the scene for the research and goes some way to helping the researcher make sense of the data. It is through the window of external review that self-review in early childhood education in New Zealand is explicitly explored and interpreted. The role and function of the external review agency, the Education Review Office, is described and discussed in relation to changes that have led to shifts in the focus of external review, while the purpose of external review has remained largely unchanged. The way in which ERO has reported on self-review in ECE services over the past ten to fifteen years is explored.

Chapter three provides the rationale for the methodology and describes the approach to the research. The methodology and associated method for data gathering, and the process by which the analysis was undertaken, is explored within the political and educational context of this research topic. The methodological framework presented provides the bigger picture of how theories, methodology and method are linked together in this research study. This framework sat behind the research, acting as a reference point to reflect on during the research process.

The findings from the analysis of the sample of ERO external review reports are presented in chapter four. They provided a window into the language of external review and the understandings about self-review in ECE from an external review (ERO) perspective. The findings illuminated practice and gave an insight into how ERO has influenced how services go about self-review through identifying and reporting what works well and what needs to be improved.

The research questions are used to frame the discussion in chapter five. The first two questions are addressed through the literature examined in chapter two as well as through the insights from the sample of ERO reports analysed in this research. The third question is more specifically relevant to the analysis of the excerpts from the 150 ERO reports (75 'a' reports and 75 'b' reports) that provided the central data that is at the heart of this research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review explores the political and educational contexts in which self-review has emerged as a means to improve the quality in education, particularly in ECE. One of the key purposes of this literature review was to look at how self-review has been defined, understood and practiced in the ECE sector in New Zealand, as portrayed in what has been written on the subject. The emergence of self-review in both the school and early childhood education sectors is discussed. Relevant research about self-review is examined in an attempt to identify the thinking that has informed the development of understandings and practices associated with self-review at a time when external review was beginning to place an increased focus on self-review.

Literature reviews can serve many purposes, including summarising the literature in a field, identifying gaps or omissions in previous research, helping to redefine research questions and helping the researcher understand the research problem or question. In the case of this literature review, the main purpose is reflected in the words of Wagemaker (1992) who noted, “a major purpose of presenting a review of the literature pertinent to the research project is to provide the reader with the necessary background and framework within which to view the research” (p. 38).

Understandings and practices associated with self-review are influenced, not only by external review, but also by the educational milieu of the time. Making transparent the factors that influenced the creation of the data – ERO reports and the literature - drawn on for this research means that I was better able to understand and make sense of how this data has influenced thinking and practice associated with self-review in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand from the late 1990s through to 2005.

As there is no previous research that I was able to access that undertook a similar study, the literature reviewed here primarily sets the scene and goes some way to helping the researcher make sense of the data. It is important that I situated the research in the time, acknowledging the myriad of events, changes, reforms and developments taking place. The associated political and educational contexts played a critical role in creating a picture for this sense making to take place.

This literature review examined the educational reforms in New Zealand, and the rest of the world, that led to increased accountability and pressure for improvement of standards, quality and outcomes in education. It is through the window of external review that self-review in early childhood education in New Zealand is explicitly explored and interpreted. The role and function of the external review agency, the Education Review Office, is described and discussed in relation to changes that have led to shifts in the focus of external review. The way in which ERO has reported on self-review in ECE services over the past 10 to 15 years is explored. The relationship between external and internal review is also discussed. It is this relationship that offers the greatest challenge to these distinct, yet potentially complementary processes.

2.2 Education reforms

Understandings and practices associated with self-review developed during a time of significant world-wide educational change. The political and economic environment of the past 15 years, with its underlying emphasis on improving standards and raising achievement levels, was instrumental in bringing about significant educational reform, both internationally and within New Zealand. This process of change was reflected in the opening statement of a paper presented by Whetton, Twist and Sainsbury at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting 2000. They stated:

All around the world, education systems are undergoing processes of change. These may involve changes to the curriculum, refinements to assessment systems, alterations in management structures and responsibilities, the introduction of inspection or other accountability mechanisms and shifts in control towards or away from schools. In many countries, the motivation for such change is political and economic. Often underlying the desire for change is a perceived need to raise educational standards because these are believed to have a link to future economic success (p. 1).

Globally change was taking place in response to the need to improve standards and in order to demonstrate the economic value of educational provision. Sims and Sims (2004) noted that such change was driven by greater social complexity and increasingly competitive demands of a global economy, along with societal pressure to improve

educational effectiveness. Reform was focused on developing more effective education systems and raising levels of achievement (Hopkins, 2001).

In New Zealand, a major overhaul of educational administration took place in the context of massive restructuring of the public sector. This restructuring was underpinned by various theories, which collectively contributed to a new social, political and economic regime referred to as the New Right Ideology (Boston, 1991; Fiske and Ladd, 2000).

Changes to the welfare state in New Zealand during the 1980s followed a trend similar to that in other advanced capitalist countries (Olssen and Morris Matthews, 1997). Claims of falling standards and rising mediocrity necessitated change, according to Treasury (1987). The talk was about efficiency, choice, competition, and accountability.

The most significant reform in early childhood education in New Zealand came in the late 1980s. At the same time as reform was taking place in the school sector, driven by recommendations in the report *Tomorrow's Schools: The Reform of Education in New Zealand* (Department of Education, 1988), a parallel process was underway in the early childhood education sector. According to Butterworth and Butterworth (1998) "the early childhood sector was in crisis in the mid 1980s as a direct result of rampant inflation and rising unemployment" (p. 91). May (1992) referred to the period from 1988-1990 as a "roller coaster of education reforms affecting all of the education system" (p. 37). *Education To Be More: The Report of the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group* (1988) proposed changes for early childhood education intended to set the stage for more equitable and affordable services.

Education to be More (1988) was followed by *Before Five, Early Childhood Care and Education in New Zealand* (Lange, 1988). *Before Five* presented the government's statement of intent for early childhood care and education. It was part of a policy commitment from the Government to improve the standards of care and education in the early childhood education sector (Lange, 1988). Improving standards across the education system became a focus for policy makers and accountability mechanisms became the means to achieve such improvement.

2.3 Accountability

The political climate of the early 1990s saw accountability positioned as a key issue in education (Buell and Peters, 2003; Goddard and Leask, 1992). According to Stoll and Fink (1996), *performance* and *accountability* became the catchphrases of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In New Zealand the scene was set for a new regime of accountability and improvement, where responsibility was devolved through charters, as well as regulatory requirements. *Education To Be More: The Report of the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group* (1988), as already noted, proposed a new system of administration for early childhood services whereby each service was to develop a charter setting out its aims and objectives.

Before Five (Lange, 1988), the report that followed *Education to be More*, set out the nature of charters, noted that “the charters will act as a contract between the service and its community, and between the service and the state. Services will be accountable for meeting their charter objectives and responsible for the spending of government funds” (p. 1).

As indicated above, services were to be held accountable for meeting charter objectives. These objectives were to be drawn up based on national guidelines. According to *Before Five* (Lange, 1988) a Review and Audit Agency (later to become the Education Review Office), not the Ministry of Education as advised in *Education To Be More: The Report of the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group* (1988) was given responsibility for reviewing chartered ECE services’ reporting on “the pledges made in the charter” (p. 8). The initial intention was that services would be reviewed on an annual basis.

Thus the charter became a contractual undertaking between the Ministry of Education and the licensee of each early childhood service. Farquhar, Smith and Crooks (1991) reported that the process of charter development led to increased accountability for quality. However, the motivation for writing charters became driven by government funding, rather than for processes of development and improvement (Farquhar, 1991).

The charter, as a mechanism for quality assurance, was not to fulfil its original intentions and, according to Meade (1994), cynicism about charters increased with the blanket inclusion of the *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (DOPs) (1990) in all charters in 1990. The inclusion of the DOPs, as an integral part of charters, removed the necessity for quality to be higher than minimum (Farquhar, 1993). Meade (1994) referred to the increase in central control over the content of charters and the move to a more prescriptive approach to charters than was originally intended. According to Meade “confusion was rampant in 1991 and 1992, about the relationship between the charters (developed by centre staff, parents and managers), and the Statement. This confusion appears to have decreased, but so too has the sense of ownership of charters” (p. 5).

The issue of ownership of the charters became even more critical with the revision of the *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* in 1996. ECE services were required to update their charters to include the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (1996). The revised DOPs included the obligation for services to review their charter on a regular basis. This review became a process of including the revised DOPs in the charter and resulted in charters becoming more generic and less reflective of community aspirations and service specific objectives.

Achieving Excellence: A Review of the Education External Evaluation Services (Austin et al. 1997) reported that the charter had failed in its function to guide the operation of centres. Although recommendations were made in *Achieving Excellence* to strengthen the charter by the inclusion of three-year strategic plans and annual plans within the charter document, these were not acted on with regard to early childhood services. It was interesting to note that ERO’s *Framework and Resources for Early Childhood Education Reviews* (ERO, 2002) made little reference to the charter.

More detail about self-review as a contractual requirement of charters is provided in the section in this chapter on the emergence of self-review.

2.4 The emergence of external review

The function of ERO, as an external evaluation agency, has evolved over the past 15 years. ERO was born of the education reforms of the late 1980s. Initially to be known as the Review and Audit Agency, ERO was established as a government department in October 1989.

The Education Act 1989 set out ERO's powers in relation to undertaking reviews. The Education Amendment Act, 1993 clarified ERO's role, affirming its independence and giving it explicit power to initiate a review or carry out an investigation (Rodger et al. 2000). However, the specific functions of ERO were not set out in statute, thus allowing flexibility in determining the focus and functions associated with external evaluation (Rodger et al. 2000).

In the early 1990s ERO's focus was on establishing an approach to reviews that met with political expectations and the expectations of the ECE sector in terms of developing understandings of the review process. When ERO began reviewing in the ECE sector, its reviews were focused largely around the newly developed charters. The charters, along with the regulatory framework established largely in the *Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations* (1990), were the basis of ERO's early reviews. These early evaluations, called assurance audits, were instrumental in helping services clarify their contractual responsibilities. Assurance audits raised the consciousness of services regarding the requirements as set out in regulations. The focus was largely on compliance (French, 2000), with a heavy emphasis on evaluation for accountability purposes.

ERO's newly appointed Chief Executive, Judith Aitken, in her annual report for the year-ended 30 June 1992, highlighted the need for ERO's work to be redefined. A new approach to reviewing and reporting on schools and early childhood services was adopted in response to the incoming Minister responsible for the Education Review Office's requirement for ERO "to focus more directly on learning achievement and standards expanding and building on the previous focus on the charter" (ERO, 1992, p. 1). The impact for ECE services, according to ERO, was an increased focus on learning and development and communication and relationships between ECE services and local communities.

Twelve months later in 1993, the focus of ERO's reporting in relation to the early childhood education sector began to shift. The Chief Review Officer in ERO's annual report for the year ended 30 June 1993 reported that:

in the early childhood sector the Office continues to notice the lack of balance between, on the one hand, extensive regulations governing physical conditions and, on the other, poorly defined requirements in relation to the quality of staff and the curriculum provided (ERO, 1993, p.1).

Criticism of the lack of standards to ensure quality was directed at the government and the ECE sector. This was a theme that permeated through ERO's annual reports over the next eight or so years.

Accountability reviews were introduced in 1998 and focused on management, health and safety, and education delivery (ERO, 1999). According to ERO, the review reports informed "the Crown and the governing or management bodies of centres and their staff on the quality of education they provide and their management and self-review practices" (p. 22).

ERO's review methodology for ECE services changed again in 2002. *Early Childhood Reviews Future Directions* (ERO, 2002), distributed to the sector in May 2002, outlined proposals for changes to ERO's reviews of early childhood services. The focus of the new education reviews was on educational improvement, with ERO continuing to maintain compliance functions. One of the reasons for the changes, according to ERO, was that many in the sector said that they wanted ERO reports to be more useful. In developing the education review methodology, ERO adopted a model that focused on an 'assess and assist' approach to external review model. According to the *Framework and Resources for Early Childhood Education Reviews* (ERO, 2002a) the term - assess and assist - was intended to reflect dual purposes of accountability and improvement.

2.5 ERO under review

The changes to ERO's methodology in 1998 and 2002 (for ECE reviews) were driven largely by Ministerial reviews of ERO that took place in 1997 and 2000.

The data for this research is drawn from two time periods: 1998-2002 and 2005. The first period, from 1998-2002, was significant because, as already noted, ERO's review

methodology changed in 1998 to include an increased focus on quality and performance. 1998 was also the year that self-review became a mandatory requirement through the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (1996). The Ministerial reviews of ERO were politically motivated and undertaken at a time when the demands for accountability were high and the focus was increasingly on improvement in schools and ECE services.

The first of these two Ministerial reviews was undertaken in 1997 by a panel appointed by the Minister responsible for the Education Review Office. The purpose of this review was “to recommend ways of increasing the effectiveness of the Education Review Office’s contribution to improving the quality of education outcomes for students in schools and early childhood centres.” (Austin et al. 1997, p. 77). The guiding theme: self-management, self-review and self-improvement, was adopted by the panel, reflecting the links to the body of literature on school improvement and school effectiveness drawn on as part of the review.

The findings of the Ministerial review were reported in *Achieving Excellence: A Review of the Education External Evaluation Services* (Austin et al. 1997). These findings set the scene for ERO to introduce accountability reviews, where the focus shifted from compliance to educational effectiveness. An accountability review was defined as “an external evaluation of the performance of a governing/managing body in providing students with educational services” (ERO, 1998). In early childhood services, these reviews were broad-based evaluations of management, health and safety, and education delivery (ERO, 1998).

Two years later, with the election of a new government, a further Ministerial review of ERO was undertaken. The report of this review, *A Review of the Roles and Responsibilities of the Education Review Office* (Rodger et al. 2000) made a number of recommendations. The review committee recommended that ERO’s primary purpose be one of encouraging educational learning in schools (Rodger et al.). The report included a total of 27 recommendations that focused on largely on ERO’s role, the purpose of its reviews, composition of review teams and its relationship with other agencies such as the Ministry of Education.

During 2002, the methodology for undertaking reviews in early childhood services changed substantially in response to the Ministerial Review Committee's report (Rodger et al. 2000). Increasing the usefulness of ERO's reports was another factor identified as part of the change to reviews in the early childhood sector (ERO, 2002a).

2.6 Emergence of self-review

Self-review has emerged as a means to both prove and improve educational outcomes. According to Wansbrough (2004), self-review in early childhood education in New Zealand was driven by two key influences: *Ngā Huarahi Arataki - A 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2002) and the new education review methodology for external review introduced by ERO in 2002. These influences are explored in more detail later in this section.

2.7 Defining self-review

The term self-review is often used synonymously with other terms such as self-evaluation, internal evaluation, evaluation, assessment, monitoring and appraisal. Interpretations of self-review include the concepts of taking stock, monitoring everything that happens, and improving institutional performance (Brown, 2000). Such varied interpretations result in differing understandings and practices associated with the term self review. As Wansbrough (2004) notes "the variety of terminology used when talking of self-review has contributed to the reason why early childhood centres have not had a clear idea of whether what they were doing was self-review" (p. 24). A lack of clarity around terminology and the use of multiple terms synonymously to refer to review, have acted as barrier to self-review becoming an effective means to continuous improvement.

The word 'self' in self-review was sometimes questioned as being more about the individual than the collective. Clift, Nuttall and McCormick (1987) acknowledged the issue with the use of the word 'self' noting that "its connotations are clear enough when we are considering individual teachers evaluating their own practice inside the four walls of their own classroom at their own instigation, but in institutional self-evaluation they are less clear" (p. 8).

The word review implies some process or thinking which involves re-looking or looking back. Goddard and Leask (1992) referred to this retrospective nature of review and distinguished it quite clearly from the monitoring process which is often confused with review. They presented two definitions of the term review that help clarify meaning. Both definitions have an evaluative component involving 'questioning assumptions', 'collecting and examining evidence' and 'asking fundamental questions'. According to Goddard and Leask (1992):

Reviews [of policy, performance and procedure] are periodic and semi-formal and used for questioning assumptions. Review is retrospective involving the collection and examining of evidence and information. It goes beyond monitoring to ask fundamental questions e.g. programme aims, rationales, impact, value, reassessment of priorities and alternative policies (p. 159).

Clift et al. (1987) added another dimension in their discussion of the concepts of school self-evaluation by referring to the work of the International Schools Improvement Project (ISIP) undertaken in the 1980s. They cited Robert Bollen (1987) who was the Dutch convenor of the ISIP who summarised school self-evaluation as "a systematic inspection by a school, a subsystem or an individual, of the actual functioning of the school" (p. 203). It is the systematic nature of the process that is the key to this process (Bollen, 1987 cited by Clift et al.).

Defining self-review in the context of the school sector has also been somewhat problematic. The definitions of self-review in the literature are varied and have evolved in different contexts and at different times as the school sector has grappled with self-review and what it means for those in governance, management and teaching roles.

⊂ Schollum and Ingram (1991) referred to self-review as "an ongoing process enabling a school to focus on its vision, to listen and look at itself and determine what the school is really like" (p. 4). Although this definition referred to some kind of ongoing process and described what review should focus on in the school setting, it did not make clear what that process might involve or what kind of outcome was being sought.

An ERO report on self-review in schools referred to self-review as "the processes of monitoring the policies and curriculum management strategies authorised by the Board of Trustees" (ERO, 1994, p. 3). This definition, whilst reinforcing the notion of review

as a process, is also a little confusing in that the word monitoring is used without any clarity about what this might involved or what it might achieve.

The Ministry of Education (1997) defined self-review as “a process that enables a school to evaluate how effectively it is meeting the goals it has adopted” (p. 9). In the Ministry of Education’s April 2003 issue of a newsletter, *Planning for Better Student Outcomes*, self-review was referred to as a process that involved “investigating evidence about student outcomes and current ways of doing things to find out where improvement is needed” (p. 1). Although this definition was more specific about the why of review, it was less clear about what investigating involved and what was meant by evidence.

According to Martyn (1996) school self-review is quite eclectic, borrowing from many evaluation models and approaches. Often terms such as review, evaluation, monitoring and investigation are used interchangeably or synonymously implying that they all mean the same thing. Although some definitions refer to a process of evaluation or investigation, many tend to confuse rather than clarify what self-review involves and its purpose.

2.8 Self-review in ECE: a brief international perspective

Self-review in the context of ECE is not commonly referred to in international literature. Where there is reference to review, or more commonly accreditation and self-evaluation, it was often in relation to quality improvement systems. Space does not allow for a comprehensive discussion of the international literature relating to the range of quality assurance and improvement systems and frameworks that exist internationally. The focus of this section therefore is to give a brief overview of accreditation systems in the United States and Australia and to acknowledge the self-evaluation frameworks recently introduced in the United Kingdom.

Quality became the subject of much debate, in a time where the ways in which quality was defined, understood and evaluated was changing. Quality assurance systems that were very prevalent in the late 1980s and through the 1990s reflected an emphasis on lists of characteristics or features of quality. These characteristics contributed to quality, such as those developed for regulatory requirements, or determined quality, as used in accreditation systems (Wangmann, 1994).

In Australia and the United States accreditation systems have been used to facilitate quality improvement in ECE (Bredenkamp and Glowaki, 1996; Wangmann, 1995). Doherty-Derkowski (1995) described accreditation as a process by which standards, above minimum regulatory standards, are set by a recognised body and used as a basis for services to voluntarily evaluate themselves against. The accreditation involves some form of self-evaluation followed by verification by trained outside observers. The body that set the standards usually undertook the verification process.

In the United Kingdom several self-evaluation publications have been developed for ECE centres. At the heart of these publications is the drive to improve what is happening for children. Performance indicators and standards, used in the external evaluation (inspection) process are a feature of these publications.

The Scottish Executive Education Department (2000) introduced an approach to self-evaluation: *The Child at the Centre*. This publication has been developed for centres providing education and care for children aged three to five years. As noted above, *The Child at the Centre* included performance indicators based on Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education performance indicators used in the inspection process. The framework for self-evaluation is very closely aligned to that used in the inspection process.

The Education and Training Inspectorate in Northern Ireland has also developed a framework for self-evaluation. *Together Towards Improvement - Preschool Education* (2004) provides guidance for centres wanting to undertake self-evaluation. The resource includes indicators of quality that can be used, along with other standards and accreditation schemes, to help centres evaluate:

How we are doing?

How do we know?

What action to we need to take to bring about improvement? (p.3)

This framework is also closely aligned to that used in the inspection process.

In the United Kingdom the Effective Early Learning (EEL) project led by Christine Pascal and Tony Bertram focused on supporting teachers to implement a programme of evaluation and improvement for children aged 0–8 years. According to Mooney, Cameron, Candappa, McQuail, Moss and Petrie (2003) the EEL project is an example

of one of the many quality assurance and improvement schemes in the UK (England). EE involves centres in a process of self-evaluation, which is externally supported and validated. Mooney et al. (2003) noted that the EEL project has been utilised by local authorities in England and in the Netherlands and parts of Portugal.

The quality assurance and improvement systems discussed here have evaluation and improvement at their core. They reflect the worldwide shifts in early childhood education to demonstrate the positive benefits of ECE and to account for the investments in education in the early years.

2.9 Self-review in early childhood education in New Zealand

Self-review within the ECE context in New Zealand has been defined in a number of ways by different government agencies, within various documents and over time. My research is particularly interested in how self-review in ECE has been defined, understood and practiced, and how this is portrayed in a range of literature, along with an analysis of ERO's evaluative findings when reporting on self-review in publicly available reports.

Self-review is a relatively new term for ECE services and has its roots in earlier terminology that referred to programme review, internal review and quality review. Review was first defined for ECE in 1998 following the mandating of internal review through the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (DOPs) (1996). The Ministry of Education's resource to support the implementation of the DOPs, *Quality in Action/ Te Mahi Whai Hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998), defines internal review as:

a process that managers and educators use both to evaluate how well their service's policies, objectives, and practices are achieving the requirements of their statement of philosophy and charter (which includes the DOPs), and to improve the quality of the service they provide (p. 87).

This definition clearly positioned review as an evaluative process linked to early childhood education services' philosophy statements and the DOPs within the context of improving quality of service provision.

The use of the term self-review in ECE emerged in 2002 with the adoption by government of a strategic plan for ECE. *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki - A 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2002) sets direction for ECE in New Zealand. This plan is based on the government's vision for "all New Zealand children to have the opportunity to participate in quality early childhood education, no matter their circumstances" (Foreword). The plan includes a goal to improve quality and it is within this goal that the plan focuses on strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning practices through the development and implementation of "self-review processes that reflect on quality practices and contribute to the external review processes" (p. 17). The strategic plan gives recognition to the importance of self-review in ECE as a means to improve quality and contribute to external review.

The Education Review Office's *Framework and Resources for Early Childhood Education Reviews* (ERO, 2002a) usefully distinguished between the terms 'self review' and 'self audit'.

Self review is a process through which early childhood education services evaluate the effectiveness of what they do, with the aim of improving the quality of their practice.

Self audit is a process of checking compliance with legal requirements (p. 5).

This definition is quite useful in that it includes the link to evaluation and clarifies the purpose. It does not, however, make any reference to what the process might involve. A further definition of self-review was offered by ERO in its publication *Self-review in Early Childhood Education Services* (ERO, 2005). ERO stated "self-review is a process whereby early childhood education services evaluate their operations and practices to maintain or improve their quality" (p. 1).

Draft Self-review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Ministry of Education, 2005), was published as part of a project I was involved in for the Ministry of Education. The guidelines were developed as a resource to support ECE services implement effective self-review.

The draft guidelines defined self-review as:

a process of finding out how well we are achieving our shared vision for our tamariki. It involves looking at how we can improve our practices to achieve positive learning outcomes for children. Self-review also enables us to check whether we are fulfilling our obligations as set out in regulations and legislation (p. 9).

This definition is more comprehensive and includes purposes and focus as well as establishing that the process is an evaluative one.

The final version of the self-review guidelines for ECE services, developed as a result of trialling *Draft Self-review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2005), has recently been published. *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua / Self-review guidelines for Early Childhood Education Services* (Ministry of Education, 2006) defined review as:

the deliberate and ongoing process of finding out how well our practice enhances children's learning and development. Review allows us to see which aspects of our practice are working well and what we could do better. As a result we can make decisions about what to do to improve. Through review practice is transformed and, ultimately, children's learning benefits (p. 8).

Across a range of definitions, a common feature is the reference to processes and a systematic approach or method. Wansbrough (2004) highlighted this feature and added that it is the improvement function that distinguishes it from other processes and practices. Many definitions highlighted the tension that arises related to purpose, particularly in relation to improvement and accountability.

As already noted, self-review is still a relatively new activity for ECE services. Hurst (1995) completed a study that looked at quality assurance in ECE, and in particular the work of ERO and how ECE services understood and practised self-review. Hurst (1995) commented that self-review was mainly informal and although self-review was actively encouraged in the school sector, this was not the case for the early childhood education sector. Hurst's study was undertaken prior to review becoming a requirement for ECE services and therefore her findings were not surprising.

2.10 Self-review as a requirement in ECE

The requirements for review in ECE services in New Zealand are set out in regulations and in charter agreements based on the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (1996). Prior to 1998, although early childhood services were not required to undertake self-review, the regulations required some form of programme review.

Currently ECE services are required to undertake programme review. Regulation 32 of the *Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations* (1998) relating to the “Programme of activities” (section e) stated that the licensee of a licensed centre must, to the satisfaction of the Secretary of Education “periodically review the programme of activities undertaken at the centre, after having regard to the developments in early childhood education and the learning and developmental needs of children.”

The *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (1996) includes two objectives relating to review. DOP 9 stated “management should develop and regularly review a statement of the service’s philosophy and the charter, in consultation with educators, parents/guardians and where appropriate whānau.”

DOP 10 (e) stated “management and educators should implement policies, objectives and practices which are regularly evaluated and modified by an ongoing, recorded process of internal review.”

These requirements, along with service-specific expectations and systems, underpin self-review practices in early childhood education.

2.11 ERO and self-review

ERO’s role in relation to self-review in ECE has changed over the last ten years. ERO first made comments about self-review in ECE in 1995, prior to it becoming a requirement that ECE services had to meet. An evaluation report titled *Early Childhood Learning Programmes* was published in 1995. It focused on improving the quality of early childhood learning programmes. The report referred to ongoing self-review in the context of programme evaluation. The report noted that “an ongoing process of self-review should be undertaken to build on findings about the match between children’s development and the opportunities offered by the programme” (ERO, 1995, p. 8).

This reference by ERO to self-review was an attempt to address the variable quality of ECE provision in the sector at the time (ERO, 1995). It was very closely linked to children's learning with an expectation that an analysis of assessment information should be used to improve the learning programme.

In 1997, as already mentioned, a Ministerial review of ERO was undertaken. This review was significant in that it included a strong focus on self-review. Although the report noted the ECE sector was ahead of the compulsory sector, effective self-review in both schools and early childhood education services was found to be in its infancy (Austin, et al. 1997).

Some centres have developed their own indicators, while others have called in a consultant to assist with the process. It is seen as a melding of external and internal quality assurance processes that has led to improved provision of quality education and care. It is also acknowledged within this sector that there is still a great deal of development work to be done (p. 43).

This situation was not surprising as requirements for self-review in ECE (referred to as internal review) had only just been gazetted (in the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices*, October, 1996) when internal review became a charter requirement for ECE services in 1998

The Ministerial review of ERO reported in *Achieving Excellence* (1997) recommended that self-review drive improvement and external evaluation (Austin et al. 1997). It also recommended that centres be required to undertake self-review supported by guidelines and professional development. ERO's review methodology was reviewed and accountability review implemented in 1998. This was the first review methodology to place an explicit focus on self-review in ECE.

The relationship between external review and self-review was a focus of the Ministerial review of ERO undertaken in 2000 (Rodger et al. 2000). The terms of reference for this review included examining the relationship between external evaluation and self-review. The executive summary of this report noted that "the office should pay more attention to self-reviews, and contribute to the improvement process by providing guidance to schools on how to address concerns (Rodger et al. p. 1).

Strategies for early childhood services to develop their capacity for self-review were identified by Rodger et al. (2000) and included the need for the provision of resources, training and support for management and teachers. ERO was charged with ensuring that early childhood services had a programme set out for self-review, that self-review was being undertaken and that results of self-review had been analysed, evaluated and reported (Rodger et al.) .

ERO's focus on self-review in ECE continued with the release of a report titled *Early Childhood Services* in May 2001. The report's purpose was to "inform policy work on strategies to improve participation in early childhood education" (ERO, 2001, p. 1). It was based on information gathered from a meeting with 13 review officers with experience and expertise in ECE (ERO, 2001). The report commented on how well the early childhood centres reviewed by ERO during 2000 were meeting their legal and contractual obligations. A total of 615 ERO reviews reports of kindergartens, education and care centres, playcentres, kōhanga reo and umbrella bodies, completed between 1 January and 31 December 2000, were analysed in relation to legal and contractual obligations not being met. One of the most common 'actions for compliance' related to internal review. Thirty-three percent of the ECE services were not meeting the requirements of DOPs 10 (e) relating to internal review.

The link between self-review and external review (ERO) was acknowledged in *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki - A 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2002). The development of the strategic plan involved a working group and sector consultation. *The Final Report of the Working Group for Development of the Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* was released in October 2001. This report included a strategy to "ensure ongoing improvement through review and evaluation" (p. 16). It highlighted the need for "excellent practice to be extended across all licensed and chartered early childhood services" (p. 16) and noted that "external evaluations by the Education Review Office (ERO) would stimulate EC services to take an improvement approach, with emphasis on the services' own management goals and review processes and on curriculum, teaching and learning" (p. 16).

Education reviews for ECE services, introduced by ERO in 2002, included a strong focus on self-review. ERO's *Framework and Resources for Early Childhood Education Reviews* (ERO, 2002a) sets out its approach to education reviews in ECE and notes

“ERO’s emphasis on developing linkages between external evaluation and self review” (p. 4). Before each review ERO provides ECE services with an opportunity to complete a *Programme Philosophy and Self Review Statement*. According to ERO (2002a), it wants its reviews to enhance the relationship between external reviews and services’ own self-review. ERO seeks information from each service about the extent and nature of its self-review. ECE services are asked to describe their self-review process as follows:

Description of self review process

Which of the following would you use to describe the self review you undertake?

Please circle one option.

- *Highly developed*
- *Well developed*
- *Needing further development*
- *Early stages of development*
- *Not yet started.*

Could you please provide a brief description of the focus and process of your most recent self review(s). If appropriate, enclose a record (or summary) of the findings, evaluation and action plan for improvement from those self reviews (ERO, 2002a, p. 3).

ERO’s education reviews emphasised self-review with ERO (2002a) stating that:

ERO’s aim is to encourage and support the development of self review in the early childhood sector through raising awareness of review processes and incorporating services’ self-review information in ERO reviews. At the same time, where no self-review information relevant to the review priorities is available, ERO’s processes need to be flexible and robust enough not to depend on self-review information (p. 6).

ERO (2002a) also noted the variable quality of ECE service’s self-review and that where self-review was not well developed, it would use external review to support development of self-review.

In 2004, ERO published its *Evaluation Indicators for Education Reviews in Early Childhood Services* (ERO, 2004a). According to ERO (2004) this publication “added to a series of publications designed to strengthen ERO’s review processes in early childhood education and schools, and to improve the quality of self-review in early childhood services” (p. 39). In its annual report for the year ending 30 June 2005, ERO noted feedback indicated that 91 percent of early childhood services found the evaluation indicators to be useful and 77 percent said they would use them for ongoing self-review (ERO, 2005a). These findings suggested that ERO’s evaluation indicators were supporting ECE services’ self-review process.

All ERO reports of early childhood services in 2005 and 2006 included self-review as an area of national interest. Areas of national interest are a part of the review focus in education reviews that provide “information about how government policies are working in early childhood centres” (ERO, 2006). In evaluating self-review in ECE services, ERO focused on how effectively ECE services are implementing self-review to improve the quality of education and care (ERO, 2005). In December 2005, ERO published an evaluation report on self-review. *Self-review in Early Childhood Education Services* was based on an analysis of data collected from education reviews completed in term 1, 2005. The sample was made up of 164 ECE services and four umbrella organisations. The report found “ECE services have a developing understanding of the purpose of self-review and how to integrate it into ECE practice” (ERO, 2005, p. 1).

According to ERO (2005a), ECE services needed to:

- *increase staff awareness of the importance of effective self-review processes;*
- *involve all staff in the self-review processes;*
- *broaden the range of activities that are included in self-review processes; and*
- *increase staff awareness of the resources available to support them with self-review (p. 2).*

ERO (2005) noted that ECE services used a variety of terms to describe their self-review and that the words used in the report reflected the wide range and use of terms to describe self-review. It acknowledged the importance of self-review in improving outcomes for children.

There is a growing understanding of the purposes of self-review and how to integrate it into ECE practice. While many services still need to develop self-review further if it is to have an impact on improved outcomes for children, many others are showing the positive effects of self-review (p. 16).

ERO concluded its report by noting that the most effective intervention was whole centre professional development that focused on developing understanding about self-review and supporting the implementation of self-review to improve the quality of the service (ERO, 2005).

ERO has taken an increasingly interest in self-review in ECE services. This interest has been influenced by the two Ministerial reviews of ERO in 1997 and 2000 as well as by the changes to ERO's review methodology in 1998 and 2002. ERO's reporting on self-review as an area of national interest has highlighted the importance and value of self-review in improving the quality of ECE in New Zealand.

2.12 Research and self-review

Research related to self-review is limited. Studies that have been undertaken in New Zealand and internationally identified several common themes relating to important characteristics of effective self-review (Carr, May, Podmore with Cubey, Hatherly and Macartney, 1999; Grey, 2002; MacBeath and McGlynn, 2002; Martyn, 1996). Common themes in the research highlighted the importance of:

- collaboration and participation by all individuals involved;
- leadership in relation to the self-review process;
- engagement in self-review as an ongoing process;
- ownership of the self-review process by all involved; and
- documentation which is both accessible and useful.

Research related to self-review practice in early childhood education services in New Zealand is also very limited. The key research studies relate largely to programme evaluation, and the implementation of *The Quality Journey/ He Haerenga Whai Hua*:

Improving quality in early childhood services. (1999). *The Quality Journey*, published by the Ministry of Education in 1999 outlines a framework for developing quality improvement systems in the early childhood sector and was developed to extend the concepts and ideas found in the DOPs (1996), *Quality in Action/Te Mahi Whai Hua* (1998) and the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Matauranga mo ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Initially, research was focused around programme evaluation linked to *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Matauranga mo ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996). One such research project (May, Podmore and Mara, 1998) focused on the development of a framework for self evaluation of early childhood programmes. This project aimed to develop a cohesive framework for practitioners to undertake their own evaluation of programmes using *Te Whāriki* (1996). The concept of teaching stories, as an evaluation tool emerged from this research. The project developed the idea that the evaluation of an early childhood programme should be grounded in quality from the child's perspective.

Research by McLachlan-Smith, Grey and Haynes (2001) reported on the preliminary findings of a study involving 72 early childhood centres involved in a professional development contract to implement *The Quality Journey/ He Harenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1999). The centres involved included childcare centres, kindergartens, playcentres, Montessori pre-schools, community creches and a Pasifika centre. The research project set out to answer the question "In what ways has the quality improvement programme influenced participating teachers' practice?" The professional development programme gave emphasis to empowerment and exploring self-review in a culture where responsibility rather than blame was important.

Outcomes of this professional development included participants setting up, reflecting on and revising management or planning systems, especially in relation to the DOPs (McLachlan-Smith et al. 2001). This research, however, did not make clear the extent to which the professional development impacted on pedagogy (Mitchell and Cubey, 2003). Feedback from participants, as part of the evaluation of the professional

development programme, indicated that most thought their interactions with children had improved as a result of improved methods for documenting teaching and learning.

A study by Depree and Hayward (2001) trialled the resource *The Quality Journey/ He Haerenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1999) in 10 Christchurch early childhood centres. A prerequisite to participating in the professional development based pilot study was that centres were to have “strong organisational groundwork in place” (Depree and Hayward, 2001, p. 1). Whole team professional development of 15 hours per centre was provided for each of the ten centres. This study differed from that of McLachlan-Smith et al.’s study in that it provided whole centre development and placed an emphasis on each centre setting their own goals as a focus for review (Mitchell and Cubey, 2003).

In reporting on the outcomes of the pilot professional development programme for three of the 10 centres involved, Depree and Hayward (2001) highlighted a number of positive aspects of involvement in reviews based on *The Quality Journey/ He Haerenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1999). These included:

- *increased awareness of teaching practices;*
- *educators challenged to lift their standard of professionalism;*
- *teams working together and leadership skills encouraged;*
- *whole teams, including educators and management striving for excellence;*
and
- *enhanced problem solving skills.*

(Depree and Hayward, 2001, p. 8)

These benefits related to outcomes for the participants and link with the benefits identified in *The Quality Journey*, particularly in relation to increased professionalism (Ministry of Education, 1999).

The importance of support for self-review and the importance of leadership for self-review have been identified in a number of research studies. An article by Meade, Grey, Depree and Hayward (2002) reported on professional development pilot studies undertaken in Auckland and in Christchurch. In drawing together the overall findings of both studies, Meade et al. commented on the nature of the support needed from the

professional development facilitators. Many centres indicated a need for more support to undertake further reviews. Meade et al. concluded that there is a need for release time, advice and guidance, and simple methods “if reviews are to become an integral part of professional practice in early childhood education” (p. 6).

Grey (2002) explored the role of the leader in self-review in early childhood education. The two centres involved in this case study research had been involved in a professional development programme to support the implementation of self-review processes. Grey’s (2002) research into leadership and self-review highlighted the role of the leader in relation to improvement.

Wansbrough (2003) set out to look in depth at an ECE centre undertaking review to see how useful the resource *The Quality Journey/ He Haerenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1999) was in establishing a quality improvement system. The study “confirmed the need for strong organisational groundwork as a basis from which to develop a quality improvement system” (p. 139). Wansbrough’s findings concurred with those of Grey (2002) with regard to the importance of leadership in review. The importance of ECE services developing a vision and educational goals focused on outcomes for children was identified by Wansbrough (2003) as a critical factor in self-review.

Grey, Haynes and McLachlan-Smith’s (2000) hypothetical case study referred to earlier identified five benefits of conducting self-review. The benefits for the centre in this study related to encouraging learning, demystifying the evaluation process, increasing collaboration between those involved, ownership of the review process, and supporting innovative approaches to evaluation.

Wansbrough (2004) in an article for the journal *Early Education* titled *Self review- The hot topic* summed up the challenge for the ECE sector when she stated “I think it is important that early childhood teachers are thinking about what self review processes should look like so that they are able to take part in the debate and not have things ‘done to them’” (p. 24).

The ECE sector needs to be involved in ongoing dialogue about the benefits and challenges associated with self-review. The role of research in this dialogue is to contribute to the understandings about the challenges and outcomes of self-review and the extent to which effective self-review can contribute to improved quality. Research

is also needed to further explore the changing relationship between self (internal) review and external review.

2.13 Relationship between external review and self-review

This research study looked at an aspect of the relationship between external review and self (internal) review. The relationship explored is one of seeking to understand how external review has influenced understanding and practice associated with self-review. External review evaluates the effectiveness and quality of self-review, as well as the extent to which early childhood services meet requirements for review. These requirements, as already noted, are expressed in the regulations and through contractual undertakings as set out in charters.

There is much discussion in the literature as to the relationship between external review and self-review. Internal evaluation is seen to be synonymous with self-evaluation (MacBeath and McGlyn, 2002). The words internal or self are used in a corporate or communal sense. MacBeath and McGlyn argued a case for internal evaluation on the grounds of ownership “that lies with the Socratic notion of knowing thyself” (p. 19). They noted however, the challenge that comes with needing to consider a range of perspectives when undertaking internal (self) evaluation. According to MacBeath and McGlyn focused, relevant and robust self-evaluation can remove the need for external verification.

Critics point out that internal evaluation can be self-deluding and argue that external evaluation leads to a culture of dependency (MacBeath and McGlyn, 2002). Ferguson, Earley, Fidler and Ouston (2000) acknowledged that although self-review can be a worthwhile activity, external review adds rigour to the process. Self-review is often suspected of being an easy option (Ferguson et al. 2000). External evaluation can provide the reality check so often needed with a fresh set of eyes seeing what can be the blind spots for those within schools and early childhood services. The expectation that external evaluation can serve two key functions, those of accountability and improvement can be problematic. These two functions are not necessarily complementary. External evaluation, such as inspection, can become a barrier to improvement, especially when the process places an emphasis on proving rather than improving (Hopkins, Harris, Watling, and Beresford, 1999).

Nevo (2002) questioned whether internal evaluation and external evaluation can exist together. He noted that external evaluation can stimulate internal evaluation, expand its scope and serve to validate its findings while internal evaluation can expand the scope of external evaluation and increase evaluation literacy (Nevo, 2002). The benefits and limitations of external evaluation are usefully summarised by Cuttance (1994).

External evaluations can contribute to accountability because they have a degree of independence by being conducted at arm's length from the operations of the school. External evaluation approaches, however, are less effective than internal approaches in the everyday monitoring of progress towards intended development outcomes (p. 108).

MacBeath, Boyd, Rand, and Bell (1999) emphasised that both internal and external evaluation are needed in evaluation and neither can exist by itself. They stated:

In the best possible worlds external and internal evaluation are complementary and draw on the particular strengths of each approach. The balance is only likely to be achieved, however, where the purposes and relative strengths of each are recognised and planned for. Above all there has to be a systematic attempt to fit external and internal evaluation together and use them as a coherent whole (p. 1).

It is clear from the literature that a combination of both internal and external evaluation is better than either alone (Hargreaves, 1995; MacBeath et al. 1999; MacBeath and McGlyn, 2002; MacGilchrist, 2000; Stoll and Fink, 1996). However, the nature of the relationship between external and internal evaluation is one which is yet to be resolved (MacGilchrist, 2000).

My research is undertaken from the perspective of external review. Although it does not explore in depth the relationship between internal and external review, it does raise some questions about this relationship and how the two might exist in the future. Nevo (2002) suggested that a rigorous evaluation system would see external evaluation focusing on how good the self-evaluation is in a school rather than how good the school might be.

2.14 Conclusion

The literature examined here serves several purposes. It provides a context for the analysis of the data (ERO reports on ECE services) and for the discussion of the findings. The literature reviewed spans the breadth of the research questions as well as responding specifically to the first two research questions:

1. How has self-review been defined, understood, practiced and evaluated in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand as viewed through the relevant literature and sample of ERO reports?
2. In what ways have the political and educational contexts of the past 15 years informed self-review understandings and practices?

The literature reviewed positions the growth of self-review in a wider context of educational reform and accountability. The history of self-review demonstrates the rationale for its existence. Self-review in ECE is at a critical stage in its acceptance and implementation. The real challenge for the future lies in how the two processes (internal and external) work together to achieve desired outcomes in ECE.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the rationale for the methodology and approach to the investigation of the development of understandings and practices associated with self-review in the early childhood education (ECE) sector in New Zealand.

The focus of this research was to investigate how understandings and practices associated with self-review in the ECE sector have been influenced through external review. A qualitative research methodology was adopted and used to analyse and illuminate key messages about self-review as communicated through a sample of Education Review Office (ERO) reports on a range of ECE services undertaken between 1997 and 2005. This period has significance for a number of reasons already outlined in the literature review. The most significant development during that time, in terms of self-review, was the inclusion of the requirement for ECE services to undertake self (internal) review as part of charter undertakings specified in the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (1996). There was also an increased focus on self-review through ERO's external review methodology that was influenced by the two Ministerial reviews of ERO; one in 1997 and another in 2000. Both of these reviews highlighted self-review as an important complementary process to ERO's external review in bringing about improvement in schools and ECE services.

3.2 Methodological framework

Mutch (2005) presented a useful way of thinking about the 'bigger' picture of how theories, methodology and method link together in a research study. I have adapted the framework presented by Mutch (2005, p. 109) in order to provide an overview of the research. Table 1 on the next page provides an overview of the views, theories, research topic, research questions, sample size, method, data and methodology.

Table 1: Methodological framework

World view	Subjective and interpretive
Macro-level theories	Hermeneutics and grounded theory
Mid-range theory	Constructivist
Topic	Self-review thinking and practice (in ECE) and the influence of external review (ERO)
Research questions	How has self-review been defined, understood, practiced and evaluated in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand? In what ways has the political, social and educational context of the past 15 years informed self-review understandings and practices? How has external review (through ERO's accountability and education review reports) positioned self-review and reported on its development in the early childhood education sector?
Sample size	75 ECE services x 2 reports = 150 report segments
Method	document analysis
Data	Qualitative
Methodology	historical research

This research is essentially qualitative, inviting the researcher to position themselves within the research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research locates the observer in the world. As the researcher, I located myself within this context, with a personal and professional interest in the topic, as well as with experience working as an external evaluator in ERO, and with my knowledge of self-review gained through my work leading a project to develop self-review guidelines for ECE services. This interest, knowledge and experience contributed to the potential prejudices and biases I brought to the research, and in particular to the analysis of the data. By making transparent my own position within the research, I was better able to identify the impact of previous experiences and knowledge on the research process itself, as well as on the findings that emerged.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) referred to the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur, a maker of quilts. Bricoleur is a French term used to refer to those who use what they have at hand to get the job done (McLeod, 2000). According to McLeod such people are flexible, responsive and reflexive people who recognise the research process as being shaped by their personal history.

The materials for the quilt in this research are the ERO reports and associated literature that give both context and meaning to the language of the reports. The quilt is stitched together from the outcomes of the analysis. The montage represented the codes and categories that evolved through the process of analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) noted that qualitative research “consists of interpretative material practices that make the world visible” (p. 4). The quilt revealed the understandings and practices of self-review in ECE from the perspective of the external reviewer (ERO) and the perspective that I, as the researcher, brought to the process.

3.2.1 Underpinning theories

An interpretive, constructivist approach underpinned the research. Gephart (1999) noted that interpretive research is concerned with making sense of the data, rather than measurement of the data. The process of meaning making was based on the knowledge brought to the analysis process, as well as the knowledge gained as a result of the analysis.

Scott and Usher (1999) referred to the process of analysis and meaning making as a ‘fusion of horizons’ in which standpoints and situatedness come together.

Through the interplay between one’s interpretive frames or pre-understandings and the actions one is trying to understand that knowledge is developed. Pre-understandings can make one more open-minded because the process of interpretation and understanding they are put at risk, tested and modified through the encounter with what one is trying to understand (p. 28).

According to Gephart (1999) constructivists are concerned with the interplay of the subjective, objective and intersubjective knowledge derived from language, social interactions and written texts. In this research the interplay was largely between the context (as reflected in the literature review), the ERO reports (written texts) and my

own experiences and perspectives as the researcher that I brought to the interpretive process of analysis.

This interpretive research was underpinned by hermeneutics: a method of textual analysis (Bryne, 1998). According to Bryne hermeneutics emphasises the historic and sociocultural influences on inquiry. The term 'hermeneutics' is derived from the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, to interpret and from the noun *heremena*, meaning interpretation (Thompson, 1990, cited by Bryne). It is historically associated with the interpretation of biblical texts. Hermeneutics is concerned with the meaning of a text and is the starting point in understanding. It can be both an underlying philosophical grounding for an interpretive approach and a specific mode of analysis. In the context of this research, hermeneutics underpinned the approach to qualitative analysis rather than the analysis being specifically grounded in hermeneutics. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) referred to the hermeneutic act of interpretation as a process of making sense to communicate understanding. They noted that "not only is all research merely an act of interpretation, but hermeneutics contend perception itself is an act of interpretation" (p. 285).

The systematic analysis process involved the iterative development of working theories about the role of external review in influencing understandings and practices about self-review. This process was an iterative one closely aligned to an inductive approach referred to as grounded theory. Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and refers to a process by which theory develops from the data collected and not by testing formulated hypotheses in a deductive way. The idea behind grounded theory is that the reading and re-reading of data assists the researcher to discover and label variables, categories, concepts and properties and their relationships in the data. Grounded theory is summed up well by Strauss and Corbin (1990) who stated "One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area of study is allowed to emerge" (p. 23).

As I interacted with the ERO reports, I read and re-read individual service sections searching for possible themes. Early themes emerged from the examination of the reports related to what services reviewed, how review was understood and implemented, what it looked like in practice and why it was important. Sometimes the obvious themes stood out, such as the findings associated with compliance and recommendations for improvement. At other times the themes were seemingly hidden

and were only made visible through closely reading the text and recognising the nuances in the words used and the context in which findings were couched.

As key themes in the written texts (ERO reports) emerged, new understandings prompted further analysis of the data. Each time the data was revisited, new themes emerged creating opportunities for theorising.

3.2.2 Historical research

This research study was loosely historical in terms of the methodology applied. The context and the data gathered and analysed were created in a different time from that in which the study was completed. McCulloch and Richardson (2000) noted that the selection of dates or a period of time is common in historical research. This research used reports which are a public record of the outcomes of a process that took place in a political, educational and economic context. This context influenced both the external review process and the nature of the reported findings. The authenticity of the ERO reports was considered a given as the reports were obtained from the website of the organisation responsible for producing them (www.ero.govt.nz).

3.2.3 Document analysis

The research method was essentially a document analysis using historical information. Mutch (2005) noted that document analysis is an easy and accessible way to gather data to answer a question. For this research the main source of data was ERO reports that have been written to communicate the findings of external review. These reports, a sample of 'accountability review' and 'education review' reports, are publicly available and were written as an outcome of an external review process undertaken by ERO.

According to Duffy (2005) documents can be from either primary or secondary sources. In the case of the ERO reports, although they are from a primary source, the data was secondary due to the fact that the reports were written at an earlier time by a person other than the researcher and for a different purpose.

The ERO reports reflected both witting and unwitting purposes (Marwick, 2001) in this research. The reports imparted what ERO intended through its external review reporting processes and I also used and interpreted them in unintended ways. This research attempted to take both the witting and unwitting into account in the analysis

process. The intended messages of the reports were very much to the fore in the analysis process, but the analysis itself meant that the reports were used collectively and analysed in ways not linked to their main primary purpose.

According to Derrida (cited by Hodder in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) "texts are a form of artefact produced under certain material conditions and embedded within social and ideological systems" (p. 707). The ERO reports, used as the main source of data for this research, were informed by the external review process that is based on a pre-determined methodology (ERO, 2002a) and written according to specific standards.

3.3 The documentation

As already noted the central documentation selected as the main data source was publicly available Education Review Office (ERO) reports on early childhood services. The use of these documents was undertaken with the copyright statement on ERO's website <http://www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/Footer+-Conditions+of+Use> in mind, ERO (2006a) stated:

Copyright: ERO material may be reproduced free of charge, without requiring specific permission, for all educational and research purposes including private use, but not for commercial gain. This is also subject to the material being reproduced accurately and not being used in a derogatory or misleading manner. The source of the material must be acknowledged.

Supporting documentation included other ERO documents such as annual reports, departmental forecast reports, statements of intent and national evaluation reports. It also included the two Ministerial review reports of ERO undertaken in 1997 and 2000. This supporting documentation was drawn on in the discussion of the analysis of the ERO reports.

A sample of Education Review Office (ERO) reports was used as the basis for analysis and discussion. The Accountability Review reports and Education Review reports were accessed from the ERO website during September 2005. The sample comprised reports from 75 early childhood education (ECE) services made of different services as in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample of ERO reports from different ECE services

Playcentre	Kindergarten	Education and care	Total
25	25	25	75

The 75 ECE services were selected across all of ERO's five regional areas.

Table 3: Regional sample of numbers of reports

Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5
5 playcentres				
5 kindergartens				
5 education & care services				

3.4 Selection of data

3.4.1 Time periods for reports

Two reports for each of the 75 ECE services were randomly selected from two broad time periods. The time periods were (A) 1998-2002 and (B) 2005. Time period (B) was selected as all ERO Education Review reports on early childhood education services undertaken in 2005 included reporting on self-review as part of "an area of government interest". Therefore, the playcentres, kindergartens and education and care services in the sample all had an ERO report in 2005 (between January and August as sampling was done in September 2005).

In selecting the reports for the (A) time period (1998-2002), the services had to have had a report in this time period, as well as one in the (B) time period (2005). The rationale for this was that the requirement to implement self-review was promulgated in 1998 and at the same time ERO introduced Accountability Reviews where the focus shifted away from compliance to performance and generally included reporting on self-review. The time frame was broadened from 1998, as many of the services reviewed in 2005 had variable timing of previous reports, spanning several years from 1998 to 2002.

The sample would not have been adequate if the first time period had been limited to 1998.

Table 4: Time periods for A and B reports

1998 - 2002	2005
25 playcentre reports	25 playcentre reports
25 kindergartens	25 kindergartens
25 education and care services	25 education and care services

3.4.2 The selection process

The selection process involved searching on ERO's website www.ero.govt.nz to identify playcentres, kindergartens and education and care services that had a review completed between January and August 2005, and had had their previous ERO review between 1998-2002. The lists of services, in alphabetical order, that met the criteria were printed out. The ERO regional area in which each services was located was identified.

The next step of the process was to randomly select from the lists 5 services of each service type from each of ERO's five regional areas. Random numbers were drawn for each area (using a website Research Randomiser www.randomizer.org), depending on the number of services with ERO reports in that area of that type in the time period. For example, if there were 30 playcentres that met report criteria in Area 1 then the random numbers that were calculated were 3,4,7,11,19 using the Research Randomizer. The reports were allocated an identifying number and reports in time period A were referred to as 'a' reports and reports in time period B referred to as the 'b' reports. Thus a total of 150 reports made up the raw material for this research. Table 5 shows the reports as coded per region (each area of ERO) and for the different services.

Table 5: Sample of ERO reports as coded for analysis

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5
Playcentres [numbers in bold total number of 'b' reports located on ERO's website]	5 PC2a/b PC4a/b PC9a/b PC11a/b PC14a/b	21 PC5a/b PC16a/b PC18a/b PC22a/b PC23a/b	9 PC7a/b PC10a/b PC12a/b PC20a/b PC25a/b	24 PC1a/b PC8a/b PC6a/b PC13a/b PC21a/b	16 PC3a/b PC15a/b PC17a/b PC19a/b PC24a/b
Kindergarten	30 K6a/b K7a/b K10a/b K16a/b K19a/b	15 K4a/b K15a/b K17a/b K20a/b K21a/b	8 K2a/b K3a/b K11a/b K12a/b K14a/b	29 K1a/b K5a/b K9a/b K18a/b K23a/b	7 K8a/b K13a/b K22a/b K24a/b K25a/b
Education and care	13 EC8a/b EC9a/b EC13a/b EC16a/b EC17a/b	29 EC3a/b EC8a/b EC14a/b EC19a/b EC22a/b	19 EC2a/b EC4a/b EC18a/b EC23a/b EC24a/b	26 EC5a/b EC6a/b EC7a/b EC12a/b EC21a/b	16 EC1a/b EC10a/b EC11a/b EC15a/b EC20a/b

3.4.3 Selecting the relevant excerpts of text

The full ERO reports were copied from the ERO website www.ero.govt.nz, and saved as word documents with coded names e.g. PC1a (Playcentre number 1, 1998-2001 report) and PC1b (Playcentre number 1, 2005 report). Each report was then searched using the 'find' function to identify text that referred to review. The excerpts of text that reported on review were copied and saved in a new similarly labelled document. Each report comprised only text that related to reporting on review and included text from the summary, body of the report, recommendations and actions for compliance sections, and the conclusion. The 2005 reports generally included more information about self-review because self-review was reported on in all ERO early childhood education reports in 2005.

3.5 Analysis – making sense of the data

As already noted Denzin and Lincoln (2000) likened the qualitative researcher to the maker of quilts, the bricoleur who assembles images into montages. They stated that the researcher is like the quilter who “stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together... ..creating(es) and bringing(s) psychological and emotional unity to an emotional experience” (p. 5).

A significant part of the qualitative research process involved organising the data. Through coding and categorising, data was broken down into manageable chunks. The analysis process was largely ‘thematic’ whereby the documents were approached with an open mind and allowed to speak for themselves (Mutch, 2005). Mutch noted that thematic analysis is the most common way of undertaking qualitative analysis and involves a process of:

- browsing to see what the document is saying;
- highlighting what is of interest or relevance;
- coding key words and themes;
- grouping and labeling to identify emerging patterns;
- developing theses and categories;
- checking for consistency and resonance of themes for further exploration;
- selecting examples to exemplify findings; and
- reporting findings by summarizing key themes, providing relevant examples, suggesting theoretical explanations, raising issues and highlighting implications.

Seidel (1998) took a different but equally valid approach to qualitative analysis that he described as a simple foundation to what is a complex process. He referred to the first part of the process as being one of “noticing, collecting and thinking about interesting things” (p. 1). Seidel saw the process as one that was iterative and progressive, recursive and holographic. For Seidel, discoveries emerged from the sorting and sifting process. The approach I took to the analysis of the data reflected elements of the kind of thematic analysis referred to by Mutch (2005) particularly the browsing, highlighting, coding and grouping. It also included aspects of Seidel’s process of noticing, collecting and thinking.

3.5.1 Computer assisted or manual approach to data analysis

As a relatively novice researcher I was drawn to using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). However I was also mindful that I had limited experience and skills in using CAQDAS and was aware of the limitations this placed on using such a system for analysis.

The use of CAQDAS has increased in recent years. The mid 1980s saw a rise in the use of computer-based qualitative analysis software (Osman, 2004). The merit of using computer assisted software to carry out qualitative analysis has become a focus for debate. Roberts and Wilson (2002) noted that the use of information and communication technology for analysis of qualitative data was a contentious issue.

People are split into two camps when it comes to CAQDAS (Welsh, 2002). The views of the proponents of CAQDAS (Richards and Richards, 1994 cited by Welsh, 2002) are that use of such systems can facilitate more accurate and transparent data analysis, save time (Roberts and Wilson, 2002) and add rigour to the process (Osman, 2004). CAQDAS also helps the researcher gain a general picture of the data (Welsh). On the other hand CAQDAS can distance the researcher from the data and increase the quantitative analysis of qualitative data (Welsh).

Welsh (2002) suggested using the best of both CAQDAS and manual methods for qualitative analysis. Software can provide a great organising tool but there is a risk of over-coding the text beyond what is necessary to gain an understanding of the data. On the other hand, according to Welsh, manual analysis can assist the researcher to scrutinize the text, make notes, question the data and help with extracting the findings.

Osman (2004) and Jemcott (2002) highlighted the importance of the need for the researcher to be the decision maker and thinker when using CAQDAS. Roberts and Wilson (2002) also supported this viewing stating “researchers who make use of these packages must remain alert to the need to preserve the integrity and context of the original material and not lose sight of this during the process of coding and subsequent analysis” (p. 117).

3.5.2 Categories and coding

I decided to use a mixed approach to analysis by using a CAQDAS called Nvivo 7 to organise the data according to categories determined by an initial manual analysis. The

initial categories reflected the emerging themes and patterns in a small sample of report segments that focused on self-review.

The initial categories included:

- what services reviewed or should be reviewing (according to ERO);
- how services went about review or should undertake review;
- why services engaged in review and why they should undertake review;
- when review took place, in terms of frequency and when it should be undertaken; and
- who was involved in review and who should be involved.

I also thought it would be useful to identify what reports said about:

- actions for compliance; and
- what services needed to do to improve self-review.

I used these categories to code the reports using Nvivo 7. During the coding process a number of other codes emerged more specifically related to the 'b' (2005) reports.

These related to:

- areas of good performance;
- areas for improvement;
- use of self-review information.
- use of information in self-review;
- reference to professional development; and
- reference to use of resources.

Codes are labels used to assign meaning to data gathered during a study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Coding provides a means of organizing and chunking information so that it is more manageable, and enables the researcher to work with it to more clearly see themes, patterns and trends. Coding can take a number of forms (Johnson and Christenson, 2004) including open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

Roberts and Wilson (2002) referred to different ways of coding: coding down – where some categories are determined before data collection; and coding up - where most categories emerge during the process of collecting and managing the data.

I used an open coding approach that included coding up, whereby I named and categorized discrete elements in the data. This process of coding helped to reveal the key words and themes in the text and these were represented in the emerging codes.

3.5.3 Scrutinising the data

After the initial coding, the coded text was searched for more specific information. All of the reports (text relating to review) were analysed in more depth following up on patterns and trends identified during the initial coding process using Nvivo 7. This process in turn led to the identification of other interesting features of the texts that seemed to have relevance to the research questions. New features emerged such as whether or not the reports focused on accountability or improvement purposes, and whether or not the reports made reference to children's learning.

Findings emerged about the significant differences between the 'a' and 'b' reports, the key messages that the reports communicated about self-review and the extent to which the reports evaluated the quality of an ECE service's self-review or reported on what services were reviewing or needed to review. I decided to use a five point rating scale to categorise services according to the ERO's reporting on the quality of their self-review. Each report excerpt relating to review was rated as follows:

1. no self-review undertaken
2. self-review evident but not well developed
3. self-review developing but needing strengthening and refining
4. self-review quite well developed
5. very effective self-review.

The rating scale was applied to the 'a' and the 'b' reports using ERO's judgments to determine the rating for each service's report.

The analysis of the data led to both qualitative and quantitative findings. Some of this can be attributed to the use of Nvivo 7 as it made it easier to quantify data by being able to count the number of times the reports mentioned particular features.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was not sought for this research because the data used was publicly accessible documentation (see reference to source and use of documentation earlier in the copyright statement on ERO's website regarding the use of the material).

3.7 Validity and reliability

The relevance of applying the concepts of validity and reliability in qualitative research has been questioned as not fitting with the nature of such research (Golafshani, 2003). The use of the terms 'validity' and 'reliability' is questioned whilst the need for some test of the credibility of the research acknowledged. Golafshani suggested that the issue was more about the quality of the research than its reliability or validity, both of which are linked and more difficult to assure in qualitative than quantitative research. Golafshani cited various references in the literature to support the redefining of how qualitative research is tested for credibility, dependability, trustworthiness, rigour and transferability. Winter (2000) discussed issues of validity (and associated reliability) in qualitative, as well as quantitative research, and noted how fraught defining these terms in the context of research has become.

In my research, issues of validity and reliability have been addressed to some extent by exploring the notions of rigour and credibility. One of the ways I sought to undertake research that has credibility was to make transparent the processes by which the main data (ERO reports) was selected and analysed. In presenting the findings I included excerpts from the sample of ERO reports to give authenticity and credibility to the research. The iterative process of determining categories and coding text segments was not formulaic or theory bound. As already noted, the scrutinising of the report excerpts revealed new understandings that were not apparent to me as the researcher when I began the analysis.

The extent to which the findings can be generalised for all ERO reports on ECE services in the time periods from which the sample reports were selected is also unknown. However, there is a high likelihood that generalisations could be drawn from the findings due to the size of the sample and the national and service type sampling that took place.

Researcher bias can pose a threat to the validity of the data analysis. Johnson and Christensen (2004) pointed out that personal views and perspectives can affect how data is interpreted. They suggested that such bias could be addressed by the researcher being reflexive. In undertaking this research I was very aware of my background working as a reviewer in ERO and also my work in the Ministry of Education leading the project to develop self-review guidelines for ECE. By being explicit about the experiences and understandings I brought to the research, those who read and use the findings and associated discussion are aware of the researcher's personal and professional contribution to this work.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has made visible the methodological framework that underpins this research. The qualitative, interpretive approach to this research provided me as the researcher with many challenges. Qualitative analysis brings with it flexibility to go where the data takes one; and provides opportunities to take a close look and as well as stand back from the data. As the bricoleur I have had at my disposal the tools and methods to 'quilt'. Just as the bricoleur pieces together the quilt using techniques and approaches known to the world of the quilting, I have drawn on various research methodologies, methods and theories to investigate my research topic and associated research questions.

This chapter has made transparent the approach to data selection and analysis, including the use of computer assisted data analysis software to interrogate the data. The iterative nature of the analysis of the data resulted in a complex process of understanding the words and phrases in the ERO reports to identify, confirm and reconfirm the emerging findings.

The methodological framework presented at the beginning of this chapter provided the bigger picture of how theories, methodology and method are linked together in this research study. This framework sits behind the research and has been useful as a reference point to reflect on as the research has neared completion.

Chapter 4

Findings

4.1 Introduction

Just as the bricoleur assembles the pieces of the quilt before stitching together, so too the qualitative researcher assembles the findings from the process of analysis. In this research study, the pieces are interpretations of text, the frequency and nature of words used in relation to self-review, and the meanings assigned to words and phrases using codes and categories devised to analyse the text drawn from Education Review Office (ERO) reports.

The text reporting on review in 75 ECE services' accountability review and education review reports was examined and analysed in this study. As already noted in chapter 3, the ECE services involved came from a mix of different services that included education and care services (EC), kindergartens (K) and playcentres (PC). The services' reports were drawn from a national sample of ERO reports undertaken between 1998 and 2002, and in 2005.

This chapter begins by discussing what the sample ERO accountability review reports ('a' reports for this research) stated on in relation to self-review. Each 'a' report in the sample of 75 reports had a matching 'b' report, an education review report for the same service on the findings of the service's 2005 ERO review. The findings from the analysis of the text reporting on review in the 'b' reports are also presented. The findings from the analysis of the 'a' and 'b' reports are then compared, particularly in relation to the shifts in self-review understandings and practices.

These findings provided a window into the language of external review, and the understandings about self-review in ECE from an external review (ERO) perspective. Reporting on compliance issues, and how reported recommendations were used to bring about shifts in practice, is examined. The way in which self-review was practised and what constituted good performance and areas for improvement, as reported in the 'b' reports, is discussed.

4.2 Getting underway with self-review

As already noted, the 75 'a' reports in the sample for this research were written and published by ERO as a result of an accountability review methodology. There was no requirement for ERO to report on self-review in accountability reviews unless compliance issues associated with review were identified through the external review process. Therefore, the extent of reporting on self-review in the 'a' reports varied from nothing in 6 of the 75 'a' reports analysed, to just over a page of text (630 words) in one of the 'a' reports.

4.2.1 The language of review

The terminology used in relation to review varied across the 'a' reports. The term review was most commonly used, often accompanied by descriptors such as quality, informal, formal, and systematic. The term internal review was the next most commonly used and this was not surprising given that this is the term used in the requirement for review. Other terms were used less frequently including evaluation or self-evaluation, programme review and curriculum review. Self-review was used less frequently and sometimes used as well as the term internal review in the same report. Table 6 shows the breakdown of the number of reports using the various terms to refer to review. A small number (6 of the 69 reports) referred to both internal review and self-review.

Table 6: Reference to review in 'a' reports

Reference to review-term used in 'a' reports	Number of reports (out of 69 reporting on review)
Review	43
Self-review	8
Internal review	38
Programme review	8
Curriculum review	3
Evaluation/self-evaluation	12

4.2.2 Understanding review

Reference to understanding about internal or self-review was not a strong feature of the 'a' reports. Only 2 of the 69 reports included findings linked to understanding of review. These reports noted:

Parents have an understanding of the review process and are able to identify the benefits of review in further improving performance. (PC5a)

Strategic planning and internal review systems are not well understood. (K 15a)

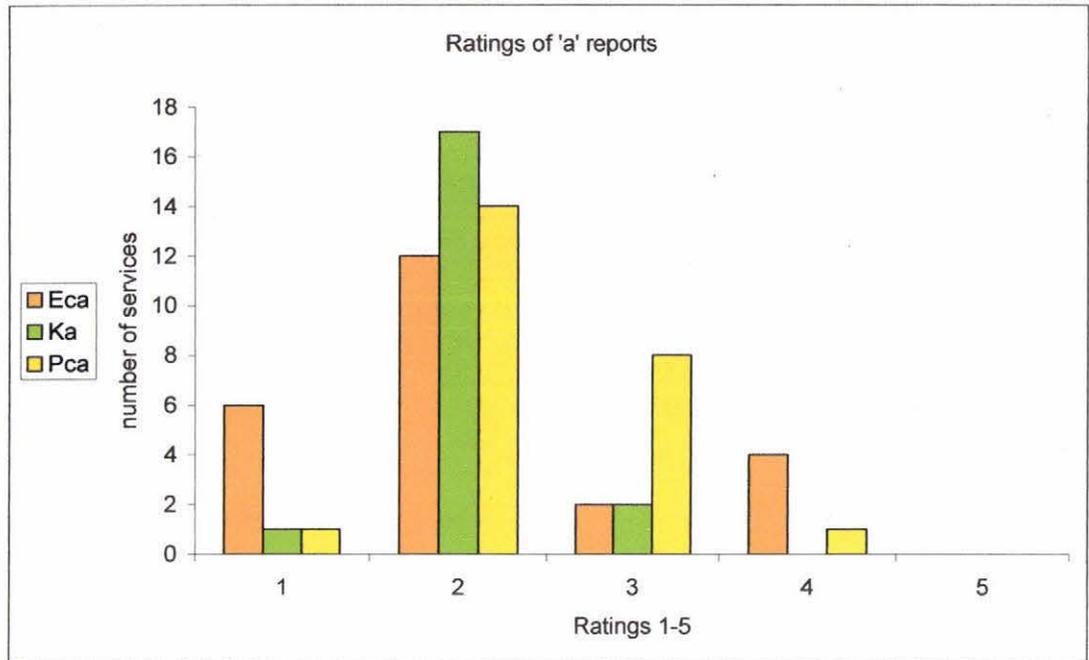
4.2.3 Rating the 'a' reports

As well as coding segments of text against pre-determined categories and additional categories as they emerged (these are listed in chapter 3), the reported findings about self-review in each report were analysed using a 1-5 rating scale. I developed this 5 point scale to rate each report in terms of my assessment of the stage each ECE service was at with developing and implementing self-review. The rating was based on an overall assessment of what the reported findings said about self-review. The ratings were as follows:

1. no self-review undertaken
2. self-review evident but not well developed
3. self-review developing but needing strengthening and refining
4. self-review quite well developed
5. very effective self-review.

Figure 1 (on the next page) shows the spread of ratings for the 'a' reports. Eca refers to the education and care services with reports between 1998 and 2002. Ka refers to the kindergartens with reports between 1998 and 2002. Pca refers to the playcentres with reports between 1998 and 2002.

Figure 1: 'a' report ratings



The majority of services' (43 out of 69) 'a' reports rated a '2', indicating self-review was evident, but not well developed. In 12 of the 69 reports review was developing, but needing further development. These reports used phrases such as: *extending review procedures; establishment of a systematic internal review programme; internal review processes should be strengthened; further develop internal review processes; and implement a more formalised process of review.* There were clear messages in the reports about the need to improve self-review.

There were no services in the overall sample with a rating of 5: 'very effective self-review'; and only 5 with a rating of 4: 'quite well developed self-review'. The reports that rated '4' included a range of judgements about the quality of self-review.

Centre operations are subject to a well-established cycle of internal review. (EC9a)

A well-established programme of internal review that covers most key areas assists the licensees to identify the effectiveness of the overall service. (EC10a)

Evaluative practices are well integrated into the centre's operational procedures. The internal review programme provides for regular reflection, analysis and subsequent action. (EC11a)

Internal review processes have been used over several years to reflect on the appropriateness and quality of centre practices. The centre's well-established internal review processes should ensure that the current standard of performance is maintained. (PC18a)

The 'a' reports with a rating of 1 (8 of the 69 reports) indicated that services needed to *establish a systematic internal review programme, develop and implement a process of internal review across all areas of centre operation, or develop a review cycle for policies and procedures*. Only 4 of the 6 reports that rated a 1 included actions required for compliance in relation to meeting requirements for programme review and internal review.

Comments or judgements about the quality or effectiveness of review in the 'a' reports were largely made about the nature of systems, programmes, processes or plans for review. For example:

Internal review systems ensure reporting processes include evaluation of the extent to which outcomes have been achieved. (PC12a)

The internal review programme enables the licensees to identify how well the service is operating. As a result, the management can demonstrate how systems, policies and practices have been confirmed, modified or improved. (EC10a)

4.2.4 Programme review and curriculum

A small number (8 of the 69 reports) reported separately on programme review, (a requirement in the regulations), as distinct from self or internal review (a requirement of the DOPs). Report findings largely focused on whether programme review took place, rather than focusing on the quality of the review. The reported findings were very much a description of practice as these excerpts from 'a' reports show.

Programme review takes place at the monthly supervising team's planning and evaluation meetings. (PC 1a)

Programmes are reviewed through the session diary and on a tick sheet recording activities visited by individual children. (PC 13a)

Two of the 'a' reports included evaluative judgements about the quality programme review as show in these excerpts.

Teachers complete a term programme review. As part of this review they have identified science and carpentry as areas that need upgrading. This process is a useful way for teachers to reflect on their provision and practice. (K10a)

At this stage a process for programme review is still to be fully developed and implemented. (K21a)

Only 3 of the 69 'a' reports referred to curriculum review rather than programme review.

4.2.5 Reasons why services review

The reasons why services should engage in review varied and included compliance as well as improvement purposes. For example, compliance purposes were commented on in these 'a' reports.

The association's procedural statements and the timeframe for policy review help make sure the committee operates within the charter requirements. (K8a)

They need to refine these procedures into a regular, recorded process of internal review for monitoring charter obligations. (K10a)

Management must develop quality assurance systems to ensure all requirements for high quality education and care are met. (EC4a)

Improvement purposes in the 'a' reports emphasised enhancing existing practices, ensuring high quality and the maintenance and improvement of quality as key purposes for review.

4.2.6 Focus of review

The 'a' reports placed emphasis on what services were reviewing or what needed to be reviewed. ERO found that services reviewed specific areas of their operation, documentation or practices such as scrapbooks, the charter and philosophy, policies and procedures and centre layout and equipment. ERO also identified aspects of a service's practices, processes and policies that needed to be reviewed. These included specifics

such as reviewing the suitability of story time, the safety of furniture, the smoking policy, recording of accidents, compliance with the DOPs and all curriculum areas.

The most frequently noted review activity in the 'a' reports was in relation to review of policies or procedures. Just over half of the 'a' reports made reference to services undertaking or needing to undertake review of policies and/or procedures. Reported findings included:

The review of policies is regular and inclusive of staff and parent consultation.
(EC13a)

Policies and procedures are well organised, clearly documented and regularly reviewed. (K14a)

The review of existing centre policies and guidelines, in consultation with staff and parents, helps to achieve shared understandings and makes sure that centre practice are accurately recorded. (PC19a)

Some of the 'a' reports also included reference to charter and philosophy review. A quarter of the reports made reference to charter review and 9 reports mentioned philosophy review. DOPs 9 requires that services regularly review their philosophy and charter. Excerpts from reports show how ERO's reporting acknowledged this aspect of review.

The initial charter is now under review. The centre's philosophy needs to be added to the established review schedule. (EC15a)

The centre charter is currently due for review and members are working to address this. (PC5a)

Charter, philosophy and centre policies are part of a regular cycle of review.
(PC10a)

Reference to the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (1996) (DOPs) was evident in 6 of the 'a' reports. This reference was mostly in the context of services' reviewing or needing to review implementation of DOPs.

As yet the managers have established limited procedures for review. They are reviewing individual policies at staff meetings. They also need to develop a framework for reviewing individual policies at staff meetings. (EC20a)

Parents have developed timelines for reviewing all centre policies and procedures. This process provides a sound framework for reviewing the way in which the DOPs are implemented in the centre. (PC7a)

4.2.7 Improving review - recommendations

Eight of the 'a' reports included formal recommendations for improving self-review. Some of the recommendations were reported at the end of the report in a special section labelled recommendations. Other recommendations were included as part of the main body of the report. Some reports had recommendations in the body of the report that were repeated at the end of the report. Fifty-two of the 'a' reports that reported on self-review included reference to the need for improved review in the text of the report.

The recommendations focused on improving review in the service as well as identifying areas to be reviewed. Improvements were recommended in relation to developing review procedures and processes, including parents in review, establishing a timetable, including a review date on policies and extending review policies. The areas identified for review related to reviewing performance management systems, policy formats and reviewing programmes. None of the kindergarten 'a' reports included formal recommendations.

4.2.8 Meeting requirements - compliance

The 'a' reports also included actions required for compliance that identified where the ECE service was not complying with regulations or the DOPs. One fifth (14 out of 69) of the 'a' reports included 1 or more actions to meet requirements for self-review. The majority (12 of the 14 reports) of the compliance areas related to DOPs 10(e) that requires services to "implement policies, objectives and practices which are regularly evaluated and modified by an ongoing, recorded process of internal review." Regulation 32 (c) of the *Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations (1998)* requires services to "periodically review the programme of activities undertaken at the centre, after having regard to the developments in early childhood education and the learning and developmental needs of children." Two of the 'a' reports included an action for compliance related to Regulation 32 (c). Table 7 shows the breakdown of numbers of services where actions required related to self-review were reported across

the service type 'a' reports. Three reports had more than one action for compliance related to self-review.

Table 7: Actions for compliance in 'a' reports

'a' reports	EC	K	PC
DOP 10 (e)	6	4	2
DOP 9	1	2	0
ECC Reg 32 (c)	0	1	1

In reporting on the requirement for review in relation to DOP 10 (e), the wording of the DOP was sometimes modified to reflect the intent of the requirement but not the 'actual requirement. For example:

Establish a system of internal review to evaluate policies and practices and modify them as necessary. (EC16a)

Develop effective internal review procedures which address management as well as kindergarten operations. (K20a)

Formalise an ongoing process of internal review and long term planning. (PC 11a)

Another compliance area reported on in the 'a' reports included DOP 9 relating to philosophy and charter review. The requirement in the regulations relating to reviewing the programme of activities featured in only 2 of the 'a' reports.

4.2.9 Formalising review

A feature of a few of the 'a' reports (6 reports) was the focus on what was found to be informal review and the need for ECE services to adopt a more formalised approach to review. Informal review was reported as review that wasn't documented or recorded. It included meetings and on the spot dialogue.

4.2.10 Analysis and review

There were very few references to analysis as a part of the review process in the 'a' reports. Only 3 reports make specific mention about analysis. Where reference was made, comments alluded to analysis being part of a systematic process related to information gathering and part of the process that led to action of some kind.

4.2.11 Professional development and use of resources

There were few references (in 4 of the 69 reports) to ECE services undertaking professional development focused on self-review. Where comments were made they were made in relation to the use of Ministry of Education resources to support review. The two key resources referred to in the 'a' reports were *Quality in Action/ Te Mahi Whai Hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998) and *The Quality Journey/ He Haerenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1999). The two reports that referred to *Quality in Action* did so in relation to the internal review process outlined in this resource. *The Quality Journey* was referred to by ERO as providing useful guidelines for services to improve their review processes.

Consideration could be given to developing a policy and procedure that outlines the process to be used for reviewing centre performance. The Quality Journey publication provides useful guidelines. (EC14a)

Centre management should consider developing policy and procedures showing how its review strategies will cover aspects of centre functioning over a period of time. The Ministry of Education publication, The Quality Journey, provides useful guidelines. (PC 23a)

4.2.12 Support for review

Some of the PC and K reports included reference to the ways in which the service's umbrella organisation, supported or set expectations for review. Five of the Ka reports and 4 of the PCa reports mentioned the important role of the association in providing procedures, timelines and professional development for review.

4.2.13 Long and short term planning and review

Eleven of the 'a' reports also included reference to the links between annual and strategic planning and self-review. The focus of reporting included the need to review strategic planning and developing or using strategic planning as a basis for self-review.

4.2.14 Reflection and review

In a small number of the 'a' reports (5 out of 69), reference was made to reflection as part of the process of review. Review was described as a '*useful process of teachers to reflect on their practice*' and a way of improving quality '*through reflection, analysis and planned action*'.

4.2.15 Reference to appraisal

Four of the 'a' reports made reference to appraisal in the context of review. In some reports the findings indicated that appraisal processes needed to be reviewed. For example:

An appraisal system has been established for some years. It would be timely to review and strengthen the process to more clearly reflect the DOPs. (EC6a)

The appraisal system should be reviewed and strengthened to more clearly reflect the DOPs. (EC7a)

In one of the 'a' reports the term review was used in the context of appraisal. In K10a the head teacher's appraisal was reported to be *an inclusive and useful review*.

4.2.16 Use of information in review and use of self-review findings

A small number of the 'a' reports (3 out of 69) included findings about the ways in which services use information in review as well as how they make use of self-review findings.

4.3 Progressing with self-review

The 'b' reports were written based on ERO's education review methodology. In 2005 all education reviews included a focus on self-review as an area of national interest. Most of the 'b' reports (64 out of 75) used a common template format for reporting, that included reference to background information about why ERO was reporting on self-review, key findings including areas of good performance and areas for improvement. Recommendations and actions for compliance were included where appropriate. The extent of reporting on self-review ranged from a paragraph (100 words) to two pages (780 words) of text.

4.3.1 The language of review

The terminology used in relation to review varied across the 'b' reports. Self-review was most commonly referred to. The next most common were references to 'review' accompanied by words such as *rigorous, comprehensive, extensive, planned, spontaneous, quality, informal, formal, and systematic*. The words self-review appeared in 70 of the 'b' reports. Two reports made reference to only to internal review and 5 used both internal review and self-review within the same report. Other substitute terms for review were used in 17 of the 'b' reports. These terms included evaluation, reflection, measurement and monitoring. The following excerpts demonstrate this well.

Using an extended evaluation process may help staff engage in more focused discussion about the effectiveness of their own teaching. (EC8b)

As a team the teachers are focused on critical reflection, or self-review, of every aspect of their practice. (K10b)

In particular, members should consider the potential outcomes for children when identifying criteria for measuring the effectiveness of practices.

(PC21b)

4.3.2 Understanding review

The 'b' reports included many references to the understanding that those involved in ECE services were developing about review. Findings included awareness of the purposes of self-review and how these related to improvement, performance and children's learning. Understandings included:

- the positive influence of review on children's learning;
- the use of self-review as a tool for improvement;
- self-review as a means to ensure compliance with the charter;
- review as a process for ensuring the ECE service provides the best possible education for the children who attend;
- the promotion of ongoing improvement of the learning programme through effective review;
- the use of self-review to enhance opportunities for children and improve their well-being;

- self-review as a means to reflect on the effectiveness of teaching practice; and
- the use of review to enhance centre operations.

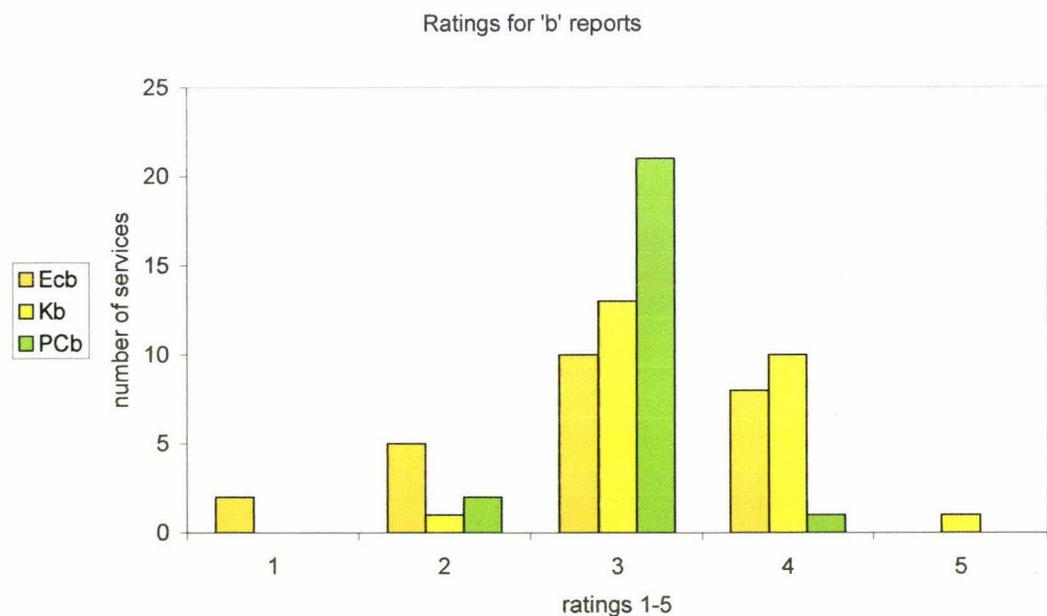
4.3.3 Rating the 'b' reports

The 'b reports were also rated using the 5-point rating scale referred to earlier in this chapter. The ratings were:

1. no self-review undertaken
2. self-review evident but not well developed
3. self-review developing but needing strengthening and refining
4. self-review quite well developed
5. very effective self-review.

Figure 2 shows the spread of ratings for each service type in the sample of 'b' reports.

Figure 2: 'b' report ratings



The ratings of the 'b' reports show that the majority of services (45 of the 75 in the sample) were developing their self-review, and findings reported by ERO indicated a need for refinement or strengthening of self-review. Only one service, a kindergarten, was reported to have very effective review. Eleven of the services were implementing

self-review that was quite well developed and only two services had no evidence of any self-review.

4.3.4 Programme review and curriculum

The 'b' reports included quite a strong focus on curriculum as a focus for review. Although there was some reference to programme review in a few reports, the majority focused on curriculum or core curriculum review. Reported findings often referred to the ways services were reviewing planning, assessment and evaluation processes. They also identified the need for services to review aspects of the curriculum.

4.3.5 Reasons why services review

The 'b' reports included a wide variety of purposes for review. Although the purposes were largely around improvement, there were some 'b' reports that included a compliance focus.

The improvement purposes included:

- informing and influencing decision making;
- refining systems and enhancing operations;
- meeting's children's needs;
- providing a safe learning environment;
- improving quality of curriculum and associated programmes;
- improving teaching practice; and
- improving learning outcomes for children.

The compliance purposes included:

- ensuring children's safety;
- meeting minimum association standards;
- following association directions;
- being assured that all contractual obligations are being met; and
- how effectively the DOPs were being implemented.

4.3.6 Focus of review

The 'b' reports acknowledged the range of areas, documents and practices that ECE services reviewed. The focus of the 'b' reports was more on what services needed to review than on what they were reviewing. The reports identified the specifics that services needed to review such as accident registers, layout of the indoor area and the Me Book, as well as broader processes and practices such as planning and evaluation processes, curriculum areas and implementation of the DOPs.

Review of policies and procedures was a dominant feature of the 'b' reports. Just over half of the 'b' reports made reference to policies and procedures being reviewed or needing to be reviewed. ERO reported:

Systems provide for regular review of policies and procedures. Policy review is undertaken systematically. (PC 2b)

Planned cycle of policy review provides an up-to-date framework to guide the operation and management of the kindergarten. Policies under review are displayed for parent comment. The review process ensures policy and practice are aligned. (K 14b)

The licensee has now established a regular cycle of policy review and offers parents and staff opportunities to contribute to this review. (EC 9b)

Charter and philosophy review featured in the findings of a small number (8 out of 75) of the 'b' reports. Comments by ERO indicated these services engaged in review of their charter and philosophy on an annual basis. Reference to review of the DOPs was evident in 12 of the 'b' reports. Comments in these reports focused on whether or not services were reviewing their implementation of the DOPs or reviewing their operations and practices against the DOPs.

4.3.7 Improving review - recommendations

Recommendations were included in 38 of the 75 'b' reports. The recommendations were quite broad in their scope. The recommendations included:

- further development of review processes;
- extending self-review practices;
- formalising review processes;

- refining self-review processes;
- developing a cycle of self-review;
- developing frameworks for self-review;
- reflecting on self-review;
- extending capability in review;
- seeking support to strengthen review; and
- getting outside assistance and training to establish self-review processes.

The recommendations in the 'b' reports also suggested services review:

- assessment, planning and evaluation processes;
- teaching strategies and aspects of the planned programme;
- teaching practice;
- annual and strategic plans;
- outdoor area;
- integration of te reo Māori; and
- procedures to include formal observations of children.

One of the 'b' reports included a recommendation that related to the review process. The recommendation noted that the service needed to *gather, analyse and evaluate information*.

4.3.8 Meeting requirements for review – compliance

The 'b' reports also included actions required for compliance. Compliance issues were reported in 4 of the 75 'b' reports. Two were EC reports and the other two PC reports. The compliance areas related to DOP 10 (e) and DOP 9. The wording for 3 of the actions reported varied from that of the original wording of the DOP as expressed in the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices 1996*. For example, report EC 16b combined requirements of DOP 9 and 10 (e)

Develop self-audit and self-review procedures to ensure that the centre philosophy and charter, policies, and objectives, and practice are subject to regular evaluation, modification and improvement.

4.3.9 Areas of good performance and areas for improvement

Most of the education review reports (64 of the 75 'b' reports) identified areas of good performance and areas for improvement in self-review as a result of the review of the ECE service. Three of the 'b' reports used no headings for reporting on self-review, 3 used the heading progress with self-review and 4 used findings as a heading.

The 'b' reports included a wide range of judgements about the quality and effectiveness of self-review as well as about the wide range of processes and practices that was reported to be good performance. Comments or judgements were related to understandings associated with review, the approach taken, the robustness, effectiveness and the comprehensiveness of review processes or systems. The 'b' reports also included findings that directed services to improve review in some way. The areas for improvement reported on were also wide ranging. Reports encouraged services to further develop, strengthen and reflect on processes and systems for review.

4.3.10 Good performance

Sixty-four of the 'b' reports included areas of good performance and only 1 report had no areas of good performance (where only areas for improvement were identified). An analysis of what constitutes good performance in self-review in the 'b' reports revealed a very wide range of processes, practices and activities. The analysis of the 'b' reports identified 20 areas associated with good performance. Good performance was associated with:

- self-review;
- review systems and processes;
- understanding of self-review;
- outcomes of self-review;
- the formality of self-review;
- documentation of self-review;
- compliance;
- centre operations;
- the curriculum and programme;
- strategic and annual planning;
- performance management and appraisal;

- the environment and property;
- health and safety;
- the implementation of the *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (1996);
- reflection;
- decision making;
- consultation;
- dialogue;
- meetings; and
- action research.

These areas covered a large portion of what ECE services do as providers of early childhood education. Exploring a few of the findings in more depth revealed what services were doing that was deemed to be good performance in self-review.

The most common (in 12 or more reports of the 'b' reports) and the least common (in 2 or 3 of the 'b' reports) areas are explored in more depth in this research. The most commonly reported areas were review systems and processes (26 reports), performance management and appraisal (16 reports), strategic and annual planning (14 reports), curriculum and programme related (12 reports) and self-review (12 reports).

Review systems and processes were reported as good performance if they were systematic, thorough, based on a framework, comprehensive, regular, purposeful and used effectively. Both formal and informal systems were considered to be good performance. These excerpts from 'b' reports show a sample of findings about review systems and processes.

The centre demonstrates a commitment to regular and purposeful processes of self-review. (PC22b)

Centre management has a good understanding of the importance and purpose of self-review, and has undertaken considerable review in the last three years. (PC2b)

A variety of formal and informal processes are used effectively. (K17b)

Some review systems are effective in monitoring ongoing improvement. (EC2b)

Findings related to performance management and appraisal noted where appraisal policies had been reviewed and positioned appraisal as a review activity.

A comprehensive appraisal policy has been developed and is regularly reviewed. (EC13b)

Application of the performance appraisal system is rigorous leading to the identification of relevant goals and individual and team professional development. (K3b)

Self and peer appraisal is reported by supervisors as being effective in identifying their professional development and training needs. (PC7b)

Reporting on strategic and annual planning, as an area of good performance in self-review, included findings linking the development of long and short term plans with review.

The kindergarten has established a strategic plan that identifies directions for development. In addition, annual plans and action plans identify objectives for the immediate future. This clear framework enables teachers to undertake aspects of self-review in a timely and manageable manner. (K6b)

Good performance in self-review associated with curriculum and programmes included the review of curriculum with links to changed teaching practice. The 'b' reports highlighted the ways in which ECE services made use of assessment information in curriculum reviews. These report excerpts demonstrate these findings.

The planned and emergent curriculum is reviewed and evaluated, providing useful information for reviewing aspects of teaching practice. (EC19b)

Core curriculum areas are regularly reviewed in conjunction with the planned programme. (K18b)

A cyclic process of programme planning and review is informed by high quality assessment information. (K4b)

Reporting on self-review as an area of good performance included reference to the ways in which self-review was supporting improvement and change, and the stage the service was at in implementing self-review.

Self-review is beginning to provide a useful basis for improvement and change. (PC10b)

Centre members operate several systems of ongoing review. (PC13b)

Self-review processes are at the early stages of implementation. (EC18b)

The least commonly reported areas of good performance related to documentation of self-review (3 reports), implementation of the DOPs (3 reports), decision making (2 reports) and meetings (2 reports). The documentation of review was identified as providing a clear trail of decision-making and improvements and included observations of children's learning and development. The DOPs were reported as being regularly reviewed and used as a framework to align planning and review. In terms of decision making, review was reported as contributing to decisions about change and improvement. Meetings were reported as good performance in review as they were seen to provide opportunities for reflection, dialogue and discussion.

4.3.11 Improvement

Areas for improvement in the 'b' reports featured in 59 of the 75 reports. Six of the 'b' reports that included 'areas of good performance' did not report any 'areas for improvement'. There was a strong link between some of the areas for improvement reported on and the recommendations made at the end of the report. The range of what constituted improvement in self-review was very broad and as for the areas of good performance covered a range of practices, processes and activities linked to the operation of an ECE service. Just as the areas of good performance were categorised into a number of areas, so too the 'b' reports revealed a similar list.

The need for improvement in self-review was linked to:

- self-review;
- review systems and processes;
- understanding of self-review;
- outcomes of self-review;
- the formality of self-review;
- documentation of self-review;
- use of self-review information;

- centre operations;
- the curriculum and programme;
- strategic and annual planning;
- performance management and appraisal;
- health and safety;
- the implementation of the *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (1996);
- reflection;
- decision making;
- consultation;
- evaluation; and
- compliance.

The most commonly reported areas for improvement related to review systems and processes (18 reports), strategic and annual planning (13 reports), curriculum and programme (12 reports), and performance management and appraisal (12 reports). It is interesting to note that these were also highlighted as the most commonly reported areas of good performance.

Reporting about review systems and processes focused on the need for strengthening and formalising processes, developing frameworks and adopting a more rigorous and systematic approach to review.

Current systems for self-review are largely informal. Staff and committee members now need to develop a planned and documented cycle of self-review that will inform centre direction and provide a record of ongoing development.
(EC3b)

There is a need to establish a more comprehensive and formalised framework that provides clearer direction for self-review. (PC5b)

ERO noted that in many cases services had strategic and annual plans that did not have specific objectives, timeframes and defined responsibilities. Reports also noted that information being gathered from the use of tools such as surveys, and from self-review in general, was not being used to inform long and short term planning.

Improvement in self-review was linked to curriculum and planning focused on teaching and learning practice and the informal nature of existing review processes (including reflection). Emphasis was placed on the links to outcomes for children and improving the overall quality of education provided by the service.

Children's learning outcomes will be helped by some further development of curriculum review and further assessment of the centre's planning processes. Once this occurs the processes of review will be more effective in achieving continuous improvements in the programme and environment to further enhance learning outcomes for children. (PC3b)

Self-review requires further development in the area of curriculum. Currently little formal reflection of the effectiveness of the programme is undertaken. (K2b)

The 'b' reports also included the need to improve performance management and appraisal processes as an area of improvement related to self-review. As with the areas of good performance, reported improvements positioned appraisal as a review activity as well as indicating that services improve implementation of appraisal processes.

Appraisal processes require further refining. (PC12b)

Although all staff have been appraised, the system lacks rigour. (EC2b)

While a change to appraisal is intended as a result of the promulgation of professional standards for kindergarten teachers, a more rigorous approach to implementing and recording the process should improve its effectiveness in promoting teacher development. (K21b)

The least commonly reported areas for improvement related to documentation of self-review (4 reports), consultation (2 reports) and reflection (2 reports). Documenting the review process, as well the outcomes, was highlighted along with the need to involve parents in review as shown in this excerpts.

Teachers now need to increase the extent of their documentation of reviews. Records should include analysis of parent surveys and consideration of other parent contribution to review processes. (K7b)

The charter and philosophy are regularly reviewed by staff. However, as yet there has been no formal invitation for consultation with parents regarding these key documents. (EC6b)

The need for improved reflection included the development of a reflective culture and increased reflection on the effectiveness of teaching practices.

In 23 of the 'b' reports, the areas for improvement linked to recommendations formally reported at the end of the 'b' reports.

4.3.12 Professional development and use of resources

The 'b' reports included reference to professional development undertaken or needing to be undertaken to build capability in self-review. A small number of 'b' reports (6 of the 75 reports) included areas for improvement or recommendations that services seek advice and support.

Centre management access suitable support or advice to strengthen self-review and strategic planning processes. (EC3b)

Management and educators, with support from external advisory services, continue to strengthen self-review systems to improve centre operations and enhance learning outcomes for children. (EC24b)

Teachers acknowledge that self-review needs further development and plan to undertake professional training through the association. (K1b)

A few of the 'b' reports (3 reports) also reported on the impact of professional development on self-review as shown in this excerpt.

As a result of recent centre-wide professional development the centre has developed a comprehensive framework for effectively reviewing its programme and operations. (EC7b)

The reports also noted when professional development was lacking as shown in this example.

The management and teachers have had little training in self-review. (EC20b)

Reports also made links to Ministry of Education resources such as *Quality in Action/ Te Mahi Whai Hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998) or *The Quality Journey/ He Haerenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1999). They acknowledged the use of these resources, and advised services to make use of them as shown in these examples.

To assist with their reviews the teachers use various Ministry of Education resources, for example 'Te Whāriki' (the early childhood curriculum) and 'Quality in Action'. (K23b)

Resources such as 'Quality in Action' and 'The Quality Journey' will assist with ongoing development in this area. (EC5b)

Following recent professional development in using 'The Quality Journey', supervisors have formulated an action plan for, and begun the process of, reviewing assessment practices. (PC7b)

The licensee uses the process of review outlined in the Ministry of Education's 'Quality Journey'. (EC11b)

4.3.13 Support for review

The role of umbrella organisations in supporting and setting expectations for self-review was referred to in the K and PC reports. As with the 'a' reports of ECE services governed by umbrella organisations, the 'b' reports referred to the range of ways services were supported in implementing self-review. Nine umbrella associations (7 of these were kindergarten associations) were reported to be providing frameworks and templates and others, according to ERO reports, set out expectations for services to follow.

4.4 Comparing the 'a' and 'b' reports

The 'a' and 'b' reports differed in a number of ways. They were based on different review methodologies and written at different times, reflecting the changes taking place in the ECE sector and in ERO between the two review time periods.

The extent to which self-review was reported varied between the 'a' and 'b' reports. It was more extensively reported in the 'b' reports. This was not surprising as all ERO reports on ECE services in 2005 included a section reporting on self-review as an area of national interest reporting.

4.4.1 Shifts in ratings

As already noted, I rated the 'a' and 'b' reports on a scale of 1 to 5, based on how well developed self-review was in each service as reported by ERO. The comparison of individual 'a' reports with the matching 'b' report showed shifts in the quality of self-review as reported by ERO.

Education and Care Services (EC 'a' and 'b' reports)

Self-review in just over half of the education and care services in the sample had improved between the initial 'a' report and the 'b' report. 15 of the 24 EC 'b' reports (one of the 25 EC 'a' reports did not have any reporting on self-review) rated higher than the corresponding EC 'a' report. Seven of the 24 EC services ratings remained the same and 2 had a 'b' report that rated less than the 'a' report.

Kindergartens (K 'a' and 'b' reports)

Most of the kindergartens in the sample had improved the quality of self-review between the 'a' and 'b' reports. Twenty of the 21 K 'b' reports (4 of the 25 K 'a' reports did not have any reporting on self-review) rated higher than the K 'a' report. Only one of the K reports had a rating the same for both the 'a' and the 'b' report. There were no K 'b' reports that rated less than their comparative 'a' report.

Playcentres (PC 'a' and 'b' reports)

With the education and care services, just over half of the playcentres had improved the quality of their self-review between the 'a' and 'b' reports. Fourteen of the 24 PC 'b' reports (1 of the PC 'a' reports did not include any reporting on self-review) showed a positive shift in rating. Nine PC 'b' reports rated the same as the 'a' report and 1 of the K 'b' reports rated lower than the 'a' report.

Overall there was an improvement in rating in 49 of the 69 'b' reports compared to the 'a' report rating. The findings also showed that 17 rated the same and 3 dropped in their rating.

4.4.2 Recommendations

Recommendations were a feature of both the 'a' and the 'b' reports. Table 8 shows the number of formal recommendations in the 'a' and 'b' reports across the different service types.

Table 8: Recommendations in the 'a' and 'b' reports

Number of reports with formal recommendations	EC	K	PC
'a' reports	9	3	5
'b' reports	16	9	14

The 'b' reports had more recommendations at the end of the report than the 'a' reports. This is not surprising given the emphasis in the 'b' reports on areas for improvement that often led to recommendations. The 'K' reports had a lower incidence of recommendations than the 'EC' or 'PC' reports. The findings regarding the nature of the recommendations is reported on in the findings for the 'a' and 'b' reports earlier in this chapter.

4.4.3 Actions required for compliance

Eighteen of the 144 'a' and 'b' reports analysed in this study (that reported on self-review) included compliance related findings. As noted earlier 3 of the 'a' reports and 1 of the 'b' reports included more than one action for compliance. The 'a' reports included a significantly higher number of compliance issues than the 'b' reports as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Actions for compliance in 'a' and 'b' reports

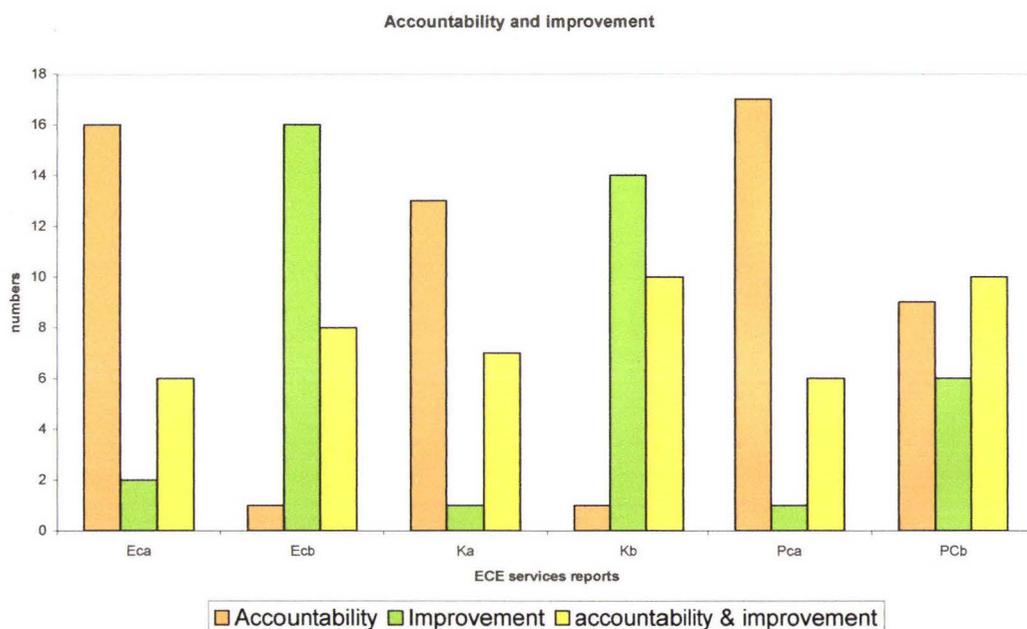
	'a' reports	'b' reports
DOP 10 (e)	12	4
DOP 9	3	1
ECC Reg 32 (c)	2	0

Three (2 EC and 1 PC) of the 75 services had the same actions for compliance report in both ‘a’ and ‘b’ reports.

4.4.4 Accountability and/or improvement

An analysis of the extent to which reports focused on accountability or improvement, or both, was undertaken for all of the reports. The ‘a’ reports had a much stronger focus on accountability, with the 16 of the EC ‘a’ reports and 17 of the PC ‘a’ reports focusing on accountability. The trend was somewhat reversed for the EC and K ‘b’ reports. In all reports there was a degree of focus on both accountability and improvement. Figure 3 shows the number of reports that had an accountability or improvement focus or both.

Figure 3: Accountability and improvement in ‘a’ and ‘b’ reports



The PC ‘b’ reports had a higher number of reports where reporting focused on the accountability purposes and a lower number of reports with improvement purposes for review.

4.4.5 Undertaking review

The ‘a’ and ‘b’ reports described the nature of the review process by making judgements about the process as well as explaining ‘how’ review was undertaken. Self-

review was most frequently referred to as a process. That process was reported as being or needing to be systematic, rigorous, formal, fragmented, comprehensive, well managed, thorough, purposeful, documented informal, reflective and effective.

Other terms associated with how review was undertaken included reference to cycles, schedules, timetables, strategies, procedures, programmes and plans. Although reports referred to review being a process or a variety of processes, they rarely made reference to what these processes looked like or involved. One report made reference to the service gathering information, analysis of information and the outcomes or decisions made as a result.

Teachers use an effective data gathering process for reviewing their programmes. (K22b)

Another report recommended that the service gather, analyse and evaluate information; however this was not a common feature of the reports.

One service (PC13b) was reported to have undertaken an analysis of the centre's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities before developing the strategic plan. Another report noted how reflective journals were used for review.

Some reports referred to how services used surveys to collect information from parents. Findings in 12 reports noted how results of surveys were collated and used to inform planning or decision making.

At an informal level, review was carried out through dialogue, discussion and reflection. Reports noted the value of such interaction and often included reference to these activities as areas of good performance.

4.4.6 Timing of review

The requirements for review, in the regulations and the DOPs state that review should be undertaken regularly. Just what regularly means is not specified and therefore is largely interpreted by services. Both the 'a' and 'b' reports most often referred to review being undertaken regularly. Other references to frequency included annually, recently, ongoing, monthly, termly, as the need arises, constantly and frequently. In a few reports review was just beginning or ERO noted it was now timely.

4.4.7 Involvement in review

Who was involved in leading review and who it involved was also a feature of both the 'a' and 'b' reports. The differences were very evident between the different service types. The EC 'b' reports made the most reference to staff and management being involved in review. It was not surprising that the K reports made more reference to teachers and the PC reports more reference to parents, the group and the supervision team. The term educators was not commonly used. The PC reports were the only ones to make reference to centre members.

4.4.8 Links to teaching and learning

The reports were analysed in terms of the extent to which they linked reporting on self-review to learning and teaching practices and curriculum. As shown in Table 10 the EC 'a' reports and PC 'a' reports had less of a focus on learning and teaching practices than the K 'a' reports. The K 'b' reports all made reference to learning and teaching practices (curriculum). Most of the EC 'b' and PC 'b' reports included reference to learning and teaching practice.

Table 10: Reference to learning and teaching in the 'a' and 'b' reports

	EC	K	PC
'a' reports	12/24	17/21	13/24
'b' reports	23/25	25/25	23/25

The reports were also analysed in relation to whether they referred to children, their learning and development and learning outcomes. The results were quite dramatic in the difference revealed between the 'a' and 'b' reports as shown below in Table 11.

Table 11: Reference to children's learning and development in 'a' and 'b' reports

	EC	K	PC
'a' reports	2	7	6
'b' reports	23	16	18

These results were particularly evident in the text of the 'b' reports', where the language used frequently made explicit links between review and children and their learning. Some examples these links are shown here.

Reflection on teaching practice should be come an integral part of self-review, enhancing learning outcomes for children. (K2b)

Self-review processes are enhancing the quality of the curriculum experienced by children. (K4b)

The licensee and staff base their reviews on ways they can change their practices to benefit children either directly through the programme or through improved management systems. (E:C9b)

A review system will ensure that any new developments of the environment provide appropriate and meaningful opportunities for children's learning. (PC:15b)

4.4.9 Links to other practices

Governance and management practices related to review were referred to in 'a' and 'b' reports. Reported findings related to policy development and review, annual equipment and property checks, meeting contractual obligations, enhancing centre operations, implementing the DOPs, reviewing job descriptions, developing strategic and annual plans and monitoring change.

Collaborative practices associated with review were also mentioned in the 'a' and 'b' reports in relation to the way management and staff worked together, the team work between teachers, and the processes for consulting with and involving parents in the service.

References to professional practice in the 'a' and 'b' reports included reviews of personnel policies, team goals and personal appraisals, professional development and training for qualifications.

Reference to leadership was a feature of a few 'a' and 'b' reports. Reported findings included reference to the impact of leadership in review as shown in these excerpts.

She demonstrates high quality leadership using up-to-date professional knowledge to review and identify priorities for development, establish a team culture, and provide direction for staff. (EC15b)

The head teacher provides informed, focused and highly effective leadership. She fosters a collaborative approach to planning and reviewing all aspects of kindergarten operation. (K20b)

4.5 Conclusion

The findings presented here reflect the outcome of extensive analysis and synthesis of the data (sample of ERO reports) that formed the basis for this research. The data provided many opportunities for analysis of the special features of the 'a' reports (reports from accountability reviews undertaken by ERO between 1998-2002) and the 'b' reports (reports from education reviews undertaken in 2005), as well as comparisons between the 'a' and the 'b' reports and to a lesser extent between the EC, K and PC reports.

The external review (ERO) reports provided a way to examine how a sample of ECE services understood and implemented self-review. The reports illuminated practice in terms of how services were practising self-review. They also gave an insight into how ERO has influenced how services go about self-review through identifying what is working well and what needs to be improved, as well as making recommendations in reports.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter responds to the ‘so what?’ question in response to the findings of this research study. As the bricoleur (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) I stitched the pieces of the quilt together and examined the quilt in its wholeness. In doing so, I had the opportunity to reflect on the findings and the literature review in relation to the research questions. The discussion brings together the significant, useful and relevant findings that illuminate thinking and practice in self-review in early childhood education.

As already noted, the review of the literature provided a valuable context for making connections between the findings from the analysis of the Education Review Office (ERO) reports and the educational and political context at the time the external review reports were written. The literature review also provided a valuable source of information to consider the research questions.

Thus the research questions, developed at the outset of this research study, provided a relevant and useful framework to shape the discussion of the findings. They are restated at this point.

Research questions

1. How has self-review been defined, understood, practiced and evaluated in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand as viewed through the relevant literature and sample of ERO reports?
2. In what ways have the political and educational contexts of the past 15 years informed self-review understandings and practices?

3. How has external review (through ERO's accountability and education review reports) positioned self-review and reported on its development in the early childhood education sector?

The first two questions were addressed through the literature examined in chapter two of this research as well as through the insights from the sample of ERO reports analysed in this research. The third question was more specifically relevant to the analysis of the excerpts from the 150 ERO reports (75 'a' reports and 75 'b' reports) that provided the central data that is at the heart of this research.

5.2 Making sense of self-review in ECE

The first research question focused on how self-review has been defined, understood, practiced and evaluated in the ECE sector in New Zealand. The literature review dealt with this more fully in terms of the definitions, requirements and developing understandings that have evolved through the education reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The establishment of ERO in the early 1990s and the way that ERO's role and function as an external review agency included an increasing focus on self-review that contributed to the purpose and focus of self-review in ECE services.

5.2.1 Defining review

The way in which review has been defined provided a useful starting point for discussing: What's it all about? Definitions have been expressed in various documents, including a range of Ministry of Education and ERO publications, and in selected evaluation related literature. The range of definitions of self-review, already discussed in the literature review, had in common a view that review is a process that is ongoing, systematic, and evaluative and usually carried out in relation to some kind of framework, for example, goals, objectives, and practices. This view has some parallels

in the ERO reports analysed in this research. There is however a number of differences between the definitions and the way self-review has been defined in ERO's reports on ECE services. This is explored in more detail later in this chapter.

The ECE sector has been supported to make sense of self-review through Ministry of Education resources such as *Quality in Action/ Te Mahi Whai Hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998) and *The Quality Journey/ He Haerenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1999). More recently the *Draft Self-review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2005) and *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua / Self-review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2006) have contributed to thinking and practice, offering new definitions and making explicit a process by which review can be undertaken. The guidelines were not available to ECE services at the time the 'b' reports were written but these reports did make mention of the development of the guidelines. In the majority of the 'b' reports, ERO noted that "The Ministry of Education is currently preparing guidelines for self-review in early childhood. When these guidelines are promulgated early childhood services will have further support for their self-review activities."

ERO also defined self-review in a number of ways in different reports and publications. Definitions were developed in the context of schooling, as well as in ECE. National evaluation reports such as *Self Review in Schools* (ERO, 1994) and *Self-review in Early Childhood Education Services* (ERO, 2005) offered definitions, along with the *Framework and Resources for Early Childhood Education Reviews* (ERO, 2002a). The literature examined in this thesis (reported on in Chapter 2) also provided a range of definitions of self-review in different contexts (schools, ECE and a wide range of institutions).

The definitions are revisited and summarised in Table 12 below in order of the year of the publication.

Table 12: Definitions of self-review

Source of definition	Definition of review (internal or self)
Bollen, 1987 cited by Clift, Nuttall and McCormick, 1987	<i>A systematic inspection by a school, a subsystem or an individual, of the actual functioning of the school. (1987, p. 203)</i>
Schollum & Ingram (1991)	<i>An ongoing process enabling a school to focus on its vision, to listen and look at itself and to determine what the school is really like. It can then compare this reality with the vision, identify the gaps and implement a plan of action to 'improve' the school so that the reality and the vision are one. (1991, p.4)</i>
Goddard & Leask (1992)	<i>Review is retrospective involving the collection and examining of evidence and information. It goes beyond monitoring to ask fundamental questions e.g. programme aims, rationales, impact, value, reassessment of priorities and alternative policies. (1992, p. 159)</i>
Education Review Office (1994)	<i>The processes of monitoring the policies and curriculum management strategies authorized by the Board of Trustees. (1994, p. 3)</i>
Ministry of Education (1997)	<i>A process that enables a school to evaluate how effectively it is meeting the goals it has adopted. (1997, p.9)</i>
Ministry of Education, (1998)	<i>A process that managers and educators use both to evaluate how well their service's policies, objectives, and practices are achieving the requirements of philosophy and charter (which includes the DOPs), and to improve the quality of the service they provide. (1998, p.87)</i>
Ministry of Education (1999) [Quality review]	<i>A review that measures and evaluates how well an early childhood service is performing in core areas of practice. These reviews compare practice against set goals and/or standards and have the specific aim of improving outcomes and effectiveness. (1999, p.71)</i>
Ministry of Education (April, 2003)	<i>A process which involves investigating evidence about student outcomes and current ways of doing things to find out where improvement is needed. (2003, p.1)</i>
Education Review Office (2002a)	<i>Self-review is a process through which early childhood education services evaluate the effectiveness of what they do, with the aim of improving the quality of their practice. (2002a, p.5)</i>

Education Review Office (2005)	<i>Self-review is a process whereby early childhood education services evaluate their operations and practices to maintain or improve their quality. (2005, p.1)</i>
Ministry of Education (2005)	<i>Self-review is a process of finding out how well we are achieving our shared vision for our tamariki. It involves looking at how we can improve our practice to achieve positive learning outcomes for children. Self-review also enables us to check whether we are fulfilling our obligations as set out in regulations and legislation. (2005, p.9)</i>
Education Review Office [included as part of the template or standard wording of the section of the 'b' reports on self-review headed 'current areas of specific government interest']	<i>A process through which early childhood education services evaluate the effectiveness of what they do, with the aim of improving the quality of their practice and ultimately the outcomes for children.</i>
Ministry of Education (2006)	<i>Review is the deliberate and ongoing process of finding out how well our practice enhances children's learning and development. Review allows us to see which aspects of our practice are working well and what we could do better. As a result we can make decisions about what to do to improve. (2006, p.8)</i>

The similarities and tensions in these definitions exist in relation to the nature, focus and purpose of review. As shown in the table of definitions, and noted earlier, review was most often referred to as a process that was usually evaluative. The evaluative nature of review was evident in words such as effectiveness and how well. There was a clear link in many of the definitions between review and the benefits for children's learning. This was particularly so in the more recent definitions.

Some of the definitions highlighted the dual purposes of review in terms of meeting requirements, such as those in the charters (*Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* [DOPs], 1996), and bringing about quality improvement. The one-off references to review being about inspection or monitoring were not consistent with the more widely held definitions. Review was mostly defined as a process that can prove

and/or improve, reflecting the dual purposes that ERO identified (ERO, 2002a; ERO, 2003). In setting out its framework for education reviews in ECE services, ERO (2002a) noted:

There are tensions between ERO's improvement and accountability functions, and also between the information needs of different audiences for ERO reports. This framework provides ERO reviewers and early childhood services with resources that focus on improvement, while at the same time clarifying ERO's accountability purpose (p. 7).

The accountability purpose (to prove) and the improvement purpose (to improve) were inherent in the definitions listed above and in the practice of review whether it be internal (self) or external review.

A feature of the definitions discussed in the literature review and the analysis of the ERO reports was that the review process or processes referred to were largely invisible in the reporting on self-review. Thus, how review was undertaken was largely implied, rather than being explicit. The exceptions were the definitions by Goddard and Leask (1992) and the Ministry of Education (2003) where reference was made to the collection and examining of evidence and the investigation of evidence.

The majority of the ERO reports analysed in this research did not make any reference to just what was meant by the process by which review was to be undertaken. Where there was reference to a process in the reports, there was a sense that it involved some form of information gathering, analysis, reflection and action aligned to the Goddard and Leask (1992) definition.

The sample of ERO reports analysed portrayed a view of self-review as having multiple processes. This was also noted in ERO's Education Evaluation Report *Self-review in*

Early Childhood Education Services (ERO, 2005). This view may be a reflection of what services are doing, or of the perspective that ERO has used that indicates there can be multiple processes by which review can be undertaken. The findings support a view that there is within the ECE sector, varying and interchangeable use of terms such as processes, activities, practices and programmes when used in the context of self-review.

What is reviewed was the most variable factor across the definitions. ERO reported that services reviewed such aspects of practice as the functioning of the institution, its vision, policies and curriculum management strategies, goals, ways of doing things, a service's policies, objectives and practices, operations, and obligations in regulations and legislation. The analysis of ERO reports reflected this variation.

5.3.2 Understanding self-review

The extent to which definitions of self-review have contributed to how it has been understood was not clear and was outside of the scope of this study. However, this research identified a number of ways that thinking and understanding about self-review has been influenced through change at the system level and through the fact that external review has had an increasing focus on self-review. ERO (2000) specifically referred to the use of its reports by staff and centre management (as well as government officials) to "inform their understanding of the quality of care and education in individual centres and the sector as a whole" (p. 14).

Although this research did not investigate the extent to which this was the case, it was based on the premise that the intention of the reports was to inform understanding.

In ECE, the terminology used to refer to review changed overtime. The term self-review was not one that was developed and understood from within the ECE sector, rather the term was been borrowed from outside ECE. It was used by ERO and the

schooling sector. The terms internal review and programme review were more commonly used in ECE as they reflected the language of the regulations and DOPs. *The Quality Journey/ He Haerenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services*. (Ministry of Education, 1999) introduced the term quality review as a way of getting ECE services to establish quality improvement systems. It did not, however, use the terms self-review or internal review; leaving the ECE sector with another term, quality review, to understand and incorporate into practice. *The Quality Journey*, however, reinforced the concept that review was about evaluation. This was reflected in the definition of a quality review referred to in chapter 2.

The term self-review was formally introduced to the sector in *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki - A 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2002). Prior to that time, it had been used in ECE largely as a result of its use in the schooling sector; the focus it had in the Ministerial reviews of ERO in 1997 and 2000, and in a range of ERO publications. Several of the ERO reports, both 'a' and 'b' reports, used the terms internal review and self-review within the one report. There was a noticeable increase in the use of self-review in the 'b' reports. This was not surprising, given the increased focus on self-review in a number of ERO publications.

The ECE strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2002) used the term self-review in the context of improving quality, particularly in relation to learning and teaching practice. As noted in the literature review, the strategic plan has been a key influence on services undertaking self-review (Wansbrough, 2003). *The Final Report of the Strategic Plan Working Group* (2001) positioned self-review in relation to ongoing improvement and placed responsibility with ERO for checking ECE services' self-review with a focus on services' goals in relation to quality provision for children. However, the analysis of the ERO reports did not reveal a strong focus on services' goals. Where there was

reference, it was largely related to (long or short term) management or strategic planning.

The language used in the ERO reports was largely influenced by the DOPs and, in particular, DOP 10 (e). This was evident in the use of words such as regularly, policies, objectives and practices, ongoing, and evaluated. Other words in DOP 10 (e), such as modified and recorded, were largely invisible in the ERO reports. If services were already undertaking self-review that was found to meet requirements, reports recommended or suggested that services strengthen, further develop or formalise self-review. The reports identified the need for services to establish systems or processes for review where these were found to be lacking. This was understandable, given that ERO was charged with taking a more proactive role in reporting on self-review, particularly in the 'b' reports.

A number of ERO publications also made reference to self-review in a way that contributed to developing understandings and expectations for practice. ERO's *Framework and Resources for Early Childhood Education Reviews* (ERO, 2002a) and other publicly available documents, such as ERO's annual reports, statements of intent and a range of education evaluation reports, included reference to self-review. This was particularly in relation to ERO's role in reviewing ECE services whereby self-review information was used in the external review process where it was available and, where there was no self-review information, ERO was to report on it in a way that built capability to undertake review (ERO, 2002a).

Research undertaken in relation to the professional development pilot programmes to support the implementation of *The Quality Journey/ He Haerenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1999) also

contributed to the understanding associated with self-review. The studies (Depree & Hayward, 2001; McLachlan-Smith et al. 2001) highlighted the importance of review being underpinned by organisational groundwork, vision and goal setting, and documentation of review within a framework of the DOPs. The reference to organisational groundwork included the development of policies, plans and procedures to guide practice (Wansbrough, 2003).

5.3.3 Self-review practice

The actual practice of self-review in ECE services gave emphasis to the review of policies and procedures. The DOPs provided a framework for ECE services to review their practice against, as well providing the rationale for review (as stated in DOP 10e). Policy review was a feature of the 'a' and 'b' reports, with just over 50 percent of all the reports analysed ('a' and 'b' reports) in this research referring to services' review of policies and procedures. This study highlighted the dominance of review that has focused on ECE services' policies and procedures. The important shift for ECE services was in the links made between what was documented in policies and the implementation of the policies in practice and getting alignment between the two.

The actual doing of self-review was influenced by the way in which review was described in various publications and resources. *Quality in Action/ Te Mahi Whai Hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998) set out a visual image of what internal review looked like in practice and *The Quality Journey/ He Haerenga Whai Hua: Improving quality in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1999) described in some detail how to go about undertaking a quality review based on a cyclic action research process.

It is only recently that the process of self-review was explained in more detail in a publication for ECE services. *The Draft Self-review Guidelines for Early Childhood*

Education (Ministry of Education, 2005) and the more recently published resource *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua/ Self-review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2006) was the first Ministry of Education publication to describe self-review in some detail. The review process outlined in these resources was one that involved preparing for review, gathering information and making sense of it, and using the findings to make decisions about changes to or affirmation of practice.

5.3.4 Evaluating self-review

External review has taken an ever-increasing focus on reporting on the development and quality of self-review in ECE services. The focus of ERO reports changed as the emphasis and nature of ERO's review methodology changed. The earliest references to self-review in ECE appeared in Hurst's (1995) study looking at quality assurance in ECE and ERO's (1995) report on *Early Childhood Learning Programmes*. The ERO report positioned self-review in relation to programme evaluation. This positioning was evident in many of the 'a' and 'b' reports where programme or curriculum review featured in reporting on self-review. ERO's reporting on self-review was influenced by the requirements of the DOPs (charter obligations) and the findings of the 1997 and 2000 Ministerial reviews of ERO that in turn influenced on ERO's changing review methodology.

Self-review has been a visible feature of the landscape of external review undertaken by ERO in ECE services since 1998. It became more prominent following the publication of a report *Early Childhood Services*, by ERO in 2001. As noted in the literature review, this report highlighted findings from analysis of accountability reviews of 615 services undertaken in 2000. One of the most common actions for compliance related to internal review with 33 percent of services not complying with DOP 10 (e). The

analysis of the sample of 'a' reports (accountability reports undertaken between 1998 and 2002) in my research study showed that 17 percent of the reports included actions for compliance related to DOP 10 (e). This reduced to 5 percent in the 'b' reports (education review reports undertaken in 2005).

ERO's annual report for the year ended 30 June 2002 made reference to ERO's approach to external evaluation including self-review information and helping to build capability in self-review. This was at the time that ERO was developing its education review methodology for reviews in ECE services. ERO's Statement of Intent for 2002/2003 reiterated the message that self-review information was to be incorporated into reviews in ECE, with a strong focus on improvement. In its subsequent Statement of Intent for 2003/2004, ERO signaled its intent to focus more closely on self-review. ERO (2003) stated:

One of the marks of a healthy organization, including a school or early childhood education service, is the use of self review to ensure that the organization continues to improve. However, although self review may be thorough and take note of responses by the community, by definition it remains internally driven and open to bias. External review complements self review. It provides an independent evaluation, transparency, and the ability to draw on experience with other similar organisations (p. 6).

ERO's *Framework and Resources for Early Childhood Education Reviews* (2002a) included a focus on encouraging and supporting the development of self-review in ECE services. Including the requirements for ECE services to complete a *Self Review Statement* at the beginning of the external review process was a new feature of the external review methodology.

Also noted and discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2) were the findings of ERO's national evaluation report *Self-review in Early Childhood Services* (ERO, 2005). This report provided the ECE sector with the findings from ERO's education reviews that investigated the quality of self-review in 168 ECE services reviewed in term 1, 2005. This report added to the findings of ERO's reviews of individual ECE services that have included a focus on self-review in all education reviews in ECE in 2005 and 2006.

Self-review continues to be a focus of external review undertaken by ERO in ECE services. ERO's Statement of Intent for 2006/2007 indicates ERO's interest in determining the impact it has on education outcomes. One of the target outcomes identified for schools and ECE services is the improvement of self-review.

5.4 Educational and political influences on self-review

The second research question related to the educational and political influences on how self-review has been understood and practiced. The educational and political influences were discussed in the literature review. The most significant influences were those associated with the educational reform of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The role of external review through the work of ERO, and changing legislative requirements for ECE services, impacted on the development of thinking and practices associated with self-review.

5.4.1 Political influences

The most significant political influence on self-review in ECE was the two Ministerial reviews of ERO in 1997 and 2000. Both of these reviews positioned self-review in schools and in ECE as needing support and encouragement. The focus was very much on building capability in self-review through external review. However, the

significance of these reviews in shaping the relationship between self-review and external review has not been fully realised. The relationship between self-review and external review was discussed in more detail in the literature review (chapter 2).

The political context also informed understandings and practices through the language of the regulatory/legislative framework and associated accountabilities as set out in regulations and charters that were based on the DOPs. The literature review discussed these accountabilities in relation to review. The 'a' and 'b' reports reflected the political context in that they included a focus on compliance and often used the language of the regulations and more specifically the DOPs.

MacBeath (2004) offered another way of looking at the politics of self-review (or as he refers to it – self-evaluation). The key purpose of review, whether it be self or external is political in that it is embedded in a “need to raise standards, nationally and internationally, as a political benchmark of governmental effect and as an economic proxy indicator” (p. 88).

5.4.2 Educational influences

The changes for the ECE sector resulting from the education reforms of the early 1990s set the scene for increased accountability and promoted a strong focus on improving the quality of educational provision. It was within this context that the ERO reviews (accountability and education reviews) were undertaken and reports for individual (ECE) services written.

The educational context has informed thinking and practices associated with self-review through increased understanding of the role and function of evaluation, changes in the nature, context and focus of curriculum and an increased emphasis on improvement and outcomes in education.

The other significant educational (and somewhat political) influence for ECE has been the adoption of the 10 year strategic plan *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki: - A 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2002) in 2002. This plan was developed as a result of extensive consultation with the ECE sector. The *Final Report of the Working Group for the Development of the Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* (October 2001) set out a wide range of strategies to achieve increased participation, collaborative relationships, improved quality and sustainability of services. One of the strategies focused on ensuring “ongoing improvement through review and evaluation” (p. 16). The focus was “excellent practice in EC service self-review leading to ongoing improvement” (p. 16). The role of external review by ERO was reported by the working group to be one of stimulating an improvement approach through self-review. As noted in the literature review (chapter 2) the early childhood strategic plan paved the way for thinking about self-review and external review as complementary processes both with a focus on improving quality and learning outcomes for young children.

5.5 What counts as self-review?

The third and final research question focused specifically on how external review (through ERO’s accountability and education review reports) positioned self-review and reported on its development in the early childhood education sector. The notion of what counts as self-review in this research reflected both the perspectives of ERO as the external reviewer and the ECE services’ understandings and practices associated with self-review as reported by ERO. These understandings and practices developed in parallel as ERO’s methodology for review changed in its purpose and focus, alongside ECE services’ development of systems and frameworks for self-review. ERO’s review

process and the growing understanding and practice of self-review in the ECE sector interacted at the point of external evaluation.

The analysis of all the reports, as to what they said about review, revealed a complex milieu of activity that spanned everything that those who are involved in early childhood education services do as part of the operation of their service. This included reflection, appraisal, health and safety checks, meetings, informal discussions, planning, consultation, documenting, assessment, monitoring and reporting.

ERO reports fulfilled a number of purposes in reporting on self-review. Firstly the reports acknowledged what services had reviewed and sometimes noted how well they had done this and reported on the outcomes of such review. Secondly the ERO reports identified what needed to be reviewed and suggested or more formally recommended such review activity. ERO's reports also included judgments about the ECE service's self-review in terms of the quality and effectiveness of review. Judgments in the reports also referred to the level the service had attained in developing self-review processes or practices. This is likely to have been informed by the judgments ECE services' made about their self-review by completing the *Self Review Statement*, which were verified or not by ERO's evaluation process.

ERO's reporting on self-review in the 'a' reports reflected the early stage the ECE services' had reached with self-review. The focus was very much on the systems to support review rather than the outcomes. Where self-review was quite well developed, (in a small number of reports) the reporting focused on the effectiveness of the systems and the maintenance of those systems. The development of self-review spanned a continuum that stretched from compliance related activity to performance and improvement focused reviews.

Accountability reviews ('a' reports) analysed in this research reflected the shift in ERO's methodology where the focus widened to take account of the performance and quality of the ECE service (ERO, 1999). The previous reviews, assurance audits, had had a very strong focus on compliance with legal requirements. The extent to which the 'a' reports reflected a focus on performance and quality varied between reports. This was most likely due to the position ECE services had reached in meeting more than the minimum requirements for self-review. It also reflected the transition for ECE services in coming to understand and implement the requirement for internal review in the DOPs. Recommendations in the 'a' reports were less formalised and fulfilled a dual emphasis of improving review as well as identifying what needed to be reviewed.

An interesting feature of the 'a' reports related to the difference between informal and formal review. The ERO reports emphasised the difference between 'doing' review and having it written or recorded in some form as required by DOP 10 (e). However, just what documented or recorded review looked like was not clear. The issue of formal versus informal review opened a window as to what counted as self-review. This was especially in relation to informal review and what constituted self-review. The 'a' reports identified activities, such as meetings, chats, discussions, and dialogue as informal review. It was unclear as to what happened at such activities that were deemed to be self-review by ERO or the ECE service. Formal review seemed to be regarded as review that was systematic and written in some form. Because there was a lack of clarity around the nature of the self-review process, activities associated with teaching practice, such as reflection, were acknowledged and reported as being self-review.

ERO reported on what services were reviewing and what needed to be reviewed. The 'a' reports also included a limited range of judgments about the quality and effectiveness of self-review. The focus was very much on undertaking review rather

than the understandings, purposes and outcomes associated with review. It was as if ERO's understanding of self-review in the ECE context and ECE services' own developing understandings and practice developing as parallel processes, bound by ERO's review methodology and the requirements for self-review in ECE.

Increasing the emphasis of ERO's external reviews on teaching and learning was very much a focus of the two Ministerial reviews of ERO in 1997 and 2000. ERO (1999; 2002) also acknowledged the shifting focus in its review methodologies for ECE. The analysis of the sample of ERO reports, in particular the 'b' reports, reflected this emphasis through the frequent references to curriculum review and practices such as planning, assessment and evaluation associated with curriculum implementation.

The findings from the analysis of the sample of ERO reports also highlighted increased use of the term self-review to the extent that it was a common feature in all the 'b' reports. This was not surprising given that the 2005 education review reports in the sample included reporting on self-review as an area of national interest. Nevertheless there has been a noticeable shift in the use of the term self-review evidenced in the work of the Ministry of Education to develop self-review guidelines for ECE services and in the increasing number of masters' theses and articles on the topic of self-review (Depree and Hayward, 2004; Grey, 2002; McLachlan-Smith et al. 2001; Meade et al. 2002; Wansbrough, 2003; Wansbrough, 2004; and White, 2003). The increasing use of the term indicated a growing acceptability of the term self-review as being one that was understood and practised by the ECE sector.

5.6 Shifts in thinking and practice

The analysis of the 'a' and 'b' ERO reports showed the changes in thinking and practice associated with self-review in the ECE sector and for ERO. There has been quite a shift

in how ERO has reported on the purpose, rationale and drivers of review. The reasons why ECE services should and do engage in review were clearly evident in the reports analysed. The rationale for review varied from quite specific accountability purposes to a range of improvement purposes. This may have been because the 'a' reports were more concerned with compliance by nature of ERO's accountability methodology. It may also have been a reflection of the time, with a higher numbers of services still coming to terms with self-review in the period 1998-2001, than in 2005 where services were engaged in professional development and using available resources to support the implementation of self-review.

The terminology ERO used to describe and make judgements about self-review at different times indicated some changes in relation to thinking and practice. The findings revealed a shift from an emphasis on self-review fulfilling accountability purposes, to a wider variety of purposes related to change, improving performance and better learning outcomes for children. This aligned to the intent of ERO's methodology (ERO, 2002) for education reviews where there was a deliberate focus on outcomes for children.

The analysis of the sample of ERO reports also highlighted an increased focus on the developing understandings about, and awareness of, the purpose of self-review. The 'b' reports included reference to those working in ECE services engaging in review to improve both the performance of the service and children's learning. The reasons why services engaged in review broadened to go beyond compliance to include a much wider range of purposes associated with all aspects of the operation of the service.

A feature of just over half of the 2005 'b' reports was the inclusion of formal recommendations. The recommendations in these reports focused on improving the

quality of review as well as identifying what ECE services needed to review. The education review methodology described in ERO's *Framework and Resources for Early Childhood Education Reviews* (2002a) reflected the intent of the 'assess and assist' approach whereby ERO sought to "identify useful strategies for improvement in its recommendations" (p. 3). In 'Resource E' (p. 23) of this framework ERO (2002) noted that "all ERO reports are expected to include some recommendations" and that "recommendations focus on improvement, and all services are able to improve."

The 'b' reports included significantly less reporting on ECE services non-compliance with requirements associated with self-review. Only approximately 5 percent of reports had compliance issues reported in relation to self-review. This reflects the overall trend in ERO's reporting on self-review as evident in the comparison of the ratings of 'a' and 'b' reports in chapter 4.

Another feature of the 'b' reports was ERO's reporting on areas of good performance and areas for improvement. The majority of the education review reports (88 percent) explicitly reported on areas good performance and areas for improvement. The range of what constituted good performance in self-review was very wide, particularly in terms of what services were reviewing and what constituted effective self-review. ERO's evaluation report *Self-review in Early Childhood Education Services* (2005) noted that the language and terminology used by ECE services in self-review was broad. The analysis of ERO reports in this research showed that what constituted good performance in self-review was also very broad.

The findings from the analysis of ERO reports showed a definite improvement in ECE services' self-review over time. The 1 to 5 rating scale used for the excerpts reporting on self-review from the 'a' and 'b' reports indicated improvement in 49 of the 69

reports that included reporting on self-review in both the 'a' and 'b' reports. The factors that can be attributed to this improvement are outside the scope of this research.

5.7 Conclusion

The analysis of the sample of ERO reports in two time periods offered a glimpse into how self-review has been understood and practiced in ECE services. The role of external review in relation to self-review was a mix of reporting on compliance, describing self-review processes and practices, identifying what was working well and making recommendations for improvement. ERO's role in evaluating the effectiveness and impact of self-review on improving the quality of educational provision in ECE services changed over the past 8 years. An increased focus on self-review bringing about improvement, particularly in relation to children's learning and development, was clearly evident in ERO's education review reports. The challenge lies in thinking about what ERO's role, and more broadly the relationship between external and internal review (self-review), will be in the future.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the research study

This research study has focused on investigating how self-review, undertaken in early childhood education services, has been understood and practiced through an analysis of external review (ERO) reports within the political and educational contexts described in a review of relevant literature. As noted there was no research that I could draw on that focused specifically on how self-review developed in the ECE sector in New Zealand.

The literature reviewed positioned self-review in ECE within the wider educational reforms and changes taking place in New Zealand in the late 1980s through to the mid 1990s. The changing role of ERO and the associated changes to the focus of its external review methodology was discussed in relation to self-review. The way self-review has been defined in schools and in the ECE sector through various publications showed how the emphasis has been on the purpose and focus rather than on the process and just what that process involved. The relationship between self-review and external review was briefly explored with the literature being quite conclusive about the need for both but less certain about the nature of the relationship between the two processes.

The underpinning approach to this research was essentially qualitative, with the analysis of the ERO reports providing the opportunity for the emerging findings to be quantified, and the themes in the reports made explicit through the use of specific excerpts. The reports illuminated practice in terms of how services understood the purpose of self-review, what they reviewed and how effective their self-review practices were in bringing about improvement. They also gave an insight into how ERO has reported on the way in which services implement self-review processes or practices by identifying what was working well and what needed to be improved. Just what counted as self-review was questioned in the discussion of findings. The range of what constituted good performance and what services could do to improve in self-review was so broad that almost anything associated with the operation of an ECE service was seen to count as self-review.

6.2 Key findings

The findings from the analysis of ERO reports revealed a number of key messages about self-review. These are included here as a way of summarising the broad characteristics of self-review. Self-review was most often described as an activity that is evaluative in its intent. It was found to be undertaken for a range of purposes that included:

- informing decision-making;
- refining management systems;
- meeting children's learning needs;
- improving quality of the curriculum;
- identifying, and supporting children's learning;
- improving outcomes;
- promoting high levels of teaching practice,
- gauging the effectiveness of programmes, and
- enhancing operations.

Self-review was found to be a process that took place on a regular basis and was both informal and formal. It was about processes, practices, programmes and cycles and often linked to the framework of the DOPs. It was most commonly used in relation to review of policies and procedures. Annual and strategic planning was informed by and/or monitored and evaluated using self-review processes. Self-review varied in its quality and effectiveness. There were definite shifts in the understandings and practices associated with self-review in the two time periods from which the ERO reports were drawn.

Role of external review (ERO's reporting on self-review)

ERO's accountability and education review reports provided a mirror to look at what ECE services were doing that constituted self-review. The reports also gave an insight into what ERO identified as good practice in self-review. ERO's reports served multiple functions in reporting on self-review. These included:

- evaluating the extent to which ECE services were complying with the requirements for review;
- identifying what ECE services needed to review;

- acknowledging and describing what ECE services has reviewed;
- making judgements about the quality, effectiveness and impact of self-review
- identifying what was working well (good performance) and what could be improved; and
- making recommendations for improvement.

ERO continues to report on the quality and effectiveness of self-review in its education review reports for ECE services. Further research will be needed to see how thinking and practice is influenced and shaped by this reporting and the changes that continue for the ECE sector as a result of the implementation of *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki: A 10-year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2002).

6.3 Implications for early childhood education

This research identified a number of implications for the way self-review is understood and practised in ECE services, as well as for the way that ERO focuses on self-review in its education review methodology. As a result of my research further thinking and research could be undertaken to explore ways to:

- support ECE services to implement effective self-review that provides a useful and relevant focus for external review;
- strengthen self-review practices through ERO's external review methodology that recognises and complements self-review in ECE;
- provide opportunities for dialogue and debate in the ECE sector and beyond about what effective self-review looks like and ways in which ECE services are using self-review to improve the quality of education provided for infants, toddlers and young children;
- better understand just what self-review is all about and what it isn't; and
- understand how ECE services are implementing self-review to bring about improvement, to increase its effectiveness, and to better understand the nature of the relationship between external review and self-review that results in complementary processes that maximise outcomes for young children's learning and development.

Building capability in self-review is an area that warrants further attention in terms of the best ways to achieve improved capability and the benefits and challenges for early

childhood services. A growing range of evaluation literature explores the notion of evaluation capacity building (ECB). According to Baizerman, Compton and Stockdill (2002) “ECB is the intentional work to continuously create and sustain overall organisational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine” (p. 109). Sanders (2003) referred to mainstreaming evaluation as a way of making it an integral part of the everyday operation of an organisation. Mainstreaming evaluation is the context referred to by Sanders would see evaluation woven through all parts of an organisation. If building capability is about doing just that, then there are a number of challenges to consider in terms of what this might mean for ERO’s work as an external evaluator and what it might mean for early childhood services in the diverse ECE sector in New Zealand? How can increased capability in self-review contribute to external review and vice versa?

An overarching implication of my research was the need for all involved in education to better understand just what ‘complementary’ self (internal) and external review looks like and how the two processes interact to bring about improvement. In Figure 4 the shaded part where the two circles intersect is the area that we need to better understand.

Figure 4: Self-review and external review



What happens at the point where they ‘intersect’? What is it about methodology of each that is the same? What is different? Should the focus of each be the same or different? How does the system maximise the value of each as well as recognising what happens when the two processes come together when an ECE service is involved in an ERO review?

6.4 Conclusion

MacBeath (2004) wrote about “putting the self back into self-evaluation” (p. 87). He noted:

Self-evaluation is a dialogic process, a meeting of hearts and minds, a forging of new ways of seeing and doing, vital and continuing because it is at the core of a school’s educational life. It is the essence of the learning community, the intelligent school, schools that learn. (p. 90)

If we accept that self-review and self-evaluation are ways of referring to the same process and that in the above quote we can substitute the words ECE service where there is reference to schools, then we have a powerful way of thinking about self-review. If review, external or internal, is at the core of what happens in education then the prospect for the future lies in valuing what each process has to offer. This research has attempted to explore what self-review is all about and how you do it. In doing so I have pieced together the meanings from relevant literature and a sample of ERO reports for a range of different ECE services. In making sense of all the pieces it has become clear to me that there are some fundamental issues to be resolved about review (internal and external) as an evaluative activity in ECE. My hope is that this small research study will pave the way for further discussion, debate and research.

I conclude with another quote from John MacBeath that has both relevance and challenge for the future thinking about self-review. He refers to self-evaluation as a “risky business” (MacBeath, 2004, p. 90) and noted that:

It has no fundamental antipathy to external observation, or indeed inspections – provided they are conducted with courtesy and without threat or danger – because challenge and new ways of seeing are the motor of capacity building and the drivers of transformational change (p. 90).

Self-review can provide both the challenge and new ways of thinking that will build capacity and lead to change that is truly transformational.

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