

## Teaching Today, a podcast from The Teaching Council

### Season 2, Episode 1: Mythbusting appraisal

**Host:** Francesca Hilbron

**Panelist:**

**Christina Thornley**

**Jane Lee**

**Francesca Hilbron:** Welcome to a Teaching Council myth busting special, where I talk to Council lead advisor innovation and collaboration Christina Thornley and Jane Lee, manager national projects from the Education Review Office, to debunk some of the misconceptions about the appraisal process for teachers.

Welcome, Chris. Can you tell us, Chris, why is it important for the Council to talk about some of the misunderstandings we're hearing from parts of the profession about appraisal?

**Christina Thornley:** I think from the Council's point of view, we're really keen that appraisal is something that is beneficial to teachers, their students, their early childhood service, their kura, their school – to everybody involved. But sometimes the messages we hear back about appraisal put an emphasis on compliance as opposed to the potential growth and development. Whilst the Council certainly needs to know that people are meeting Our Standards, Nga Paerewa, in their practice, we don't want it to be something that has a kind of compliance focus or an accountability focus. We want it to be about learning and growth and development.

**Francesca Hilbron:** Chris, you're a former teacher yourself, can you tell me briefly about your role at the Council in strengthening appraisal.

**Christina Thornley:** Well, I lead the project, really, around strengthening appraisal but I do this with lots of other people, facilitators, teachers, with whom we collaborate and of course, my colleagues across the Council. The focus is on professional learning, so we've had an extensive workshop programme in Māori Medium and English Medium settings and that's been an opportunity for us to learn with and from teachers and we kind of figure out what's the best way for schools and centres and services and kura to undertake appraisal and to think about Nga Paerewa, Our Standards. Once we do the workshops we develop website resources – things like webinars for people who can't access the workshops themselves or prefer not to, print resources and such like so people can engage with the materials at their own leisure. So, it's a professional learning focus.

**Francesca Hilbron:** Of course, we also have Jane Lee from ERO, can you tell us why ERO is at the table with the Council today?



**Jane Lee:** ERO is at the table today because we work closely with the Teaching Council to support them in undertaking audits. So, in January 2015, the Teaching Council contracted ERO to undertake audits in schools and early learning services for at least 10 per cent for those practising certificates that were issued in any one year.

**Francesca Hilbron:** Great, and near the end we'll probably touch more on how the two organisations work together, but let's first talk about renewing of practising certificates. So, teachers must have been involved in an appraisal process using the *Standards for the Teaching Profession* for the renewal of a practising certificate. Chris, is that what this is all about? Is it about getting appraisal done for Council to prove teachers are meeting the *Standards*?

**Chris Thornley:** Well the Council does hold a responsibility for appraisal, and in fact the responsibility sits across three groups. The State Sector Act of 1988 has a requirement for appraisal of teachers. Then the Education Act states that Council must ensure that the issue and renewal of practising certificates must be based on appraisal by professional leaders that is of a consistent and reasonable standard. So, the Council provides guidance and professional learning to strengthen appraisal and ensure understanding of *Our Standards*. Additionally boards, professional leaders including principals, tumuaki and managers have the responsibility for ensuring there is an effective appraisal process at their place. And finally, all teachers and professional leaders holding practising certificates have the responsibility to participate in the process. So it is a shared responsibility to meet the legal requirements.

But we agree with the things teachers tell us about the potential benefits of appraisal and what appraisal should look like when it's strong and effective. So, it becomes an opportunity for people to reflect on their practice and really think deeply about the relationship between what they do and the outcomes for their learners: outcomes of wellbeing, achievement, learning, outcomes for their colleagues and then the *Standards*. So, it becomes this three-part interrogation, if you like, about how does what I do impact on others and how does that fit with the *Standards*. But more than that – how can the *Standards* support me to do my work in a way that is more effective? So, appraisal has an evidence-base to it, which is why people talk about evidence and I'm sure we'll talk about evidence later but it also has this strong conversation component because whenever people talk about appraisal, they talk about the value of the relationship and the dialogue with the appraisee and appraiser and often about that being a two-way relationship where both people are growing and learning and thinking about practice.

**Francesca Hilbron:** What about then teachers who are listening who are thinking me and my colleagues are fantastic teachers, they're great teachers actually, they excel. Jane, can you tell me then what the benefits are of appraisal for teachers who are expert teachers, no matter where they are in their career.

**Jane Lee:** I think every teacher is improvement focused and appraisal is part of the process of improvement. It's allowing them to think more deeply about their practice and have those ongoing conversations with other professional colleagues in relation to improving their practice and improving learning outcomes for children. It's also allowing them to lead in that space of appraisal. You might be the expert teacher but it is also having the opportunity to take some of that learning and expertise that you have and sharing that across the appraisal space with other teachers.



**Francesca Hilbron:** So, what I'm hearing is this isn't just about an individual going down their pathway, it sounds like a very collaborative affair.

**Jane Lee:** Absolutely, we see it as a very collaborative affair because what ERO does look at is how does the appraisal within the service or the school support teaching and learning across the school and not just for individuals. So, we're looking at the practices that supports that reduction in disparity and supporting that equity in excellence.

**Christina Thornley:** The other thing about that is interesting to me, is that in the workshops we talk about *Our Code, Tikanga Matatika* and ask people what it actually means to be a member of a profession and in every workshop people talk about as a teacher we want to grow, learn and the students and young people and children that we work with every year are different from those in the past and we always have things in our practice that challenge us or that we see things we could do differently. It's about adaptive expertise and so appraisal, if you have the focus as Jane described it and it's rich in conversation and it's evidence based it has the potential to support all of us at any point in our career.

**Francesca Hilbron:** So, in terms of meeting the intentions that it set out to meet people are probably thinking about evidence. How am I proving how I'm doing in terms of appraisal? We hear comments from teachers who think they need to collect, they need to show boxes and folders of evidence and you have these pictures of them lugging this stuff around with them. Where's the truth in this understanding of the role of evidence in appraisal?

**Christina Thornley:** We're trying to minimize the focus on gathering of evidence to be thinking about the analysis, interpretation and understanding of evidence. That's one aspect of it. But we also see evidence in two ways. One is that as the teacher, I need evidence that I participated in a system and people haven't always understood that but you can hear that from Jane, that that's what we are collectively looking for. Have I been a participant, do I have some observation, for example, do I have some notes from conversations, have I been part of a process that has been set up in our place by our professional leaders. Once I have that, then the evidence I have that shows I meet the *Standards* has a bit more strength if you like. Because, I'm saying this shows that I demonstrate the *Standards* and it's been affirmed through my participation in the process. So, the document that we refer to is the Quality Practice Template: where we talk about what the *Standards* look like in your place and what the naturally occurring evidence would be, as something that can replace a collection of evidence. If you have that in place, it may be you decide you still want your teachers to collect and analyse the evidence of the *Standards* as they play out at your place or it may be that you say we know this is in existence and we know you've got it in your naturally occurring place and now the evidence that you put together to discuss in appraisal conversations could be more about your work around your goals, or an example of important and significant practice and learning for you or could be focused on inquiry. We've got a document called 'Thinking about Evidence: Putting together a folder or portfolio' that calls out those options and explains it.

We really do not want people with big boxes full of evidence, but we do want people to collect or gather evidence that links to their goal work or their inquiry or an example of their practice or some aspect that they can have a strong conversation with their appraiser about, rather than just a collection of things that are unrelated.

**Jane Lee:** And just adding to that, we would look at how are you using that information and that evidence to improve your teaching at the school level and also maybe at the syndicate or department level and also at the leadership level. So, it's bringing all that information together and saying actually, what's happening in this place



and how are you responding to that at the various levels? I think what we're looking for - and if you're going to take a key word away from today, - would be around alignment. Ensuring that there is clear line of sight between what it is, what's happening and what's trying to be achieved and what's the outcome of that. I think the word of the day is alignment, from our perspective.

**Francesca Hilbron:** I don't want to labour the point about evidence but if, for example, I was a new teacher, what might my evidence look like by the end of Term 1 and my first appraisal conversation?

**Christina Thornley:** That's a great question because when we talk about induction and mentoring programmes which provisionally certificated teachers will be involved in, we see that they will be somewhat like the appraisal process, so they're not going to look completely different. There would be more observations and conversations and it would all be wrapped around with a stronger mentoring focus. A lot of people say that as mentors they sit down with the PCT and look at the Quality Practice Template and then say, now what would this look like for you in your practice and what kind of naturally reoccurring evidence have you got. A lot of them will have amassed evidence which sits closely to the Quality Practice Template or each of the six *Standards* rather than something more global like goals. They've said that there's greater comfort because they can see that their growth and development and thinking around the individual *Standards*.

**Francesca Hilbron:** Is that evidence something tangible that I bring in to show or is it some information that I've written down?

**Christina Thornley:** We do have some examples in terms of what evidence around a goal or inquiry would look like. So, you would have notes from student voice, you'd have your planning, examples of your practice, learnings from your students, the piece of policy that helped you to think about why you took this particular approach or the research that you had read, you'd have the feedback of the observations, you'd have readings that you had done, not the whole reading but maybe a photograph of a key piece of it, you'd have notes from the last conversation that you had with your mentor, you'd have maybe some things you'd read online, maybe a piece of the curriculum. You would have a heavy emphasis on evidence that showed how the students were engaged, what their learning was like, what their achievement was like and you would have the same for children in early childhood settings. So, it's really about the evidence that's going to help you understand the relationship between your teaching, the outcomes for learners and the *Standards*.

**Jane Lee:** I think one of the myths around when we undertake a review is that we are looking for all of that and it has to be in a nice folder. We acknowledge that that information can be sitting in teachers planning, in strategic planning, in reflections. What we would suggest is that you articulate where it is so that we can have those conversations because sometimes it is a matter of talking past each other so just being really aware to say this is where this sits and this is how it links back to some of the appraisal or *Standards*.

**Christina Thornley:** Whilst we talk about that in the workshops we also encourage people to put into a separate place the evidence that they would want to bring to their appraisal conversations so that they have ready access to it. It's exactly as Jane said, in its naturally occurring place but also somethings amassed to be able to be discussed. Your appraiser is going to be the person who really can help you have a dialogue around understanding what's going on in your practice.

**Jane Lee:** It's about curating it in a way that it's easily accessible but also being able to articulate a wider point of view of where the links are and how they're made.



**Christina Thornley:** There's one more piece of evidence, should I talk about this? I guess it's a piece of evidence that you have engaged in a system and it's some kind of a summary report so that annually each teacher would have a document that said - and this is the must-have - whether or not they meet the *Standards*. So, sometimes in the past people have had a summary report that says they have done a great job, outlines all of the innovations they have undertaken, the success of their students, all sorts of things but doesn't actually call out whether or not they have met the Standards and that's really problematic and one of the root causes of people feeling like they have to amass a lot of evidence and hold it for three years because they're worried if they go to a new school or a new service how will the professional leader know that I met the Standards in the past? So, the summary document and we've got examples of it and templates of it but people are increasingly developing their own, that gives me the assurance that I met the Standards in each of those years and that my professional leader has seen this evidence, it was discussed and then I have this summary report. The summary report also shows that the professional leader has put in place a system that I have engaged in.

**Francesca Hilbron:** I want to talk about the responsibility of teachers as professionals to self-examine the effectiveness of their teaching practice, which is part of appraisal. Is it correct that every teacher must engage in inquiry?

**Christina Thornley:** No, and that's definitely one of the myths that we have been working on. There's certainly a standard that says in your professional learning that you use inquiry. So, definitely you use inquiry, collaborative problem-solving, professional learning to improve professional capability to impact on the learning and achievement of all learners – that's true, but we do not have to have an inquiry as the centerpiece of your appraisal documentation.

A lot of people chose to do that because they're undertaking inquiry in their place to promote teacher learning, better outcomes for learners, but they do not have to do that. Some people say we're going to have goals as the centre-piece of our appraisal, other people say we're going to have some significant examples of practice, other people say we're going to have the six individual *Standards* and each teacher will talk about or be thinking about evidence in relation to those. If you're going to undertake inquiry as the main piece of your appraisal work we would expect that you would have collectively done the Quality Practice Template or the work around what do each individual *Standard* look like and what does the practice look like. I could have a great inquiry on a really narrow topic and that inquiry could show I do touch on all of the *Standards*, and we do hope it would, but my professional relationships might only be being examined or discussed by me in relation to my inquiry as opposed to across all of my work. Or my commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi might only evidence in inquiry but not across all of my practice. So, the Quality Practice Template is the breadth of teacher practice in relation to the *Standards* and inquiry or goal work or whatever else you choose is the centre-piece is more the depth.

**Francesca Hilbron:** I think it's really important to go back to the idea of ERO and the Council working together. I've had a professional leader come to me at a conference saying 'we're going through the review process with ERO but I'm a bit confused about how the audit process fits in with that'. So, Jane, can you tell us about the audit process, just briefly, and how it fits or doesn't fit with reviews.

**Jane Lee:** Firstly, let's talk about how it fits with reviews. We see it as an integral part of reviews because prior to the contract, review officers will always look at appraisal process within a service or school because it's one of the levers that drives up best practice in teaching. We would have always looked at that. The audit is a discretionary piece of work that we do that is also integrated into the review, so it doesn't sit out there separately. What we would be doing as part of our review process is we look at the assurance statement where



you attest to appraisal and then we look at your policies and procedures in relation to how is appraisal being enacted in this school, and then we would look at some of those samples of teacher's appraisals and the evidence they are collecting. Not the primary evidence, we're looking at the summary and those sorts of key pieces.

What we're seeing is that when you talk about the processes that more schools and services meet the requirements and we see them as satisfactory audits, so you can see that there is good practice happening out there and it's basically up to the services to decide what that looks like and how that's enacted in their centre. I can't come back to that enough, because from our point of view there seems to be this myth that we have this ideal appraisal in mind and that's what we're looking for. What we're looking for is how is it enacted here and how do you monitor that it's being effective and it's having the outcomes that you desire. It's very much about what do you in your place and how do you show and how do you know.

**Christina Thornley:** So, when the information comes to the Council we are able to look at it in terms of thinking about the upcoming programming of our workshops and professional learning resources. We look at the content, so what is it that schools and services are doing really well in relation to our aspirations for appraisal and what is it that might still benefit from strengthening. It helps us design the content of the workshops. It also helps us to design resources, I think that's probably one of the most prevalent areas – what are we going to put up on the website for people to access and also helps us with our advertising and our reach programmes so that we're looking at have we actually done enough workshops in that particular area, did we advertise it enough so that people in those areas know that the workshops are available or that the resources are available.

**Francesca Hilbron:** If I'm a teacher and I hear the word audit I think of compliance but what I'm hearing very clearly that this is actually about informing continuous improvement for the profession.

**Christina Thornley:** I think it's about strengthening appraisal in order that appraisal can meet the aspirations of teachers because I never fail to be surprised when in the workshops we ask people what are the characteristics of effective appraisal and who could reap the benefits and we always chart it up and the board becomes absolutely full and the number of people that they see as potential beneficiaries of an effective appraisal system is astonishing to me and then my comment is always so do you have the things in your system to ensure these people get the benefits and the secondary comment is you have great aspirations for what appraisal could potentially do. I think for as long as we as a profession believe in the potential of appraisal then as a Council we want to be working on how do we actually have an appraisal system in every school, service, setting that's going to maximise the benefits for teachers and learners and all of the people teachers believe should benefit.

**Francesca Hilbron:** Thanks for listening to this episode of Teaching Today. Is there any other area of teaching or the Council's work that you would like to hear demystified? Share your views with us.

