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# COMMENT

The philosophy comes down to this: the highest form of accountability is self-accountability (Patton, 1997, p. 161).

New Zealand early childhood services are increasingly engaging in this form of accountability, that is in what Michael Patton calls “empowerment evaluation”. Ironically it would seem, government actions have been influential. Generally, the perception is that governments seek to *control* through accountability mechanisms. But my view is that the philosophy underlying many recent initiatives is a development philosophy. These initiatives included the Revised DOPs, *The Quality Journey* (Ministry of Education, 1999), the expectation of self-reviews expressed in the Education Review Office’s guidelines *Education Reviews for Early Childhood Services* (2002), and the promulgation of self-reviews in *Pathways to the Future! Nga Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002).

It could have been otherwise. The tip-over point came in 1999 when the government of the day pulled back from introducing something akin to an accreditation system for higher levels of funding. If it, or later governments, had gone for external raters evaluating and deciding on funding levels the balance would have tipped the other way. External accountability would now dominate. Instead, trust prevails, with a more supportive Education Review Office checking whether that trust is warranted. (After all, someone has

to check—children’s futures are at stake.)

A growing number of resources and models for self-review are being developed and promulgated—the quality indicators in *The Quality Journey* resource folder, teaching and learning story formats, the Education Review Office early childhood education indicators (just published), and action research as carried out in the centres of innovation. One of the first articles from the Centres of Innovation Programme is published in this issue of the *Early Childhood Folio*. Val Podmore and Jan Taouma write about the transition programme at A’oga Fa’a Samoa.

Data gathering for internal self-reviews, empowerment evaluations, and/or action research is not a substitute for action by those responsible for children’s learning and development. Rather, it provides guidance on where to act. Common to all these approaches is the intent to improve education for children and their parents and whānau. A common outcome for all who engage in these approaches is renewed excitement about their chosen field of work.

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## Reference

Patton, M. Q. (1997). Towards distinguishing empowerment evaluation and placing it in a larger context, *Evaluation Practice*, 18(2), 147-163. Available online at [www.Stanford.edu/~davidf/patton.html](http://www.Stanford.edu/~davidf/patton.html)