Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author’s right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

To request permissions please use the Feedback form on our webpage. [http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback](http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback)

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the Library Thesis Consent Form.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Research Process

This chapter outlines the research process and associated procedures under five major sections: research methodology; sampling; ethical considerations; data collection; analysis of data; and ensuring the trustworthiness of the research. In the first section, research methodology, the research questions are specified. Justification for the selection of the interpretive paradigm and the use of a qualitative methodology follows. A brief description of the research design is also given. Specific details related to the sampling procedures for each of the two phases of the research are outlined in the section on sampling, as are participant profiles. Ethical principles and issues as they pertain to the current research are then addressed. Contained within the section data collection is a justification for each of the methods utilised, followed by relevant procedural information. Included in the section analysis of data, is information about the methods and modes of analyses employed. The chapter concludes by outlining how each of the four evaluative criteria for judging the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was met in the present research.

The Research Methodology

Research, along with experience and reasoning, is a way in which people attempt to understand their environments (Cohen & Manion, 1985). Yet research is far from a unified and monolithic enterprise (Candy, 1989). Research serves different purposes for diverse audiences (Hammersley, 1992) as evidenced by the multifarious attempts to describe, explain, predict, measure, understand, interpret and/or theorise selected phenomenon (Glesne, 1999). Hence, debates continue to occur within the research community as to what is worth knowing, how research should be conducted and what should be counted as evidence in supporting knowledge claims.
Methodology can be conceptualised as the interpretive framework that guides a particular research project. The aim of methodology is to help the researcher understand, in the broadest possible terms, both the process and the products of inquiry. The challenge, however, is to select a methodology and associated research methods that will be the ‘best fit’; the most appropriate for the subject of the inquiry (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992; Bouma, 1996; Burgess, 1984).

The Research Questions

Cognisant of the critical interplay between beliefs and practice, the current study was designed to investigate primary school teachers’ beliefs and understandings about, and use of feedback. The overarching question was “How is feedback conceptualised and implemented by teachers?” More specifically, the research sought answers to the following questions:

- What conceptions and knowledge do teachers hold about the nature and role of feedback in the enhancement of learning?
- When and how do teachers give feedback?
- What do teachers focus on when giving feedback?
- Do teachers engage in a range of feedback practices?
- How is teachers’ use of feedback affected by the context within which feedback occurs?
- How is feedback related to goal setting and criteria for success?
- How do teachers involve learners in the feedback process?
- Do teachers hold differing conceptions of feedback?
- If there are differences in teachers’ conceptions of and practice in providing feedback, how can those differences be explained?

Specifying the delimitations and limitations (Wolcott, 2001) of a research project is an important component of the research process. The current research was delimited in that the investigation was focused solely on the teachers, their beliefs, understandings and practice. Students’ perceptions of their role in the feedback process and the impact of teachers’ feedback on their learning were not considered. For some, a lack of student voice may be seen
as a limitation. However, delimiting the research in this way ensured the manageability of the project and enabled the researcher to gain a rich, thick description of teachers’ beliefs, understandings and practice.

**Research Paradigms**

Methodological selection is not only informed by the nature of the research question but also by beliefs (at times, implicit rather than explicit) about the world and how it should be studied and understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Ontological and epistemological beliefs and assumptions provide much of the justification for selection of a particular methodology (Schwandt, 2000). Ontology, epistemology, and methodology are central, connected elements that give shape and definition to the conduct of an inquiry. Collectively, these elements are often referred to as a research paradigm, a framework or basic set of beliefs that guide decision-making and action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Three main research paradigms are identified in the literature: positivist, interpretive and critical social science (Candy, 1989; Neuman, 2003; Sarantakos, 1993). Research paradigms, however, do not in themselves exist, rather “they are theoretical artefacts or constructs: an invention of the theorists who have studied social science research” (Candy, 1989, p. 7). Each paradigm has features in common with the others but, at the same time, differs in important aspects. Of importance is the realisation that no one paradigm is intrinsically or universally better than any other (Burgess, 1984; Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Nor will one paradigm ever be able to solve all the problems it defines (Kuhn 1970).

**The Interpretive Paradigm**

Research paradigms represent clusters of assumptions and broad orientations related to conceptions of social reality, individual and social behaviour that, in turn, determine the methods to be used and the questions to be addressed within the research endeavour. The aim of interpretive inquiry is to produce accounts that describe phenomena occurring in a small study. The main focus is on the intentional interactions of participants within a complex scene where
participants attribute meaning to their actions. Traditionally, interpretive accounts have sought to give a deeper, more extensive and systematic representation of events from the perspectives of those involved. While interpretive approaches cover a range of different positions and perspectives, there are a number of common assumptions that underpin the approaches and methodologies that are associated with interpretive research:

- Events and/or actions are explicable in terms of multiple interacting factors, events or processes. Causes and effects are interdependent;
- Complete objectivity is impossible to achieve, especially in terms of observing humans who construe or make sense of events based on their individual systems of meaning;
- The aim of inquiry is to develop an understanding of individual cases rather than universal laws or generalisations;
- The world is made up of tangible and intangible multifaceted realities best studied as a unified whole, not as dependent and independent variables; context makes a difference;
- All inquiry is value laden and such values inevitably influence the framing, bounding and focusing of research problems.

(Candy, 1989)

The interpretive paradigm was considered the most suitable for the current research. It provided the best fit ontologically (there would be multiple, non-contradictory and equally valid descriptions and explanations of feedback), epistemologically (participants are ‘knowing’ subjects who are shaped by, and who are also able to shape their environment) and methodologically (the interaction between the researcher and the participants is value-laden and subjective). Central to the current investigation has been an understanding of teachers’ beliefs about their role and that of learners in the feedback process and how these beliefs have influenced practice. Exploring teachers’ viewpoints, perceptions and practical realities with reference to the implementation of feedback strategies, some of which may have been new and challenging, was deemed a crucial aspect of the research. Thus the interpretive notions of understanding, meaning and action were fundamental to the inquiry
if one were to grasp the motives, intentions, beliefs, concerns, actions and unconscious behaviours (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the participating teachers.

**Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative methodology is one of two major research methodologies. Emerging from, although now not exclusively associated with the interpretive paradigm (Sarantakos, 1993), qualitative methodology refers to research strategies and approaches that aim to provide a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under investigation. In contrast to their peers who opt for a quantitative approach to research, qualitative researchers reject the notion of research as an exact science that can be compartmentalized or measured accurately; objective reality can never be captured. The world can be interpreted and ‘understood’ (if indeed it can be at all, as evidenced by some qualitative approaches) only by studying the participants within their natural settings. Valuable knowledge will be gained by producing a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation through the use of descriptive data in the form of words and pictures to illustrate and substantiate the perspectives of the participants. To ensure that the socially constructed understandings of the participants are captured, there is an emphasis on data collection that is open ended, persistent and prolonged in nature (Hawe, 2000). Of importance is the need to capture the complexity of the situation given that participants have diverse ways of interpreting the same situations (Gomm & Hammersley, 2001).

While there are various methods aligned with qualitative methodology five features are common to all. These are “the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of fieldwork, an inductive orientation to analysis and findings that are richly descriptive” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). A given piece of research may not, however, exhibit the five features to an equal degree (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). A qualitative methodology was considered the most appropriate for the current study because at the core of the research was the desire to “describe and probe the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts,
situations and circumstances of action” (Denzin, 1978, p. 39) of the participants in situ. If a thick description were to be obtained, where the voices of the participants were brought to the fore, then the researcher had to become the primary instrument of data collection and analysis.

The Research Design: A Two-Phase Approach
As shown in Table 5.1 the current research was divided into two phases with each phase involving multiple data collection methods. The phases were undertaken sequentially with the participants in phase two selected purposively from all those who participated in phase one.

Table 5.1
An Overview of the Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase and data collection methods</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase One</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>20 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase Two: Case study</strong></td>
<td>3 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-taping of lessons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specific detail related to the sampling procedures for each of the two phases is outlined in the section that follows. Also included in the sampling section are participant profiles. A justification for each of the methods used is given in the section entitled data collection. This justification is followed by relevant procedural information.

Sampling
The Sampling Frame for Phase One
Questions of sampling arise when defining the target population for the research. The challenge is to decide what parameters to put around this population given that the researcher “cannot sample everyone, everywhere,
"doing everything" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27). In the present study the target population for phase one could have been all primary school teachers, or all those teaching in the greater Auckland area. In each of these instances the potential number of participants would have been large, and selection unwieldy in light of the fact that the research was interpretive and qualitative. However, to approach teachers in one particular school or cluster of schools was considered too limiting. A sampling frame such as a school or a cluster of schools might have minimised the differences among the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to such an extent that it would have hampered the current investigation in relation to understanding the variations among teachers in regard to their beliefs and understandings about feedback and how feedback was utilised to support students' learning.

In qualitative research, non-probability sampling, of which there are a number of variations, is invariably utilised. Convenience sampling, that is the accessing of a population to which the researcher has easy access, is one such variation. Researchers such as Ezzy (2002) have argued that convenience sampling is one of the least desirable approaches to non-probability sampling. Others, however, (for example, Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003; Punch, 2005) have noted the increasing use of this approach given the proliferation of qualitative research and the associated difficulty of accessing potential participants. As Cohen et al. have commented convenience sampling is relatively unproblematic as long as it is recognised that the sample represents no other group than itself. As a consequence, the researcher cannot make generalisations to wider populations. What is important is the researcher's honesty in regard to how the sample was obtained and her reflexivity in relation to "how the selection / recruitment has affected the data collected" (Delamont, 1992, p. 70).

The sampling frame utilised in phase one of this research can be regarded as one of convenience as it was a defined population of teachers that the researcher had potential access to through her employment as a lecturer. The Bachelor of Education (Teaching) teachers' specialisation is a degree option
for practising teachers with a teaching diploma who wish to upgrade their qualifications to a degree. Essentially the sampling frame consisted of all those primary teachers who had, during the time period 1999-2004, graduated with this degree from the Auckland College of Education (now incorporated into the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland).

**Selecting the Sample for Phase One**

At the time ethics approval was gained (February, 2005), approximately 400 practising teachers had completed the teachers' specialisation of the Bachelor of Education (Teaching) degree. As part of the ethics approval process, permission was sought from the Dean of the Faculty of Education (Appendix A) to access the names and addresses of all graduated teachers. Once access was gained, a third party, an administrator in the contact centre, made a simple random selection of potential participants by drawing 100 names out of a hat. In early March 2005, following this initial selection, the administrator sent out a letter to these 100 teachers. The focus of the research, the nature of the sampling selection and the required number of participants for phase one of the study were outlined briefly (Appendix B). A participant information sheet for interview respondents (Appendix C) and a baseline information form (Appendix D) were both included with this letter, as was a stamped address envelope for reply. The baseline information form was included to ensure that if the researcher received more than the hoped for 30 responses, there would be sufficient information to make a purposive selection of teachers from the potential pool of respondents. Given the interpretive, qualitative nature of the current research, where the aim was to produce an account that described the phenomena occurring in a small study (Candy, 1989) anywhere between 15-30 participants was deemed sufficient. Such numbers would enable the researcher to obtain a rich description from a participant’s frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). At the same time it would maximise the differences between participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

By the end of March 2005, 13 acceptances had been received. An additional four teachers responded that they would have liked to participate but personal
circumstances stood in the way. Seven of the 100 letters were returned unopened, marked no longer at this address. Of the 13 acceptances, three were excluded from the study on the grounds that they were no longer teaching in the primary sector. One teacher had retired, one was currently teaching in a kindergarten and the third was working in Team Solutions in a school advisory capacity. These three teachers were contacted by telephone, thanked and the basis for their exclusion explained.

Given that only a third of the required sample of 30 had been obtained, the decision was made to send an invitation to participate to an additional 100 teachers from the original sampling frame. This was done in early April, following the same procedure as before. Mailing out the extra 100 invitations resulted in a further seven acceptances and two refusals. In an effort to reach the hoped for number of 30 participants another strategy was utilised. Included in the two lists of teachers were fifteen teachers, known to the researcher in her role as a lecturer, who had yet to reply to the invitation to participate. Each of these teachers was contacted by telephone and personally asked to participate. This resulted in five more teachers agreeing to participate, bringing the final number of acceptances to 22. Of these 22 acceptances, one teacher withdrew from the study after reading her interview transcript citing the fact that she felt she did not ‘know’ anything about the research topic. Another participant withdrew just prior to interview because she had to fly overseas on a family emergency and would be out of the country for at least two months. The final number of phase one participants was therefore 20.

*The Phase One Participants*

Common to the phase one participants was their recently acquired degree status. All had graduated with a Bachelor of Education (Teaching) during the period from 1999 to 2004. However as anticipated, these teachers were not a homogeneous group. There were differences in regard to their years of teaching experience; type of position held in the school; class level taught; and involvement in various assessment-related professional development
initiatives. While all could be referred to as experienced, there was a considerable variation in the number of years spent teaching. Length of teaching service ranged from nine to thirty one years, with over half of the participants having spent more than twenty years in the teaching profession. Eight held Scale A positions; eight were senior teachers with responsibility for leading a school syndicate and four held senior management positions (assistant or deputy principal). While all had daily teaching responsibilities not all had their ‘own class’. Two of the senior managers taught small groups of students from across a number of classes. Three of the teachers were specialist teachers, one teaching visual art, another food and materials technology and the third reading. Variation was also noted in regard to the class level taught. Nine teachers taught in the junior school (Years 1/2/3), three in the middle school (Years 4/5/6) and six taught at the intermediate level (Years 7/8). Two teachers had what can be referred to as ‘an itinerant position’ within a school. Each taught across all levels from Year 1 to 6 as they released other teachers for specialist duties.

Teachers’ assessment related professional development experience was a further point of difference. Five had been involved in assessment related professional opportunities offered by the Ministry of Education. Others, as part of their degree programme, had completed a course on assessment. Of these teachers, two had completed an assessment focused postgraduate course. Three teachers had been involved in assessment focused professional development run by their schools. Of the 20 teachers, four had never been involved in any professional development related to assessment. Table 5.2 summarises the demographic information for each of the phase one participants.
**Table 5.2**

**Demographic Information: Phase 1 Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Current Class</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>MoE assessment</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Other assessment related professional development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>Yr 2/3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Scale A</td>
<td>AToL</td>
<td>Scale A</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunita</td>
<td>NE-Y6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Scale A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susanna</td>
<td>Yr7/8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Senior Teacher</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meg</td>
<td>Y1/2/3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Y7/8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Scale A</td>
<td>AToL</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Y2/3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Senior Teacher</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Y2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Senior Teacher</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Y7/8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>NE</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Senior Teacher</td>
<td>AToL</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>NE-Y6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Scale A</td>
<td>AtoL</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Y1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Scale A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evie</td>
<td>Y3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Scale A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marama</td>
<td>Y8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Senior Teacher</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate &amp; Postgraduate courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gem</td>
<td>Y5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Scale A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sela</td>
<td>Y7/8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Senior Teacher</td>
<td>AToL</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynda</td>
<td>Y5/6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior Teacher</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>Y5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Scale A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ree</td>
<td>Y7/8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Senior Teacher</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate &amp; Postgraduate courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krystal</td>
<td>Y1/2/3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>Y1/2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undergraduate course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 AToL is Assessment to Learn, an assessment related professional development programme offered to schools since 2002
2 AtoL is Assessment for Better Learning, an assessment related professional development programme offered to schools during the period 1995-1999
Phase Two: A Case Study

Case study has been defined as:

"An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1989, p. 23).

A multi-site case study approach, involving several replications of a single case, was utilised in phase two of this project. Case study was considered particularly appropriate as the aim of the inquiry was to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning of feedback as seen through the eyes of practising teachers charged with the responsibility of using feedback in the real world setting of the classroom (Bassey, 1999; Merriam, 1998). An additional prompt to use case study was the recognition that conducting this phase of the research in the naturalistic setting of the classroom would be complex. There would many intervening variables in operation (Guskey, 2002) that from the researcher's perspective would be both difficult to isolate or to impose control over (Denscombe, 2003). Holding the belief that "human systems develop a characteristic wholeness or integrity and are not simply a loose connection of traits", of importance to the investigation was an understanding of the "interdependencies of the parts and patterns that emerge" (Sturman, 1994, p. 61).

Writers in the area have emphasised the notion of a case as a bounded system, focused on the particular, descriptive in style, and intent on bringing about new meaning or understanding about the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 1998; Stake 2000). In phase two of the research, the case to be studied was teachers' use of feedback during the teaching of a written language unit, bounded in time and space. It was particularistic in that it focused on the roles of the teacher and the learners in the feedback process, as well as the nature of the opportunities teachers provided for students to develop evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise. The heuristic value of the case lay in its potential to provide insight into the complexity of
the beliefs / practice nexus, given that the teachers selected for this phase of the study were those whose discourse was closest to that currently promoted as 'best practice' in the feedback literature.

While cases can be typified in a number of ways, for example, intrinsic, instrumental and collective (Stake, 2000), research may not always easily fit into one particular type. Mindful that types should be seen as "heuristic rather than determinative" in intent (Stake, 2000, p. 438), the current research can generally be regarded as an instrumental case study. The case had been identified as teachers' use of feedback during the teaching of a written language unit, created to advance understanding about a particular problematic issue, the use of feedback to support and enhance learning.

Selection of Phase Two Participants
Case study aims both to represent the case (Cohen et al., 2003; Stake, 2000) and to learn a great deal about the issues of central importance to the case (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000). To achieve these aims, non-probability sampling techniques are the most appropriate, given that they have the potential to provide 'information-rich cases' for study (Merriam, 1998). A perusal of the literature about the various types of non-probability sampling techniques indicated that purposive sampling was the most fitting for phase two, given the nature of the research question and the total population from which the sample could be drawn.

Through the establishment of explicit relevant criteria, purposive sampling enables the researcher to be selective (Schwandt, 2001). The following criteria, reflective of the contemporary feedback discourse (for example, Hattie & Jaegar, 1998; Sadler, 1989; Torrance & Pryor, 2001), were established in the belief they would provide 'information-rich cases' (Merriam, 1998). Selection was based on whether teachers' discourse was consistent with the following notions:

- The goal(s) of learning and the expected performance were shared with students;
Feedback was linked to the goals of learning and was both achievement and improvement focused; 

- Students were seen as active participants in the processes of learning and feedback; 
- Students were given opportunities to develop evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise.

Essentially teachers were selected because their discourse and self-reported practice were consistent with what is identified within the literature as 'best' feedback practice. Table 5.3 provides an overview of how each of the twenty, phase one participants met these purposive criteria. As can be seen, from all of the teachers interviewed, five provided strong evidence in relation to the purposive criteria. These five teachers (Audrey, Jennifer, Kate, Marama and Tara) were invited to participate in phase two.

Once the selection was made, each of the five teachers was contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the case study phase of the research. A brief outline of what participation would involve and why teachers had been selected was given. Following this conversation, a participant information sheet (Appendix E) outlining the nature of teachers' participation during the observational phase of the study and the follow up interviews was mailed out. Teachers were advised that the researcher would contact them again after a week to see if they would be willing to commit to this phase of the research.
### Table 5.3

**Teachers’ Discourse Compared to the Purposive Criteria for Phase Two**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Goals of learning and Expected learning shared with students</th>
<th>Feedback linked to goals</th>
<th>Student viewed as active</th>
<th>Opportunities to develop evaluative &amp; productive knowl. &amp; expertise</th>
<th>Learning Intentions</th>
<th>Success Criteria</th>
<th>Achieve</th>
<th>Improve</th>
<th>Self Assess.</th>
<th>Peer Assess.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunita</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susanna</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meg</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xx</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evie</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marama</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gem</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sela</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynda</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ree</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krystal</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY:**
- **x:** mentioned the area; few or superficial examples/descriptions given
- **xx:** mentioned the area; examples given although sometimes key aspects absent from descriptions
- **xxx:** mentioned the area, explained and expanded; detailed examples given which included key aspects of the area

**The Case Study Participants**

Of the five teachers invited to participate, Audrey, Kate, Marama and Jennifer consented. Tara, however, declined as she would be leaving her senior teaching position and her year one class at the end of the term three 2005 to take up an assistant principal position at another school. From her perspective, it would take time to establish a rapport with her new group of students and to establish the routines and norms of accepted behaviour that she would expect. Hence, if observations were to take place they may not represent her ‘typical’ ways of working with students. While Jennifer agreed to participate initially, ill health forced her to withdraw after the first observation undertaken in...
November 2005. Although alternative times were proposed, an agreement could not be reached as to when subsequent observations could be undertaken prior to the school year finishing. Tara’s unavailability due to change of circumstance, and Jennifer’s withdrawal meant that phase two involved three teachers only.

It should be noted that although each of the five teachers met the criteria, their discourse, at times, focused on and emphasised different components of quality feedback practice. This was neither surprising nor concerning for two reasons. Firstly, the nature of the semi-structured interview during phase one offered the participants some flexibility to develop and follow their own train of thought within the constraints offered by the researcher. The semi-structured interview also allowed the researcher to probe areas of particular interest (Cohen et al., 2003). Secondly, there is a general acceptance that the implementation of a formative assessment strategy such as the provision of quality feedback, cannot and should not be implemented in a rigid, prescribed manner. Indeed, Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003) found that the teachers they worked with who were implementing a range of formative assessment practices, followed “different trajectories of change – so that not only their starting points, but also the routes they travelled were different” (p. 83). Based on an analysis of their interview responses, it seemed that the three teachers selected for the case study phase of the research study were travelling different ‘routes’, albeit with the common aims of utilising feedback to support learning and involving students in the learning / feedback process. A précis of the three consenting teachers’ interview responses, in the form of vignettes, is included in the appendices to illustrate in more detail how each met the purposive criteria (Appendix F).

Gaining Access to the School Sites

Once phase two teachers had agreed to participate, permission from the school principal for the researcher to come onto each school site was gained. Each principal was contacted by telephone. After explaining the purpose and nature of the research, a request was made to access the school site. Following each
telephone conversation a written request was mailed out (Appendix G) along with a written consent form for the principal to sign (Appendix H). To keep parents of the students in each teacher's class fully informed, with the principal's permission, a letter was sent home to parents (Appendix I) prior to the observations being undertaken. In the information letter sent to parents it was stressed that the focus of the study was the teacher's practice.

**Selection of the Case Study Context**

The selection of a participant sample is not the sole decision to be made in field research. Sampling also involves the selection of events to be observed (Burgess, 1984; Delamont, 1992). The aim of the case study phase of the study was to see how teachers whose articulations were reflective of the contemporary feedback discourse, implemented their feedback strategies. Hence it was critical that the chosen context had the potential to support the aim.

Written language was identified, as the context in which there was the greatest probability that rich data about teachers' ability to implement theoretically appropriate feedback strategies could be gathered. The rationale for selecting written language was informed by participants' interview responses, findings from relevant literature and a consideration of the current focus on literacy in New Zealand Ministry of Education curriculum policies and initiatives. Specifically, it was the combination of the following factors that informed the selection:

- In the baseline information sheets that all 20 teachers had completed prior to the start of the research, each of the five case study teachers had rated their confidence in providing feedback to students in the area of written language highly – either 4 or 5 on a 1-5 self-rating scale. While confidence and competence cannot be equated, there is the recognition that confidence has an emotional influence on competent classroom performance (Shallcross, Spink, Stephenson & Warwick, 2002). The self-assurance with which people approach and manage
difficult tasks determines whether they make good or poor use of their capabilities (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero, 2005);

- During their interviews, each of the five teachers used the context of written language more frequently than any other curriculum area to illustrate what they did. More importantly, their descriptions of practice included critical aspects of quality feedback practice. They talked about involving students in the generation of intentions and criteria, the use of exemplars and the inclusion of specific strategies (conferencing, self and peer assessment) to develop students’ evaluative and productive expertise. Teachers’ descriptions of what they did in other curriculum areas did not necessarily include all of the aforementioned aspects;

- Teachers have often reported high levels of self-rated competence in regard to the teaching of written language (Dixon, 1999; Hargreaves & Comber, 1996);

- In New Zealand, literacy is an area where teachers have been acknowledged as both confident and competent (Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000);

- The improvement of literacy teaching and learning has been a stated national educational policy goal since 1999 (Ministry of Education, 1999);

- Since 2000, there has been a commitment on the part of the Ministry of Education, through the provision of a range of professional development initiatives, to support teachers in making sustainable changes to their literacy practices (Ministry of Education, 2002).

Ethical Considerations

Aware that “ethical responsibility is essential at all stages of the research process” (Miller & Brewer, 2003, p. 95), ethical principles such as informed consent, the protection of confidentiality and anonymity and the minimisation of risk to participants have guided the current research.
Informed Consent

To give their informed consent participants must fully understand and agree, without coercion, to participate in the research. In the present research prospective participants were made aware of the nature of the research, provided with all information relevant to their decision to participate, and invited to take part. This information was given in appropriate language by means of participant information sheets. An individual’s right to decline to participate, or to withdraw, without prejudice, at any time during the project was respected at all times. In one case, as was requested, information provided by a participant was withdrawn and subsequently destroyed. In each phase of the research, consent to participate was gained through a signed consent form (Appendices J & K). Site access was negotiated with The Dean of the Faculty of Education and the school principals on behalf of school Board of Trustees. An information letter was sent to the parents of the students in each phase two teacher’s class informing them of the project.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Rights to anonymity and confidentiality were respected at all times. As Miller and Brewer (2003) have noted, a critical aspect of social research is the protection of participants’ identities. Pseudonyms were used, both in the coding and the reporting of data. Participants were assured that access to data would be restricted to the researcher, the research supervisors and the professional transcriber. Coding strategies, known only to the researcher, were used when taking field-notes and in the transcriptions of all the collected data. The person employed to transcribe the tapes was made aware of privacy and confidentiality issues and was required to sign a confidentiality agreement outlining her responsibilities (Appendix L). Protocols outlined by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee were adhered to at all in times with regard to the storage of data.

Minimisation of Risk

Involvement in research holds potential risks for the participants. Risks may include stress, emotional distress, fatigue, embarrassment, cultural dissonance

96
and exploitation (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Mindful that asking teachers to deconstruct their feedback practice may have been potentially threatening to their professional self-image and self esteem, it was stressed prior to interviews and observations that the researcher’s role was to make interpretations rather than judgements about teachers’ responses and actions. As already mentioned, recognising that at times probing was causing anxiety to a participant, a line of questioning was dropped even if not explored fully to the researcher’s satisfaction.

While participants were drawn from a list of graduates from the researcher’s institution, the power differential was negligible. They had already graduated with their degree. For those who may have continued with further study, a question was included in the baseline information form to determine teachers’ current enrolment in programmes and courses. To address the issue of a lecturer/student power relationship, if there were any volunteers enrolled in courses the researcher was required to teach, it was decided that they would be deemed ineligible to participate. This, however, did not eventuate.

**Data Collection**

*The Collection of Plausible and Credible Evidence about Teachers’ Feedback-Related Beliefs, Understandings and Practices*

Despite complex and rigorous methodological approaches to the collection and analysis of data, it is not possible to capture all the intricacies of the human condition. Research can only claim to portray a selective representation of reality (Hammersley, 1992). Therefore, the assemblage of credible evidence, whatever its form and content, must be able to depict the phenomenon under investigation. Evidence is used as a justification for the claims and arguments made (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992; Phelan & Reynolds, 1996). Conversely, if the evidence is weak or unrelated to the question, it casts doubts on the validity of the interpretations put forward. Hence a crucial methodological concern for the researcher is the adequacy and sufficiency of evidence. Careful consideration must be given to what will count as evidence and how best to capture that evidence (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992; Ely, Anzul,
Friedman & Garner, 1991). The more complete the evidence, the greater the confidence is in regard to the interpretation.

Hammersley (1992) has identified three important considerations in determining sufficiency of evidence. Firstly, evidence must be plausible and credible. That is, given our existing knowledge, the evidence gathered must be a reasonably accurate portrayal of the research context. Secondly, there is a need to collect convincing evidence. To be convincing, evidence must not only support claims made, it must also be strong enough to refute competing arguments or interpretations. Finally, evidence must relate to the type of claim being made.

Thus, research instruments or techniques used must be sensitive to the nature of the phenomena under scrutiny (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992). In the selection of data collection methods, issues of content and construct related validity (Crooks, Kane & Cohen, 1996) must be considered. In the first instance, to ensure that construct related evidence is strong, the data collection methods chosen must be able to tap into the construct under examination and, secondly, once the most suitable methods have been selected, they must adequately sample the domain. In the present research, different data collection methods were used at different points in time in accordance with the nature of the information sought (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). The methods of data collection were selected to extract evidence of teachers’ beliefs and understandings about feedback. Also, evidence was gathered in relation to teachers’ self-reported practice and, in a smaller number of cases, teachers’ actual use of feedback in the enhancement of learning, including their explanations of and justifications for practice.

Given the nature of the research and the specific question to be answered, the use of a range of qualitative data collection methods ensured that:

- The complex and deeply embedded meanings the participants ascribed to their world were captured;
- The socially constructed nature of reality was understood from the perspective of the participants through the provision of a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation;
Participants' perspectives and understandings were gained through an emphasis on data collection that was open ended and prolonged in nature; Participants were observed within their natural settings.

Table 5.4 provides an overview of the two data gathering phases, their primary purpose, data collection methods used and the participants involved in each phase of the research.
**Table 5.4**

*An Overview of the Research Phases, Primary Purpose, Data Collection Methods and Participants in Each Phase and Date Data Collected*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Phase</th>
<th>Primary Purpose</th>
<th>Data collection methods</th>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Data collected on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2005-</td>
<td>To investigate teachers' beliefs and knowledge about feedback</td>
<td>Individual, semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Sela</td>
<td>15/4/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2005</td>
<td>To investigate teachers’ perceptions of their practice</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Patricia, Krystal, Diana</td>
<td>20/4/05, 22/4/05, 27/4/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collection of learning intentions &amp; success criteria; other relevant documentation</td>
<td>Meg, Ree, Sunita, Kate, Monica, Mary, Evie, Marama, Susanna</td>
<td>5/5/05, 6/6/05, 9/5/05, 12/5/05, 13/5/05, 18/5/05, 19/5/05, 20/5/05, 25/5/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Carol, Lynda, Gem, Tara, Jennifer</td>
<td>1/6/05, 10/6/05, 14/6/05, 15/6/05, 22/6/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priscilla, Audrey</td>
<td>18/7/05, 29/7/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Selina (withdrew)</td>
<td>25/5/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2</strong></td>
<td>To investigate teachers’ feedback practice</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Marama</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 2005-</td>
<td>To probe teachers’ intentions, pedagogical decisions and beliefs</td>
<td>Audio-taping of 5 written language lessons</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>21/9/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2005</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collection of relevant artefacts; learning intentions &amp; success criteria; student handouts/worksheets; teachers’ planning exemplars used</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>25/11/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>24/11/05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outlined below is the specific justification for, and procedural information about, each of the data collection strategies used.

**Phase 1: The Semi-Structured Interview**

The interview as a technique provides access to what is ‘inside’ a participant’s head (Tuckman, 1972). It is a means through which a researcher can access the knowledge, values, preferences, attitudes and beliefs that participants hold. In the current research, dependent upon the quality of the questions asked, interviews were thought of as being able are to provide strong construct and content related evidence (Crooks, Kane & Cohen 1996) about teachers’ beliefs, understandings and self-reported feedback practice.

Although structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews are all essentially didactic transactions between the researcher and the informant (Nuich, 1995), there are key differences between these forms with regard to how the interview is conducted and controlled. The choice of one particular form over another is dependent not only on the nature of the research question and the information sought, but also on the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the research. The semi-structured interview was considered preferable for this research project given its interpretive, qualitative focus. The use of open-ended questions would allow the researcher to probe in greater depth teachers’ complex, embedded and implicit beliefs and assumptions about feedback and to gauge their perceptions of practice. In addition, the beliefs / practice nexus could be explored as and when necessary.

The semi-structured nature of the interview questions provided participants with some flexibility to develop and follow their own train of thought within the constraints offered by the researcher. This was seen as important to understand the subjective meanings of the individuals involved in the study. Sticking too rigidly to an ordered set of questions could have meant that such an opportunity would have been lost (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Delamont, 1992).
The Interview Schedule

As explained in Chapter Four, Sadler’s (1989) theory of formative assessment and feedback was utilised as a major conceptual frame informing this research project. Hence, the development of the interview schedule was informed partially by this framework. The schedule was divided into five sections: general conceptions and beliefs about feedback; teachers’ understandings about learning intentions and their use; teachers’ understandings about success criteria and their use; teachers’ understandings about the relationship between goal setting and the provision of feedback; and how teachers’ understandings have been shaped (Appendix M). As such, the questions aimed to tap into teachers’ conceptions about the nature and role of feedback in the enhancement of learning; their beliefs about their role and that of learners in the feedback process; and the strategies and practices that teachers utilised and ascribed importance to within the feedback process, including the opportunities offered to students in relation to the development of evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise (Sadler, 1989). It was also hoped that insight could be gained in relation to how teachers’ understandings had been shaped.

Cognisant that research questions must be framed in language accessible to the participants, specialised terms used by Sadler were not incorporated into the schedule. Rather, the terms learning intentions and success criteria, akin to Sadler’s notions of goals and standards of performance, were utilised. Aware that these were terms currently promoted by the Ministry of Education (2004), it was felt that the participants would have some familiarity with such terminology. Given that the sharing of learning intentions and success criteria have been advocated practices in various assessment related, literacy and mathematics focused professional development initiatives for some time, it was further anticipated that some teachers would be utilising such practices.

Piloting the Interview Schedule

Prior to its use, the interview schedule was piloted with two teachers not involved in the study. These were two of the teachers who had initially
volunteered to participate in the study but who were subsequently excluded because they were no longer teaching in a primary school. The purpose of the pilot was three-fold. The pilot helped to ascertain the researcher's ability to establish a rapport with participants. Teacher feedback about the overall structure of the interview including the clarity and ordering of the questions was gained. Finally the logistical aspects of recording interview data were tested. The pilot interviews were undertaken in a context that was as authentic as possible and proved beneficial in several respects. As a consequence of the pilot, it was found that more time than anticipated needed to be spent establishing a rapport with the participants. Secondly, several of the questions needed to be reworded. Importantly, it was discovered after one interview that, although one of the teachers did not use learning intentions and success criteria, she did share expected learning with her students and she did try to convey her expectations of what successful performance might look like. As a result of this insight it was decided that if participants answered no to these questions they would be reframed. Teachers would be asked how they shared expected learning and how they tried to convey expectations of performance. From a technical perspective, whilst the quality of the tapes was adequate, they were hard to decipher in places. It was decided to ask teachers to wear a microphone to achieve a better sound quality.

**Conducting the Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with each of the phase one participants during the period April 2005–July 2005. Each interview took between 35 and 60 minutes. This range was not surprising given that not all people are equally articulate or perceptive (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), or willing to reveal their thoughts and practice. While attempts were made to gather as much data as possible from each participant this was counterbalanced by awareness that probing can be perceived as threatening. Hence there were times when it was felt that a line of questioning had not been fully explored, but needed to be left behind because of the effects of further probing on a participant.
Recognising the importance to interpretive inquiry of understanding the real world settings of the participants, it was suggested to participants that, if convenient to them, interviews be conducted in their classrooms. As a result, with four exceptions, the classroom became the venue for the phase one interviews. It was assumed that interviewing in the classroom was beneficial in a number of respects. It was a familiar space for the participants, a place where they could feel in control and where they had authority and standing. The classroom also provided a common ground between the participants and the researcher. It provided an opportunity to develop a rapport and to get acquainted using the common experiences of both parties (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Furthermore, it was anticipated that particular classroom displays such as the recording of intentions and criteria would serve as additional stimuli for conversation or prompts and probes for either the participant or the researcher. Also teachers would have easy access to a variety of classroom artefacts, known only to them that they might want to utilise as a means of illustration. The interview experience bore out these assumptions.

**The Collection of Relevant Documents During Phase One**

Teachers often referred to wall charts, class books, whiteboard work, or students’ completed work during an interview. Thus the researcher was provided with deeper insights into the naturalistic setting of each teacher’s world. The detail gained in regard to each teacher’s classroom was recorded in the form of field notes. Some of these notes were recorded at the time of the interview (such as specific examples of recorded learning intentions, success criteria, or charts displayed related to the development of students’ evaluative expertise). Other notes were recorded as soon as possible after the interview. Notes made post interview again pertained specifically to important aspects of the feedback process such as the presence or absence of exemplars displayed in the room or use of modelling books (Appendix N). Prior to the interview, teachers had been asked that if they used learning intentions and criteria, to bring those currently in use to the interview to share with the researcher. With teachers’ permission these were photocopied and filed with the field notes for future reference. Owing to their specific circumstances, four teachers did not
have a classroom that they could use for an interview. Two, however, were interviewed in their school offices (and hence many of the aforementioned benefits still accrued to both parties). The remaining two teachers elected to come to the researcher’s place of work to be interviewed.

In all instances, with participants’ permission, interviews were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed by a professional transcriber. Individual transcripts were returned by mail to each participant for confirmation and or amendment and any general comment they wished to make. At this time participants were asked to select a pseudonym that would be used in the final report. Of the 21 teachers who were sent transcripts, 15 responded. As explained earlier in the chapter, one teacher withdrew after the first interview and hence her data were withdrawn and destroyed. None of the other participants made major amendments to their transcripts. Seven teachers did however comment that their responses were ‘rambling’, ‘disjointed’, ‘vague’ and at times ‘incoherent’. Of these seven, two teachers commented that they felt their understandings about feedback, learning intentions and success criteria had developed since the time of the interview. As not all of the 15 provided a pseudonym, the researcher made the choice when none was given.

**Phase Two**

As shown in Table 5.4, phase two of the study was undertaken during the period September to November 2005 and involved three of the five teachers selected from phase one. During this phase, data were collected using the following qualitative strategies: field notes; audiotaping of selected lessons; the collection of relevant artefacts; and a post-observation semi-structured interview. These forms of evidence provided complementary information and ensured a rich pool of data.

**Justification for and the Focus of the Observations**

Participant observation is used frequently when the aim is to get close to people within their natural settings so that reality can be understood from the perspective of those being studied (Hawe, 2000). It was considered
particularly appropriate to the present study given that a noted strength of observation is that it enables the researcher to study the phenomena under investigation in depth and detail. Furthermore, it facilitated the researcher’s ability to gain insights into and better understanding of the motives, intentions, beliefs, concerns, actions and unconscious behaviours of the key actors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Utilising a range of field and membership roles such as ‘complete-participant’, ‘participant-as-observer’, ‘observer-as-participant’ and ‘complete-observer’ (Burgess, 1984; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), researchers are able to gain access to the field and gather data in an ongoing and authentic manner.

In the current study, the role of complete observer was adopted. Aware that observation must be undertaken in a “thoughtful and principled way” (Delamont, 1992, p. 113), it was deemed necessary to look and pay close attention to a selective set of phenomena. A combination of Sadler’s (1989) conceptual frame of formative assessment and feedback and insights gained from phase one, set the parameters around these observations. Sadler argued that three conditions have to be satisfied simultaneously during learning if feedback is to effect improvement and move students towards becoming self-monitoring. Teachers must communicate the goals of learning and what constitutes a successful performance, they must encourage students to compare current performance with that desired and, finally, assist students to close the gap between current and desired performance. Furthermore, Sadler contended that the three conditions could be realised only if students have access to teachers’ guild knowledge about what constitutes a quality performance and if they are given opportunities to develop evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise during the production of work. Teachers’ practice in relation to the development of the three conditions became the focus of the observations, as did the nature of the evaluative and productive opportunities offered to students. Data were collected through the use of field notes, the audio-taping of five lessons from each teacher’s self selected written language unit and the collection of relevant documentation.
Undertaking the Observations

Audiotaping was considered a particularly useful strategy for the current project, as there was a need to capture teacher talk in a close and detailed way. The three teachers agreed to wear a microphone during lessons so that the complexity of the verbal interactions that occurred between them and students could be captured at the speed at which they occurred. Given that an individual’s capacity to reconstruct the specifics of a verbal interaction is a near impossible task (Psathas, 1995), audiotaping provided a rich and accurate source of data that could not be gained simply by the taking of field notes.

As a complete observer, sitting as unobtrusively as possible in the classroom, field notes were written to document aspects of the observed lessons that could not be captured by audiotape. Field notes included organisational and structural details such as seating layout, teacher and pupil movement from one activity to another and the nature of the interaction (group, class, individual). Details pertaining to teachers’ use of and reference to learning intentions, success criteria and exemplars during lessons were also recorded, as was students’ use of these resources. The nature and the length of the opportunities provided to students to make evaluative judgements and productive decisions either with the teacher or with each other were also noted (Appendix O).

Studying participants as a complete observer or on an intermittent basis may contribute to mistaken perceptions on the part of the researcher and may also lead to reactivity on the part of those being observed (Lee, 2000). A common, although not a universal outcome of observation can be that the presence of the observer leads to reaction on the part of those being observed, resulting in atypical rather than typical behaviour being displayed. Levels of reactivity can be reduced, however, if positive relationships are established between the researcher and her participants and if observation is prolonged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In the current study, a rapport had been established with the three case study participants during the phase one interviews. This rapport was built upon prior
to commencing observations. Each teacher was visited in her classroom prior to the observations and during this time procedural information was shared and discussed including the researcher’s role as complete observer. It was stressed that during the observations it was hoped to see typical occurrences not a ‘special show’. As already explained, the context for the observations was a written language unit comprised of between nine to twelve lessons, taught over a three to four week period. While it would have been ideal to observe the unit in its entirety, the researcher’s employment circumstances prevented this happening. Thus, to meet the demands of prolonged engagement and persistent observation strategic decisions had to be made in regard to the selection of the lessons to be observed.

Again, notions central to Sadler’s (1989) theoretical argument informed this decision-making. While Sadler argued that the three conditions for effective feedback should happen simultaneously not sequentially, information gleaned from the phase one interviews indicated that the focus of teachers’ practice would very probably vary at different points in time during the unit. At the beginning of the unit the focal point would be on sharing the goals of learning with students and developing their understanding of what constituted successful performance. It was also hoped that at this time insight would be gained as to how students were involved in the creation and development of goals and criteria as this was a practice that these teachers had talked about during their interviews. As the unit progressed it was presumed that the focus would be on the continued development of students’ knowledge of successful learning and on the development of their evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise during the writing process. Near the end of the unit it was anticipated that teachers would provide students with further opportunities to make evaluative judgements about their own and others’ completed work. Based on this information the decision was made to observe two lessons at the beginning of a unit, two at midpoint and one at its completion.

With one exception (Kate) each teacher was observed five times. Six observations were undertaken in Kate’s classroom because one lesson was cut
short unexpectedly due to students’ participation in a school sports day practice. Each of the observations lasted for the duration of the lesson, which was anytime between 40 and 55 minutes. To be as unobtrusive as possible, consideration was given as to where to sit in the classroom, what to wear and how to respond to students if they initiated contact during the observations. Prior to the start of the observations, a brief explanation about the reasons for the researcher’s presence and the focus of the research was given to students in each class. While a conscious decision was made not to intrude on students’ individual or group work, eavesdropping as a listening technique was utilised (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). Eavesdropping provided some insight into the learning related nature of some of the unsolicited talk that occurred between students as they engaged in their productive work.

Documents, an essential source of case study information (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003), were collected during the observational phase. These included each teacher’s written language unit plan, the learning intentions and success criteria developed, the models used and the handouts and worksheets given to the students. Each document was numbered and dated to ensure it could be matched with the relevant lesson transcript and associated field notes.

**Piloting the Observations**

As with the semi-structured interviews, trials were undertaken prior to data collection to test out the logistics of collecting data in this manner and to determine whether there may be features that should be attended to during an observation that had not already been anticipated. Two teachers, recommended to the researcher because of their expertise and experience, but who were not part of the study, generously allowed the researcher into their classrooms. As a result of these observations a number of minor changes were made. While originally it was intended to record field notes under two columns headed ‘teacher action’ and ‘student action’, the trials proved this to be cumbersome. Hence, the final versions of the field notes were recorded in an unstructured way. A notebook, one for each teacher, was ruled page by page with a large margin left on each page to record analytic memos.
(Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). The other amendment made as a result of the trials was the purchase of a stronger, more sensitive lapel microphone for teachers to wear to ensure that student responses could be captured more distinctively.

Post Observation Semi-Structured Interviews
A shortcoming of the complete-observer role is that the researcher may fail to understand fully the perspectives of the participants. To overcome this potential flaw, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each teacher at the completion of the observations. At this final stage, the interviews were aimed at probing teachers' intentions, pedagogical decisions and embedded beliefs. During the observations when field notes had been taken, analytic memos written in the form of questions (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973) were recorded as prompts to aid the construction of the post observation interview schedules. While these schedules were specific to each teacher, questions were formulated under the same six headings: contextual information; learning intentions and success criteria; exemplars and models; conferencing; making judgements; and concluding information (Appendix P). Again, with permission, interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and sent to participants for verification and/or amendment. Mindful of the difficulties individuals face when asked to remember and talk about their taken for granted, habituated practices (Psathas, 1995; Rodriguez & Ryave, 2002), each interview was conducted as soon as possible after the final observation.

Analysis of Data
Hermeneutics and Phenomenology
Two theoretical lenses associated with interpretive inquiry were employed to interpret and explain the subjective meanings and actions of the participants in the current research: hermeneutics and phenomenology. While each emphasises the importance of subjective meaning and interpretive understanding, they differ in the assumptions held about how understanding can be constructed, viewed and analysed. Aspects of each lens were utilised to
ensure a deep and systematic representation of the phenomenon under investigation.

Hermeneutic philosophy, the science of interpretation and explanation (Bauman, 1978), emphasises the importance of language in the construction of meaning. Originally, hermeneutic theory was concerned with the interpretation of texts and how these reflected the worldview of society at the time of their production. Latterly, hermeneutics has been extended to include the interpretation of social action (Schwandt, 2000) and has led to the notion that teaching is a form of text to be described and analysed for the meaning it reveals (Smyth, 1989). Hermeneutic theory provided a lens through which critical episodes could be analysed to illuminate and give insights into the subjective understandings of the research participants. It informed the analysis of data collected from the teaching-learning episodes and the interviews.

While phenomenology also aims to identify and describe the everyday and subjective experiences of participants, it cannot be considered a single unified philosophical standpoint (Schwandt, 2001). The work of one particular phenomenologist, Alfred Schultz, has been of interest and relevance to the current research. Schultz, in combining the works of the German philosopher Husserl, the founder of phenomenological inquiry and the sociologist Weber moved the focus from individual subjectivity to an emphasis on social patterns of action and meaning (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Using the lens of social phenomenology, developed by Schultz, was considered particularly appropriate for the current study because it drew attention to how common sense knowledge, taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and ideas about feedback had been socially constructed and disseminated.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a systematic process that imposes order on the descriptive data collected during fieldwork. It involves the breaking down of data into meaningful and manageable units of analysis; a synthesis of these units and a reconstruction of the data to reveal what is important and what has been
learned. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) have conceptualised data analysis as a “process that can be broken down into stages” rather than “one vast interpretive effort” (p. 157). Within qualitative inquiry, approaches to analysis can differ quite markedly (Ezzy 2002). Likewise, the point in time when analysis occurs can vary. In some projects analysis follows data collection, in others data collection and analysis occur concurrently. Notwithstanding the argument that there is no one right way to undertake analysis (Punch, 2005), whatever its form or timing, analysis must be informed by scholarly rigour and discipline (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Silverman, 2000).

For the current project an eclectic approach was employed. Advocating for an eclectic approach to analysis, Ezzy (2002) has argued that this will result in stronger analysis and interpretation:

“A mixture of practices is an art that results in research that is both evocative, in the sense it provides new insight, and convincing because it rests on systematic research” (p. 82).

Data analysis was informed by three recognised approaches, namely, thematic analysis, the constant comparison method and discourse analysis (Ezzy, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The processes and procedures associated with each of the three approaches were used in a reflexive and flexible manner. Sampling decisions necessitated a preliminary analysis of the data collected during phase one, prior to the commencement of phase two. A fully-fledged analysis of data collected from the two phases occurred once data collection was complete.

A common feature of qualitative research is its inductive approach to analysis although the degree to which induction is used can vary (Ezzy, 2002; Merriam, 1998). While it is often thought that grounded theory is purely inductive, Glaser (1978) has argued that a more sophisticated form of grounded theory is one that mixes both inductive and deductive approaches. Ezzy (2002), elaborating on the work of Glaser, points out that existing theory can sensitise the researcher to “orientating questions that need to be examined
during the research" (p. 12) as long as the use of deductively derived theory does not constrain what is noticed.

Open, Axial and Selective Coding

The coding and re-ordering of data and the interrogation and communication of developing theoretical ideas enables the researcher to disassemble and reassemble the data in a systematic manner (Burgess, 1984; Ezzy, 2002; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). In the current research, while it cannot be claimed that grounded theory has been used, particular strategies associated with this approach have been utilised. The constant comparison method, along with open, axial and selective coding strategies (Strauss, 1987), has been used to disaggregate, compare and contrast and categorise the data in a systematic manner. As already mentioned, a well-respected, comprehensive theory of formative assessment and feedback (Sadler, 1989) informed this study at different stages of the research process. The purpose of using Sadler’s framework was not to test his theory. Rather it was used as lens through which teachers’ feedback beliefs, understandings and practice could be explored and illuminated. As such, the framework provided some of the emergent categories used during the process of open coding. Concepts central to the feedback process such as ‘communicating the goals of learning’ and ‘making qualitative judgements’ became categories and were used as substantive levers (Neuman, 2003) to investigate the data. Mindful of need to pay attention to the voice of the participants, other categories were created inductively. For example, ‘conferencing with students’, a practice not mentioned in Sadler’s theory, emerged out of the data and subsequently became a category.

Open coding took a number of forms. In the first instance, all data sources were read and re-read in a detailed manner. Key words and phrases were highlighted. Events, behaviours, activities, issues and problems were also noted in an attempt to ‘break open’ the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the process of open coding, the notes made were sometimes little more than descriptive. They did not move far beyond paraphrasing the participant’s voice. At other times, notes involved a first level of inference.
and were akin to analytic memos as they indicated possible theoretical ideas embedded in the data.

A phenomological approach recommends that data be analysed individually and collectively, simultaneously, in order to maximise understanding of the phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). Hence, as part of the open coding process, an individual profile for each of the phase one and two participants was developed. Using the data from the semi-structured interviews, field notes and collected documents (and in phase two the audio-taped lessons) meant that a holistic picture of each participant was gained. In phase one, individual profiles were developed around the concepts and categories that were beginning to emerge from the data. Appendix R provides an example to show how typically a concept was developed and, in turn, related to individual teachers. In addition to the researcher’s commentary, each profile contained key words and phrases used by the participant, supported by chunks of raw data in the form of direct quotes. In phase two, summaries took a different and lengthier format. Each of the three cases was written up one by one in a descriptive manner. Integrated with this description were data levered out of the post observation interviews about each teacher’s explanations and justifications for practice (Appendix S).

Moving toward looking at the data collectively, computer developed grids specific to an emerging category were developed (Appendix T). Organising the data in this manner highlighted the broad similarities and differences among the participants (Eisenhardt, 2002). Undertaking this activity facilitated the move from open to axial coding.

Axial coding is the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions. The way in which categories "cross cut and link" at both a descriptive and conceptual level (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124) becomes the focus of the coding endeavor. Following the advice of Strauss and Corbin, who have emphasised the need to continually "mine the data" (p. 65) so that each category is developed to its fullest "explanatory
questions concerning when, where, why, who and how were asked. To further stimulate thinking about the relationship between categories and their properties and the possible linkages between concepts and themes (Neuman, 2003), further questions were posed about causes and consequences, conditions and interactions, strategies and processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Subsequently, categories and subcategories were reorganised by theme, concept or relationship through the use of mind-maps and grids (Appendix U).

Selective coding is the process of integrating and refining categories so that a central or core category is established, representing the main theme of the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). At this point in time, Sadler’s conceptual framework (Sadler, 1989) was once again utilised as a deductive tool as it was felt that the framework had the analytic power to pull categories together to form an explanatory whole. What the framework could not do, however, was account for the considerable variation within categories. Hence, the use of an inductive approach in the development of central categories (Ezzy, 2002). As has been established in the literature, the identification of core categories is a difficult task for the emergent researcher (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) at a formal level with the academic supervisors and at an informal level, with several professional colleagues, aided the clarification process with reference to these categories. Responding to challenging questions and being asked to defend analyses and produce evidence in regard to the substantive arguments underpinning the research all helped to clarify core categories.

Consistent with recommended practice; frequent recourse was made in an iterative manner to the original data at the stage of selective coding (Ezzy, 2002; Flick, 2002). During this ‘mining’ of the data, examples of the themes and concepts were extracted, to illustrate and validate a core category and to strengthen, wherever possible, under-developed categories. Simultaneously, extraneous concepts that seemed to contribute little to a core category were eliminated.
Discourse Analysis

In addition, the processes and procedures associated with one of two, broad discourse traditions informed the analysis of data. That is the discourse tradition rooted in European philosophy and cultural thinking, strongly influenced by philosophers such as Husserl, Hegel and Heidegger and, in more recent times, Foucault (Maclure, 2003). This is the type of discourse analysis derived from European social philosophy and cultural analyses that aims to demonstrate how institutions, practices and individuals are constructed through the workings of a set of discourses (Maclure, 2003; Potter & Wetherell, 1994). As mentioned in Chapter Four, Sadler (1989) re-conceptualised the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students in the processes of formative assessment and feedback. Advancing the concept of connoisseurship (Polanyi, 1962), Sadler contended that teachers must ‘download’ their ‘guild’ knowledge, thus enabling students to acquire the evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise necessary if they were to become insiders in learning and assessment. Given the nature of Sadler’s argument, the European type of discourse analysis seemed particularly appropriate. Its use facilitated the examination of how feedback was used in the promotion of the learning and in how the roles of the teachers and the students and the accepted norms of behaviour were constructed through both language in use and practice. For example, in both phases of data collection, the transcripts of teachers’ interviews and classroom observations were examined to take note of how power relations were constructed between teacher and students and how these relations worked to constrain students, assigning them an outsider position or, alternatively, enabled students to attain insider status (Appendix V).

Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the Current Research

Within the methodological literature, considerable debate has occurred in regard to how qualitative inquiry can be evaluated. Significantly, no agreement has been reached with some writers arguing that, because of its nature, there can be no defensible criteria for judging the quality of qualitative inquiry (Smith & Heshusius, 1986). Others (for example, Hammnersley,
1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) have sought to reformulate the traditional criteria of validity and reliability to reflect better the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning qualitative inquiry.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have argued that the findings of qualitative inquiry are only worthy of attention if those findings have been deemed to be trustworthy. Trustworthiness, in their opinion, can be determined by applying four evaluative criteria to the research:

- **Credibility** – is there a commitment on the part of the researcher to establish the ‘truth’?
- **Confirmability** – are there strong links between the data collected, the analysis of data and the claims and inferences made?
- **Transferability** – does the research provide a sufficiently thick and rich description of relevant evidence?
- **Dependability** – has the researcher demonstrated her reflexivity and responsiveness to the vagaries of the field?

**Credibility**

Credibility is associated with establishing the ‘truth value’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the research findings. Prolonged engagement in the field, a commitment to persistent observation and the use of triangulation are essential in qualitative inquiry if the researcher is to better understand the culture of those being studied, test for misinformation and distortion and build trust between researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the current research various strategies were employed to ensure that plausible and credible evidence was gained.

The use of semi structured interviews during phase one allowed the teachers to articulate their beliefs and understandings and share their perceptions of practice. In phase two, field observations, incorporating the audiotaping of selected lessons and collection of relevant artefacts, captured the complexity of teachers’ classroom based feedback practice. Furthermore, the use of multiple observations at strategic points during a unit helped the researcher to
determine the salient features of teachers' feedback practice. The decision to observe at the commencement of, during and at the end of the unit satisfied the need for information to be gathered at "different points in the temporal cycles occurring in the setting" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 198). As already mentioned, the use of post observation interviews addressed the potential limitations of the complete observer role. This particular set of data gathering methods illustrates a commitment to persistent observation and prolonged engagement.

Triangulation, or the testing of one source of evidence against another to both verify findings and strip away alternative explanations, is a necessary strategy for increasing the trustworthiness of research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to offset threats to plausibility (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). In this study methodological triangulation was used in relation to the articulations and practices of one particular group of participants. As such the biases that stem from the use of one single approach to data collection were counteracted and ensured that flaws in one method were offset by the strengths of alternative methods (Lee, 2000). As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) have argued, "If diverse kinds of data lead to the same conclusion, one can be more confident in the conclusion" (p. 198).

To counteract researcher effects the researcher must not only recognise the reflexive nature of social research but must also employ a reflexive approach throughout the research process. The researcher's conscious self-understanding of the inquiry process must be applied in two ways: the first, to test out the testimony of the respondents and the second to test out their own activities (Hawe, 2000). In the current research the use of methodological triangulation (field observations, semi structured interviews, collection of relevant documentation), across time (at strategic points throughout the written language unit) and space (the three teachers’ classrooms) ensured the credibility of findings. The use of strategies such as, participant confirmation (Carr & Kemmis, 1983) and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) promoted researcher reflexivity.
While each strategy has its own internal problems (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) both participant confirmation and peer debriefing were considered to be valuable tools to enhance the trustworthiness of the current research. Participant confirmation (Carr & Kemmis, 1983) was used as an additional source of data and insight to check out the interpretations and constructions of the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). It was sought formally through the provision of transcripts of raw data, and the preliminary findings for participants' consideration, amendment, comment and/or verification.

Peer debriefing is another strategy that contributes to the credibility of an investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by drawing attention to the possible biases that might occur in the analysis of data. Peer debriefing with academic supervisors, and with a colleague who was thoroughly conversant with the literature and research about feedback, was undertaken throughout the research process. In the first instance engagement in a peer debriefing process allowed for analyses to be made explicit and to be defended. Secondly, it facilitated the consideration of alternative interpretations and perspectives as analyses were challenged.

Regular meetings with a critical friend, also enrolled in doctoral study, provided another opportunity to outline, explain, debate and defend the research process, interpretations and constructions. These discussions proved beneficial as they allowed the dependability of ways of proceeding to be checked as well as providing consensual validation (Schwandt, 2001). At times a lack of consensual validation led the researcher to reconsider interpretations and constructions.

**Confirmability**

Studying individuals in their natural settings places the researcher in a central position within the research process. A potential threat to the trustworthiness or plausibility of the research is the effect of researcher subjectivity on data and findings (Hawe, 2000). Therefore the research process must be made explicit so that the links between the data, analyses and inferences made are
clear (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). In the current research a detailed explanation has been given in regard to the selection of participants, the data collection methods employed, the methods and modes of analysis used and how conclusions were reached. Supporting evidence in the form of extensive appendices is also provided to exemplify further the nature of the participants, fieldwork and analyses. Together, these sources of information illustrate that the findings have not been unduly influenced by the researcher’s biases, idiosyncratic perspectives or motivations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability
The aim of interpretive, qualitative inquiry is to develop an understanding of individual cases rather than universal laws or generalisations (Candy, 1989). For those working outside of the parameters of interpretive, qualitative inquiry, the size of the sample populations and the methods used to gain the samples for each phase of the present study may be considered a limitation. In both instances the realities associated with finding volunteers to participate in a study and dealing with participants who needed to withdraw from the research at particular points in time had to be dealt with in the best possible manner. It is recognised that the sample only represents itself (Delamont, 1992; Punch, 1995) and thus no claims are made in regard to the generalisability of the findings. Furthermore, the possible biases inherent in the sample have been revealed to the reader through the reporting of the sampling procedures in an open and honest manner.

In interpretive, qualitative inquiry what is of importance is the need to provide a sufficiently thick and rich description, grounded in contextual experience, so that the reader can decide what is of relevance to them (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The provision of a rich description, with extensive use of the participants’ voices can demonstrate the links between the data collected, the analysis of data and the claims and inferences made. Rich descriptions are provided in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. By paying attention to the particular, readers can make their own judgements about the transferability of the findings and the conclusions (Merriam, 1998).
Dependability

The dependability criterion of trustworthiness is concerned with the consistency of the results obtained from the data (Merriam, 1998). The responsibility lies with the researcher to provide a chain of evidence between the data collected and the conclusions drawn. In regard to the current research, records of the research process have been kept in a systematic and accessible manner thus providing an audit trail (Bryman, 2001). Establishing an audit trail has served a dual purpose. It has facilitated the researcher’s reflexivity throughout the research process (Delamont, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For example, throughout the duration of the research, emerging insights, analytic memos and areas that needed to be explored further were noted down in research notebooks. Secondly, establishing a permanent record of each aspect of the research process attests to the use of dependable procedures and the generation of credible and confirmable findings should a third party wish to examine this record.

An important aspect of the audit trail is a statement of the theoretical framework that frames a study (Schwandt, 2001). Chapter Four provides an explanation of Sadler’s (1989) theory of formative assessment and feedback and outlines the impact and use of this theory in the field. It concludes with a justification for the selection of Sadler’s theory as the major framework informing the study. In the current chapter attention has been paid to describing the analysis of data permitting the reader to understand how the data were coded, recoded and analysed. Overall, the detail provided in the current chapter, together with the evidence provided in the appendices and in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, enables the reader to trace the path from data to conclusions.

The Next Chapter

In Chapter Six the first set of research findings is reported. Structured under four themes, this chapter reports on the universal conceptions held by the teachers interviewed in phase one of the research, and the self-reported practices they have in common.
CHAPTER SIX

Teachers’ Understandings of Feedback and Perceptions of Practice: The Nature, Place and Role of Feedback in Learning and Teaching

Within the interpretive paradigm it is assumed that reality is constructed and represented through individual interpretation and meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, in the current research, there was an expectation that teachers’ articulations would reveal a range of conceptions and beliefs about feedback. Also, it was anticipated that teachers would identify an array of feedback-related practices and strategies. The challenge, in the first instance, has been to understand teachers’ individual interpretations and practices. In the second instance it has been to report these in a way that is both representative of those constructions and interpretations, and meaningful to the reader.

In Chapters Six and Seven data generated from the twenty individual, semi-structured interviews are presented. In giving ‘voice’ to teachers’ descriptions and explanations, the two chapters are organised to highlight the similarities among teachers in regard to their articulations about feedback and secondly, to underscore the differences. Chapter Six is restricted to a description of the similarities: the universal conceptions held by teachers, and the self-reported practices they have in common. Universal conceptions and common practices are those mentioned by all teachers. In presenting these findings it is acknowledged that some teachers made a passing mention of a particular point whereas others provided more elaborate, detailed descriptions and explanations.

Informed by Sadler’s theoretical framework, four themes common across all teachers have been levered from the data and are reported in this chapter. These are: feedback is the link between learning and teaching; feedback is comprised of three inter-connected elements; feedback requires teachers to
draw upon a range of knowledge and experience; and feedback involves communicating learning expectations to students.

**Feedback is the Link Between Learning and Teaching**
All teachers talked about feedback occurring within the context of learning and teaching. The belief that feedback, as a strategy, was an embedded aspect of teachers’ practice was commonplace.

**Feedback Supports Learning**
Without exception, teachers linked feedback with learning. Feedback was seen as part of the learning process. It could be used to support learning and to help effect improvement. Sometimes, the belief that feedback worked in this manner was expressed in a generalised way:

*Well definitely to support and improve learning I think that is the key* (Meg, Int);

*So that children can improve and learn* (Evie, Int);

*They improve make progress* (Lynda, Int).

More typically, this belief was implicit within teachers’ more complex explanations of how feedback aids the learning process:

*That’s the way I help children learn. There’s no better way to me. That’s the whole deal … the best way for learning for me is when you see a child individually doesn’t know something and it’s that aha moment that you can give because you know what comes next and you just help them that little bit, that tiny next step and then they understand and they can go further on their own and you can help them go further* (Sela, Int);

*The idea is to take the next step in that learning … and the next step in that learning is to improve. For example, in writing they might have been writing something that’s very dull and boring*
and they might be using like the dog yowled outside or something. So you might be looking at the description of the dog. ‘So what type of dog was it?’ So they’re adding more adjectives into it or they might be starting to think about the verbs, starting to think about adverbs to actually create a stronger picture in their writing (Gem, Int).

Teachers’ explanations of how feedback could support and improve learning also revealed that they had taken on board much of the discourse that pervades both the formative assessment literature and associated policy documents. Specific terms and phrases, drawn from the literature and current policy, were very much part of teachers’ everyday language. Frequently teachers talked about feedback, or “feed-forward” (Krystal, Int), as a strategy to advance learning. As they explained, feedback was able to set a new direction for learners through the identification of the “next step” (Priscilla, Int) in the learning process. Information about the next step in the learning process enabled learners to know “where they need to be headed next” (Meg, Int) or “where to go from here” (Ree, Int). Feedback helped learners take action by indicating “how to move forward to a desired outcome” (Ree, Int). Teachers perceived that feedback assisted learning by either “giving them [the learners] the steps or strategies” needed (Meg, Int) or by talking about “the things they [learners] can improve on” (Sunita, Int).

**Feedback is Part of Teaching**

Feedback was also linked with teaching. It was considered “a large part of the classroom operation” (Marama, Int). As Mary (Int) explained, “feedback has been something that teachers do, have done for a long time”. Likewise Patricia (Int) noted, “I’ve always given feedback”. Teachers believed that feedback was something that “happened continually” (Meg, Int) as it was embedded into teaching in an “ongoing way” (Patricia, Int). Feedback was sometimes given at the start of a lesson. It continued throughout the course of a lesson as learners were engaged in an activity and, at times, was provided at the conclusion of a lesson:
You can't say it's just at the beginning or it's at the end of the lesson. I think it's onward going (Gem, Int);

I do it throughout the lesson, sometimes even at the beginning of a lesson (Priscilla, Int).

Oral feedback was seen as a natural part of the everyday interaction and information exchange that occurred between teachers and students. It was given "a lot of times during the day" (Carol, Int). Teachers believed that their feedback was embedded in the talk and discussions that arose out of various teaching / learning activities:

So feedback for me is more of that interaction one on one as opposed to a lot of written feedback ... So I probably use the oral feedback more (Marama, Int);

... there's not a lot of written stuff that we do anymore. A lot of it is discussion and working together ... so I guess the feedback is oral ... a lot of it would be oral at the moment" (Lynda, Int).

Through attending to, appraising and responding to learners, teachers used feedback as a link between learning and teaching.

Feedback is Comprised of Three Inter-Connected Elements

Attending to a Learner's Production

Teachers talked of giving feedback when they noticed and recognised something of significance. As Sela noted:

It's the response that I give to the child when I've observed or noticed something that is happening in the teaching and learning process that I feel they need to make some form of development and so I'll make a choice about how I intervene (Sela, Int).

Teachers indicated that they noticed and responded to learners when misunderstandings and misconceptions became evident. In particular, teachers
responded when they perceived a need common to a number of learners. In
these instances the audience for the feedback was the whole class or a group:

*I've noticed that a lot of children don't understand the difference
between a negative terminal and a positive terminal ... So we did
actually stop as a class right then* (Sela, Int).

From their descriptions of practice, much of what teachers noticed happened
spontaneously as they interacted with learners. Due to the unpredictability of
students’ responses, feedback was likened to "running commentaries"
(Priscilla, Int), given "on the run" (Gem, Int).

Making an Appraisal of the Learner's Productive Effort
Teachers provided a number of examples, where they appeared to use their
tacit knowledge as a reference point to make an appraisal of learners’
productive efforts. Take for example the case of Susanna, a specialist art
teacher. In making a judgement about students’ work, she uses her knowledge
of proportion and balance to inform her appraisal. A comparison of the
learners’ work against this point of reference indicates to her that more work is
needed to achieve the desired outcome. Given her knowledge of the
importance of proportion to the overall quality of an artefact, she makes the
decision to respond. She makes explicit reference to what is wrong with
learners’ current work:

*Across the class, if I see something that is a common thread like for
example the other day they were doing cats and a lot of them were
getting the ear proportions all wrong so I stopped the whole class
and say it as a general comment* (Susanna, Int).

Responding and Taking Action
While the act of attending to the learner's production was often spontaneous,
the action teachers took as a result of noticing the significance of something
was seen as deliberate. Feedback was given to take advantage of the
"teachable moment", the time when a student(s) would benefit from the
particular feedback intervention:
It's like a teachable moment really isn't it? ... A deliberate act of teaching, so it's something you might have picked up on the run ... so it's not planned for but it happens on the run (Gem, Int).

Kate for example talked about how she intervened as students were engaged in their productive efforts, focusing on particular aspects of their work that warranted further attention:

... It's like have a look here. Now are you sure you've checked that line? Well hang on there's a few capitals missed. Can you see those? Where do you use capitals? (Kate, Int).

Teachers believed that timing was important in taking action. The closer feedback could be given to the actual learning event, the greater its perceived impact:

I think the more powerful is at the time of learning or very soon afterwards (Meg, Int);

I try and make it as instant as possible. I think with littlies you've got to do it then and there because if they write their story and then you say Friday's our time, its gone, so I try and do it instantly (Tara, Int);

I think straight away on the spot if you can. You capture the essence of the learning right then and there (Evie, Int);

I think the feedback, it's no good doing something and then feeding back weeks after they [learners] have done it because it's gone it's lost, its moved on. So I think feedback as quickly as possible is the most beneficial (Kate, Int).

The Concurrent Use of the Three Elements of Feedback

The following extracts, taken from the interviews with Sela, Jennifer, and Ree provide insight into teachers' perceptions of how they use feedback to effect
improvement. Further, they illustrate the complexity of the feedback process. In each case, during students’ productive activity, the teacher describes how she notices, in a spontaneous way something that is considered significant, makes an appraisal and in turn formulates a deliberate response.

In the first extract Sela is talking about a classroom incident where she gave feedback to a Year 8 student who had been working on a poster presentation. Sela’s description of the incident illustrates the way in which she makes a decision about a student’s readiness to move on. While she acknowledges what has been achieved, the student’s attention is drawn to a new skill set, yet to be mastered but necessary, if the work is to meet the desired standard. In doing so a fresh focus for future learning is established:

*You try to give children an indication of where to go next. So try to say 'okay you've really got a handle on tinting and toning. ... Can we have a discussion about how to do shading and shaping?' You've got two parts to it really. You've done well here, and now where are you going to go?* (Sela, Int).

In the following extract, Jennifer is describing an episode where she was not convinced that certain children had produced their ‘best’ work. In making this judgement Jennifer, almost concurrently, decided to take action. She decided that the children needed some feedback to focus their attention on what could be improved in the piece of writing:

*We’ve just finished doing onomatopoeia poems where they did space journeys and quite a few of the kids went from blast off to landing on the moon so I made the inquiry – ’Well before you landed on the moon you had to have travelled through space. What did you encounter? Did you have to go through an asteroid bar? Were any comets going past? And as the rocket was landing I have no evidence of what trauma the rocket was experiencing as it was landing’. So the kids had to go back and go through that process ... I just bring them back and even if it means they sit with me ... I talk them through it* (Jennifer, Int).
Jennifer’s feedback, in the form of questions and prompts was intended to stimulate students’ thinking about the changes that could be made to their particular piece. Following the discussion, Jennifer expected students to action the necessary changes, thus providing them with the opportunity to move their work closer to the desired performance.

In the final scenario, Ree, a food and fabric technology teacher, is recounting a situation where she responded to learners because she had identified a particular weakness in their attempt to produce the desired outcome. Attending to the features of the work, and comparing these features to a standard she held in a tacit form, she felt it necessary to indicate to the group that their attempts had fallen short of the expected outcome:

> While they’re actually doing the task, if it was for instance creaming the butter and sugar, I would move around all the groups and say ‘oh that’s really good. Are you supposed to have those lumps in there though? What do you think you can do about that?’ And [then I’d] ask another group and say ‘remember when you had those lumps, you go and tell John how that might work or give him some suggestions’ (Ree, Int).

Drawing the group’s attention to the shortcomings of the performance was the first step in the feedback process. Ree then decided to offer some remediation advice with the intention of moving students’ current performance closer to the one desired. Rather than simply giving this advice, students from another group are asked to offer possible suggestions as to what could be done to reach the expected outcome.

**Feedback Requires Teachers to Draw Upon a Range of Knowledge and Experience**

**The Intellectual and Experiential Resources Pertinent to the Feedback Act**

The aforementioned extended examples also illustrate the intellectual and experiential resources teachers draw on as they engage in the feedback act. In each of the examples, teachers, in making a judgement about a learner’s
productive effort, seemingly brought knowledge of appropriate task related standards to the situation. Students’ work was appraised against a point of reference. Each teacher appeared to have a generalised set of expectations in regard to the desired outcome. Based on her experience as a food and fabric technology teacher, Ree had a picture in her mind of the expected outcome. Her judgment about the students’ efforts was made in regard to this and her feedback was reflective of this knowledge. In the case of Jennifer, she too appeared to draw on tacit knowledge, not only of what she expected as an outcome but also in regard to the standards expected from students of a particular age level. An additional point of reference was also evoked. Knowledge of individual students’ previous performances and their capabilities were called to mind. She tailored her feedback comments in regard to this knowledge.

In each of the examples, through attending to specific features of students’ productive efforts, feedback was framed in terms of the work produced. Appearing to draw on their tacit knowledge of what would be an appropriate way in which to help students to effect improvement, Jennifer and Ree also described how they tried to elicit “revealing and pertinent responses from students” (Sadler, 1998, p. 80). Rather than simply telling students what to do to make their productive efforts closer to the desired standard, each seemed to shape her feedback comments in a way that enabled students to generate ideas about how work could be improved.

The recognition of a particular weakness in a student’s productive effort was seemingly matched by the desire to help the student effect improvement. The teacher accepted the responsibility to help students develop, improve and do better. Teachers’ feedback was apparently intended to serve as the conduit between the learner and the body of content and skills to be acquired. It was intended to function as the link between teaching and learning.
The Influence of Intellectual and Experiential Resources on the Feedback Act

While all teachers considered feedback a fundamental part of teaching and learning, there was an acknowledgement that their feedback practice was affected by the curriculum context. None believed that their feedback practice was consistent across all curriculum areas:

*I like to think I do. I know I do in English and I know I do in Maths, I probably think I am [giving feedback] ... I do with my reading, my writing, my handwriting ... I do it with PE ... but yeah probably with the topic stuff like the Music, Science that sort of stuff I probably think I do, but I don’t* (Tara, Int).

Feedback practice was seen to be variable, both in terms of quantity and quality. Not surprisingly, teachers felt they gave more feedback in core subjects such as English and Mathematics than in other curriculum areas. As they noted, these are areas of the curriculum that are given a great deal of attention during a school day, hence the quantity of the feedback given:

*A lot more in English than anything else. And in Maths, I would do in every subject but I wouldn’t be specific or detailed in many of the others* (Mary, Int);

*Quite a lot of the day you do big chunks of literacy and you do big chunks of numeracy so I’m teaching that a lot more, so I feel more comfortable. ... Our topic work you do a lot less* (Tara, Int);

*It happens in other areas but because I’m not teaching them as often as I am in core subjects the feedback still occurs, but not as often because I’m not putting time into it. ... So you do it but it’s not as often as the literacy and numeracy because I’m doing those three hours a day* (Jennifer, Int).
Additionally, teachers believed that the feedback provided in core curriculum areas, was often qualitatively different. From their perspectives they gave clearer, more specific and targeted feedback in these areas:

*Writing and reading it seems much more easy to give a lot more targeted feedback because your learning intentions are so specific for each group, whereas in PE, they tend to be more global (Meg, Int).*

The perceived quality of the feedback given in other curriculum areas was very much individual to each teacher. While teachers noted a discrepancy in practice, the reasons for this were not clearly evident. Although some made specific mention of the intellectual and experiential resources they drew upon in order to provide what they considered to be quality feedback, others only alluded to these resources.

Gem was one of the teachers who made explicit mention of the various knowledge bases that teachers draw upon when engaged in giving feedback:

*Well you have to have knowledge of the learner and you have to have your professional knowledge, knowledge of the curriculum, or knowledge of the particular, for example reading* (Gem, Int).

While other teachers also made reference to different knowledge bases that informed the nature of the feedback they gave, no one base was referred to consistently by all.

Some teachers made reference to the importance of knowing where learners were at, what their needs were and where they should be headed. Such knowledge was seen as helping them give targeted and useful feedback:

*Knowing what I am doing better in the way that I know where the kids are at and I know where I want them to be. So probably I'm much more comfortable in knowing that in my head better* (Tara, Int);
I know exactly, today I’m working with this group and we’re working on this particular focus. It’s when the skill is focused, that is when the feedback is purposeful (Evie, Int).

Knowledge of the curriculum was considered important by several teachers if they were to give feedback:

I think a teacher’s understanding of the curriculum is very important. So if the teacher’s knowledge is quite well rounded then it’s a lot easier (Meg, Int).

However, when these teachers talked of knowledge of the curriculum it was difficult to ascertain what meaning they ascribed to the term. Priscilla, for example appeared to refer to what had to be learned:

I think there does need to be that knowledge of what it is, what are the steps towards meeting that learning intention. What do the children have to know? What do they have to be able to do? (Priscilla, Int).

For Sela, curriculum knowledge enabled her to identify the next step in learning:

You know what comes next and you just help them that little bit, that tiny next step and then they understand and they can go further on their own or you can help them go further (Sela, Int).

Gem drew attention to the fact that without curriculum knowledge teachers could not provide students with quality feedback. There was the danger that teachers would fail to “broaden their [students’] thinking” (Gem, Int). Priscilla, however, highlighted the possibility that teachers’ knowledge was incomplete. The possession of knowledge, specific to a particular curriculum or an area of that curriculum, was for some teachers “unknown or a bit hard to pin down” (Priscilla, Int). In a similar vein Gem brought attention to the difficulty teachers faced given they were expected to teach a raft of subjects within and across seven essential learning areas. As she commented:
It's very hard because we're actually trying to be a master of all trades and we're not. We're trying to be an expert in Dance, in Drama, in Maths, in Visual Language and the list goes on. We can't be experts in everything we do because we are not masters of all trades (Gem, Int).

"Teacher knowledge of the topic" (Meg, Int) within a curriculum area was identified as an important resource to draw upon in regard to the feedback process. Alluding to the fact that their topic knowledge may not have been as substantial as necessary, several teachers talked of the need to do professional reading around a topic so they would know where they should be headed in regard to students' learning:

If you were doing a Science topic that you didn't really know much about you've got to do some background reading to know where you are heading" (Audrey, Int);

If you ask me about Science I'd have to delve for three hours into the curriculum and several supporting books and then go and read up about electricity as well. You can't gloss over things. You've got to really know what you're doing so that is a difficulty (Mary, Int);

... depending on the Science topic that could be a lot harder to give feedback (Audrey, Int).

Audrey, however, was the only teacher to make specific mention of subject matter knowledge:

I think you've got to know your subject matter and just knowing where you are going, what's the point of doing this and where are you going to go next. I think that is the biggest thing (Audrey, Int).

In regard to 'topic work' a number of teachers confessed that in areas such as social studies and science the feedback they gave lacked clarity. As Sharon
explained "it [feedback] doesn't come quite so clearly". In part, this lack of clarity appeared related to the fact that, as Audrey and Mary explained, teachers were unsure where students' learning was headed. This was confounded by the fact that the individual needs of learners in these areas were less apparent to teachers. As a consequence, feedback lacked focus - it was "more airy fairy" (Audrey, Int) and directed towards the class:

*There is grouping within Reading and Writing and Maths [based on their ability] whereas in something like Art you're doing it as a whole class activity* (Meg, Int).

To summarise, in describing aspects of their feedback practice it was evident that teachers endeavoured to give feedback that was work-focused. As teachers noticed and recognised something significant in learning and chose to intervene, feedback was intended to function as the link between learning and teaching. However, by their own admission, teachers' ability to provide feedback that supported learning in this manner was curriculum specific. However, teachers themselves found it somewhat difficult to pinpoint the reasons for the disparity in practice.

**Feedback Involves Communicating Learning Expectations to Students**

Teachers' reported use of feedback was not only restricted to noticing and responding to a common need or to identifying weaknesses in students' productive attempts. A lot of teachers' talk was related to their use of feedback to draw students' attention to what was expected and what successful learning would look like. All of the participating teachers believed that students had to know what successful learning would look like if they were to 'produce' the required work. Teachers' descriptions of practice revealed that, at different stages of a lesson, various feedback-related strategies were used with the intention of providing students with knowledge of what a successful performance would look like in concrete terms.
Frontloading Expectations: Teachers Conveying Expectations Prior to Learners’ Productive Activity:

Models were seen as a tangible way in which expectations could be conveyed to students. Teachers described how they often began a lesson by either creating or referring to a model that encapsulated aspects of the desired performance:

By having examples probably on the board ... I have a lot of examples so I’m often referring [to them], you see that crayon and dye, just showing them (Susanna, Int);

Before we start an activity [I say] I’ve got some examples for you to take with you and so we have a look and we see ‘hello this is where I want you to get to’ (Kate, Int).

The rationale for using models at this stage of the lesson revolved around the notion that seeing the teachers’ expectations, enabled learners to gain a fuller understanding of those expectations more quickly. As Jennifer explained "once they have got an example, they get it [what learning is expected] so much faster, because they get what it is they’ve got to do” (Jennifer, Int).

Sometimes, teachers said they created the model themselves and children observed the creation of the product. At other times, teachers spoke about the joint construction of models as they sought input from learners:

We also work with the whole class with teacher modelling and you’ve got your teaching focuses ... We’re really working on sentence structure so then the children are constructing a story with you and you’re attempting to get [them] to put the capital letters in and full stops, so that’s something done on the mat (Meg, Int).

Teachers did not limit children’s exposure to only teacher created models. Commercially produced work, drawn from a range of sources, was sometimes utilised:
I've got a whole stack of cameos that are just for a unit ... so I would use those at the beginning (Audrey, Int);

We've used the exemplars in identifying, it was argumentative writing, persuasive writing last year, looking at the different criteria, the different elements that make it persuasive writing and identifying this in someone else's journal stories (Mary, Int).

Learners were also presented with models produced by their peers. On some occasions teachers selected what they considered to be an appropriate model produced by a class member, and with the child's permission, shared the work with the rest of the class. Less frequently, teachers chose to share students' examples produced outside of the context of their own classrooms to illustrate what their same aged peers could achieve. Seemingly, when teachers did this, their intention was to develop students' knowledge of what an expected standard would look like with regard to children of the same age or stage of development:

I'll ask them if I can use their model and I might actually write it out by hand on to a big piece of paper or I might put it on overhead (Gem, Int);

I've actually photocopied the child's piece of work [taken from the New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars] ... and this is how another child in another school has described (Jennifer, Int).

Through drawing attention to particular features, teachers believed that learners gained knowledge similar to that of the teacher. It would appear that an underpinning assumption held by teachers was that once learners' attention was drawn to specific features of a piece of work they would be able to apply this knowledge to their own productive attempts:

... modelling and all that talk about that genre and these are the features and this is what it looks like, the children would actually start to use some of those features in their writing (Tara, Int);
We'll go through it, we might work on it together, we might highlight particular words, we might find a particular phrase we like, we might look for particular aspects of language in it. We might look for a metaphor, a simile or alliteration or we might be looking for nouns ... so we're looking at the different features of the work and what makes it work so they can apply it in their own work (Gem, Int).

While the need for learners to ‘see’ the expected learning was emphasised by teachers, this alone was considered insufficient if learners were to grasp what was expected. Teachers articulated the need to talk to and with students about the model:

\begin{quote}
Oh you’d talk about it [the model] and what makes it such and such. What are the components of it (Diana, Int);
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
I think it's a combination. I think you’ve got to talk about and tell but you’ve got to show as well (Mary, Int).
\end{quote}

When the introductory phase of a lesson ended, the model was sometimes discarded. However, more often than not, teachers said they displayed the model with the expectation that learners would use it as the point of reference to guide and inform their subsequent productive attempts:

\begin{quote}
If it’s a mathematical thing I usually hang them up. They are usually hung up so children can refer to them (Evie, Int);
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Often I leave for instance if it’s creaming the butter and sugar I’ll leave mine up here [at the front of the room] (Ree, Int).
\end{quote}

While the frontloading of knowledge about what expected learning would look like seemed a pre-requisite to learners’ engagement in productive activity teachers also reported that they focussed on the development of this knowledge during the time when students were engaged in production. It appeared as though teachers deliberately looked for opportunities to intervene
so that they could feed back to students in regard to what expected learning looked like.

**Reinforcing Learning Expectations During Productive Activity**

Reportedly, during the course of a lesson teachers often noticed, recognised and responded to successful attainment by providing feedback. This was especially so if they thought some learners were still unclear about what learning was expected. As students were working, teachers would intentionally look for an individual whose work, in their estimation, was “on the right track” to reinforce students’ notions of what constituted expected attainment:

_Sometimes I think, ‘I don’t know if the kids have actually got this’ so I’ll actually look for someone who I think is on the right track and I’ll actually feed back there and then ‘oh look at the way so and so is doing this’ (Jennifer, Int)._

Once this work was discovered often the first step was to acknowledge to the individual that the work met the teacher’s expectations. Usually, this acknowledgement was framed in terms of the teacher’s approval of the work in progress. As Lynda explained:

_During a lesson we stop quite a bit when I read good ones or hear good ones. And I just praise that person. Give them some feedback_ (Lynda, Int).

While the feedback was directed to the individual, it was also intended to alert and remind other children as to what attainment was expected. However, at this point in time, the rest of the class could be considered onlookers or bystanders:

_You pick someone’s work who’s good … You’re telling the child they’ve done really good work and to the rest of the class that’s really feed forward isn’t it? It’s an expectation_ (Lynda, Int).

To move the class from peripheral to full participants in the feedback exchange teachers then appeared to change the focus of the feedback interaction. They
switched from interacting with the individual to interacting with the class as they attempted to focus other students’ attention on the distinguishing features of the selected work. This was achieved by sharing the individual’s work with the wider audience of the class. Sharing could take a number of forms dependent on the curriculum area and the nature of the task. Where the work produced was in a permanent form, such as in the case of written language, teachers often elected to read the work aloud:

I’ll just say ‘listen everybody to this fantastic sentence that so and so has done’ (Carol, Int).

In areas such as food technology or art where there was also a tangible product to refer to, teachers presented this work to others, giving feedback and placing emphasis on what was good about the work:

I’ll say ‘that’s really good, that boy over here. He really knows how to chop it, he’s diced it all, all the pieces are of an even size. Why do you think that’s a good factor in what he’s doing?’ (Ree, Int).

In curriculum areas such as oral reading or dance, where a performance was unable to be recorded, teachers would then ask the child/children to repeat the performance, to demonstrate to the class what they considered to be important elements of that performance:

... [in] Dance someone will be doing the right element and I’ll say ‘look, this person has really introduced this whole element of space ... now look at the quick dance they’ve done’ (Jennifer, Int);

If we’re reading and listening to the children and I hear somebody doing something, ‘oh can you read that again to us’... Sometimes I’ll ask other children ‘why do you think I asked that person to re-read or did you notice how their reading sounded?’ (Priscilla, Int);

If it’s been a group that’s stayed on topic I will have that group demonstrate to the rest of the children what it sounds like to be on topic (Evie, Int).
Given the non-permanency of the product it would appear that while teachers intended that students have access to the work of others so that they could gain knowledge about expected performance, arguably this access was fleeting.

As students worked on their own productive attempts, models were referred to when teachers perceived learners misunderstood or did not fully understand what was expected or if they felt that learners’ productive attempts fell short of that desired:

*I get the children to look at them … I tell them they can always go and read them - those poems that are around the room* (Carol, Int);

*We showed it initially and then … we kept referring back to it. So you have to keep looking back to it because they forget. Or you have to go back and go over something that they haven’t quite understood* (Lynda, Int).

Thus the model became the point of reference to remind students of what was expected. The model sometimes served a further purpose. It became the point of reference against which students could judge the quality of their own productive attempts. On some occasions, the message teachers gave to learners that their work was not reaching expectation, was subtle. Teachers inferred that work had not quite reached the desired performance by referring an individual(s) back to a model in the hope that learners would ascertain that more work was needed:

*Often I leave for instance if it’s creaming the butter and sugar I’ll leave mine up here [at the front of the room] and I’ll say ‘is it the same colour as mine?’*. They’ll say ‘no it’s not the same colour as hers’ and go back [and do] more [creaming] (Ree, Int).

**Revisiting Learning Expectations: Sharing Judgements about Achievement**

To conclude a lesson, teachers reported that at times they brought the class together as a group to talk about what had been produced:
Often we just have a little, I call it a warm down time but it’s a collective time talking about what we’ve done (Carol, Int).

During this time teachers selected work, which they judged exemplified either the desired attainment or features of it and then shared the successful components of an individual’s achievement with the class. This practice was intended to reinforce what the expected attainment looked like:

That was the focus … to create different colours in our faces [so I] used the children’s models who had succeeded to talk about what they had done, how they had done it, to remind others (Gem, Int);

I’ll show their work in front of the class at the end of the lesson and say ‘look, look at the way this person has done that’ (Susanna, Int);

They’ll talk and share their work … and then we’ll go over that’s a good simile or whatever it is. So that is one way you reinforce it … they see each other’s work (Lynda, Int).

Conversely, if teachers thought that there were still aspects of work that needed further attention then they took the opportunity to feed back this information to the class:

I work with quite a lot of class feedback that’s kind of generalised.

A lot of people in this class have done such and such really well but quite a lot of people need to work on this (Mary, Int).

Seemingly, when teachers gave this work-related, class focussed feedback they assumed that individual class members had sufficient knowledge, based on their understanding of what was expected in real terms, to make an appropriate appraisal of their work in regard to whether that work was fulfilling / not fulfilling expectations.
Work-Related and Class Focused Feedback

From teachers’ descriptions much of the feedback given throughout a lesson was focussed on describing required features of work that were in some way significant. Sometimes teachers’ comments encapsulated what features added to the overall quality of the work produced. At other times, teachers’ feedback identified features that detracted from the work. While the feedback teachers provided was work-related, it was seemingly more often directed at the class or the group than to the individual learner. Teachers provided few examples of the individual feedback interactions between themselves and a learner. Those provided served to illustrate how teachers used feedback to convey their approval of work achieved.

Worthy of note are the assumptions teachers appeared to hold in regard to the impact of work-related, class-focused feedback on individual learners. Firstly, teachers assumed that individuals within the class would understand the feedback. Secondly they assumed that individuals would be able to extrapolate from the class-focussed feedback specific aspects that related to them and their work. Once individuals had identified what feedback was pertinent to them, it was further assumed they would be able to take action and make changes to their work as necessary.

Chapter Summary

To summarise, from teachers’ perspectives feedback was seen as supporting learning. It was viewed as an authentic and natural part of learning and teaching, embedded in the interactions that occurred between teachers and learners. Teachers’ descriptions revealed that feedback involved them in noticing, appraising and responding to students’ productive efforts during teaching / learning episodes. In this way feedback was intended to function as the link between learning and teaching.

Whilst teachers considered feedback to be an important facet of their practice, they recognised that the information they provided in certain curriculum areas was both quantitatively and qualitatively different from that provided in other
areas. Some explanations were given for the variations in feedback practice although the reasons given were not common to all teachers. There was some acknowledgement that resources teachers were able to draw upon affected their ability to recognize, appraise and respond to student learning.

Building learners' knowledge of what successful learning would ‘look like’ was given significant attention prior to, during and following students’ productive activity. Much of the feedback given throughout a lesson was seemingly focused on descriptions of the distinguishing features of work, produced by either the learners themselves or encapsulated in models that teachers had selected from a wide range of sources. While it would appear that teachers endeavoured to give work-related feedback mostly this was directed at the class or group rather than to the individual. Seemingly, teachers assumed that individuals would be able to both understand and respond to class-focused feedback. Although the importance of students’ ‘seeing’ what was expected was emphasised, evidence would suggest that, particularly in regard to the work of other students, access to ‘seeing’ was ephemeral in nature. Seeing was short-lived and viewed on the run.

The Next Chapter
While all teachers contended that feedback should be used to enhance learning, considerable differences were apparent in terms of what teachers thought was implied by the term feedback, specifically their beliefs about their role and that of learners in the feedback process; and in the detail of how feedback information was conveyed to learners. These differences are examined in some depth in the next chapter through the explication of three groupings of teacher feedback discourse.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Teachers' Beliefs and Understandings about Feedback and Perceptions of Practice: Three Groupings of Feedback Discourse

Utilising Sadler's (1989) theoretical framework, teachers' interview responses were examined iteratively to search for patterns. In combing the data, similarities and differences between teachers were revealed in regard to the framing of feedback statements, the communication of the goals of learning and the development of students' evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise. Differences were also apparent in the ways teachers took on board and dealt with difficulties associated with the implementation of new feedback-related strategies. These differences are dealt with in some depth in this chapter.

The identification and grouping of similar responses led to the establishment of three groups of teachers. While teachers' placement in a group was based on their overall pattern of responses, it was also determined by the existence of certain responses, considered by the researcher as critical. For example, to be placed in the group referred to as 'the empowerers', the active role of students in the feedback process had to be to the fore in teachers' articulations as this is a critical aspect of Sadler's theory of formative assessment and feedback. Of the twenty teachers interviewed, eight (Carol, Diana, Evie, Krystal, Monica, Patricia, Sunita and Susanna) were grouped together and called 'the technicians'. Seven were placed in the group referred to as 'the pragmatists' (Gem, Lynda, Mary, Meg, Priscilla, Ree and Sela) and five (Audrey, Jennifer, Kate, Marama and Tara) placed in the empowerers' group. The names 'the technicians', 'the pragmatists' and 'the empowerers' have been created to capture the salient characteristics of each group of teachers.
Framing Feedback Statements

From their descriptions of practice, all teachers endeavoured to provide feedback that included descriptions of students’ work. There were, however, considerable differences in terms of how these feedback statements were framed and conveyed to learners.

The Technicians

The idea that feedback comments should be work-related was relatively new to some of the technicians. They reported a recent change in thinking about the type of feedback comments that were important for learning which, subsequently, had led to a self-reported change in practice. Where previously they had given general, global feedback comments they now endeavoured to give feedback that was specific to students’ work:

I’ve changed my whole thinking on that. I used to write good girl or great work. Now I’ll sit there and say ‘you have tried very hard with your sloping today’. Or ‘this is wonderful the way you have put on your flicks’ or ‘your letter shapes look awesome’ (Evie, Int);

I was an effective teacher for 18 years in different countries I thought. But then I came back [to New Zealand] and I’d never heard of formative assessment. The thing I’ve found, you cannot be an effective teacher and not give feedback based on learning ... so I learned about specific feedback (Sunita, Int).

The technicians believed that specificity was one of the important characteristics of work-related feedback because it would make the feedback accessible to students. Students in fact expected and appreciated “specific, not general, vague waffly things” (Krystal, Int). As Evie explained:

I don’t think you should be writing good work because what is good work. I think what you say should be meaningful to the child at that time in relation to the learning you’re looking at and where you want them to get to, to move to. I do believe that (Evie, Int).
Often, teachers reported that feedback given was in regard to what had been achieved, with a particular emphasis on what was right (and to a lesser extent what was wrong) about a piece of work:

*I will say to the child you have achieved that, fantastic and I will let them know they have done that* (Evie, Int);

*Through a lesson, if somebody is doing the right thing I’ll just say ‘everybody listen to this fantastic sentence that so and so has done* (Carol, Int);

*I’ll give them feedback whether they are right or wrong* (Evie, Int).

From their perspectives, providing learners with work-related feedback could, however, evoke a raft of negative emotions. For example in Evie’s experience, students sometimes interpreted feedback comments as a reflection of their worth rather than as a response to their work. When students personalised feedback in this manner it caused them to react negatively:

*If they’ve done something wrong, they [the students] take it too personally. You can see sometimes they’ll go inward or they’ll put their head down. I’ve had tantrums where they’ve thrown their work and stamped off* (Evie, Int).

In the technicians’ opinions, being positive was a way of mitigating the potentially damaging backwash effects of work-related feedback. Comments such as "we try and keep things in the credit model so it becomes a positive thing” (Krystal, Int) or "I like to have a positive atmosphere where you treat each other with respect and we appreciate the positive in each other” (Sunita, Int) were typical of the technicians.

Descriptions of practice indicated that praise was an integral part of the technicians’ feedback. Approval of work, and of particular learning behaviours and attitudes, and the pleasure these instilled in the teacher, were important messages that needed to be communicated to students. As Susanna
noted "I think they need to know you’re happy with what they’ve done ... you find they want to please the teacher". Comments incorporating phrases such as ‘I like’ and ‘I love’ were prevalent in the technicians’ talk. As they explained, sometimes approval was bestowed on an individual child in a private manner. More frequently, it was given publicly so that the rest of the class could hear [author’s emphasis]:

I really did like the way you have been doing your reading last night. I just think that was fantastic. I just think you’ve been trying really hard (Monica, Int);

I’ll just say listen everybody to this fantastic sentence that so and so has done and it’s giving the child feedback. It’s also giving the students feedback this is what I like, the type of work I like (Carol, Int).

In bestowing their approval, technicians firmly believed that students would feel good about themselves, a state perceived as critical if learning was to occur. Teachers equated feeling good about one’s self with enhanced self-esteem and increased motivation. It served to encourage learners to engage in learning [author’s emphasis]:

I think self-esteem is very important. Without self-esteem you are not going to learn (Evie, Int);

Developing students’ self-esteem is what I always try to do. If I’m not positive how will they develop self-esteem?" (Patricia, Int);

It actually makes them feel quite good. They’re only six and seven and they actually feel quite good. If you even come past and give them a stamp on their hand and say ‘wow you’ve started off something really well, it was really great’ you seem to get so much better work out of them. It’s encouragement [for students] (Carol, Int).
Regardless of how feedback statements were framed the feedback process itself was commonly thought of as a one-way form of communication, initiated and controlled by the teacher in response to something that the student had done or said:

\[ \text{[Feedback is] giving information back to somebody} \ (\text{Diana, Int);} \]

\[ \text{[Feedback is] giving relevant information to children} \ (\text{Evie, Int);} \]

\[ \text{Feedback means the information I give back to students} \ (\text{Sunita, Int).} \]

Apparently during the act of giving feedback, emphasis was placed on the transmission of important information to students with the intention of assisting them in the process of learning. The notion of telling was prevalent in the technicians’ talk. Sometimes this notion of telling was referred to explicitly by teachers:

\[ \text{You’re telling them … I’m going around the group telling them - this doesn’t make sense, can they go back and have another look at it} \ (\text{Diana, Int);} \]

\[ \text{I tell them maybe we’re ready to move on or this is what you need to focus on} \ (\text{Sunita, Int);} \]

whilst at other times it was implied:

\[ \text{You’ve done A, B and C and it’s all going fine. You could try this and this} \ (\text{Krystal, Int).} \]

The Pragmatists

A number of the pragmatists also made reference to a shift in their thinking about what constituted effective feedback, with a self-reported change in practice. General comments such as ‘well done’ or ‘good work’ were considered to have little effect on learning because of their lack of specificity. Whereas previously feedback may have focused on less important aspects of
students’ work, there was now the perception they gave targeted, descriptive feedback comments. From their perspectives, students were now clearer about the teacher’s expectations:

To focus our feedback to the children and to try and get away from a lot of the peripheral things. I was thinking like in writing we want the writing to look nice or we want it to be spelt correctly. I think often our feedback has been on those things when maybe we really want them to use adjectives well. If they do a piece of writing and I say that is a good piece of writing … it’s because they’ve used adjectives not because it is neat or fifteen pages long (Priscilla, Int);

... when I was roaming around [as children were engaged in a sequencing task] instead of focussing and saying ‘look you’ve cut that out and you’ve got that picture in place. I wonder what is going to happen next? Can you explain the process?’ I’d be saying things like ‘Gosh, can you cut more carefully?’ So giving mixed messages.

... The message you’re giving the children [now] is that the learning intention is this. This is what I’ll be feeding back on (Meg, Int).

The importance of phrasing feedback comments in a positive manner was also evident in the pragmatists’ talk. The rationale for framing feedback in this manner was seemingly related to their perception that students were responsive to positive feedback. Like the technicians, several of the pragmatists voiced their concern about the detrimental effects of feedback caused by teachers’ overuse of negative feedback. Consequently, breaking down student barriers and helping students accept and use feedback was viewed as something that took a considerable amount of time and effort:

Some kids don’t want feedback. They take a lot of getting used to feedback because they’ve only had negative feedback … I’ve had children who are damaged. ... It takes a long time for them to
actually learn to accept and work with feedback and that it isn’t going to be negative (Sela, Int).

Others expressed the belief that positive feedback would enhance student self-esteem. It would help them to “feel confident and proud” (Lynda, Int) and “better about what they’ve done” (Gem, Int).

However, the need to be positive was counterbalanced by awareness that students possessed evaluative knowledge and were able to make evaluative judgements. They had an idea of the quality of their work. Given this knowledge students would know whether the feedback the teacher gave was justified; therefore it had to be warranted. Indiscriminate positive feedback would not have the desired effect:

I think it has to be specific and merited. I guess otherwise it’s like breathing in and breathing out. The children don’t take much notice of it. I guess maybe if you overdo it then it can be like water off a duck’s back especially if it isn’t warranted. If it hasn’t been particularly good but you’re still saying good job (Priscilla, Int).

When the pragmatists made mention of giving specific feedback, they were referring to the importance of using learning intentions and success criteria as the focus of their feedback to learners. Mary’s explanation of the relationship between intentions, criteria and feedback was representative of the pragmatists understanding of the way in which feedback comments should be linked to criteria:

You’ve got your learning intentions and then you develop success criteria so you know what that [the intention] looks like. Then feedback tells you how you matched up against the success criteria which leads on to what you need to learn next or the same thing again (Mary, Int).

When the technicians described how feedback related to intentions and/or criteria there was some evidence that the criteria were used as a point of
reference to feedback to learners “what they’ve done” (Ree, Int). While this was an aspect of the pragmatists’ feedback practice, emphasis was also placed on providing feedback in relation to improvement:

*Where to go from here, how to move forward to the desired outcome* (Ree, Int);

*Things they need to work on. … What they need to look at next* (Gem, Int);

*Where they have to go next, what they need to improve* (Mary, Int).

From their descriptions, it appeared as though the pragmatists took the leading role in the feedback process. While they did not make explicit reference to the act of telling, this notion was implied. They took responsibility for making judgements about the quality of the work produced. In these instances it seemed as though learners were viewed as the passive recipients of feedback information:

*I might say this work isn’t up to standard because of a, b and c* (Mary, Int);

*You’ve used your tints really well. You understand the process of adding black, adding white to create light and dark* (Sela, Int);

*… giving an explanation of what they’ve done well or what they’ve got to improve on* (Lynda, Int).

The tendency to take the lead, to tell students what warranted attention or what strategy to use to effect improvement, was tempered by the belief that students themselves could make evaluative judgements. On some occasions, this belief led the pragmatists to promote conversations with learners where they were asked to make judgements about their performance in relation to that desired. While some responsibility was handed to learners, from the
pragmatists' descriptions, there was still a sense that it was the teacher in control of the discussion:

If they haven't achieved it you might be asking them a question related back to the criteria 'Have you actually done this? Have you with your characters? Show me a character in your first line of writing?' (Gem, Int);

... you've really got a handle on your capital letters now. Would you like to look at paragraphing with me? (Sela, Int).

**The Empowerers**

The empowerers viewed feedback as a "critical discourse, not always positive ... [but] quite constructive" (Marama, Int), achieved by "interacting with students and the engagement between myself and the students in terms of working out where they are at the moment and where we're going to go and what we need to do in order to get there" (Jennifer, Int). While it was considered important that feedback be framed in a positive way, this was tempered by the belief that feedback had to be honest. Also, if learning was to occur, feedback needed to focus on areas for development as well as what had been achieved.

The empowerers conceived the roles of the teacher and learner in the feedback process quite differently from the technicians and the pragmatists. While the empowerers conveyed the sense that they possessed expert knowledge they did not consider it their role to use this knowledge merely to inform students of their judgements or decisions. Rather, they believed that teachers and students should work together to form a partnership with the intent of achieving a shared goal. Significantly, if this partnership was to be formed, teachers had to resist dominating the feedback process. In the empowerers' opinions, the feedback process was a two-way exchange of information where both teachers and students jointly generated feedback. As Marama explained "it is a two-way process, it's not them and us, it is more of us as team working together". Hence, students were seen as playing a significant role.
While the empowerers accepted there was a time and place for telling students what needed to be done, or what strategy to employ to effect improvement, this was not their preferred way of communicating information about learning and achievement. Telling was considered an easy option, and one that could have a limiting effect on learning:

*It’s really easy as a teacher … to go they’re not getting it. I’ll just take control and I’ll tell them … then it would just be me controlling their learning and telling them what to do. I personally cannot see the value in that* (Jennifer, Int);

*You get them to tell you, you don’t tell them* (Kate, Int).

In addition, it was felt that if teachers took control, students would fail to respond to the feedback:

*The reception you get to feedback is different when I’m just telling Helen what she needs to know and just leaving it at that … They don’t take it on board* (Marama, Int).

Conveying feedback information through telling was to be used in moderation and only when warranted. One such time was when students were introduced to new knowledge, understandings or skills. At this point in time the empowerers believed that students needed more support and guidance from an expert other, thus the need to scaffold them. Later, as their competence and confidence increased, there appeared to be the perception that students would no longer benefit from being told. At this point it would be beneficial if they were encouraged to generate their own feedback information in collaboration with the teacher. Thus, the nature of the feedback changed over time as students’ expertise increased:

*If it’s something that is new to them I will input some ideas as to how we could move there. If it’s something that we’ve been working on for a while then I’ll ask them ‘what do you think might be that thing that will push you up over there?’ And then they feedback some ideas as to how they could get there* (Marama, Int).
The empowerers explained they endeavoured to create opportunities where students could become engaged in learning and feedback conversations. To create a conversation, teachers reported that they tended to frame their feedback as a series of questions or prompts for students to consider. Developing a dialogic approach enabled negotiation to take place between teacher and students in relation to where students needed to be headed or what needed to be done to effect improvement:

*Some children just come into school with this idea that you’re going to tell them everything and the moment you start questioning them … they look at you and think this woman is mad. [But] Instead of sitting there thinking, ‘Oh everything I learn is what Miss B tells me’, they actually start to think about what they are doing* (Tara, Int);

*It’s not like I’m telling them I’m actually asking them ‘where to next sweetheart?’ … Creating a discussion, whether it is a written discussion in the book or an oral discussion* (Jennifer, Int);

*In terms of the children I’m currently working with there is a lot of negotiation because at this point they’re at the stage where they are trying to work out for themselves how to get there* (Marama, Int).

As the aforementioned statements illustrate, students were not seen as reliant on the teacher to make important judgements and decisions about the quality of their efforts or about the direction in which their subsequent attempts should be headed. Rather, they were seen as possessing relevant knowledge in regard to the nature of their achievements. In asking students to make judgements about where to next or to make decisions about what strategies or moves might be appropriate to use, the empowerers recognised that students had both evaluative and productive expertise to draw upon.
Summary of the Differences Between Groups in Framing Feedback Statements

While all teachers described how they gave work-related feedback, there were marked differences among the three groups in regard to how this information was framed and conveyed to learners.

The technicians accentuated the need to convey specific, achievement-focused feedback. Concerned that feedback could have a damaging effect on students' self-esteem, the technicians stressed the need to frame feedback in a positive manner. From their descriptions, feedback was often used to bestow approval of, and pleasure in students' achievements. Regardless of how feedback statements were framed, the technicians conceived the feedback process as a one-way exchange of information with emphasis placed on the teacher telling students what had been achieved, what warranted further attention or what could be done to effect improvement.

Like their technician counterparts, the pragmatists also acknowledged the potential damaging effects of feedback on student self-esteem. While the need to be positive was acknowledged, this belief was counterbalanced by awareness that students were discerning consumers of feedback. Hence, positive feedback had to be warranted in regard to the quality of the work produced. According to the pragmatists, work-related feedback was framed in relation to pre-specified intentions and criteria. While the pragmatists recognised the need for learners to be involved in making judgements about the quality of their productive attempts, they still conveyed the sense that it was the teacher who directed and controlled the feedback process.

Although the empowerers also expressed the belief that feedback should be framed positively, they placed emphasis on the fact that it needed to be honest and constructive if learning was to be enhanced. That feedback had to be both achievement and improvement focused was also highlighted. From their perspectives the feedback process was a joint activity. Students were assigned a significant role to play in the process as they were expected to generate
feedback information in collaboration with the teacher. Given students’ ability to make judgements about the quality of their productive attempts, telling was a strategy that was to be used sparingly and only when warranted. In an attempt to develop a dialogue with students, from their descriptions of practice, the empowerers framed their feedback as a series of questions or prompts rather than directives to be carried out.

**Communicating the Goals of Learning**

All teachers in the study acknowledged that if work-related feedback was going to have the desired effect on learning, in the first instance students had to know what was required of them. As reported in the previous chapter, all indicated that they used models in an attempt to make learning expectations explicit. In addition, the majority had taken on board the strategy of sharing learning intentions (Clarke, 2000) to communicate their learning expectations to students. Sometimes teachers wrote intentions themselves, either individually, or collectively as part of a school syndicate. At other times intentions were taken straight from Ministry of Education resources, such as the Numeracy Project booklets, or other commercially produced resources. Consistently, intentions were phrased in student-friendly language, commonly prefaced with the terms ‘I am learning to’ or ‘we are learning to’ and recorded in a variety of places for display and reference purposes.

**The Technicians**

While all of the technicians had heard of the term learning intentions, only some had adopted the practice of using them with students. Those who used them reported that, across a range of curriculum areas, they had modified their usual lesson structure to share learning intentions with students at the beginning of each lesson:

> When I go into each lesson I talk about it [the learning intention] at the beginning of the lesson. I write it on the board ... My children now tend to look up there [the blackboard] and see what they are doing (Carol, Int);
Most of them [learning intentions] are in books. We have a modelling book for maths and writing and reading. Everything has a modelling book. In the book the WALTs [We are learning to] are written in there (Krystal, Int).

Learning intentions were often expressed in terms of discrete skills or fragments of knowledge that were, in fact, component parts of a much broader skill set:

We are learning to use full stops at the end of a sentence (Krystal, teacher planning);

We are learning to identify the parts of the human body (Krystal, class modelling book);

We are learning to match words we know (Monica, teacher planning);

We are learning to use descriptive words (Sunita, Int).

The majority of the technicians were not familiar with the term success criteria. They had not heard of the term, nor did they know what function criteria serve in relation to learning intentions. Two of the technicians were however the exception. They had heard of, and used criteria to further specify what was expected. Sometimes the success criteria were a rewording of the learning intention. For example the learning intention “we are learning to identify parts of the human body” was supported by a single criterion, stated as “body parts” (Krystal, teacher planning). At other times, the success criteria consisted of a list of items to be included in an end product. For example, the criteria generated to exemplify in more detail what successful completion of the intention “we are learning to write a narrative”, was restricted to a list of four properties “interesting words, characters, happenings, descriptions” (Monica, class modelling book).
Once learning intentions (and to a lesser extent criteria) had been shared with
learners these were seen by the technicians as the focus for their feedback.
They were the point of reference against which teachers could make
judgements about the work achieved:

So you’re thinking about those criteria. Either they’ve done it or
they haven’t (Monica, Int).

Teachers’ reasons for using learning intentions
In these teachers’ experience the practice of sharing intentions and criteria had
become an accepted part of teaching and learning. For Monica it was now so
much “part of our culture, of everything we do” (Monica, Int) that their use
had extended across every curriculum area. Krystal made a similar
observation:

We started in Maths and it just grew and grew and now they’re
sort of everywhere (Krystal, Int).

The writing of intentions was perceived as a relatively straightforward task,
especially for experienced teachers:

Learning intentions come from my learning outcomes. So that to
me is quite straightforward … but then I’ve been teaching for so
long (Carol, Int);

We started with the WALTs and now they’ve spread through
everything it’s easier. People have found it easy to write the
WALTs (Krystal, Int).

Furthermore teachers noted that, students had adjusted to, and appreciated the
approach – “they love these WALTs, they love [them]” (Krystal, Int) because
it had focused “the children on what they’re actually doing” (Carol, Int). The
framing of intentions was however a “challenge for the teacher” (Sunita, Int)
in that “you’ve got to make them simple for the children to understand”
(Carol, Int). A tight specification of intentions was considered the most
appropriate way to aid student understanding of expectations.
While a general sense of positiveness towards the use of learning intentions was conveyed, several of the technicians felt that the approach was yet another ‘fad’, which teachers had been required to implement. It was promoted within their schools as an official requirement that teachers share, record and display learning intentions:

_We have to. It’s school policy … I have to because I’m told I have to_ (Carol, Int);

_Some schools require it. Some schools I’ve been in to it’s expected that you write the learning intention on the board … It’s sort of top down. This is what is expected … It’s like fashion this is what the principal wants done_ (Sunita, Int).

In Sunita’s opinion, if a new approach is forced upon teachers from the ‘top down’ then some teachers will engage in game playing. They make the decision “this is what I need to do to play the game”, but with little genuine change to their everyday practice:

_So it’s like sometimes playing the game. This is like an expectation of the school so sometimes people just finding something [the learning intention] to put up there, but which in practice is not happening_ (Sunita, Int).

**The Pragmatists**

All of the pragmatists used learning intentions to communicate to students what needed to be learned. While this practice was acknowledged as a relatively new one, it was now “part of the way you set up the lesson” (Priscilla, Int). The framing of intentions varied considerably not only among teachers within this group but also within individual teachers’ practice. Like the technicians, some of the pragmatists expressed the need for learning to be broken down into its component parts:

_It can’t be too broad so you’ve got to really narrow what you are looking for. We’ve been trained to think quite broadly to go from A_
to B but not to think of the tiny, tiny, little steps in between. So it's a different mindset (Gem, Int);

You're breaking them down (Meg, Int).

Hence, some of the intentions were framed in a narrow, fragmented manner:

We are learning to sew a straight line (Ree, student self-assessment booklet);

We are learning to read for speech marks (Priscilla, group laminated chart).

Others, however, were expressed in broader terms:

We are learning to deliver a speech that informs and entertains the audience (Mary, teacher planning);

We are learning to follow instructions successfully doing a science experiment (Lynda, teacher planning).

In contrast to the technicians, all pragmatists made mention of the need for success criteria to support the learning intention. They understood success criteria to be the specification of “what you need to see in a successful piece of work” (Mary, Int). They were the “building blocks” that helped learners to “know how they are going to have to meet the learning intention” (Priscilla, Int).

Although the importance of criteria was recognized, a number of the intentions shared were not supported by criteria. As several pragmatists explained, developing criteria was a new practice that was being phased in slowly, hence the absence of criteria in support of some intentions. When used, criteria were sometimes expressed in almost identical terms to the intention:
LI: To sew a straight line
SC: The line is straight (Ree, student self-assessment booklet)

LI: I have to form a hypothesis
SC: I know I have learned when I can form a hypothesis (Lynda, class modelling book).

At other times the criteria did not link clearly to the intention:
LI: We are learning to look in words for parts we know
SC: We know we have achieved this because we look carefully through the words (Priscilla, group laminated chart).

In only one instance did the criteria that were shared, contain helpful information and valuable clues as to what needed to be included in an end product. Words such as "some perception" and "confidently shapes ideas for a particular effect" conveyed the sense that achievement of those criteria would be a matter of degree rather than an absolute judgement:

- Shows links between paragraphs
- Full orientation paragraph
- Emphasis on important events
- Uses a variety of words and phrases to denote time and time links
- Personal views conveyed with some perception
- Conclusion paragraph stating and justifying personal feelings
- Language and language features (similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia, alliteration, personification) used to engage the audience and give detail
- Punctuation spelling and grammar generally correct (few intrusive errors)
- Confidently shapes ideas for a particular effect" (Mary, teacher assessment sheet)

Significantly, these criteria were drawn from a Ministry of Education resource package for teachers.
The benefits and drawbacks of using intentions and criteria

The pragmatists made mention of a number of positive outcomes for both students and teachers as a result of adopting the practice of sharing intentions and criteria. There was the perception that students had greater insight into what was expected of them because they were “in the know” (Lynda, Int). Being “in the know” would help students to become more motivated and more willing to take responsibility for, and ownership of their learning:

A positive is that everybody knows what is expected of them. I think that is really a good thing because I know, they know, everybody is in the know (Lynda, Int):

Learning intentions and success criteria - it’s a motivating factor in the fact that the children see the purpose to what they are doing (Mary, Int);

So giving the child ownership of what is happening (Sela, Int).

Furthermore, teachers when providing feedback, were less likely to draw attention to peripheral matters:

Well I think the good things are that in my own thinking sometimes the lesson tends to be more focused. I don’t necessarily get caught up in too many distractions. It certainly gives more focus to the kind of feedback I’m giving to the children (Priscilla, Int).

Adopting the practice of specifying and communicating intentions and criteria had some perceived benefits for teachers. Teachers reported that they were now interrogating their tacit knowledge in a more detailed manner. Grappling with what needed to be made explicit to learners had resulted in greater clarity on teachers’ part in regard to what needed to be learned and what successful learning might look like. Both Meg and Priscilla made mention of this:

It makes the teacher very clear about what they’re going to teach and why they’re going to teach it. Sometimes I’ve gone in and bumbled through a lesson. The target now is so specific it allows
for the child to grasp ‘well finally I actually understand what I’m doing here’ (Meg, Int);

I think we have a lot of intuitive head knowledge that we haven’t always been able to itemise exactly what is that the children should be doing at those different stages. Specifying it for others is helpful because there it is (Priscilla, Int).

Reservations about the practice of providing feedback solely on the basis of intentions and criteria were articulated. For several of the pragmatists, the practice was seen as constraining given the idiosyncratic nature of learning. From their perceptions, if feedback was focused exclusively on the pre-specified criteria this was potentially limiting as the teachable moment could be lost. Ignoring the teachable moment in favour of providing feedback that was linked to the known criteria was seemingly a source of frustration and led some teachers to feel hampered and unable to fulfil their teaching responsibilities:

It can feel a little bit suffocating because it becomes so focused … [if you] focus on one thing and not mark everything I struggle with that. I feel you’re missing a lot of teachable moments. I find that to be strangulating (Lynda, Int).

The Empowerers

For feedback to support learning, the empowerers thought it imperative that explicitly stated goals and criteria were established. Meaning could only be ascribed to feedback if students were both knowledgeable about and understood what learning was expected and what constituted a successful performance in a given area:

“The learning intention is what you want them to do, success criteria is how you want them to do it and feedback is how they can improve for next time … so its cyclic really (Audrey, Int);
They’re all tied in. It’s a big vicious circle, without any of those there is no reason, they’re totally intertwined. Well how can you give feedback on something if you don’t know what you are getting feedback on. So you have to have a reason or a purpose for doing something. So you know what you’re doing and then the feedback has to come from that (Kate, Int).

Although, in the majority of instances, students were not involved in their development, the empowerers made mention of the need for students to take ownership of intentions. Ownership was considered important in relation to goal achievement. Hence, they sought to gain student commitment to, and understanding of, the overall rationale for learning. This was important as students had to understand not only what they were learning but “why they’re doing it” (Tara, Int). In Kate’s case, understanding “the purpose of what you’re doing … was the most important thing”. It was assumed that if students could see the purpose and relevance of intentions and tasks this knowledge would motivate them to become more active and engaged in the learning process.

Jennifer’s description of her approach to the development of learning intentions was somewhat different from the other empowerers. She reported that she sometimes questioned children about what they thought they should be learning, creating learning intentions from their responses. As she noted “I generate it, but my questioning is such that the children actually give to me what the learning intention is” (Jennifer, Int). Although Jennifer recognised that the situation was somewhat contrived, it was warranted. It gave students a voice; a feeling they were involved in making decisions about their learning.

The empowerers tended to phrase learning intentions in terms of what they expected students to know, understand or be able to do. Taken on their own, some of the intentions resembled tasks to complete:

I am learning to remember to leave finger spaces between my words
(Tara, child’s writing book);
I am learning to record my ideas in a mind map (Marama, whiteboard, whole class)

However, others were specified in broader terms:

*To create a useless invention to demonstrate creativity and originality* (Kate, assessment sheet given to the class at the beginning of an integrated unit)

*I am learning to plan and carry out a scientific investigation* (Audrey, assessment sheet handed out to class)

*We are learning to write a narrative. This is a story we get from our imagination* (Jennifer, class chart)

All of the empowerers were familiar with the term success criteria, although some teachers reported that they restricted the use of criteria to certain curriculum areas. Many of the intentions teachers shared were supported by criteria. Essentially, they were seen as the deconstruction of the learning intention or an “unpacking” of how that intention might be achieved (Jennifer, Int). Criteria served to “focus them [students] on what they need to be good at” (Audrey, Int).

In a number of instances, teachers attempted to identify the essential properties to be included in students’ work. Take for example the criteria developed to support the intention “we are learning to write a narrative” which were listed on a class chart in the following manner:

*Having a problem*

*Explaining how the characters respond to the problem* (what they did)

*Record what was done about the problem*

*Say what happened – solution*

- *bigger problem* (Jennifer, class chart)
Less frequently, criteria included a standard, often implicit. Such was the case in regard to some of the criteria Audrey had used to support the learning intention “I am learning to plan and carry out a scientific investigation”. Including words such as ‘informed’ and ‘suitable’ indicated a particular kind of performance. Again, these were criteria derived from a commercially produced resource [author’s emphasis]:

*I can make an informed prediction/hypothesis*

*I can collect and record results in a suitable way*

(Audrey, assessment sheet)

Kate’s practice was unique in regard to the other empowerers. She used an assessment rubric and in doing so constructed criteria to specify levels of performance. The rubrics developed for each major unit of work, contained four levels of achievement: ‘skilled’, ‘competent’, ‘developing strength’ and ‘having difficulty’. Take for example her integrated language and technology unit on useless inventions. Her rubric was divided into three distinct areas and identified the particular understandings and skills students would be expected to display in regard to the construction of a model, the production of a poster advertising the model and the marketing of the model through an oral presentation to peers. As can be seen below, Kate indicated the differences between the four levels in qualitative terms:

*A well designed structure, long lasting materials, extremely eye catching, carefully constructed, a definite purpose and highly original [Skilled]*

*A well designed structure, eye catching, carefully constructed, a purpose and original [Competent]*

*A structure that could be developed more, acceptable purpose and not that original [Developing Strength]*

*A structure that has been thrown together very quickly, without much thought or effort, and not that original [Having Difficulty]*

(Kate, assessment sheet given to children at the beginning of a unit).
Teachers' reasons for using learning intentions and success criteria

The empowerers appeared excited about, and committed to, the use of learning intentions and success criteria. Seemingly, their excitement and commitment arose from their perceptions of changes that had occurred in terms of students' involvement in, understanding of, and increased responsibility for learning. Also, a positive change was noted in regard to their teaching, which had become more focused. Greater clarity about what they were teaching and why this was important had been achieved. Importantly, this information was being communicated to students:

*I think I'm much clearer with what I'm asking children to do. I'm much more specific, much more we are going to do this and the reason we're doing it ... I think I've clarified the purpose of doing it and the students can see a much more logical order about doing it* (Audrey, Int):

*I'm happy that I've started and it's changing my teaching. It's definitely changing how I teach. I think it's putting the onus on the children. It's quite wonderful and then just giving them a little spark and seeing that they're thinking 'mm I need to go there'* (Kate, Int).

Marama linked improved communication about expected learning with an increase in student achievement:

*It has had a huge impact on what learning actually does occur because everyone is on the same page, everyone is sharing the same vision and because you're doing that the achievement has to raise* (Marama, Int).

Challenges associated with using intentions and criteria as a basis for feedback

The use of intentions and criteria as the foundation of the feedback process was not without challenges and problems. Gaining student commitment to, and fostering student understanding of the learning intention approach, was
seen as critical. As Audrey noted “we’re [teachers] not used to it” and neither are the students - “it’s all new for them”. Given its newness it had caused some confusion in regard to the students’ role in the learning and feedback processes. Teachers commented that students were being asked to participate in ways that were foreign to them and initially students did not understand “what you’re [the teacher] going on about” (Tara, Int).

To ensure student understanding of the approach, teachers felt they had to spend additional time, in an already busy day, recording, sharing, discussing and reviewing criteria with students. The extra time spent was considered necessary if students were going to commit to the practice and become part of it. Without student understanding and commitment, the whole approach would fail. As Marama explained:

> Until those ideas [intentions and criteria] are shared and we’re all coming from the same direction, it falls apart because it’s very difficult to get buy in from everyone in the room if they don’t understand what those two things really mean (Marama, Int).

Although the empowerers were committed to developing students’ understanding of expected learning and criteria for success, some felt that this was hard to achieve under the constraints of a crowded curriculum. They believed that modifications to the classroom programme had to be made. Where, traditionally, teachers have been expected to cover a raft of topics in a relatively short amount of time, this was considered no longer viable. Students’ evaluative knowledge and understanding could not be developed over a short period of time. Hence, prolonged periods of time needed to be allocated to topics within a given curriculum area. Indeed, several of the empowerers had made the decision that “something else is going to have to go” (Kate, Int). Unless there were fewer topics to cover, they felt that despite their best intentions, they would be forever “skimming the surface” (Kate, Int), a state that was unsatisfactory as it was not conducive to the development of students’ evaluative knowledge.
In addition to gaining student commitment to, and developing understanding of intentions and criteria, other significant challenges were identified. Several of the empowerers considered the writing of quality intentions a difficult task, one that they had struggled with. They admitted that when they first began writing intentions, they were often phrased in terms of the specification of a task rather than an expression of the learning required. The following description illustrates how Jennifer, along with her syndicate colleagues, had to grapple with the identification of important learning inherent in a given task:

We are learning to write a story about candles. That’s not a learning intention. Where is the learning? And so we go but that’s what I want them to write a story about. With questioning it would be like oh we are learning to record information about candles in a list, on a flow chart that what we’re learning. Then we went from there to we are learning to organise our ideas. That’s the learning intention. What we were learning to do was organise our ideas and it took us ages to get to that (Jennifer, Int).

There was the associated difficulty of distinguishing between intentions and criteria. Several of the empowerers confessed that when they had first started using the approach they were not clear about the two and the function that each served. They had had to grapple with “working out what was a learning intention or was it really success criteria?” (Marama, Int). Through a combination of trial and error, and engaging in extra reading about intentions and criteria, they felt they had begun to gain a better understanding of the functions of each. In the interim, however, it was felt that the quality of both the intentions and the criteria had been affected. At times, neither was well written “we were putting the criteria in the learning intention and our learning intention wasn’t concise. Like we were learning all sorts” (Jennifer, Int).

Even when empowerers had gained some clarity about the difference between intentions and criteria there was the challenge of identifying criteria that
matched intentions. In reality, making explicit the details of a successful performance proved problematic because teachers experienced difficulty in describing what that might look like. As Marama explained, “sometimes there’s a mismatch because you can’t think of what that [a successful performance] looks like”. When such a mismatch occurred it was acknowledged that it had a negative effect on students’ learning. In the first instance it was perceived that students became confused about learning expectations. Secondly, the quality of the expected performance was compromised.

Despite their reservations about their understandings of, and their skill in writing intentions and criteria, the empowerers were committed to their use as an integral part of the feedback process. As several teachers emphasised they were still learning about intentions and criteria. They were still not sure that they had mastered the skill of specifying intentions and criteria in an acceptable form. While they believed they still had much to learn, they seemed to have faced problems of implementation in a way that had enabled them to persevere with the approach. They remained excited and energised to improve their feedback practice. As Kate noted “I've got the start. … I want to take it further and I want to spend more time in my class doing it properly”.

Summary of Differences Between Groups in Communicating the Goals of Learning

Given the belief that feedback should be work-related, all teachers thought it important that students should have an understanding of expected learning. Hence, the majority of teachers had adopted learning intentions as an approach to specify and communicate the goals of learning. However, key differences between teachers became apparent when considering their understanding of the approach, their commitment to it and their use of the approach when faced with difficulties of implementation.

The use of learning intentions and success criteria was carried out by only some of the technicians. Those who used the approach felt it quite
straightforward given their status as experienced teachers. It was understood that learning intentions should be specified tightly which resulted in the goals of learning being expressed as narrow, fragmented items of knowledge. In the cases where success criteria had been developed these were framed either as a list of items for inclusion in an end product or as a reiteration of an intention. While teachers conveyed a general positiveness about the approach, it was also revealed that some had taken it on board to comply with the wishes of their school’s senior management. The adoption of the approach was likened to game playing by one teacher as teachers endeavoured to meet the demands of others more senior.

While the pragmatists understood the relationship between learning intentions and success criteria and the need for criteria to further elaborate expected learning, from their descriptions of practice, criteria were not always developed in support of intentions. Like their technicians counterparts, pragmatists often framed intentions in a narrow fashion and there were issues in regard to the specification of criteria. Although the adoption of the approach was generally seen as beneficial to both teachers and students, some pragmatists felt that the approach could be constraining - the ‘teachable moment’ was lost if they only focused on providing feedback in relation to pre-specified criteria.

All empowerers were committed to and excited about using intentions and criteria to specify to students what learning was expected and what that learning would look like. While a number of examples shared were framed in a similar manner to those of the other two groups of teachers, there were exceptions. In some instances helpful information about the properties within particular criteria was identified and, in one case, levels of performance were indicated. Of importance to the empowerers was the development of students’ understanding of, and commitment to the approach, hence their acceptance of the need to involve students in either the generation or the deconstruction of criteria. Identifying a variety of reasons, the empowerers explained that the
writing of intentions and criteria was a difficult task, one that they were only beginning to master.

The Development of Students' Evaluative and Productive Knowledge and Expertise

The Technicians

Competent teachers draw upon a range of intellectual and experiential resources during the act of feedback (Sadler, 1998). Like other participants in the study, the technicians made reference to their knowledge of what was to be learned. They considered this knowledge an integral part of being "the experienced teacher" (Sunita, Int). Basically, this knowledge gave them expert status. It enabled them to make decisions with regard to what learning was important:

I'll say for today this is really important and this group or everybody needs to know this aspect (Sunita, Int).

The technicians referred to their evaluative knowledge as well as their evaluative expertise. From their perspectives these evaluative tools allowed them to make the necessary qualitative judgements:

I would be saying today you've almost got what I want you to do (Carol, Int);

I can talk them through [their work], I know where the conceptions are and what the intention was for doing it [so then] I can give written feedback. Work from here or try the dictionary drafting (Sunita, Int);

I have the best understanding of whether they have met the learning outcome or [if] they are above or below [a standard in regard to their achievement] (Susanna, Int).

In referring to their evaluative knowledge the technicians made the comparison between teachers' knowledge and that held by students. They
alluded to the superiority of their knowledge compared to that of their students:

*I'm the art teacher. I have the best understanding of whether they have met the learning outcome. I probably know the criteria. I know the expectations, and they [the students] wouldn't have the same understanding of criteria. They wouldn't know the level of criteria I'm looking at either* (Susanna, Int).

The recognition that teachers' evaluative knowledge and expertise was more extensive than that held by students seemingly influenced the way in which the technicians conceived their role in the feedback process and that of learners. Given teachers' superior knowledge and expertise they perceived that they had to take the leading role in the feedback exchange. As one teacher explained "we should be sharing back ideas to children, telling them where they are at and how to do it" (Diana, Int). From the technicians' perspectives it was the teacher's responsibility to make the judgements and decisions and to tell students what these were.

Consistent with their belief that teachers needed to play the major role, the technicians tended to frame their feedback in terms of a directive to be carried out by the learner:

*The things they can improve on ... I'll say some people will need to do this ... and then later I might go one on one and say let's have a look at this and try and do this* (Monica, Int);

*You've done this. This is what you need to look at next. Or it could be at the end of a lesson. This is what we did and this is how we went and what we're going to do next* (Diana, Int).

In each of the examples above there is a strong sense that it is the teacher who utilises her evaluative knowledge and expertise. Drawing upon her superior and more elaborate knowledge base she plays the role of arbiter of quality in regard to learners' productive attempts. She is the decision maker. She makes
the qualitative judgements about achievement and the quality of work. She makes the comparisons about learners' actual levels of achievement against those required. Furthermore, it is the teacher who makes the decision about the students' subsequent productive attempts. It is the teacher who decides what moves to make or what strategies to employ to effect improvement.

A sense of the learner being unknowing and uninformed was revealed when teachers' reasons for telling students about their achievements were examined. Implicit in teachers' talk was the notion that students had limited, if any knowledge of what had been achieved. Hence, it was role of the teacher to provide this information; moreover, students expected and appreciated this:

*Feedback is really important because they know whether they have achieved what you asked them* (Evie, Int);

*[Feedback] makes people aware they have achieved it* (Sunita, Int);

*It's important for them to know how they're doing at the time, how they're meeting those expectations* (Diana, Int);

*Children appreciate knowing what they are doing, whether they are doing it right or wrong, they need this* (Patricia, Int).

There was little acknowledgement that learners had productive knowledge and expertise. Hence, students were not expected to engage in making qualitative judgements about the nature and quality of their work. Again there was a strong feeling conveyed that students depended on the teacher to tell them how to move their productive efforts closer to that desired. Susanna's approach was typical of that undertaken by the technicians:

*I'm giving them feedback on the areas they need to watch out on. It might be proportions or it might be the way they doing some sort of pastel techniques or painting so you're giving them feedback* (Susanna, Int).
Thus, learners had a limited and restricted role to play in the feedback process. Their role was little more than that of a recipient and consumer of information. In the first instance they were viewed as dependent on the teachers' feedback in regard to what needed to be learned, what needed attention and what particular strategies to employ. Secondly they were viewed as compliant in the sense that teachers expected them to be willing and able to follow the teachers' directives. As Sunita noted "if it [feedback] is very specific they'll implement it". Given that teachers felt that students had limited evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise, it would appear that, in turn, they provided little opportunity for students to develop their evaluative or productive knowledge or expertise. Evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise were considered the domains of the teacher.

The Pragmatists

Comments made by the pragmatists indicated that they appeared to struggle with the demands of developing students' evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise. Two competing discourses ran through their talk. On the one hand they recognised the importance of providing opportunities for learners to amass and enlarge their evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise. This, however, was counteracted by their feelings about the manageability of such a task. According to the pragmatists, a number of factors made it difficult to extend students' evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise.

Providing opportunities for students to develop evaluative knowledge was seen as the ideal scenario. In reality this was difficult to achieve. Recognition of the importance of sharing intentions and criteria as the basis of feedback was offset by the dilemma of finding time to do so:

_This can sometimes take ten minutes at the beginning of my lesson. I haven't got ten minutes to spend on this but Shirley Clarke says two minutes spent on this actually makes the whole thing fit in_ (Ree, Int).
In any already busy day, finding time to share student work and for students to feed back on others' work was a challenge. Hence, the sharing of work and the feedback from peers became expendable activities that were dropped from the programme when time was tight:

_We hope to do that [share work] but time runs out. I haven't done that for a long time_ (Lynda, Int).

The other more substantive factor that seemed to impede learners' opportunities to develop evaluative knowledge and expertise was the pragmatists' perceptions of learners' responses to this involvement. The sharing of teachers' knowledge of the goals of learning and criteria for success was a relatively new teaching-learning approach. Moreover, it was an approach that disrupted and disturbed the status quo of the classroom. Students were now being asked to participate in ways, and take on roles, that had previously been the domain of the teacher. As Sela noted, "the children are used to the teachers being the keepers of knowledge". The change in role had led to some confusion among students and times when they "don't really understand [the approach]" (Priscilla, Int):

_I find the success criteria difficult to co-construct ... There are blank looks around the room. The teacher will tell me sort of look on their faces ... They are not used to being asked for what it [a successful performance] will look like_ (Mary, Int);

_If we say to them [the students] 'What would the success criteria be for that?' If you did that straight away, they'd look like, what are you talking about?_ (Sela, Int).

Furthermore, from the pragmatists' perspectives there had been a degree of reluctance on the part of students to adopt a more active stance in the evaluative process. Students were accustomed to teachers taking the lead. They expected teachers to take control, to determine the nature of success, to make the evaluative judgements and to convey this information to students. This was the teacher's responsibility:
It's early days in the fact they’re not expecting that they should know because that's my job up the front to tell them. They're still a bit in that frame of mind. How will you know you’ve done that. The teacher will tell me (Mary, Int).

There was also the perception that students did not appreciate time spent discussing intentions and criteria because it reduced the time they could spend engaged in productive activity. As Ree explained:

_The kids are busting a gut to quickly get on the sewing machines. I have to help them understand [the intentions and criteria]. That these are going to actually make the rest easier when they don’t really want to_ (Ree, Int).

In Lynda’s experience her students displayed “restlessness during the co-construction of criteria”. This she interpreted as a disinclination to be involved and led her to “write [success criteria] herself even though that’s not the optimum” (Lynda, Int). Students’ responses had affected her behaviour to the extent that even though she realised the importance of developing students’ evaluative knowledge and expertise she became disinclined to spend time encouraging students’ participation in activities of this nature. She reverted to specifying criteria herself rather than persevering with asking students for their input.

While the pragmatists’ experience had not always been positive in respect to involving students in the generation of intentions and criteria, they did try other strategies to develop students’ evaluative knowledge and expertise. Consistent with their belief that students were capable of making evaluative judgements, all made mention of providing students with opportunities to make judgements about their own performance, albeit more often at the end of a lesson or after productive activity:

_At the end of the lesson you can just recap and say ‘how do you think we’re doing?’ It’s sort of a little self-assessment of where you think you’re at. Will they need to continue working on that_
tomorrow? Allowing them to give a bit of feedback as to where they felt they were in their learning (Meg, Int);

They'll write what they did for their visual language task, what techniques they used and how they did against the criteria. I'm just starting to do that (Mary, Int);

These are the things [criteria] we decided were important. How many of those did your pizza rate well on? Which ones [criteria] was it [the pizza] let down on? (Ree, Int).

In a number of instances asking students to make judgements about their performance was a relatively new addition to the programme, with some unexpected results. Take the case of Meg. Students' engagement in self-assessment had given her new insight into their capabilities. Whilst she was initially skeptical about students' evaluative expertise, this proved unfounded. Her students had more sophisticated evaluative knowledge than she had imagined and they were able to apply that knowledge to their productive attempts:

This whole idea of self-assessment I used to scoff a little at it. But I'm just astonished how quickly children pick [it] up. I used to think children would give themselves an inflated view of where they were at ... In actual fact they can be quite harsh critics. They do have an incredible amount of understanding behind where they are at and it inspires them to know what they need to do for the next step (Meg, Int).

Students' responses to making judgements and decisions about the quality of their productive attempts helped Meg re-conceptualise their role in the evaluative process. They were seen as capable of monitoring their performance through the generation of their own feedback information.
As with self-assessment, although several of the pragmatists had gained some insight into the value of peer-assessment, this strategy was not as yet, a feature of their classroom practice:

*I've been excited about developing peer-assessment and the importance of teaching children how to give constructive feedback to one another. I can see that that could have a huge benefit. [But] That is not where we are at yet ... Peer-assessment is something we need to develop* (Meg, Int).

However, others reported that in selected curriculum areas there was the expectation that students would provide feedback to their peers about the quality of the work produced and how it might be improved. Teachers described how they had incorporated into lessons, opportunities for students’ work to be made public and for peer feedback to be given. When students were asked by the teacher to give peer feedback they were encouraged to give work-related feedback, framed in a positive manner:

*We’ve just done speeches and we as a class gave feedback. Someone would give a speech and then the student had to give positive comments. Things they liked, things they thought they could improve on* (Lynda, Int).

Gem, however, noted that her students were beginning to provide feedback to their peers in a spontaneous manner. They had begun to take on the role of the evaluator outside of the demands she made. In her opinion children were starting to contribute freely. Even without her encouragement students were starting to “think about the feedback they could give the author or writer” (Gem, Int).

**The Empowerers**

From their descriptions of practice, the empowerers made deliberate attempts to help students ‘catch’ evaluative knowledge in an authentic manner. Given their belief that telling students had a limiting effect on learning, all considered it important that criteria were not simply developed by the teacher
and told to the students. They thought it necessary to build a discussion around the criteria so that students would begin to understand them and take ownership of them. It was anticipated that discussion would focus students’ attention on the substantive learning that was required by cuing them into the kind of student responses required. Audrey’s description of the discussion that ensued about one of the criteria associated with the learning intention “I am learning to write a sad recount” illustrates how students were asked to identify the kind of responses required if they were to fulfil the criteria ‘hook the reader,’ as opposed to being told them by the teacher:

We would discuss how we could ‘hook the reader’. And we had things like exclamation marks, [using] questions, starting with good verbs, use of adjectives, having things like similes and metaphors (Audrey, Int).

Through discussion such as this, it was hoped that knowledge of what successful learning looked like would be made transparent to students.

Making learning expectations transparent was seen as a necessary power-sharing exercise. If students were denied the opportunity to develop these understandings they would be forever reliant on the teacher to make judgements and decisions about what had been achieved and what needed to be improved. Once students had access to, and understood learning expectations it was presumed that they would take more responsibility for their learning. Tara’s comment typified the empowerers’ beliefs about the positive outcomes that would accrue to students if learning were made explicit:

It was like I had all the power because I had the answers in my head. It was up to them to guess it [the answer]. It took it [the guessing] away to say this is what I want to see happening. This is how you need to go about it. ... They had a say in it really and it was like they’re responsible for their learning now (Tara, Int).
Some empowerers went a step further and not only ensured discussion of criteria but also provided students with opportunities to generate the criteria. Jennifer and Audrey reported that following the sharing of intentions they engaged students in modelling activities with the intent of providing concrete examples of what expected learning looked like. Following the modelling students were then asked to offer their suggestions about what criteria would be needed to fulfil the learning intention. They considered the use of models as critical if students were going to contribute to the generation of criteria. In Jennifer's opinion, without modeling students found it difficult to understand what was expected and hence were not able to generate criteria.

Empowerers reported that students were encouraged to engage in discussions with their classmates with the expectation that they would generate feedback information. In some situations, peer discussions occurred away from the presence of the teacher with the teacher only becoming part of the discussion at a later stage. Indeed, several of the empowerers had set up what seemed to be a formal requirement where students sought feedback from their peers prior to any work being brought to the teacher. Jennifer, for example, described how she had taught her Year Two students to ask open questions about peers' work as a lead in to providing feedback. Similarly, Marama explained how she had incorporated the notion of a critical friend into her classroom programme. The role of the critical friend was to critique work-in-progress through the provision of achievement and improvement related feedback:

*I use feedback between one another. I suppose it would relate to like the use of a critical friend where they are taking their own work and critiquing it with someone else and getting input into what makes this [the work] the way it is, or what I could do to enhance it. So that is where we're at, at the moment, trying to develop that kind of feedback between students as well and not relying on myself to provide that kind of feedback* (Marama, Int).
Implicit in teachers’ descriptions of the opportunities they provided for students to feedback to each other was the need for the teacher to value and respect the students’ voice if they were going to make a genuine contribution to the feedback process. The following example, provided by Jennifer, reveals that while she guides the feedback interaction, there is a willingness to listen to what students have to say:

*Often before they come to me they have had to have gone through a peer and the peer’s actually done some work and then I might get them both in and say ‘Look what questions were asked here and where do you think this should go? And they might say ‘I think it should go here’ and then the child will go ‘No I don’t agree with that’ and I’ll say ‘Oh this is fantastic, Why don’t you agree with that, where do you think it should go?’* (Jennifer, Int).

Openness to students’ contributions is evident as Jennifer tried to draw students into additional discussion by inviting them to make decisions and to explain those decisions in regard to work produced. A sense was conveyed of all parties in the discussion having valuable evaluative and productive knowledge to contribute.

While the other empowerers did not have formalised requirements for students to give feedback in the same manner as Marama and Jennifer, they explained how they offered opportunities for students to provide feedback to peers. These opportunities seemed to happen spontaneously and occurred under the auspices of the teacher. At various times during a lesson teachers might ask students to make a qualitative judgement about peers’ achievements or to make suggestions with regard to peers’ future productive attempts:

*When we’ve had dance groups … They might have done something individually and then in pairs and then in fours and then they have feedback. They use that same idea. I like the way you did this, but maybe if you did this next time* (Audrey, Int);
If you have another child there they'll say 'he needs to do this' or they say nicely 'look he's remembered to do that really well today'

That's really good because you are getting other children that are starting to look and see (Tara, Int).

There was the perception that once students became familiar with this expectation they were responsive to it, and hence they began to contribute without prompting from the teacher. Making contributions about others' work and achievements was seen as part of the student role. Giving peer feedback gave students insight into their learning and achievements:

_It starts them thinking about 'mm I've done that, I can move to here now'. They start thinking about their success themselves. '

'Where can we go from here?' (Kate, Int).

Yet another reason for ensuring that students were involved in making evaluative judgements and productive decisions was associated with the empowerers' belief that they needed to encourage self-monitoring behaviour in students. From their descriptions it was evident that as students were working on a piece of work or when work was completed, they were encouraged to use criteria as a point of reference against which judgements and decisions about performance could be made. The criteria essentially functioned as a series of self-monitoring prompts:

_I think the success criteria are like the checking mechanism for the kids. 'Am I on the right track? I think I am. Let me just check what it is I'm learning to do. Does it fit with what I'm doing?’ (Jennifer, Int).

Used as a point of reference, discussion about the presence or absence of criteria in a piece of work provided an indication of what aspects of the work needed improvement. In making comparisons of work against criteria, students, in collaboration with the teacher, could make some decisions about what action was necessary to close the gap between current and desired performance:
We’ve got those intentions and criteria to come back to and say okay, we said when we started this little learning journey, that these were going to be the things that we were going to have a look to see if your learning was going to be successful and use that as a starting point and say ‘Yes we’ve met this one in this way or we haven’t met it so why didn’t we meet it?’ And flesh that out so they can see what bits they need next time. ‘Oh let me do some thinking about that so I can make some choices. I can make some decisions as to where that needs to go’ … They’ve got to make some decisions as to how that next step is going to occur or how to flesh out something in order for them to move from where they’re currently at to wherever they need to be going (Marama, Int).

Marama’s description, typical of the empowerers, illustrates the faith placed in students to make not only evaluative judgements but also productive decisions. As active learners, students were seen as having a pool of productive knowledge and expertise on which to draw. Students were able to make decisions about how their work could be moved closer to what was desired.

**Summary of the Differences Between Groups in Regard to the Development of Students’ Evaluative and Productive Knowledge and Expertise**

All teachers acknowledged that they had considerable evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise on which to draw when engaged in the act of feedback. There were, however, differences apparent between the groups in regard to how each used this knowledge and in their perceptions of students’ ability to make use of evaluative and productive knowledge. These beliefs, in turn, influenced the opportunities teachers provided for students to develop their evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise.

The technicians believed that students, in comparison to teachers, had little evaluative or productive knowledge or expertise to draw upon. Hence, given teachers’ expert status and superior knowledge, they needed to take control of,
and play the leading role in the feedback process. The role of decision maker and arbiter of quality was considered the domain of the teacher. The role of students was underplayed as they were viewed as dependent on the teacher to make the evaluative and productive judgements and decisions. Students’ role was limited to that of recipients of feedback information.

Recognising that students were capable of making evaluative and productive judgments and decisions and that teachers should help students develop these capabilities, the pragmatists provided students with opportunities to self assess and, to a lesser extent, to become involved in the assessment of peers’ work. However, the time it took to involve students, and students’ reactions to playing an evaluative role that had traditionally been the domain of the teacher, were seen as major impediments to developing students’ evaluative knowledge and expertise.

Acknowledging that students were self-monitoring and the need to promote this behaviour, the empowerers considered it a teacher’s responsibility to extend students’ evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise. To this end, the empowerers described the input students had in the generation and/or deconstruction of criteria and in the assessment of their own work and that of their peers. From their descriptions of practice, students were regarded as having a significant role to play in the feedback process. They were seen as generators of feedback information about their own work and that of others, both in regard to what had been achieved and what needed to be improved.

Chapter Summary

Summary of the Technicians’ Understandings and Self-Reported Practices

Whilst the importance of work-related feedback was acknowledged the technicians appeared to hold contradictory feelings about the effects of feedback on learning. On one hand they attributed great importance to its positive effect on learning but, on the other, they were concerned about its damaging effects on learners. Feedback that could be construed by learners as negative in intent was to be avoided. In an attempt to ‘protect’ learners and to
enhance students’ self-esteem, feedback comments were framed positively, and encapsulated the teacher’s pleasure and approval. Feedback that bestowed the teacher’s approval was considered critical to the advancement of learning.

Given their superior knowledge of criteria and standards the technicians considered it their responsibility to take the major role in the feedback process. They used their evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise to make the qualitative judgements about students’ current and future productive attempts. As a result students were seen as having a restricted and passive role to play in the feedback process. They were viewed as recipients of feedback information with little opportunity provided for them to develop their evaluative or productive knowledge or expertise.

While there was some acknowledgement from the technicians that teachers’ tacit knowledge of goals and criteria for success needed to be shared with learners only some had adopted the learning intentions approach. Those who had, had done so mainly to comply with school requirements. Although the narrow way in which intentions and criteria were specified meant that what constituted a successful performance was still held inside the teacher’s head, this was a problem unrecognised by the technicians.

**Summary of the Pragmatists’ Understandings and Self-Reported Practices**

The pragmatists endeavoured to provide feedback statements that were framed positively and described features of students’ work. The purpose and role of intentions and criteria in the feedback process was clearly articulated. However the practice of framing intentions and criteria was far less robust. In many instances intentions were not supported by criteria and where criteria had been developed they either failed to specify, or gave little indication of, the quality or standard of knowing, learning or thinking required for successful completion of work.

Several competing discourses ran through the pragmatists’ talk as they described their beliefs and practices. While it was acknowledged that
intentions and criteria should form the basis of feedback to students, this practice was also viewed as constraining and potentially detrimental to student learning. If teachers only fed back to students in regard to pre-specified intentions and criteria then incidental learning was ignored. This was seen by some of the pragmatists as an abdication of their responsibility as teachers.

Awareness of the need for students to take a more active role in the processes of learning and assessment was counterbalanced by the feasibility of such a task. While a willingness and commitment to sharing their evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise with students was conveyed, there was still a sense that it was the pragmatists themselves who controlled the feedback exchange. From the pragmatists’ perspectives, although certain new and beneficial practices had been included in their programmes, these had disrupted the status quo of the classroom. There was some perceived resistance on the part of students to become involved in some of the opportunities offered to them. Students still expected the teacher to make the qualitative judgements and decisions. In some cases student resistance caused teachers to revert to practices that they conceived as somewhat dubious.

**Summary of the Empowerers’ Understandings and Self-Reported Practices**

The strongly held belief that students must be active participants in the processes of learning and assessment had a major influence on the empowerers’ feedback practices. Recognising that they needed to promote self-monitoring behaviour in students, the empowerers were resistant to making all the qualitative judgements and decisions about students’ productive attempts. Hence their feedback to students was often framed as a series of questions and prompts that would either generate conversations between teachers and students or among students, or encourage student self-monitoring.

The ‘downloading’ of evaluative knowledge was considered a critical and necessary part of the teacher’s role. The empowerers were committed to sharing their evaluative knowledge with students through the sharing of
intentions and criteria. They believed that having access to this knowledge would encourage student commitment to, and fuller participation in, the processes of learning and assessment. Students would take responsibility for and have ownership of their learning. Disclosing evaluative knowledge to learners was seen as one way in which they could empower students. However, notwithstanding their commitment, the empowerers acknowledged the problematic nature of making their knowledge and expectations explicit. To date, despite their best attempts, it was a task that they had yet to master fully. They recognised that they still had much to learn with regard to the framing of intentions and criteria.

The empowerers spoke of the opportunities provided to help students both accumulate and enlarge their evaluative knowledge. Student appraisal of the work of others, including their peers, was a key feature of the empowerers’ articulated practice. This was seen as a way in which students could develop both evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise. Making qualitative judgements and productive decisions about others’ work was seen as having a substantial effect. It led to students monitoring their performances. Student self-monitoring was considered as an important component of the feedback process.

The Next Chapter
The findings from Phase One of the current research have been presented in Chapters Six and Seven. In the next chapter, the findings from Phase Two, the case study phase, are reported. Structured under Sadler’s (1989) three conditions for effective feedback: communicating the goals of learning; comparing current with desired performance and closing the gap between current and desired performance, the beliefs, understandings and practices of the three case study teachers are compared and contrasted.