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# Creating the Climate and Space for Peer Review within the Writing Classroom

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Substantive and ongoing critique of the quality of one's writing is necessary if students are to experience writing as a recursive process. However, students' willingness to critique their texts and those of others is dependent upon the creation of a trusting and mutually supportive learning environment. Using the naturalistic setting of an elementary school writing classroom, attention is drawn to the ways in which two teachers nurtured competence and communication trust (Reina & Reina, 2006) between themselves and students, and among students. Consideration is also paid to teachers' creation and use of public and private spaces to promote interactions that helped writers revise and recraft substantive aspects of their writing in an ongoing and iterative manner.

*Keywords:* feedback, peer review and response, trust

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## Introduction

For feedback to be effective, it must aid the improvement process through the identification of a learning gap *and* the actions necessary to close that gap. In this way feedback has moved from a corrective to a scaffolding function. Significantly, feedback is no longer a one-way communicative activity where the source of information is external to the learner (Sadler, 1989; Wiggins, 1993). Sociocultural theorists now commonly consider jointly constructed feedback to be the most valuable form of feedback because it requires students to play an active role in learning and assessment. As active participants, students are now expected to be both users and generators of feedback information about their own performances and those of others. To fulfil this expectation, students must be afforded with substantive opportunities to engage in peer review during the production of work (Mulder, Baik, Naylor, & Pearce, 2014; O'Donovan, Price, & Rust, 2008).

Peer review has the potential to be an excellent feedback forum because of its dialogic, formative, and active qualities. Furthermore, it can be used to move beyond surface errors during feedback sessions. But it is also problematic because students might not trust each other to provide effective, constructive feedback. Thus, the question is how to create a healthy environment for peer review, especially among emerging writers in elementary school. In this article, we examine how two teachers responded to this challenge.

## Background

### *Peer Review*

By nature peer review is a socially situated, reciprocal process where students work together in small groups or pairs to construct achievement and encourage improvement (Hawe & Dixon, 2014). To this end student engagement in peer review must nurture understanding of the goal and standard to be aimed for, students' ability to compare performance with the standard, and engagement in appropriate action that will lead to some closure of the gap between actual and desired performance (Sadler, 1989). However, if participation in peer review is to help students develop

the necessary knowledge and expertise to make improvement-related decisions, the learning environment must provide both substantive and authentic opportunities for students to engage in such review (Dixon, Hawe, & Parr, 2011).

Essential to peer review is students' access to formal and informal learning spaces (Sewell & St George, 2012) that encourage active student engagement, interaction, and collaboration. Learning spaces have been defined as the social contexts, networks, and resources that nurture learning (Gudjonsdottir, Gisladdottir, & Woznicka, 2015). Such contexts include working in large and small groups, either with a teacher or independently. According to Duncanson (2014), students not only require access to learning spaces, they also need the latitude to use these spaces in a flexible manner so their learning needs can be supported. Easy access to peers, a key resource in the improvement of learning, is also essential. However, to benefit from peer critique of their work, students must recognize its value and feel confident and competent to engage in and respond to that critique. Yet as reported elsewhere, many students lack the confidence and commitment to engage in peer review. Doubts over peers' ability to provide useful and critical feedback have been commonplace (Mulder et al., 2014). In a number of instances peer review has failed to engage students because of a lack of trust.

Given that “relational networks facilitate group and individual accomplishment” (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001, p. 4) student engagement and participation in peer review is contingent upon the existence of trusting relationships between and among teachers and students. Built up over time, trust refers to “one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable and competent” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, pp. 19–20). To create a trusting environment and trusting relationships teachers must foster individual facets of trust. Within the context of reviewing writing it is critical that teachers model a receptive rather than judgmental stance to the work of others. A receptive stance is evident when attention is drawn to particular problems and the resolution of these problems through the application of alternative solutions (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992). Also essential is the development of two interrelated trust dimensions—competence and

communication (Carless, 2013). Competence trust, or trust in a person's ability to carry out the task in hand competently and confidently, means teachers must have the volition to provide opportunities for students to develop evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise (Hawe & Dixon, 2014; Sadler, 1989) so they can make informed judgments and decisions about work in progress. Teachers need also to engender in students the belief that they and their peers possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositional qualities to make judgments, decisions, and suggestions about the quality of their work and that of others and how to improve it.

Student disclosure of learning needs is an essential precursor to increased understanding and improvement, but such disclosure holds risks when made public. Therefore, a shift in learning from a private to a public endeavor, as is the case when engaged in peer review, necessitates the development of communication trust. There is need for teachers to nurture dispositional qualities such as respect and empathy in their students with the expectation that such qualities will underpin all exchanges. As students make their learning public, particularly their misunderstandings or misconceptions, the fostering of communication trust counteracts potential threats to student self-confidence and self-esteem.

### ***Feedback in Writing***

Writing is a complex cognitive activity that is socially, culturally, and contextually framed. As Parr (2013) has argued, the ability to plan, draft, construct, and reconstruct a variety of texts is dependent on a sound understanding of how texts and language structures work for a range of purposes and audiences. Critical to student success is the understanding, acquisition, and application of bodies of knowledge pertaining to both the deep and surface features of writing. Arguably, of equal importance is the formation of favorable attitudes towards writing (Petrić, 2002) as motivation to write is a lynchpin for writing success (Lo & Hyland, 2007). It is therefore crucial that feedback about students' writing helps them to maintain an interest in writing and writers; view writing as a pleasurable, valuable, and rewarding experience; and develop confidence in their ability to write for specific purposes and audiences. However, such understandings and beliefs can only be nurtured through direct (and fruitful) experience in the creation, evaluation, and revision of works in progress (Sadler, 2013).

The primary purpose of feedback is to effect improvement through the closure of a learning gap. However, research studies suggest that teacher feedback has been less than useful in assisting students to improve their writing (Lee, 2014). While the revision and improvement of work during production is central to the writing process (Faigley & Witte, 1981; Sadler, 1989), an inordinate amount of consideration has been paid to the revision of surface features. Also, rather than treating students' written drafts as works in progress there has been a tendency for teachers to deal with these as finished works (Hyland, 2000). As a consequence, the focus of feedback has been corrective rather than developmental with reference to the more substantive, deep features of writing (Hargreaves & McCallum, 1998; Hyland, 2000). Within the New Zealand context, it has been reported that feedback about students' writing has lacked specificity in relation to a given task, been devoid of constructive critique, and has focused on the affective aspects of performance, such as effort expended rather than quality (Ward & Dix, 2004).

Based on research evidence, there is general consensus that substantive and ongoing engagement in peer review helps students with the organization of their ideas and the revision of writing (Berg, 1999; Mawlawi Diab, 2011). Evidence also suggests that such engagement supports students' self-regulatory writing behaviors and attitudes (Glasswell & Parr, 2009; Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002; Wang, 2014; Xiang, 2004). Furthermore, Swain, Brooks, and Tocalli-Beller (2002) found students' participation in peer review supported understanding of both how and why changes in writing should and could be made. Peer feedback during writing also helped students to grapple with and address the important issue of audience and how it could be dealt with in a text (Kennedy-Kalafatis & Carleton, 1996). In a similar manner, Wang (2014) reported that effective peer feedback cultivated students' audience awareness. At the same time she noted such feedback became a motivational force, encouraging students to persevere with their writing.

To summarize, a key aim of the writing classroom is to engage students in substantive and authentic review opportunities, which help them see and understand notions of quality and how such understanding can be applied to their writing. Given what is known about students' reluctance

to engage in peer review, one of the main roles of the writing teacher is to create the conditions that will encourage full participation in the evaluative process during the production of work. To date, a number of studies have investigated interventionist strategies that provide students with the technical skills to engage in peer review (e.g., Min, 2005), students' roles in the peer-review process (e.g., Zhang, 1995), and the effects of peer review on students' writing (e.g., Paulus, 1999). What has been missing from the research agenda is investigation into the classroom context within which peer review is located; specifically the teacher's role in creating a safe, supportive, and mutually respectful learning space. Using the naturalistic setting of the writing classroom, the current study aimed to address this gap. Two interrelated research questions are dealt with in this article:

1. What types of trust do teachers nurture to facilitate peer review within their writing classrooms?
2. How do teachers create and use public and private spaces to enable students to engage in peer review?

### ***The New Zealand Context***

New Zealand elementary school teachers are generalists who are expected to teach across all areas of the school curriculum. More recently, given the lack of specialist literacy teachers, schools are expected to identify a literacy leader to support curriculum development and innovation within their context. Typically a literacy leader is a teacher who has enthusiasm for and an interest in literacy, as well as a willingness and commitment to support colleagues in the teaching of literacy. Schools' literacy leaders will have been involved in professional development opportunities offered by literacy experts contracted by the Ministry of Education.

## **Methodology**

### ***The Research Design***

Utilizing an interpretive, qualitative, case study approach the current research was conducted in two sequential phases. The first phase aimed to tap into teachers' understandings and beliefs about the role feedback plays in the enhancement of learning; their role and that of students in the feedback process; and the strategies and practices they utilized and

ascribed importance to with reference to the giving and receiving of feedback. Following calls for volunteers, 20 experienced, practicing teachers participated in phase one. While potential participants were drawn from a list of graduates from the researchers' institution, the power differential was negligible as all had already graduated. Furthermore, neither researcher had any working relationship with those who agreed to participate.

Using a semi-structured interview schedule each teacher was interviewed individually within their classroom. Interviewing in this context provided teachers with a familiar space. It also facilitated the researchers' access to artifacts of interest such as learning goals, criteria for success, modeling books, and students' work samples. In turn these artifacts served as aide-mémoires for participants. Interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and with participants' permission were audiotaped, transcribed, and then returned for verification.

In phase two, case study methodology (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000) was employed to investigate the phenomenon: how feedback was used to support learning within the context of the writing classroom. Teachers were selected to participate in phase two because their talk in phase one was consistent with "best" feedback practice. Specifically their talk and articulated practice were consistent with the following notions:

- Goals for learning and what counts as successful achievement were shared with students.
- Feedback was linked to learning goals and was achievement- and improvement-focused.
- Students were talked about as active participants in learning and feedback processes.
- Peer review during the production of work was considered an essential strategy to aid the improvement of learning.

A case study aims to both represent the case (Stake, 2000) *and* to learn about the issues of central importance to the case, in this instance teachers' use of feedback to enhance learning in writing. It was therefore important to select information-rich cases for study (Merriam, 1998). Based on their phase one interview responses, only five of the 20 teachers were invited to participate in phase two. Essentially these five were selected because their understandings, stated beliefs, and descriptions of practice were consistent

with what is known about quality feedback. Of these five teachers, three agreed to participate in phase two.

Of the three teachers who were observed, only two (Kate & Marama) provided strong evidence in regards to their use of peer review to support learning in writing. Hence a conscious decision was made to use the information-rich data generated from Kate and Marama as the basis for this article. These two teachers were committed to fostering competency and communication trust within the context of the writing classroom and had considerable skill in creating both the public and private, formal and informal spaces needed for peer review. As such the datasets for what is reported here emanate from both phase one and two of the research.

### ***The two teachers and their writing contexts.***

At the time the research was conducted, Kate had been teaching for 15 years and was currently teaching a class of 28 Years Seven and Eight students. The focus of her students' writing during this time was transactional writing. Students were expected to produce a single frame cartoon followed by a short comic strip, both of which were to convey a message through the use of appropriate literary and visual techniques. While experienced, she had no official literacy or other curriculum leadership responsibilities in her school. Marama had been teaching for 12 years and was currently teaching 26 Year Eight students. Her students were engaged in poetic writing where attention was paid to the form and the processes involved in the production of a poem. Marama was the literacy leader at her school.

In both classes teachers utilized a range of pedagogical approaches when teaching writing including whole-class and small-group instruction. While small group instruction was needs-based, students sat in social groups when writing. Typically they sat at desks grouped in configurations of eight to ten. However, students were not restricted to working at their desks. Both teachers encouraged the use of designated floor spaces around the room. In effect, students could choose to move to these spaces should they want a degree of privacy away from their social group. These designated floor spaces also opened up opportunities for students to access and work with a wider group of peers rather than just those sitting within close proximity.

### ***Data Collection***

Cognizant of the need for prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) a number of data collection strategies was utilized during phase two. To capture the complexity of teachers' classroom-based feedback practices, five 90-minute observations were undertaken in each teacher's classroom across the duration of the writing unit. The strategic scheduling of these observations satisfied the need for information to be gathered at "different points in the temporal cycles occurring in the setting" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 198). Two observations occurred during the introductory phase of the unit enabling the researchers to see how teachers facilitated development of students' evaluative knowledge. Two further observations, undertaken midway through the unit, afforded the opportunity to observe how students reviewed and revised their work, thus developing both their evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise. At unit's end, a final observation provided insight into the nature of the judgments teachers required students to make about their own and peers' writing. Observations included the audiotaping of lessons and researcher field notes that detailed organizational and structural matters pertaining to each lesson (for example, the nature of the interactions between teacher and students and among students, the activities they engaged in, as well as time spent on those activities). While the researchers audiotaped teacher–student talk in whole-class discussions and group work, they were not able to capture talk among students. However, researcher field notes captured the intent and focus of student talk that occurred as they worked independently. In turn, these datasets were supported by the collection of relevant artifacts such as teachers' work plans, the learning intentions, and success criteria developed with students, which articulated the goals of learning and the expected standard(s) of performance, the models and exemplars used, and handouts and worksheets given to students. The use of a semi-structured interview at the end of each series of observations addressed the limitations of a complete observer role. This interview, conducted individually with each participant, provided the opportunity to probe each teacher's intentions, pedagogical decisions, and embedded beliefs.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis during both phases of the research was grounded in the use of strategies associated with thematic analysis and the constant comparative method (open, axial, and selective coding) (Ezzy, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Sadler's (1989) theory of formative assessment and feedback was utilized as a major conceptual frame. As such, the framework provided some of the categories used during the process of open coding. For example, concepts central to feedback within the peer review process such as "understanding the goals of learning" and the development of "evaluative knowledge and expertise" and "productive knowledge and expertise" were applied systematically and iteratively to lesson transcripts, interviews, and lesson artifacts. Later, additional codes and categories, such as Reina and Reina's (2006) notions of competence and communication trust, were developed from and applied to the data. The use of axial coding facilitated the examination of the relationship between various categories along the lines of their properties and dimensions. Hence categories were "cross cut and link[ed]" at both a descriptive and conceptual level (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). The refinement and integration of categories, through selective coding, led to the establishment of the two core or central themes reported in this article: building trust and responsibility, and creating formal and informal spaces for peer review.

## **The Research Findings**

### ***Building Trust and Responsibility***

Both Kate and Marama viewed feedback as a "critical discourse, not always positive . . . [but] quite constructive" (Marama, Int<sup>1</sup>). Of importance was "interacting with students" to "work out where they are at the moment and where we are going to go and what we need to do in order to get there" (Marama, Int). In both teachers' opinion, for feedback to be effective it had to be a jointly generated, two-way exchange of information between themselves and their students. As a result, students were expected to make judgments about the quality of their own and others' writing and to make

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1 Int – interview data generated in Phases 1 and 2.

decisions about what strategies or moves to use to close the gap between current and expected performance. Such expectations were reinforced consistently during their interactions with students. Importantly, both teachers avoided telling students what to do when discussing works in progress. Rather, during individual conferences with students, Marama and Kate each posed speculative and exploratory questions for consideration. The nature of these questions conveyed a strong message to students that they were competent to make the necessary judgments and decisions. For example:

alliteration—do you think you need more of that or are you quite happy about what's there? . . . in this particular poem is there a use for repetition or is it something you are just going to disregard? (Marama, Obs.<sup>2</sup>)

How will you know the message is 'Don't play with fireworks?' How will we [the audience] know that's what you are saying? Do you think you'll be able to tell just by looking at it [a comic poster]? What do you need to do? (Kate, Obs.)

At the start of her unit of work, Marama emphasized to the class that when taking on the role of poet “there are different things we do as writers of poetry that are different from what we do as writers of instructions or writers of reports.” She went on to explain that as a result, there would be times when students would feel “I really don't know where to go now, I don't know what to do” (Marama, Obs). Similarly, Kate (Obs) drew her students' attention to the fact that they were going to attempt “a different form of writing,” one of which they had little previous experience. In both cases the teachers emphasized that writing was hard and that facing difficulties was to be expected when writing for different purposes and audiences. At the same time, they reinforced a strategy that students could use to overcome specific difficulties. During such times the use of a peer (or peers) as a critical friend was recommended as a “really good choice” (Marama, Obs). In particular, the way in which peers could provide audience reaction was

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<sup>2</sup> Obs – classroom observation data generated during Phase 2.

promoted as a strategy that students would find helpful as they worked on their drafts. As Marama emphasized to her students, reader response is a critical aspect of writing.

It's a really good choice to talk and say 'Look I've got this and I've got this . . . this is what it sounds like when I use this word. What does it do for you?' Ask one another for help—"what do you think of this" (Marama Obs.)

Not only did Kate encourage students to seek support and guidance from each other in general, she also used the deliberate ploy of directing individual students to seek out and talk with peers who were on the "right track." For example a number of students in her class struggled with incorporating a subtle message into their single-frame cartoons so she directed these students to specific peers who had mastered this aspect of cartoon creation.

See what Jenny's doing and Jeremy's got a really, really good idea. Speak with Jeremy about what's he's doing (Kate, Obs.)

Steven could you explain to Anna about your cartoon? And tell her what you're going to write in your cartoon. Then I want you [Anna] to guess what Steven's message is (Kate, Obs.)

Kate's rationale for directing students to others was that she wanted them in pairs or small groups to engage in a dialogue where they discussed "all the tricks" that had been used in their draft cartoons. In her opinion viewing and reviewing others' work enabled students to see not only "what was there" in their work but also "what wasn't there" and, importantly, how that work might then be "adapted and refined" (PO Int<sup>3</sup>). For example in the instance where Amber was sent to talk with Jenny and Jeremy, these three students were observed reviewing how Jeremy had used visual traits in his cartoon to show emotion in his character's face. This review led to a discussion about how visual traits can be used to subtly convey a message to the reader. Following this, Amber went back to talk with Kate about how

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3 PO Int – Post observation interview.

her work could be improved. During this time she made mention to Kate of some of the traits both Jenny and Jeremy had used, and she talked about how she might use these in her cartoon.

Thinking back to her class at the beginning of the year Marama recognized that based on their previous experiences, students were often reluctant to talk about their work, either with her or with each other. She attributed this reluctance to the fact that students had been encouraged to work privately. She understood that her expectation for students to engage in a critique of their own work as well as the work of their peers moved learning into the public domain and hence left many students feeling vulnerable. Therefore it was critical that the critique of work was treated sensitively and tactfully. Subsequently, Marama felt it important to model respectful and empathetic critique of students' work. She always publicly and sensitively asked students for permission to critique works in progress when the class came together or when working with a small group. She also recognized when individuals were "just not ready" (Marama, PO Int) for a public interrogation of their work. Acknowledging and accepting some students' reluctance to expose their writing publicly led her to be deliberately selective when asking students to share work. Students were tactfully handed the initiative as they were always asked whether and what kind of help they needed. Questions such as "Is there an area of your writing you need help with?" "How can we help?" and "What areas would you like to talk about today?" were commonly asked thereby encouraging students to disclose the nature of their difficulties. In turn student disclosure provided a focus for the critique of their work. Like Kate, Marama also reinforced the need for students to be receptive to the work of others by listening attentively to each other. Through her modeling she signaled to students that critique should be helpful rather than judgemental and destructive.

The following dialogic exchange was typical of the interactions that occurred between Marama and her students. As can be seen, the student (Kerry) felt confident to disclose to the group what she was struggling with as a writer. In turn Marama resisted dominating or dictating the nature of the discussion. Rather, she posed open-ended questions for the group to consider.

Marama: Kerry, what assistance or support can we offer you as a group?

Kerry: The rhythm (of the poem) because I usually write things with a rhyme but I'm trying to use words to describe and make it rhyme at the same time. It's rather difficult.

Marama: Do we need to worry at this point about the rhyme, does it have to have a rhyme?

Kerry: That's the problem, like when I say it doesn't have a rhyme I think in my head personally that sounds odd.

Marama: Okay, how can we help Kerry then, because she's experiencing difficulty. She's so used to writing poetry that has a rhyme. . . . And shape poems don't always have that particular structure. How can we help her overcome that?

Thomas: You could still have rhymes but like instead of having it at the end of every sentence maybe she could just have it at the end of every verse.

Marama: Would that work?

Kerry: I'm jotting down some ideas, thanks.

### ***Creating Formal and Informal Space for Peer Review***

Marama and Kate believed students needed formal and informal opportunities to review their work with peers. As a result both teachers made deliberate attempts to create the space necessary for this to occur. As illustrated above, formal attempts to engage students in peer review occurred in their presence when they worked in small groups or during teacher–student conferences. When working with a group of students, one of the ways in which the teachers promoted peer review between and among themselves and students was to ask them to look for evidence of particular language features in a piece of work. In one lesson, Marama was observed asking her students to look for the “use of similies, alliteration, rhyme, repetition and metaphor” within an exemplar. On this occasion students began by annotating the exemplar, highlighting the key features that were in evidence, and making notes about how the features were used. Students' annotations then formed the basis for a discussion as they debated in groups and as a class, the use and effectiveness of these features.

After this experience, some students (Ella, Maia, & Quinta) were observed following up on the critique when working on their drafts. Students' interactions during this time mirrored the approach advocated and modeled by Marama. Ella, for example, was observed disclosing to her peers that she was not confident about the effectiveness of her use of similes. Maia then took on the role of appraiser and critical friend. After asking permission to annotate the poem draft, Maia indicated areas she thought would benefit from further reworking. Once this annotation was completed a discussion lasting more than ten minutes was observed, focusing on how Ella could close the gap between her current performance and the desired outcome. This discussion focused on one criterion that had been identified as contributing to writing quality—whether the text “hooked the reader by grabbing their attention” (Marama, Obs). The three students were then seen discussing Ella's choice and use of descriptive words and whether or not these words met this criterion. Using a thesaurus, the three students then spent some time together looking up, discussing, and debating the most suitable words to use if Ella's similes were to “grab” the attention of the reader.

Like Marama, Kate understood that if students were to enter into a discussion with their peers about quality writing they needed substantial access to works in progress. Throughout all stages of the unit Kate urged students to spontaneously “have a wander round and see everybody's ideas” or “see what other kids in the class are doing” (Kate Obs). In turn comments such as “I'm sure there's nobody who would mind if someone said ‘What are you doing?’ ‘What's your idea?’” (Kate, Obs) conveyed to students that disclosing their ideas, seeking help, and gaining the response of others was a customary, acceptable, and beneficial part of the writing process. Consequently, during a number of lessons students were observed taking the initiative by using the designated floor space away from their desks to interact with each other independently of Kate. Bryan, for example, in moving over to a group of three other students, sought audience response to his work in progress. Spontaneously, he sought peers' feedback about his use of particular visual and textual features in his one-framed cartoon. Bryan's peers were receptive to his request. They drew his attention to their own works in progress, sharing and talking about their use of similar techniques.

Kate also created formal spaces that facilitated student access to peers' work. For example midway through the unit students were asked to leave their cartoons on their desks for public viewing. Prior to students viewing these works in progress, class attention was drawn to specific language features that students needed to look for. Significantly, more than 20 minutes of the lesson were devoted to the public perusal of peers' works in progress. From Kate's perspective, providing students with the access, time, and space to view work afforded them opportunities to explain and elaborate to others the focus of their work, ask questions about peers' work, and garner reader response to works in progress. She also believed that, in turn, such access could be used as an aid to improvement.

At the end of the unit, Kate's students were expected to use an assessment rubric to make an appraisal of their own work and, subsequently, to work in pairs to appraise the work of at least two peers. Kate emphasized to her students the need to appraise in pairs, as students "think differently," and therefore a vital aspect of appraisal was "discuss[ing] it [the work]" (Kate, Obs) from different perspectives. In this way Kate drew attention to the importance of discussion, justification (through the selection and use of evidence drawn from the work), and negotiation when making judgments about quality in writing. In some instances discrepancies between a student's self-appraisal and judgments made by peers became evident. Potentially such discrepancies could have caused students to doubt their own or their peers' capacity and competency to make trustworthy judgments about the quality of a piece of writing. However this was not the case. Students were observed articulating and elaborating upon the reasons for their judgments. Significantly, review of peers' work highlighted for students the somewhat idiosyncratic nature of reader response to a piece of writing.

## Discussion

Much has been written about the importance of trust within the context of school leadership (e.g., Tschannen-Moran, 2014) and higher education (e.g., Carless, 2013). However, less attention has been paid to the role trust plays in regard to classroom-based learning in general; or more specifically, in the development of elementary students' writing skills and behaviors. Building on the work of Reina and Reina (2006), Carless (2013)

has argued that trust is an essential element that must be fostered to ensure students feel competent and confident to participate in activities such as peer review. Competence trust, or trust in a person's ability to carry out the task at hand competently and confidently, is the first trust dimension. As illustrated in this article, both teachers sent clear and consistent messages to students that they and their peers possessed the knowledge, skills, and dispositional qualities to make the judgments about the quality of their writing and how that writing could be improved. Significantly, to reinforce this message, teachers did not ask all the questions or provide all the answers and solutions to students' writing problems. Consistent with what Bayraktar (2012) has recommended, teachers encouraged students to generate ideas and solutions to their writing problems. As such, teachers emphasized to students the need to adopt a receptive stance (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992) towards the work of others. Given what is known about student reluctance to trust the quality of peers' feedback (Fei, 2006), the fostering of competency trust is an important trust dimension that all teachers need to pay attention to within the context of the writing classroom.

While competence trust is essential to the creation of a trusting, learning environment so too is communication trust. As Marama in particular illustrated and emphasized, the development of communication trust can counteract the potential threats to student self-confidence and self-esteem when making learning public. Both teachers in this study promoted communication trust by highlighting the challenges inherent in mastering different writing genres and reinforced to students that problems encountered were to be expected and could be resolved. To encourage a receptive rather than a judgmental stance (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992) to the quality of students' writing, Marama and Kate modeled for students how to look for evidence in work and then use that evidence as the basis for healthy debate, possible dissent (Fraser, 2012), and resolution. In modeling these practices the teachers illustrated dispositional qualities such as respect and empathy. Observation of student behavior when engaged in the critique of others' work suggests that they too adopted a receptive stance as they offered solutions to peers' problems or dilemmas.

Writing is a recursive process (Harris, Graham, MacArthur, Reid, & Mason, 2011; McGrail & Davis, 2011) yet in many instances this process is hidden from students' view. All too frequently writers are denied ample and authentic opportunities to create, revise, and recraft substantive aspects of their texts in an ongoing and iterative manner; to see the "messiness" of others' works in progress (Ward & Dix, 2004); or to talk purposefully with others about their writing (Glasswell & Parr, 2009). In the current study the creation of formal and informal learning spaces provided students with easy access to the texts of fellow writers. Teachers believed the formal and informal access to writers' works in progress, along with encouragement to publicly declare problems of practice, provided students with the joint focus necessary for revisions to occur. Having the opportunity to see writing during various stages of production presented students with the chance to evaluate the quality of work produced, including their own. In turn these opportunities not only facilitated the provision of audience reaction in relation to the intent and purpose of a writer's work (Glasswell & Parr, 2009) but also the chance to respond to these reactions in subsequent iterations of work. Unlike the students in Fei's (2006) study, observational evidence suggests the students in this study took notice of, and acted on, their peers' feedback. It also suggests students as writers took the role of assessor and critical friend seriously.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research**

Albeit small-scale in nature, the current study provides insights into two teachers' practices through their cultivation of competency and communication trust and modeling of a receptive stance to the critique of work aimed at facilitating student participation and engagement in peer review. As a result, teachers hoped students would focus on the substantive features of writing through sustained participation in cohesive and productive working relationships with their peers. Observational evidence suggests students engaged in peer review to consider their performance in relation to what was desired and to take action to close the gap between the two. However, students' perspectives were not part of the original research design and this omission must be acknowledged as a limitation. It is acknowledged that "without the learner's perspective the crucially

important affective and interactional aspects of learners' responses to feedback [and peer review] are likely to be missing" (Hargreaves, 2013, p. 230). Further research in this area would therefore be a valuable addition to the field.

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