Checking, highlighting, adding and ticking off: Year 6 New Zealand students' understandings of and responses to the use of goals in the writing classroom.

Abstract

Understanding the goals for learning is fundamental to students' success as writers. We investigated how Year 6 students in New Zealand experienced, understood and responded to goals during a writing unit. The study took place over seven weeks. Data were gathered through interviews with two teachers and six student participants; field notes from lesson observations; informal chats with students; and the collection of teacher documents, resources and student artefacts. Student selected goals, success criteria and rubric statements served as points of reference for a number of writing experiences. Findings indicated the nature of the goals and the way they were framed resulted in the checking, highlighting, adding and ticking off of elements of persuasive writing. It was concluded if writing is to be understood and practiced as an art rather than a technical activity, goals for learning need to address the more substantive aspects of the genre and the writing process.

Introduction

Writing is a valuable tool for communication, learning and self-expression, and in the context of schooling, a major means by which students explore, organize, refine and present their ideas (Graham, 2006). In New Zealand's national curriculum statement, Writing is included in the Learning Area of English. In addition to a one page overview that describes the essential nature of this Learning Area, Achievement objectives identify progressions over eight levels of literacy learning

‘through which most students move as they become more effective oral, written and visual communicators’ (p.18). Within this framework schools and teachers have the freedom to design and develop writing programmes as they see fit, with reference to their local context (Parr & Jesson, 2016). When planning writing programmes and monitoring student progress and achievement, primary school teachers draw on a range of professional resources including the Ministry of Education’s [MoE] genre-based matrices of progress indicators (MoE, 2016b), the Assessment for Teaching and Learning (asTTle) Project’s genre-specific indicators (MoE 2003), asTTle’s generic writing rubric (MoE, 2016a) and two handbooks – one for teachers of Years 1-4 students (MoE, 2006a) the other for teachers of Years 5-8 students (MoE, 2006b). These resources are grounded in and informed by specific discourses and theoretical perspectives about the ways in which students learn to write and how teachers should teach writing; in turn, they have an impact on the ways teachers view and practice the teaching of writing.

Ivanic’s (2004) six discourses of writing are a useful tool when considering the teaching and learning of writing as they ‘encompasses theoretical perspectives that have informed curriculum and instruction practices across the decades’ (Peterson, 2012, p.265). While New Zealand’s literacy teaching landscape has been shaped, to a greater or lesser extent, by features from each of the discourses, three are of direct relevance to the current study – the Skills, Genre and Social Practices discourses. The Skills discourse reflects a belief that learning to write entails competence in using a set of linguistic skills and rules (Ivanic, 2004). Writing instruction thus focuses on developing students’ competence in spelling, punctuation and grammar with mastery over these an indicator of ‘good’ writing. One of the elements of New Zealand’s framework for literacy acquisition and development (MoE, 2006b) is

'Learning the code' where students learn to 'write words, sentences, and common symbols such as punctuation marks …' (p.25). This discourse is also apparent in the Surface features dimension and criteria in asTTle's writing rubric (Ministry of Education, 2003). The Genre discourse gives prominence to the form of a text and how this alters according to purpose and context. Drawing on writers such as Halliday (1994) and Rose (2008), early views of genre prioritised instruction in the conventions and characteristics of specific text-types such as exposition writing, persuasive writing, descriptive writing and/or narratives. This interpretation of the Genre discourse underpins asTTle's genre specific indicators (MoE, 2003). Many New Zealand schools and teachers use genre as a framework for organising writing programmes. The main criterion for good writing in this discourse is suitability of the linguistic features when writing within a particular text form (Ivanic, 2004). This discourse has however been the subject of critique on the grounds that it presents text-types as unitary and static entities, and as such encourages a prescriptive and technical approach to writing (Marshall, 2004). Notwithstanding the importance of spelling, punctuation and grammar, and the inclusion of specific genre related features, learning to write involves more than the proficient use of a set of pre-determined skills and features.

The third discourse, Social Practices, presents writing as a purposeful communication that occurs within a social context (Ivanic, 2004). Here 'the text and the processes of composing it are inextricable from the whole complex social interaction that makes up the communicative event in which [the writer is] situated, and meaning is bound up with social purposes for writing' (Ivanic, 2004, p.234). The MoE handbooks (2006a; 2006b) are underpinned by this view of writing (Parr & Jesson, 2016) with attention drawn to the importance of 'understanding that texts are

written for different purposes and intended for different audiences' (MoE, 2006b, p.25). Genres are represented in the Social Practices discourse as ways of writing or 'getting things done' with reference to social purposes and goals (Kress, 1993) rather than aligning specific features, structures or dimensions with particular text-types. Students come to understand that 'the features usually associated with one form [or genre] can often be effectively used in another, depending on the purpose for writing' (MoE, 2006b, p.35). Moreover as a situated activity, writing occurs within and is influenced by the social, cultural, historical and institutional setting in which it takes place (Gee, 1996 Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Street, 1995). Accordingly, writing is a 'complex social participatory performance in which the writer asserts meaning, goals, actions, affiliations, and identities within a constantly changing, contingently organised social world, relying on shared texts and knowledge' (Bazerman, 2015, p.18). Value is placed on student voice, dialogic conversations and realistic contexts for writing (Peterson, 2012). In contrast to the previous two discourses, learning to write is constructed within the Social Practices discourse as a malleable and reflexive, purpose-driven activity.

In this paper we report on the ways in which a group of Year 6 students in a New Zealand primary school classroom experienced and responded to the use of goals during a unit of work in writing. We assert the discourses that informed these goals and they ways in which they were framed had an impact on students' understandings about writing and how they carried out the writing process. Findings from the study will be of interest to a range of educational and literacy professionals including teachers in primary schools, advisers and providers of professional learning programmes.

Goals for learning, learning intentions and success criteria

The ability to establish clear goals for student learning has been identified as a hallmark of effective teachers of writing (Parr & Limbrick, 2010). Ideally, self-regulation involves students in the creation of their own goals (Zimmerman, 2008). It is however unrealistic to expect elementary-aged students to initiate and generate instructional goals – this is the teacher's responsibility. Instructional or learning goals are established for the class rather than the individual student and are referenced to national curricula. As explained by Wiliam (2011):

> The teacher is in a privileged position with respect to the subject being taught and knows more about the subject than the students do, and it would be an abdication of the teacher's responsibilities to let whatever the students feel should be valued be adopted as the learning [goal]. (p.59).

Moreover, 'until students have an in-depth understanding of what it means to be a writer for a particular purpose, learning is more likely to be progressed if teachers assist students to understand the necessary learning goals' (Timperley & Parr, 2009, p.58). Evidence indicates teacher-derived goals are no less effective than those set by students (Zimmerman, 2008). What is important is that students understand the rationale for and accept ownership over goals set by teachers and other social mediators. Most students strive to accomplish teacher-set goals (Boekaerts, 1997), relying on teacher input and scaffolding to help understand 'where they are going' in terms of their learning.

A distinction is made in the literature between two broad types of goals, learning (mastery or process) goals and performance (outcome or ego-driven) goals (Ames, 1992; Zimmerman, 2008) with the former preferred over the latter. Learning goals direct attention to the development of new skills, the understanding of content

and/or concepts and the improvement of proficiency and as such 'promote a motivational pattern likely to promote long-term and high-quality involvement in learning' (Ames, 1992, p.263). Students are more likely to be motivated to increase mastery of new skills and understanding of content when goals are sufficiently challenging, and are focused on learning rather than on aspects of performance (Zimmerman, 2008). Performance goals focus on task outcomes such as inclusion of specific elements in a piece of work, task completion, and/or grades, the accomplishment of which is considered reflective of one's ability and self-worth (Ames, 1992; Butler & Winne, 1995; Zimmerman, 2008). Students who are repeatedly exposed to performance goals tend to avoid more challenging pursuits and seek the easiest way to meet requirements (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986). While it has been reported that students who use learning process goals achieve at a higher level than those who use performance outcome goals and general 'do your best' goals (Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999), students who adopt learning goals to the point of automaticity then switch between these and performance outcome goals outperform peers who use only learning process goals (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999).

The role of goals in the writing classroom

An understanding of teacher-set goals is fundamental to successful task interpretation, self-regulation and achievement (Zimmerman, 2008). If students misunderstand these goals 'they may engage in inappropriate tactics for completing the task or they may adopt inappropriate [points of] reference for monitoring qualities of their work' (Butler & Winne, 1995, p.257). The importance of students understanding the goals for learning and associated criteria for successful achievement is underscored in a study that examined the quality of instructional

goals for writing in 15 classrooms, how well the teachers conveyed these goals to the Years 4-8 (8-13 years of age) students and how the students came to understand them (Timperley & Parr, 2009). In all of the observed lessons, the goals for learning addressed the deeper, more substantive aspects of writing. While five of the 15 teachers did not share these goals with their class, the remainder did so in a variety of ways eg: oral, written, during the lesson, at the outset of the lesson, through activities and tasks. The researchers reported when the lesson goals and criteria were not shared or clearly explained, they were not well understood by the students and as a result the latter identified surface features of writing as their focus rather than the deeper aspects articulated by their teachers; when the goals were clear but the criteria were not aligned with the goals or not clearly expressed, students again identified surface features of writing as their focus; when goals and criteria were clearly articulated students understood what these entailed and identified the intended deeper features of writing as their focus. Students thus adopted the default position of focusing on surface features when they were unclear about 'where they were going' and what constituted successful achievement. The researchers concluded that goals for writing and their related criteria 'need to be made more explicit to help [students] understand what they are working towards and to realise that writing is more than getting the punctuation and spelling right in long and neatly presented pieces' (p.58).

Another study of relevance to the current project, undertaken by Ferretti, Lewis and Andrews-Weckerly (2009), investigated the impact of two goal conditions on the quality of the persuasive texts produced by ninety-six fourth and sixth grade students (9-12 years of age). Those in the first goal condition wrote with reference to a general goal only: to take a position and write a letter to their teachers about

whether they should be given more homework. Those in the second goal condition wrote with reference to the same general goal and a series of explicit sub-goals based on the elements of argumentative discourse: ‘You need to say very clearly what your opinion or viewpoint is; … you need to mention other people have a different opinion; you need to think of two or three reasons that other people might use to back up their opinion; … you need to explain why these reasons aren’t good reasons ….’ (p.580). The researchers found the texts of those who were given the general goal plus explicit sub-goals to be more persuasive than those produced by students in the general goal-only condition. It was concluded that the elaborated goal condition enabled students ‘to better apply their knowledge of argumentative discourse and more effectively manage the myriad challenges to constructing an argumentative text’ (p.587). In this paper we examine the nature of the goals and sub-goals (success criteria) used during a persuasive writing unit and provide an account of the ways the students experienced and responded to these goals.

The research context and design

The study was carried out in a large urban primary school of just over 750 Years 1-6 students (5-11 years of age). Eloise and Kirsten (pseudonyms), two experienced teachers who co-taught a class of 60 Year 6 students, agreed to participate and provide access to the students in their class. Data gathering took place over a seven-week period (late August – mid October). All 60 students were invited to participate in the study and on receipt of student assent and parental consent forms, the teachers collected responses from those who agreed to participate and randomly selected six participants as follows: Sophia, Keith, Lily, Ioane, John and Vania (pseudonyms).

Approval to carry out the study was gained from the appropriate institutional ethics committee (UAHPEC Reference number 014932).

Data collection

As the study sought to understand the meanings participants attach to actions and events that occur within natural, everyday contexts (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014), it was grounded in an interpretive framework and a qualitative methodology. The researcher was therefore positioned alongside participants so their interpretations and subjective meanings could be understood (Denscombe, 2014). Data were gathered as follows:

- Four semi-structured audio-recorded interviews of between 30 and 60 minutes with both teachers. Two of these interviews were held prior to the unit commencing, one during the unit and a final interview at the conclusion of the unit.
- Classroom observations of writing lessons three to four times a week for the duration of the unit, with data recorded in the form of field notes. These notes included information gained through informal chats with each of the six student participants during these lessons.
- Four semi-structured audio-recorded individual interviews of between 20 and 35 minutes with each of the six student participants. The first interview was held prior to the unit commencing, the second and third during the unit and the final interview at the end of the unit of work.
- The collection of teacher documents and resources such as planning sheets, exemplars, rubrics, task introduction sheets; the gathering of class and group generated resources as part of the lessons such as topics for writing and co-

constructed success criteria; and the collection of student artefacts such as writing samples, goal setting records, planning sheets and self-evaluation sheets.

Data analysis

All data sets were systematically analysed with codes assigned in a manner consistent with the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). While a majority of the open codes were induced from the data, for example 'checking' and 'adding', some such as 'performance goal' and 'self-monitoring' were drawn from the literature. These codes were then compared and grouped to create key categories that captured the properties of and relationship between open codes, for example 'establishing goals' and 'providing feedback'. Deliberation on these categories generated the overarching theme that provided the title of this paper, 'Checking, highlighting, adding and ticking off'. While the first author carried out the coding and analysis of all data, the second and third authors coded samples of randomly selected data, and data identified as 'puzzling' as a check on the dependability and trustworthiness of interpretations.

Findings

The findings reported in this paper addresses analysed data regarding the identification of goals for the persuasive writing unit and how the Year 6 students' responded to and used these goals. The first section describes how students established their goals for the unit of work; the second section addresses four goal-referenced activities the students talked about and engaged in.

Establishing goals

Eloise, one of the Year 6 teachers, informed the class in the first of the observed writing lessons that the focus for the term was 'learning to write a piece of persuasive writing that will encourage someone to hear our point of view' (Observation 1 field notes). The two teachers then led the class in an activity where ideas about the nature of persuasive texts were brainstormed, reasons why people write such texts discussed and features of persuasive texts identified with reference to an exemplar. In addition, students identified possible topics for their own pieces of persuasive writing. The class was then issued with a Persuasive writing rubric (see Table 1). Eloise explained that getting students to go 'through the rubric and unpack the language' (Interview 2) was key to helping them understand the critical features of persuasive writing. To this end, as Kirsten modeled the writing of a persuasive text for the class, students identified and discussed features from the rubric evident in her writing, in particular her use of personal voice, emotive language and rhetorical questions and causal conjunctions (Observation 1 field notes).

Table 1 Persuasive writing rubric [goes in here]

During the week prior to this lesson students had written a letter to the school principal in which they had made a case for access to their classroom prior to the 8:30 am bell. Eloise asked the students to find this letter in their writing books then meet with their 'thinking buddy' (peer) to evaluate these letters with reference to the rubric. Elements from the rubric that were evident in their letter were checked off in pen and those not apparent were coloured with a highlighter pen (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Keith's evaluation of his letter [goes in here]

The primary purpose of this process was for each student to identify and record three goals for the persuasive writing unit:

> So like we get a sheet [rubric] and … we have to read through this [the letter] …. and then [on the rubric] we have to highlight the things that we haven't got and then we tick the things that we do get and then … there's like three lines with three goals for you [on another sheet] and then you have to choose …. like the ones you've highlighted, the most important ones that you think you need to learn and then you write it on the … sheet (Vania, Interview 1).

Although the students highlighted between six and ten statements on the rubric, by the end of the session each had selected and recorded three goals (see Figure 2). Each student glued this sheet into his/her writing book for reference during the unit of work.

Figure 2 Lily's goal sheet [goes in here]

Although the term 'goals' was used on this sheet, the students and teachers referred interchangeably to these statements as goals, success criteria and/or criteria. It was noted that neither of the teachers assisted or guided students in the evaluation of their work or the selection of goals. They considered it important for students to select these for themselves, within the boundaries of the rubric, as this fostered student ownership over and commitment to the goals. Table 2 presents information about each student's self selected topic and goals for the persuasive writing unit.

Table 2 Name of student, writing topic and goals [goes in here]

Sophia, Vania and Ioane copied their goals verbatim from the rubric while Lily, Keith and John rephrased their selected rubric statements, identifying specific features of writing or criteria to use in their work. Although Keith had highlighted

six statements indicating areas for development (see Figure 1) he selected a single statement from Language Resources and reworked this as three separate goals.

Sophia observed that as a class 'we talk a lot about the goals on our rubrics' and as a consequence she knew 'the sort of things I should be looking for and trying to use in my writing' (Interview 2). According to the students, goals provided them with a focal point when writing and served as a source of motivation.

Prior to the students commencing writing, an exemplar was used with the class to co-construct a list of features that comprised a 'great introduction' and a 'great first paragraph' (Observation 3 field notes). This sheet was then printed and issued to everyone so they could glue it into their writing books. A statement below each of the two headings [A great introduction, A great first paragraph] instructed students to 'tick [on the sheet] when you have each thing'. While criteria such as personal voice, emotive language, rhetorical questions and persuasive sentence starters reinforced goals or criteria that individuals had drawn from the rubric, two further features were included on this list: the use of sub-headings and SEE statements [State the point, Elaborate, provide an Example].

Goal-referenced activities

Students used their self-selected goals alongside class lists of success criteria and the rubric throughout the unit of work as points of reference for four activities: selecting and attending instructional workshops, seeking and providing feedback, monitoring work-in-progress and determining achievement.

Selecting and attending instructional workshops

Each week instructional workshops were offered to groups of students. In these sessions the teachers taught and/or reinforced generic aspects of writing such as planning and giving feedback to peers and more specific aspects of persuasive writing such as the use of personal voice, emotive words, rhetorical questions and persuasive sentence starters (Observations 7-20 field notes). While all students were required during the first two weeks to attend workshops entitled SEE statements and Giving feedback, they were expected to use their goals to decide which other workshops to attend:

> … say it's personal voice [your goal], you would go into the personal voice workshop (Lily, Interview 1).

In addition to the two compulsory workshops, all of the students selected two or more goal-referenced workshops to attend during the course of the unit. During the emotive language workshops Vania was observed writing a number of sentences that contained emotive words. These sentences were unrelated to her persuasive text. When Eloise was satisfied that this skill had been mastered, Vania was allowed to 'exit' the workshop. Vania explained she was then expected to 'change [my] writing to make it … how she's told us … what [emotive language] [I] should have in it' (Interview 2).

Seeking and providing feedback

Feedback was an integral part of writing lessons as both teachers provided students with oral and written feedback during individual and group conferences. Like the workshops, students booked a conference time with one of the teachers. Kirsten described how the conferences addressed students' goals:

> So they'll pull that [goal sheet] out, look at it, [and I ask] how are we going, what was the goal, what are we trying to do, then they'll link that back to

> their writing … (Interview 2).

Keith saw conferences as opportunities to 'go through [with the teacher] the … checklists and the success criteria, and we see what I have and what I don't have' (Interview 2). Students then used this feedback to make changes to their work:

> [after my conference with the teacher] I added a rhetorical question at the end of my second paragraph saying something like … how would you feel if your dog was stolen, [if] you knew that you that you'd never see that happy face again? … (Sophia, Interview 4).

Students were also expected to seek feedback from and provide feedback to their peers. Eloise explained to the class that this information needed to be about the peer's goals and the various lists of success criteria contained in the writing books (Observation 9 field notes). The relationship between feedback and goals /success criteria was reinforced in a large co-constructed chart from the workshops that was displayed in a prominent position on the classroom wall:

> Feedback is the chance for you to tell someone how well they are doing … [for example] the way they have met certain success criteria …. Feedforward is a chance for you to offer ideas to someone about what they have been working on … [for example] what part of the criteria they have missed (Observation 9 artefact and field notes).

As explained by John 'once you are finished and you've edited it, you would take it to your thinking buddy and they would read it and then they would write what … you need to improve on' (Interview 2). When giving feedback, Keith explained that he looked 'at what they [his peers] don't have in the story that's on the success criteria, and then [get them to] fix that' (Interview 1).

Monitoring work-in-progress

In addition to drawing on ideas and suggestions from peers and the teachers, it was usual practice for students to monitor their writing in relation to their goals and/or criteria during each writing lesson. While some did this after they had written one or two sentences, others waited until they had written a paragraph. All six students were observed independently consulting their goal sheet, rubric and/or additional success criteria at various times during lessons, ticking alongside statements when they found evidence of an element or criterion of persuasive writing in their texts. If an element or criterion was missing, it was highlighted then added into the text and ticked off. The students worked on their writing in this manner two to three times a week for the duration of the unit. Keith indicated that as he 'checked' his work he 'tried to add as much [from his goals] into my story as possible' (Interview 4). At the beginning of the unit Sophia thought when 'most of the success criteria [are] added [to my work] that will mean that [I'm] … doing a really good job …' (Interview 1) however she expressed some disquiet in her final interview when she reflected on the indiscriminate addition of rhetorical questions and emotive language, noting how this could overwhelm and confuse the reader. Rather than inserting elements such as these in her text at every opportunity she came to the realization that these features needed to be used where and when appropriate:

> [I] think about what sort of things in the success criteria I could add in that particular piece cause sometimes like you can't add a rhetorical question … it just isn't right for that particular part … you want them spread out …. [and] like in your introduction you don't just want it to be … to add too much emotive language, well you do add emotive language to hook them in but like you don't want to be too overwhelming …(Interview 4).

Determining achievement

Near the end of the final week of the unit each student prepared and produced a final computer generated version of his/her piece of writing. Kirsten then told the class they would be undertaking a formal evaluation of their text with assistance from their thinking buddies (Observation 21 field notes). Together the students were to consider each piece of writing in relation to a simplified version of the rubric (see Figure 3) based on Level 3 statements in the original rubric, identifying evidence of achievement in relation to these criteria. The teachers referred in passing to the initial goals established by each student at the outset of the unit, pointing out that these were covered in the simplified Level 3 criteria statements. This simplified version was presented in the form of a checklist that facilitated identification of the presence or absence of features in each piece of work.

Figure 3 Keith's completed check for Persuasive Writing [goes in here]

As observed during the lesson and seen on Keith's sheet, this evaluative activity resulted in a flurry of checking and ticking, paragraph by paragraph, as students looked for and located evidence of achievement. Once each student completed his/her sheet they gave it to their thinking buddy for checking. The single ticks on the extreme left reflect Keith's overall assessment, the ticks and crosses in the middle seem to relate to individual paragraphs and the comments on the right are from his thinking buddy.

During their final interview each student talked about how he/she had achieved his/her goals for the unit of work. John for instance made reference to his three initial goals and some additional criteria on the simplified rubric:

> [I used] capital letters and full stops and punctuation in the right spots, most words [were] spelt right, all the words [were] spelt right actually … [I also]

> put in more descriptive words … [and used] emotive language … (Interview 4);

while Vania talked about how she used statements from the simplified rubric and her goal sheet as a checklist:

> … and then I tick it if I've got it … and I have [done] that … my points and their supporting evidence and paragraph linking ideas and supporting ideas [are there] and I had to have that, and it's got … why my brother is annoying …I didn't use like SEE statements or persuasive sentence starters … (Interview 4).

To John, Sophia, Vania, Keith, Ioane and Lily the presence of all or most of the criteria from the goal sheet and the simplified rubric indicated successful achievement.

Discussion

Drawing on the work of cognitive and socio-cognitive theorists, it is generally agreed that goals have a positive impact on the quality of students' writing (Graham, Harris & Santangelo, 2015) with their absence a significant obstacle to the creation and revision of texts (~~Fitzgerald, 1987~~; Zimmerman, 2008). Moreover, evidence indicates the standard of students' persuasive texts is improved when they have a general goal accompanied by an elaborated series of related genre-specific sub-goals or success criteria (Ferretti, MacArthur & Dowdy, 2000; Ferretti et al., 2009; Nussbaum & Kardash, 2005; Page-Voth & Graham, 1999). It is not however the presence of goals and success criteria per se that ensures quality, rather it is their nature and the ways in which they are framed or structured that are of critical importance as these factors direct students' attention and influence their understanding of the learning area.

The persuasive writing rubric given to the Year 6 students in the current study functioned as the point of reference for goal selection and a range of goal related activities during the writing unit. The criteria outlined in the rubric addressed five dimensions of writing [Audience Awareness; Content/Ideas; Structure; Language Resources; Surface Features] across three levels of achievement [levels 2, 3 and 4]. As such this resource reflects the notion that it is possible to outline in advance the specific features of good writing and to reflect student development in writing through a series of steps or progressions. Sadler (1989) has observed however that 'student development [in writing] is multidimensional rather than sequential, and prerequisite learnings cannot be conceptualized as neatly packaged units of skills or knowledge' (p.123). Furthermore, as writing is a social and cultural act it is 'problematic to specify what develops or progresses in writing or what it develops towards and under what conditions' (Parr, 2010, p.4). Marshall (2004) has discussed in some detail the potential constraints and pitfalls in skills and knowledge models of progression where it is assumed that what constitutes 'good' writing is 'known, quantifiable and reducible to a systematic teaching programme' (p. 102). Despite such misgivings teachers in New Zealand are encouraged to draw on these resources 'when gathering information about their students' literacy strengths and needs … in order to plan effective literacy programmes' (MoE, 2010, p.3).

While aspects of the rubric were 'unpacked' in a class session at the beginning of the unit, this session focused in the main on what was meant by personal voice, emotive language, rhetorical questions and causal conjunctions. Although students had highlighted criteria under each of the five dimensions as missing from their pre-unit piece of writing, the majority of the personal goals chosen for the unit were taken from the areas of Language Resources and Structure. This is not surprising on two

counts. Firstly, as the features contained within these two areas were addressed when one of the teachers modeled the writing of a persuasive text, students possibly saw these as the most important elements to attend to. Secondly, the forty-seven criteria statements in the initial rubric may well have overwhelmed the students. Given they received little guidance from their teachers regarding selection of personal goals students may have chosen those that were more tangible and readily understood, avoiding those that they did not understand or seemed too challenging. When students are uncertain about the meaning of stated goals for learning they tend to adopt targets that focus on the more straightforward and mechanical aspects of writing (Timperley & Parr, 2009) – in this case statements drawn from criteria that reflected a Skills discourse and the notion of Genre as a discrete and fixed entity (Ivanic, 2004). Wiliam (2011) has observed the development of learning intentions or goals is 'most definitely not a democratic process' (p.59). Teachers have a responsibility to guide and support students so they select and/or create goals that reflect genuine and substantive areas for learning. It seems that in their wish to secure student ownership over goals, Eloise and Kirsten missed the opportunity to help students (with the exception of Sophia) establish challenging and productive learning goals - goals that reflected a Social Practices discourse such as the use of personal voice and writing for an audience. Although students were aware they were writing for an audience, the nature of this audience was never addressed. Knowing one's audience is a critical factor as it gives writers' a heightened sense of purpose, enabling them to make decisions about what information to include, how to present it, the level of detail required and the tone to adopt. To develop and present a robust and effective argument, students need to know who they are appealing to, be it their peers, parents or specific stakeholders, knowledge that assists in the development of personal voice.

The way in which the goals were framed also had a distinct bearing on how the Year 6 students understood and carried out their writing. Sophia, Ioane and Vania copied their goals directly from the rubric and as such these were recorded as performance or outcome statements. In contrast, Keith, Lily and John abbreviated and rewrote the rubric statements as elements for inclusion. An emphasis on performance goals and the inclusion of genre related elements can result in students viewing writing as a routine activity which involves identification of the critical elements of the genre and the inclusion of these in their work (Ivanic, 2004; Marshall, 2004; Peterson, 2006). As a corollary, revision is seen as little more than a technical 'fix-it' activity of individual features (Authors, 2008; Hyland, 2000) rather than a consideration of the impact of the work as a whole. The construction of writing as a 'fix-it' activity was to the fore in the current study. In particular it underpinned the talk and practice observed during workshops and peer feedback where students constantly checked work for the focus or genre-related feature, ticked their goal sheets or rubrics if the feature was present and inserted it into the text if absent. This finding resonates with an earlier study of writing lessons in 15 Years 4-6 classrooms in two New Zealand schools where the researchers concluded that 'for many students, learning to write involves identifying elements of genre, and trying to include these in writing' (Jesson & Cockle, 2014, p.612). The Year 6 students believed that when all or most of the criteria from their goal sheet and the various lists and rubrics had been ticked off as evident in their work they had met the expected standard and produced a quality text. Marshall (2004) has however observed that 'the very complexity of choices made in a good piece of work [writing] means that the effects are less neatly attributable to a set of clearly defined criteria' (p.103).

A piece of writing is more than the sum of its constituent parts (Marshall, 2004; Parr, 2010). More specifically, an argument 'possess[es] a structure that in its *totality* increases the acceptability of the writer's standpoint' (Ferretti et al, 2009, p.578, emphasis added). Deconstructing the whole and focusing on individual features ignores the multi-dimensional nature of [persuasive] writing and the relationships and dependencies between the various parts of an argument (Ferretti et al., 2009; Sadler, 2007). The more an entity is broken down into its constituent parts 'the harder it is to make the bits work together as a whole' (Sadler, 2007, p. 389). The specification and attainment of individual components of writing thus underestimates the impact of the whole (Marshall, 2004; Parr, 2010) and can lead, as evident in this study, to a fragmented approach to writing where writers concentrated on single features at the expense of the whole. So engrossed were the students in checking for and adding in individual features, they lost sight of the development of their argument as a whole. Ioane and Vania in particular illustrate this pitfall. Although both selected a goal that addressed the nature of their argument and the evidence used in support of it, they paid lip-service to these aspects as their attention was fixed firmly on ensuring they had included the features of persuasive writing in their work. The students' (and teachers') preoccupation with the individual elements of persuasive writing resulted in them losing sight of the 'big picture' and as a consequence, the quality of the students' arguments was largely ignored. As noted by Sadler (2014):

> Simply put, the grille [rubric] gets in the way. It limits the student's ability to see beyond to what really matters – the overall effectiveness of the work in achieving the stated purpose (p.161).

While elements of the Skills discourse such as Language features, Structure, Surface features and the like 'play vitally important roles … they must be recognized for

what they are: necessary but not sufficient' (Sadler, 2014, p.161). Sophia was the only student who seemed to understand that the indiscriminate addition of emotive language and rhetorical questions to each paragraph was not particularly helpful in terms of enhancing the strength of her argument. She realized these features needed to be used judiciously so they had the desired impact on the reader: she dismissed the capricious addition of these to her writing for the sake of 'ticking them off'.

Persuasive or argumentative writing is a complex act of crafting and building a case that establishes the worth of the writer's position, addresses counter-arguments and points out shortcomings in these arguments (Ferretti & Fan, 2015; Nussbaum & Kardash, 2005). As such it creates 'a dialogue between people who try to convince each other by establishing the merits of their own position and the limitations of the other's [position]' (Ferretti & Fan, 2015, p.302). The teacher-developed rubric seemed to constrain both the teachers' and students' understanding of persuasive texts. Eloise and Kirsten presented the genre of persuasive writing to the class as a type of writing used to convince or persuade an audience to see or accept the writer's point of view. This representation is however more akin with the notion of an 'opinion piece' where writers express their perspective about an issue (Ferretti & Fan, 2015). The teachers cannot be held entirely responsible for the limited and limiting nature of the goal they presented to the class as arguably it reflects the goal of persuasive writing promoted by the Ministry of Education ie: to persuade a reader to the writer's point of view through the presentation of relevant points with supporting evidence. While the reference to 'relevant points' could arguably include counterarguments, this is not explicit in any of the material provided by the Ministry. Although the Year 6 students were encouraged to state their opinion or position and support it with evidence and examples, at no time were they advised to

identify and present alternative positions and highlight associated shortcomings.

It is a demanding task for teachers to represent persuasive writing to students in ways that help them to understand and master its intricacies and nuances (Ferretti & Fan, 2015). This challenge does not mean that efforts to articulate goals and what counts as successful achievement should be abandoned (Authors, 2014). Rather than identifying the specific features of such texts through rubrics and lists of criteria as apparent in the current study, it may be more fitting to construct progress and success as movement towards a broad goal or horizon (Marshall, 2004). Moreover, if this horizon is portrayed in learning rather than performance terms, for example 'I will understand how to craft a strong and convincing persuasive argument, attention is drawn to the discursive and rhetorical nature of the task. Reznitskaya, Anderson, McNurlen, Nguyen-Jahiel, Archodidou and Kim, (2001) have highlighted how participation during persuasive writing classes in rhetorically similar practices such as collaborative oral argumentation results in the production of texts that contain a 'significant number of arguments, counterarguments, rebuttals, uses of formal argument devices' (p. 171). Through such activities, and as the unit of writing unfolds, exemplars and models can be used to make the goal or horizon clearer and sharper (Marshall, 2004). Tools such as these provide students with concrete representations of the goal and the nature of quality work (Sadler, 1989). Although the two teachers in the current study made use of exemplars and models, they did so sparingly and only at the beginning of the unit. As such they failed to realize their full potential (Sadler, 1989). When used wisely, exemplars and models promote thinking around particular issues and serve as points of reference for feedback and student self-monitoring. Moreover, analysis of and discussion around resources such as these, at key points throughout the unit of work, can alert students to the

ways in which various features and elements of a persuasive text work together, in this case to produce a compelling argument, and they can show the different pathways to achieving this goal.

Conclusion

Students' understanding of the goals for learning and what it means to master them is fundamental to their success as writers (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Evidence from the study reported in this paper supports the contention that the discourse surrounding goals and the ways in which they are framed has an impact on how students understand writing and carry out the writing process. Goals, success criteria and rubrics were central components of the Year 6 writing classroom, serving as points of reference for four key teaching-learning experiences: the selection of instructional workshops, provision of feedback, monitoring of works-in-progress and the determination of achievement. However, the discourses underpinning the goals selected by the students and the expression of these goals and criteria as performance and outcome statements resulted in the students having a relatively narrow and restricted view of persuasive writing and the act of writing. This view, clearly apparent in the talk of checking for, highlighting, adding and ticking off elements of persuasive writing in works-in-progress, limited students' understandings of and shaped their responses to the writing process. So focused were the students on including individual features and elements in their persuasive texts that they (and their teachers) lost sight of the nature of such texts and of the overall coherence and quality of these texts. Getting the balance right between learning and performance goals and between the 'big picture' and the detail is a challenge for teachers and students. If however students are to gain a broader

appreciation and understanding of writing, teachers need to ensure that the goals for learning and their associated success criteria or sub-goals address substantive aspects of writing so it is understood and practiced as an art rather than a technical activity.

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