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An Observation Guide, designed to help New Zealand teachers identify areas of teaching strength and aspects for development, was developed as part of a wider project. In the second phase of this project, 18 middle school teachers used the Guide to gather and record evidence as they participated in seven rounds of reciprocal peer observation and feedback during writing lessons with Grades 6–8 students. We report here on data from round 6 observations about the assessment for learning (AfL) strategies reported as evident in teachers' practices, how these strategies were implemented and potential gaps in practice. AfL has at its heart a core of interdependent strategies that collectively contribute to the development of autonomous, self-regulating learners and quality learning. While the middle school teachers shared goals for learning and communicated what counted as successful achievement to students, they appeared to struggle when articulating goals in terms of literacy learning and conveying the substantive aspects and quality expected in students' writing. In addition, despite AfL's promotion of learner autonomy, few teachers openly afforded students focused opportunities to take a meaningful role in their learning through the appraisal of their own and peers' writing and the joint construction of feedback. As such, teachers' AfL practice in the writing classroom failed to realise its full potential. It is argued that the promise of AfL can only be reached when strategies are enacted in ways that reflect its unitary nature, promote quality outcomes and give students a central role in their learning.

Keywords: assessment for learning; feedback; writing classroom; literacy learning

Introduction

The strategic direction for assessment in New Zealand schools as outlined in the National Assessment Strategy of 1999 was set in the context of, 'current thinking about the impact of formative assessment on teaching,

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learning and student achievement' (Chamberlain, 2000, p. 23). Related professional learning programmes such as Assessment for Better Learning (ABeL) and Assessment to Learn (AtoL) have had a significant impact on teachers' practice with both focused on development of teachers' assessment understandings about formative assessment and the use of associated strategies (Peddie, 2000; Gilmore, 2008). By 2007 teachers in approximately 35% of New Zealand's primary schools had participated in AtoL (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins, & Reid, 2009; Gilmore, 2008) with a similar percentage involved from 2008 to the present day. Typically, teachers involved in these programmes selected reading and/or writing as the context for implementation (Gilmore, 2008). Concurrent with the endorsement of formative assessment, the Ministry of Education has emphasised the need to raise levels of student achievement in literacy and numeracy (Ministry of Education, 2010). With reference to literacy, the Ministry initially put in place the national Literacy Leadership Project (Ministry of Education, 2000), followed by the Literacy Professional Development Project (Parr, Timperley, Reddish, Jesson, & Adams, 2007). Based on the premise that increases in student achievement are the outcome of quality teaching (Hattie, 2009), the Literacy Professional Development Project has aimed to further teachers' literacy-related content and pedagogical content knowledge, and enhance the teaching of writing and reading (Parr et al., 2007). Embedded within the latter project has been the development of teachers' knowledge and skills in the formative use of assessment information.

New Zealand policy statements and programmes of professional learning in assessment and literacy were initially influenced by Black and Wiliam's seminal work in the area of formative assessment (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998). Formative assessment was interpreted in these statements and programmes as a teacher-driven activity whereby assessment information was gathered and used to inform planning and teaching – it was located in the teaching process and only indirectly concerned with learning (Torrance & Pryor, 1998). In recent years, a more ambitious agenda has seen the development of an assessment for learning (AfL) discourse (Gardner, 2006). Contemporary literature depicts AfL as an everyday practice whereby learners work in partnership with their teachers and peers as together they seek, reflect upon and respond to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that promote student autonomy and enhance ongoing learning (Klenowski, 2009; Swaffield, 2011). No longer are students 'the objects of their teacher's behaviour, [rather] they are animators of their own effective teaching and learning processes' (James & Pedder, 2006, p. 28). The role of the teacher is to provide opportunities for, and support, students as they take control over their learning. The overall aim

of AfL is for students to become autonomous, self-regulating learners (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Willis, 2011). Butler and Winne (1995) have described self-regulating students as those who are able to, 'judge performance relative to goals, generate internal feedback about amounts and rates of progress towards goals, and adjust further action based on that feedback' (p. 258).

It is generally agreed that AfL encompasses the following strategies: the promotion of learner understanding about the goal(s) of learning and what constitutes expected performance; generation of feedback about the relationship between current and desired performance; learner engagement in peer feedback and self-monitoring; and the taking of action to bring about desired performance (James & Pedder, 2006; Swaffield, 2011). Although itemised individually, these strategies are neither stand-alone entities nor sequential steps. Reflecting its unitary nature, the strategies of AfL are interdependent, each feeding into and from the others in an iterative manner. Each is necessary, with no one strategy being more or less important than any other – they contribute collectively to supporting and furthering student learning. AfL is therefore more complex than teachers adding individual strategies onto existing class programmes (James & Pedder, 2006; Willis, 2011). The full potential of AfL can only be realised when all strategies are present, to a greater or lesser extent, within a learning–teaching episode *and* when students are afforded opportunities to take responsibility for their learning.

Despite considerable investment in professional learning programmes, research has demonstrated that teachers have struggled to embed AfL successfully in classroom programmes in ways that capture its unitary nature and facilitate student ownership of and responsibility for their learning (Dixon, Hawe, & Parr, 2011). In this paper we provide an account of the AfL strategies reported as evident during writing lessons, how these strategies were implemented and 'gaps' in teachers' practice. This account builds a picture of teachers' AfL practices during the teaching of writing while advancing understandings regarding the challenges of enactment in this domain. It is argued that the mere presence of AfL strategies in writing programmes is insufficient in terms of furthering student learning. What is critical is how these strategies are implemented. Outcomes from the study will be of interest to a range of educational professionals including teachers of writing, school leaders, advisers and providers of professional learning programmes. The paper also contributes to the development of what Bennett (2011) has termed a 'theory of action' which (1) identifies the component parts of the entity under discussion (AfL) along with the rationale for these parts and (2) proposes how these component parts work together to reach the desired outcome.

Assessment for Learning and the teaching of writing

Sharing the goal(s) of learning and what constitutes expected performance

If students are to play a central role in their learning, they need to understand the goal(s) of learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This understanding is critical to success. An early study carried out by Fitzgerald (1987) suggested that failure to establish goals is a significant obstacle to student revision of written texts. In its purest form, self-regulation involves students in the creation of their own goals (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Evidence indicates, however, that student-derived goals are no more effective than goals set by teachers and/or other social mediators (Zimmerman, 2008). Of critical importance is the way in which goals are framed as this influences students' understandings of the writing process and directs their attention (Hawe, Dixon, & Watson, 2008; Timperley & Parr, 2009). Much has been written about the differential impact of two types of goals on student behaviour and achievement: learning (mastery) goals and performance (ego-driven) or task completion goals (see, for example, Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986). It is widely claimed that learning goals are superior to performance goals (e.g. Ames & Archer, 1988; Timperley & Parr, 2009), with the latter to be avoided at all costs. There is evidence, however, that both types of goals can make a contribution to students' learning (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999), and students do not necessarily adopt only one type of goal; rather, according to the situation, they may endorse one, both or neither type(s) of goal (Zimmerman, 2008). Studies based in writing classrooms have shown a prevalence of performance goals (Hawe et al., 2008; Timperley & Parr, 2009) such as 'I will use more interesting words in my stories' and 'we are writing a narrative'. In the first instance, attention is drawn to counting and comparing the number of 'interesting' words used between different pieces of writing; in the second instance the focus is on the task or activity. Over time, students who are repeatedly exposed to and oriented towards performance goals will eschew more challenging pursuits and seek the easiest way to meet requirements (Dweck, 1986). Furthermore, an over-reliance on performance goals is likely to have a detrimental effect on students' writing and work against the overall aim and purpose of AfL (Harlen, 2006; Tunstall & Gipps, 1996). Students are more likely to be motivated to increase mastery of new skills and understanding of content when goals are sufficiently challenging, and are focused on learning rather than on aspects of performance (Zimmerman, 2008). When framed as broad, cognitive literacy processes, as in 'we will understand how to craft a persuasive argument' or 'I will make a strong argument that convinces the reader to support my point of view', attention is drawn to the discursive nature of writing and the notion that writing is for a purpose and/or an audience.

In addition to understanding the goal(s) of learning, students need to be acquainted with what constitutes successful achievement and/or a quality performance. This information is best conveyed through a combination of verbal descriptions and exemplars (Sadler, 1987). Since the turn of the century, teachers in a number of countries, including New Zealand, have been encouraged to share and/or generate the goal(s) of learning with students in the form of 'learning intentions' and generate success criteria that reflect progressions in learning (Clarke, 2003; Clarke, Timperley, & Hattie, 2003). When these intentions and success criteria are expressed in an appropriate manner (see Clarke, 2003) they have the capacity to capture the deeper aspects of learning underpinning learning–teaching episodes and tasks.

Questions have, however, been raised about the extent to which it is possible to delineate in advance specific and consistent features of good writing in terms of criteria and progressions (Marshall, 2004; Sadler, 1989). The act of writing is an art and for any single piece of work there is a wide range of properties that can be called upon to designate quality (Sadler, 1989). Moreover, student learning in writing is multidimensional rather than sequential and as a corollary, 'prerequisite learning cannot be conceptualised as neatly packaged units of skills or knowledge' (Sadler, 1989, p. 123). The whole is considered greater than the sum of its parts – specification and attainment of individual components in a piece of writing underestimates the impact of the whole (Parr, 2011). This is not to say that the articulation of lesson goals and what counts as successful achievement should be abandoned. Students need to know and understand where they are going and what counts as successful achievement if they are to generate meaningful feedback, monitor progress towards intended learning and become self-regulating (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Sadler, 1989). Marshall (2004) has argued that progression in writing should be construed as moving towards a broad horizon where learning outcomes and expectations are less precisely defined at the outset and where multiple pathways to successful achievement are possible. Students develop understanding of these broad horizons and different ways to achieve success as they engage in writing and participate in authentic evaluative activities designed to bring them into the subject community or guild (Hogden & Marshall, 2005; Marshall, 2004; Sadler, 1989). The importance of sharing clear goals and the criteria for mastery or success with students has been highlighted in an investigation into teachers' instructional practices during writing lessons for Years 4–8 students (Timperley & Parr, 2009) where the researchers reported:

> . . . when learning aims and mastery criteria were unclear, students identified surface features of writing as their learning aims. When these lesson attributes were clearly articulated by the teacher, students were able to identify

> deeper features of writing as the lesson aims. When the aims were clear but the mastery criteria ... misaligned ... students identified surface features of writing as the lesson aims, rather than those articulated by the teacher. (p. 43)

In the context of teaching writing, when teachers clearly convey substantive learning goals and what it is that constitutes successful writing in a way that students understand, they are more likely to generate feedback related to these qualities, and as a consequence are more likely to have students who are successful writers (Timperley & Parr, 2009).

Generating feedback

In a teaching or instructional context, feedback refers to, 'information provided by an agent (e.g. teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding ...' (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). Despite the importance ascribed to feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), much of that observed in the writing classroom has been less than helpful in terms of furthering students' writing (Hawe et al., 2008; Muncie, 2000) as it is couched in affective terms, lacks specificity in relation to a given task, is devoid of constructive critique (Ward & Dix, 2004) and is difficult for students to understand and use as a basis for action (Richardson, 2000; Zellermayer, 1989). More specifically, responses to writing are directed at quantity rather than quality (Bennett, Wragg, Carre, & Carter, 1992) and at surface rather than deep features (Hawe et al., 2008). Feedback is thus largely corrective in nature (Hawe et al., 2008; Ward & Dix, 2004) and while students may act on it, they rarely internalise or engage with it in a deep way (Muncie, 2000). Rather than regarding drafts as developmental works in progress, teachers treat them as near-finished products – hence the focus on 'fixing up' mistakes. The drafting and redrafting of work, however, provides writers with opportunities to 'mess with text' (Ward & Dix, 2004), a process critical to successful revision (Keen, 2010).

Of the four levels of feedback identified by Hattie and Timperley (2007), information about the student as a person such as 'good boy' or 'well done' is the least effective as it contains little to no information about learning. In contrast, information aimed at cognitive processes (skills, concepts, knowledge) underlying a task is very effective as it draws attention to the substantive aspects of learning and leads to deeper thinking and understanding. In a writing context, such feedback would address understandings about the purpose in writing a particular kind of text, the articulation of ideas and the use of language as a resource to express those ideas. Feedback about aspects of student self-regulation (monitoring, directing and controlling of actions towards the goals of learning) has a similar impact and degree of effectiveness. This type of feedback would

include information about students' meta-cognitive awareness of the writing process, particularly their iterative reworking and playing around with text. The fourth type of feedback focuses on how well a student is accomplishing a task. Task-related feedback is of greatest value when focused on improvement and provided in conjunction with information about cognitive processing and/or student self-regulation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). On its own, task-related feedback would address such things as construction of the appropriate kind of text and progress in the production of written work to expectations. Within an AfL framework, quality feedback that supports and furthers students' writing is complex and multi-layered as it addresses knowledge, understandings and skills on a number of levels – for example, cognisance of authorial choice and craft, metalinguistic understandings and meta-cognitive awareness of the writing process. Such feedback is heavily dependent on teachers' knowledge bases, in particular their content and pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of the student(s) and of the context (Cowie & Bell, 1999; Timperley & Parr, 2009).

Writers need quality feedback from teachers and their peers so they can discover the reactions and needs of their readers, make adjustments to their work and monitor their progress (Zellermayer, 1989). In a recent study, Parr and Timperley (2011) reported a strong relationship between teachers' ability to generate *quality* written feedback and student progress in writing (an effect size gain over 2 years of 1.19). This study, carried out across six primary schools with 49 participating teachers, concluded 'the more able a teacher was to provide the type of quality feedback to writing required in the context of assessment for learning, the greater the progress of his or her students in writing' (p. 78).

Recognising the pivotal role students play in their learning, contemporary notions of feedback involve the teacher and student(s) working together to construct achievement and effect improvement (Gardner, 2006). It is no longer sufficient or fitting for the teacher to be the sole source of feedback as this runs the danger of developing and maintaining dependence on the teacher for information about progress and learning. Rather the onus is on the teacher to provide students with opportunities to construct and engage in quality feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 1998) with the support and input of others. Such feedback provides information about progress and learning in relation to goals, criteria and standards; encourages dialogue between the teacher and student and between students about the substantive aspects of learning; helps students develop a repertoire of alternative moves or strategies; encourages positive motivational beliefs; and enhances self-esteem (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 1989, 1998). Common features of process-oriented writing classrooms such as writing conferences (Graves, 2003) and writing circles (Gunnery, 2007) provide

student-writers with opportunities to learn to interact with and craft meaning for readers and to receive audience feedback. Effective conferences help writers 'develop the meta-cognitive awareness related to the writing process and the self-regulatory strategies needed for reflecting on their texts, together with the personal responsibility needed to become a writer' (Parr, 2011, p. 56). The role of the teacher is to establish an environment where students freely exchange views about texts and mutually construct meaning in a thoughtful and reflective manner. In practice, however, teachers tend to retain control over and dominate conferences (Wong, 1998), telling students about what has been achieved, what needs improving and how to go about improvement (Hawe et al., 2008). Students are thus treated as passive recipients of information with little acknowledgement of their ability to generate information for themselves, reflect on their writing performance and take action on the basis of this information (Hawe et al., 2008; Hyland, 2000).

Peer feedback and self-monitoring during learning

Peer feedback and student self-monitoring are powerful and indispensable conditions for the improvement of learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 1989). Grounded in the notion that the locus of learning lies within the learner, these processes aim to develop learners' independence and autonomy (James & Pedder, 2006). Peer feedback is a socially situated dialogic process (Askew & Lodge, 2000) where students work together, in pairs or small groups, to clarify the goal(s) of learning and what counts as successful achievement, compare works in progress with expected performance, identify strategies to move current performance closer to what is expected and make adjustments on the basis of information generated. While valuable in helping writers make improvements to their work (Hyland, 2000; Keen, 2010), peer feedback also helps student-assessors clarify their own understandings and build their evaluative knowledge and productive expertise as they are exposed to the ways in which others have approached the same or a similar task, the challenges faced by peers and the different moves and strategies used to bring performance closer to what is expected (Paris & Paris, 2001; Sadler, 2008). Engaging in peer feedback has the capacity to lead to 'intelligent self-monitoring', a state whereby students generate information, *during* learning, about the quality of their performance (Sadler, 1989). It results in student ownership of and responsibility for learning and plays a part in the development of intrinsic motivation (James & Pedder, 2006). Students have reported that having opportunities to develop self-monitoring skills has enhanced their ability to revise and improve their writing (Xiang, 2004). Ward and Dix (2004), however, assert that teachers rarely provide organised, formal substantive opportunities during writing for students to

discuss and appraise their own and peers' texts. Much of the peer feed-back in writing classrooms occurs incidentally and informally, between friends, as they seek assistance on how to get started with their writing and ask each other for ideas (Hunter, Mayenga, & Gambell, 2006; Ward & Dix, 2004). If peer and/or self-assessment are planned for, more often than not they are focused on end products and serve summative rather than formative, forward-looking purposes (Dixon et al., 2011; Parr, 2011), or are 'bolted on' to lessons without comparable changes to class-room roles (Dixon, 2011).

Research questions

The research questions addressed in this paper relate to the AfL strategies that teachers of Grades 6–8 students (11–14 years) use in their writing (written language) lessons:

> Which AfL strategies are reported as evident during writing lessons?
> How are these strategies implemented?
> What gaps are suggested in teachers' AfL practice?

Data were gathered during the second phase of a Teaching and Learn-ing Research Initiative (TLRI) carried out in a New Zealand middle school (Grades 6–8 students) of 615 students and 31 staff members – 21 classroom teachers, 7 specialist teachers and 3 senior managers (see Parr & Hawe, 2008). The senior management team of the school planned a year-long professional learning programme for staff, comprising two complementary components. The first component addressed the further-ing of teachers' content and pedagogical content knowledge in the teach-ing of writing and the development of rich, robust classroom writing programmes. To assist in meeting these aims, a local literacy consultant was contracted to work alongside the teachers as they planned and taught their units of work in writing – one unit during each of the four school terms. The second component involved teachers at the middle school using an Observation Guide as they engaged in a process of reciprocal peer observation and feedback during the teaching of writing, with a view to strengthening literacy-related teaching practice. The Guide, grounded in and informed by national and international research evidence regard-ing the nature of effective literacy practice, and observed elements of effective literacy teaching practice in New Zealand classrooms, had been iteratively developed and trialled in New Zealand classrooms throughout phase 1 of the project. The Guide was designed to have practical and research value, that is, to enable teachers to identify areas of teaching strength and features for further learning and to provide researchers with access to samples of classroom practice. In accordance with the ethical

principles of voluntary participation and informed consent, the second component of the programme was explained and teachers invited to provide the authors with access to information gathered through the Guide (see University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics committee approval Ref No: 2006/012).

Data gathering – the Observation Guide

The Observation Guide had four sections, each with up to five areas for observation:

> *Section 1. Learning goal(s)*. The presence and nature of literacy-related learning goals; making clear and developing students' understanding of goals and expectations; activation of links between goals and students' prior experiences.
>
> *Section 2. Curricula alignment*. Degree(s) of alignment between learning goal(s)/success criteria and 'deliberate acts of teaching' (e.g. modelling, exemplars, independent student activities, literacy texts and resources).
>
> *Section 3. (1) Classroom interactions*. Participants: teacher–student; teacher–class; teacher–group. Focus of teacher–student interactions: task/activity; behaviour; learning goal.
>
> *(2) Differentiation for learners*. Resources; activities; scaffolding.
>
> *Section 4. Feedback*. Achievement-related feedback; improvement-related feedback; peer feedback; self-monitoring (self-assessment).

Continuous descriptive rating scales were used to record observations in areas where varying degrees of a criterion were to be noted. The majority of areas employed rating scales of up to four points, with each point defined by a brief verbal description (Sadler, 1987). In some cases, the points on the scale were to be treated as discrete entities with only one point being marked; in other cases it was possible for evidence of two or three points to be apparent over the course of a lesson. There was space for each point to be ticked or marked several times, to reflect, if necessary, the frequency with which an action was observed. Space was also provided on the Guide for observers to record evidence in support of judgements – a key element for referral during post-observation learning conversations (Robinson & Lai, 2006).

Over the year of the programme, teachers participated in seven rounds of reciprocal peer observation. As each teacher conducted a 35–45-minute writing lesson with their class, he/she was observed by their partner who used the Guide to direct the observation, make judgements on the rating scales and record supporting evidence. The roles were then reversed. Following the reciprocal observations, the two teachers participated in a

learning conversation (Robinson & Lai, 2006) where they discussed what each had observed and recorded, provided oral feedback about areas of strength and areas for improvement and identified how improvement could be effected.

Seven to 10 days prior to rounds 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6, the staff took part in a seminar and/or workshop that dealt with the substantive content related to the upcoming observations, how the Guide could be used to gather and record evidence of teaching practice and the processes and protocols associated with peer coaching (Licklider, 1995; Showers & Joyce, 1996) and learning conversations (Robinson & Lai, 2006). Participants had opportunities during these sessions to raise issues and discuss concerns regarding the substantive area being addressed and/or their use of the Guide. The first two rounds of observation focused on familiarising teachers with the reciprocal peer observation process and use of the tool to gather evidence and make judgements about practice. Observations during these initial rounds were confined to Section 1 of the Guide. Rounds 3, 4 and 5 addressed Sections 2 and 3, the sixth round concentrated on Section 4, while the final round covered specific areas nominated by the teacher being observed.

Data related to AfL strategies judged as evident during writing lessons, how these strategies were used and potential gaps in teachers' AfL practices, were gathered using the Observation Guide ratings and evidence from round 6. In addition to the focus on feedback, the teachers decided to gather data about lesson goals and success criteria, as these were ostensibly the points of reference for feedback (see Appendix 1 for the 'Observation Guide for round 6 observations'). Prior to commencing round 6 observations, the teachers completed an exercise to determine the reliability of their judgements when using Section 4 of the Guide. This exercise involved the teachers watching a 15-minute, video-taped extract from a writing lesson which included a conference between a teacher and a student. A written transcript was provided for each teacher to ensure the video-taped dialogue was 'picked up'. On a second viewing of the video, the teachers individually recorded their judgements (using the categories and codes from Section 4 of the Observation Guide) next to the relevant action/interactions on the transcripts, with corresponding evidence highlighted or comments provided alongside.

For the purpose of analysis, two experts divided the transcript into seven sections and identified 14 agreed-upon instances and ratings of practice related to Section 4. Each of the teachers' judgements was compared to the agreed-upon ratings from the experts and recorded as 'correct', 'incorrect' (including extra ratings) and/or 'missed'. Overall, three of the teachers achieved between 70% and 85% agreement with the experts; five of the teachers achieved between 50% and 69% agreement; six of the teachers achieved between 40% and 49% agreement; and two teachers achieved between 30% and 39% agreement. It was more common

for the teachers to miss an instance of feedback than to make an incorrect judgement. Analysis revealed that the majority of instances missed and/or rated incorrectly were concerned with achievement-related feedback (4.1.1; 4.1.2; 4.1.3). In contrast, teachers had little difficulty in correctly identifying instances of improvement-related feedback (4.2.2; 4.2.3). Two further aspects of the video-taped teacher's practice accounted for a number of the missed or incorrect ratings – the instance where the student initiated and led the discussion with the teacher about the areas she considered needed improvement and how these could be improved (4.2.4), and as most of the teachers stopped rating once the writing conference had concluded, they missed the reference by the teacher to peer feedback (4.3.2). The outcomes of this exercise were reviewed and discussed with and by the teachers, with attention drawn to the nature of achievement-related feedback and the need for observers to attend closely to a teacher's interactions with individuals, groups and the class. Given that observation is not an exact science and that observers develop shared understandings of rating descriptions through reflection, discussion and 'usage in context' (Sadler, 1987), it was decided to proceed with the use of Sections 1 and 4 of the Guide (see Appendix 1) for round 6 observations.

Findings

Nine pairs of teachers participated in the sixth round of reciprocal peer observation in the third and fourth weeks of term 3. Two pairs were unavailable due to their classes' participation in a school camp. For the purpose of reporting findings, all teachers have been assigned pseudonyms with each pair having names that begin with the same alphabet letter (e.g. Andrea, Alice; Bella, Brian; Carol, Charlotte; etc.). These observations were carried out at the mid-point of the writing unit, a time when it would be expected that students were conversant with lesson goals and what constituted successful achievement of these goals, and they would be drafting and re-crafting their work in the light of feedback.

Goals for learning and what counts as successful achievement – Section 1

Table 1 presents observers' ratings from Section 1 of the Guide in relation to the following areas: the presence and nature of goal(s) for learning, making clear what counts as successful achievement and developing students' understanding of goal(s) and/or expectations.

Presence and nature of goals for learning (1.1)

Seventeen of the 18 teachers presented students with goals for learning either orally or in a written format. For the remaining teacher (Harry),

Table 1. Observers' ratings of peer practice in relation to goals for learning, making clear what counts as successful achievement and developing students' understanding of learning goals and/or expectations.

Teacher observed	1.1 Goals of learning (LG)	1.2 Making clear what counts as successful achievement of LG	1.2 Developing student's understanding of LG/expectations and what counts as successful achievement
Andrea	1.1.3 E	1.2.1 E	1.2.2 E
Alice	1.1.3 E	1.2.1 E	1.2.2 E
Bella	1.1.2 E	1.2.1	1.2.2
Brian	1.1.2 E	1.2.1	1.2.2 E
Carol	1.1.2 E	1.2.1 E	1.2.2 E
Charlotte	1.1.2 E	1.2.1 E	1.2.2 E
David	1.1.2 E	1.2.1 E	1.2.2 E
Dorothy	1.1.2 E	1.2.1	1.2.2 E
Ella	1.1.3 E	1.2.1 E	1.2.2
Eric	1.1.3 E	1.2.1	N/A
Fiona	1.1.2	1.2.1 E	1.2.2
Fran	1.1.2 E	1.2.1 E	1.2.2
Graeme	1.1.2 E	1.2.1	N/A
Gail	1.1.2 E	1.2.1 E	1.2.2 E
Helen	1.1.2 E	1.2.1 E	1.2.2
Harry	1.1.1 E	N/A	N/A
Iris	1.1.2	1.2.1 E	1.2.2 E
Ian	1.1.2	1.2.1 E	1.2.2 E

Notes: Key: Ratings (1.1.2, 1.2.1, etc.) are explained in Appendix 1; E = evidence recorded on the Observation Guide to support rating; N/A = not apparent during the observed lesson.

the goal was deemed implicit in the lesson (1.1.1).[1] Of those who presented students with goals for learning, 13 were judged as expressing these with reference to either the genre, topic and/or task (1.1.2); for example:

To write a biography of John Walker (Alice);
To insert language that appeals to the reader and replace words that are overdone (Fran);
We are writing a haiku poem (Gail);

while the four remaining teachers were judged as having expressed goals in terms of a specific (literacy-related) cognitive process or skill (1.1.3). The following example was recorded as indicative of Ella's achievement of this rating: 'To understand how to use our senses to write a poem'.

Making clear what counts as successful achievement and developing understanding about the goal, criteria, expectations and/or what counts as successful achievement (1.2)

Overall, 17 of the 18 teachers made reference to what counted as successful achievement of the intended learning through an oral explanation or

through a written format (1.2.1). The exception was Harry, where the 'not apparent' (N/A) box was ticked. Thirteen of these 17 were rated as making 'what counts' clear to students through success criteria which consisted of 'can do' statements or lists of elements for inclusion in students' work:

> I know I will have achieved this when I have included:
> what happened; when it took place; who was involved . . . (Helen)

> I will include:

> ☐ adjectives
> ☐ nouns
> ☐ senses
> ☐ vary sentence lengths . . . (Carol)

> We will have a remembered feeling or sensation; . . . and have extended sentences (Iris),

while the remaining four teachers were deemed to have made reference to specific qualities or levels of achievement recorded on a rubric with levels of achievement.

In addition, with the exception of Harry, Graeme and Eric, the teachers were rated as engaging students in activities such as the discussion of qualities in exemplars and models, aimed at developing understanding of the goal and/or what counted as successful achievement (1.2.2). Midway through the unit of work, it seemed that most of the teachers were struggling to articulate significant *learning* goals and to convey through success criteria the substantive aspects and quality expected in students' writing. Most relied on the use of artefacts to develop understandings about what was expected. As a consequence, students could inadvertently come to understand writing as a prescriptive, product-focused activity.

Feedback – Section 4

[Table 2](#) presents observer judgements regarding feedback practice and facilitation of peer feedback and student self-monitoring.

Achievement-related feedback (4.1)

Three of the teachers were noted as using approving and/or rewarding feedback such as 'fantastic' (Ella) or 'good' (Helen), frequently, without reference to a specific aspect of achievement (4.1.1). These three (Charlotte, Ella and Helen) were also observed engaging in more targeted achievement-related feedback during their lessons; hence there are two entries for each in [Table 2](#). Overall, 17 teachers were rated as providing

Table 2.   Observers' ratings of colleagues' practice with reference to achievement-related feedback, improvement-related feedback, student-peer feedback and student self-monitoring.

Teacher observed	4.1 Achievement-related feedback	4.2 Improvement-related feedback	4.3 Peer feedback	4.4 Student self-monitoring
Andrea	4.1.4 E	4.2.3 4.2.4 E	N/A	4.4.3
Alice	4.1.3 E	4.2.3 4.2.4 E	N/A	4.4.3 E
Bella	4.1.3	4.2.1	4.3.2 E	N/A
Brian	4.1.4	4.2.3 E	4.3.2 E	4.4.2 E
Carol	4.1.3 E	4.2.3 4.2.4	N/A	N/A
Charlotte	4.1.1 4.1.2 E	4.2.1	N/A	N/A
David	4.1.3	4.2.3	4.3.3	4.4.3
Dorothy	4.1.3	4.2.3	4.3.3 E	4.4.3 E
Ella	4.1.1 E 4.1.4	4.2.4 E	4.3.1 E 4.3.3 E	4.4.3
Eric	4.1.4 E	4.2.4 E	4.3.3 E	4.4.3 E
Fiona	4.1.2 E 4.1.4	4.2.4 E	4.3.2	4.4.2
Fran	4.1.3 E	4.2.3 E	4.3.3 E	4.4.3 E
Graeme	4.1.3	4.2.2 4.2.3 E	N/A	N/A
Gail	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Helen	4.1.1 E 4.1.3	4.2.3 E	4.3.2	N/A
Harry	4.1.3	4.2.3	N/A	N/A
Iris	4.1.2	4.2.3 E	N/A	N/A
Ian	4.1.2 E	N/A	4.3.2	N/A

Notes: Key: Ratings (4.1.1, 4.1.2, etc.) are explained in Appendix 1; E = evidence recorded on the Observation Guide to support rating; N/A = not apparent during the observed lesson.

students with achievement-related feedback. Of these, four referred in a general manner to the learning focus or an aspect of literacy learning (4.1.2) such as '[I can see a] great range of describing words as I walk around' (Fiona); nine were observed telling students about the ways in which their work had met expectations either in relation to the success criteria (4.1.3):

> Fran – to class – [Student] noticed that she has used seven 'she's'. [Student] only noticed when she stopped and highlighted – great [goal of learning was to reduce needless repetition in story];

and/or generic aspects of literacy learning:

> [Alice to student] Your grammar and punctuation in this piece is perfect;
> [Carol to student]. . . use full stops for a major pause, comma where you take a breath;

and five were judged as regularly engaging individuals or small groups in a dialogic conversation, where the student(s) took responsibility for identifying what had been achieved in relation to the success criteria and/or aspects of literacy learning (4.1.4). The only observer to provide evidence in support of the latter was Alice who provided a series of short

descriptions such as '[Andrea] asked for [student's] thoughts on the intro [sic] and why it was effective . . .' along with excerpts of dialogue:

> Andrea sets up discussion with [student] about her biography and her orga-
> nisation of ideas into clear paragraphs [goal for the lesson].
> Andrea: 'Tell me what you are doing . . . Mandela right? . . .'
> Student: 'I didn't start off very well, starts off going straight into the first
> para [sic]'. . . Andrea nods
> Student: 'first para is confusing, second para, is father and brothers, third
> para, how his name got changed to Nelson'
> Andrea '. . . what is the most significant thinking about N.M. – why is he
> well known?'
> Student: 'Standing up for his race . . . .' [discussion continued about the best
> place / paragraph to include this information].

Improvement-related feedback (4.2)

Two teachers, Gail and Ian, were assessed as not having provided their students with improvement-related feedback. Of the 16 who provided improvement-related feedback (some teachers had more than one rating on the Guide), 2 were judged as addressing aspects of performance unre-lated to goal(s) of learning and/or to generic aspects of literacy (4.2.1). No evidence was provided in support of these judgements. While 1 other teacher (Graeme) provided improvement-related feedback that generally addressed the success criteria (4.2.2), he, along with 10 others, informed students about specific aspects of their work that needed improvement and how to carry out this improvement, with reference to the success criteria and/or generic features of literacy learning (4.2.3). For instance, during a short individual conference, Helen said to the student, 'What is needed here is a brief, effective ending' and Fran '[was] encouraging stu-dents to change [the order of] sentences around'.

Six teachers were judged as engaging students, individually or during 'writing circles', in a dialogue about ways to improve their writing with reference to success criteria and/or generic literacy features (4.2.4). Fran noted, for instance, that Fiona 'gave one-on-one feedback' while Eric recorded the following interchange in support of Ella's 4.2.4 rating:

> 'somewhere through here maybe, add in another line' . . . [student] 'yeah,
> yeah'.

In both cases (Fiona and Ella) the written evidence seems to sit more com-fortably with the teacher *telling* students about what should be improved (i.e. 4.2.3). There is little strong written evidence on Fiona's and Ella's Guide sheets of *dialogue* between teacher and student. Other support for dialogic feedback included Andrea's note that, 'Alice and [student] dis-cussed where she's at with her current piece, what she's struggling with.

Worked on how to focus in on a snapshot of time rather than a recount or short story ...' with excerpts of dialogue recorded alongside. With the exception of Andrea, there was little evidence of teachers and students jointly constructing or messing with text in an iterative or recursive manner. It appeared that students were assigned a passive and restricted role as recipients of and respondents to their teachers' ideas.

Peer feedback (4.3)

Eight of the teachers were judged as not openly encouraging their students to engage in peer feedback, and Eric noted in Ella's lesson instances where students spontaneously or informally engaged in this activity (4.3.1):

> [Student 1] 'will get [Student 2] to check I am ok' [goes to Student 2, read work together, make changes].

Of the remaining 10 teachers, 5 reminded their students to talk with peers about their work (4.3.2) and 5 explicitly included activities during lessons where students provided feedback to peers about where and how to improve their work in relation to goals or success criteria (4.3.3). In support of the latter ratings, Fiona wrote that Fran's students were asked, during the lesson, to stop writing and 'discuss what they have in their writing, relate to sc [success criteria] and use other ideas to help improve work', while Eric described how Ella conducted a 'writer's circle' where, after one of the students had read her story to the group, Ella invited group members to identify where and what kinds of improvements could be made and students offered suggestions. In addition, Eric noted that other students in Ella's class were talking with peers about where work had met success criteria and how work could be improved (4.3.1), hence the two ratings in Table 2.

Student self-monitoring (4.4)

Over the course of the observed writing lessons, half of the teachers were assessed as making no overt attempt to encourage their students to engage in self-monitoring (or self-assessment). Of the remaining nine teachers, two reminded students of the need to identify where their work had met the success criteria and needed improvement (4.4.2), and seven included activities during the lesson where students were asked to stop writing, read their work and carry out improvements (4.4.3). Eric, for instance, asked his students to 'look over your work ... find things to improve and do them' and as a result of this request, '[student to another student] said – I'm going to fix mine; K [was observed] re-reading [her] work and getting the dictionary out, changing words; J [was seen] re-reading his work and considering changes, making changes ...'. In contrast, Ella

took a more formal approach, handing out a sheet with the success criteria and asking students to 'mark your work' on the sheet.

Overall, in at least a third of the writing lessons, peer feedback was noted by its absence, and in half of the lessons self-monitoring was not openly addressed. In a number of the lessons, the practice of 'bolting on' appeared evident as students were instructed at the beginning of the lesson to remember to self-assess and/or give feedback to peers, but no specific times or opportunities were available during the lessons for these activities. Neither of these activities was embedded in the writing programmes.

Individual profiles of AfL strategies used during writing lessons

In addition to providing a collective view of teachers' practices, Tables 1 and 2 provide an overall profile of each teacher's AfL practice during the observed lesson. Alice, for example, described how Andrea talked with her class about their goal for writing, making reference to literacy process skills:

> We are using effective vocab and sentence structures in our memoir writing, to show our understanding and use of language features … we've written lots of memoirs … remember I'm big on sophisticated and vibrant language [modeled with class, reworking student sentences from yesterday to improve language, using more vibrant words].

Success criteria were referred to so students were aware of what counted as achievement of the goal, and understanding of these criteria was further developed as the class identified aspects of successful achievement in student work from the previous day. As students worked on their writing, there was evidence that Andrea engaged students in dialogue, individually and in small groups, about the ways in which their work met the success criteria, the areas for improvement and how this improvement might be effected:

> Andrea and [Student] – conference – discussed where [Student] is at with her current piece, identified what she's struggling with [memoir is too long, is like a long story]. Worked on how to focus in on a snapshot of time … 'So what will you do from here?'

While students were not observed giving feedback to peers, instances of informal/spontaneous student self-assessment and self-monitoring were noted.

In contrast, Graeme provided his class with a learning goal in the form of a task – 'to use quality words in our stories'. He was observed sharing with the class a list of elements for inclusion in their writing (to use proper nouns and adjectives) and the students duly recorded this list in their books. Graeme was also observed telling the class, as he walked around

the room, about whether and how their work had met expectations and how it could be improved – 'What will that look like? What will it sound like?' There was no evidence of individual or group writing conferences. Graeme did not overtly encourage his students to engage in peer feedback or self-monitoring and students were not observed participating in these activities during the lesson – they were focused on writing.

Discussion

All teachers in the current study shared goals for learning with their students and with one exception identified what counted as successful achievement of these goals. In New Zealand, teachers of writing have been encouraged to use the Ministry of Education's (2003) genre-based matrices of writing indicators and progressions (for each level of schooling) and accompanying exemplars when generating learning goals/intentions and success criteria. In relation to the teachers in this study, it could be argued that the broad and fuzzy nature of Ministry-produced indicators such as 'develops thoughts, feelings and ideas that are personally meaningful in relation to an experience or a character and begins to add detail and comments, showing some selectivity in the process' (Ministry of Education, 2003) contributed to their adopting the 'easier' default position of using genre and topic performance tasks. However, when goals are expressed in performance terms students tend to focus on the more mechanical aspects of their writing (Matsumura, Patthey-Chavez, Valdes, & Garnier, 2002; Timperley & Parr, 2009). In a similar vein, criteria are less than helpful when, as observed in the present study, they address end products and are expressed as a list of items for inclusion in a piece of writing. Undue emphasis on performance goals and the inclusion of pre-specified elements can result in students and teachers applying a 'fix-it' approach where writing is treated as little more than a routine activity (Hawe et al., 2008; Hyland, 2000; Matsumura et al., 2002). On the other hand, attention is drawn to the more substantive aspects of writing when instructional goals are framed as broad, cognitive literacy processes, and when success criteria address process and product outcomes, and highlight the quality expected. The construction of goals for learning in performance terms and the communication of success criteria as list elements for inclusion in students' work observed in the current study are not, however, unusual (Hawe et al., 2008; Timperley & Parr, 2009). Whether this is due to the influence of the Ministry guidelines and/or the state of teachers' subject knowledge coupled with difficulties in the expression of this often tacitly held knowledge is a moot point.

Challenges in the determination and expression of what constitutes the process of writing and the nature of quality writing do not mean efforts to articulate goals and what constitutes successful achievement should be

disbanded. Writing needs to be recognised as a complex activity and understood as a crafted act. Rather than using precise goals and a standard set of predetermined criteria to define progress and success, it is more appropriate to construct progress and success in writing as movement towards a 'horizon of possibilities' (James, 2008). Elements of this horizon become clearer and sharper as the instructional unit develops. Furthermore, teachers have the opportunity, during this time, to co-construct differentiated expressions of progress and success with groups and individuals, drawing not only on the cognitive aspects of learning but also on those related to the conative domain, in particular skills concomitant with goal setting, meta-cognition, self-monitoring and self-regulation (Huitt & Cain, 2005; Prawat, 1985). Feedback is particularly powerful when it cues students to learning rather than performance outcomes and triggers task-related processing skills. These outcomes and skills serve as points of reference for feedback during writing conferences, writers' circles and the like, providing relevant and targeted information for each student about the nature of his/her achievement and areas for improvement. Given that the goals, criteria and literacy features in the current study failed to capture critical aspects of thinking, writing and the writing process, it is difficult to see how the information generated could significantly enhance students' writing.

AfL is 'an inter-subjective social process, situated in and accomplished by interactions between students and teachers' (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008, p. 4). In its fullest expression, it brings students 'into the heart of teaching and learning processes and decision-making as they adopt pedagogical practices to further their own learning and that of their peers' (James & Pedder, 2006, p. 28). Dialogic feedback is a joint enterprise whereby teachers and students generate rich, qualitative information about performance through a criss-cross of ideas, thoughts, feelings and opinions (Carnell, 2000). With the exception of written descriptions and excerpts of Andrea's dialogue, much of the evidence offered by teacher-observers as indicative of dialogic feedback seemed to involve the teacher *telling* students about the nature and quality of their writing rather than the teacher and student(s) *collaborating* in a dialogic appraisal and revision of texts. An overemphasis on teacher-supplied feedback discourages the development of student autonomy and 'intelligent self-monitoring' (Sadler, 1989). It may be that the teacher-observers did not fully grasp the meaning of feedback as a dialogic process. Alternatively, capturing the full nature of teacher–student interactions in real time is challenging, and the brief descriptions and snippets of talk recorded on the Guide sheets may have been intended as aide-memoires for ensuing learning conversations rather than full representations of interchanges between the teacher and student(s). Irrespective of the explanation for the observed behaviour, it is critical to the development of student independence and autonomy

that teachers establish a discourse structure where power is shared with students and students are acknowledged as having valid insights into their own learning. Dialogic exchanges where students and teachers jointly construct achievement and the way forward can promote skills and understandings critical to developing students' writing (Ward & Dix, 2004).

The strategies of AfL are 'culturally situated patterns of participation that allow students to develop a sense of belonging as an insider in the practice [i.e. writing], while developing an identity of an autonomous learner...' (Willis, 2011, p. 402). The most effective way for students to become 'insiders' and develop autonomy is through direct participation in the creation, evaluation and revision of their work (Sadler, 2008). Opportunities for structured and focused peer response *during* production, using the language of writing, are central to developing students' understandings about how texts work and the complex nature of the writing process (Sadler, 1989; Ward & Dix, 2004). Participation in authentic evaluative experiences facilitates deep engagement with subject matter and initiates students into the 'guild knowledge' of the writing community (Marshall, 2004; Sadler, 1989). Together, teachers and students establish what they as a community of writers value. Appraisal of works in progress also helps students acquire requisite knowledge and skills for self-monitoring and self-regulation. Peer response and student self-monitoring therefore need to be *deliberately* incorporated into writing lessons through, for example, pair-peer review activities, authors' chair, writing circles and group conferences. Inclusion of students in evaluative activities requires fundamental changes to entrenched understandings, attitudes and behaviours regarding teacher and student roles and relationships (Dixon, 2011; James & Pedder, 2006). Even when teachers believe in and are committed to student independence and autonomy, they have found related strategies such as peer feedback and self-monitoring difficult to implement (James & Pedder, 2006; Marshall & Drummond, 2006).

Conclusion

Teachers' ready acceptance of AfL strategies has been attributed to the ease with which they can be attached to class programmes and the lack of disruption this attachment causes to prevailing practices and roles (Dixon, 2011; James & Pedder, 2006; Webb & Jones, 2009). The critical factor in terms of supporting and furthering students' learning is not, however, the presence of these strategies – what is important is how these are instantiated in practice. In this study, teachers' practices followed the 'letter' rather than the 'spirit' of AfL (Marshall & Drummond, 2006). This is hardly surprising given that national initiatives, educational consultants and systems of teacher appraisal and school review in New Zealand schools prioritise the presence of strategies over quality of implementation

(see, for example, Education Review Office, 2007). As a result, it can be argued that implementation has become scripted and ritualistic. AfL has at its heart a core of interdependent strategies that support and further quality learning (Black et al., 2003; Swaffield, 2011). Its full potential can only be realised if these strategies are enacted in ways that reflect the unitary nature of AfL, promote quality learning and give students a central role in the learning process.

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Note

1. 1.1.1, 1.1.2 and similar codes that follow refer to categories on the Guide in Appendix 1.

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Appendix 1. Observation Guide for round 6 observations

Teacher:	Observer:	Date:

Section 1 Goals of learning and successful achievement of goals

1.1 Presence and nature of goal(s) for learning	Written ☐	Oral ☐
1.1.1 Goal for learning is implicit in teaching/learning activities ☐	**1.1.2** Goal for learning is expressed: - as a topic ☐ - as a task ☐ - with reference to the genre ☐ - other ☐	**1.1.3** Goal for learning is expressed in terms of: - specific literacy-related knowledge ☐ - literacy-related cognitive process/skill ☐

Record evidence to support judgement

1.2 Making clear and developing understanding about what counts as successful achievement

Not apparent ☐

1.2.1	1.2.2
What counts as successful achievement is communicated in - writing ☐ - orally ☐ in the form of success criteria stated as/in - 'can do' statements ☐ - elements for inclusion ☐ - a rubric with criteria and levels/standards of achievement ☐	Expectations and understandings of goals, criteria, expectations and/or what counts as successful achievement are developed through - artefacts such as exemplars, models, vignettes ☐ - oral explanations to teacher or peers ☐ - other ☐

Record evidence to support judgement

Section 4 Feedback / information about learning

4.1 Achievement- related feedback

4.1.1	**4.1.2**	**4.1.3**	**4.1.4**
Teacher feedback is not directly related to achievement (rewarding, approving, disapproving)	Teacher feedback refers in a ***general*** manner to: - learning goal/ criteria/ expectations ☐ - generic aspects of literacy learning ☐	Teacher tells the learner about ***how*** their work has met: - learning goal/criteria/ expectations ☐ - generic aspects of literacy learning ☐	Learner and teacher discuss (***with learner taking the lead***) how the work has met: - learning goal/criteria/ expectations ☐ - generic aspects of literacy learning ☐

Record evidence to support judgement

4.2 Improvement-related feedback

4.2.1	**4.2.2**	**4.2.3**	**4.2.4**
Teacher provides feedback about aspects to improve but these are ***not*** related to learning goals/criteria/ expectations or generic aspects of literacy learning	Teacher feedback about areas for improvement refers in a ***general*** manner to: - learning goals/ criteria/ expectations ☐ - generic aspects of literacy learning ☐	Teacher tells the learner about ***what*** needs improvement and ***how*** to do this, with reference to: - learning goals/criteria/ expectations ☐ - generic aspects of literacy learning ☐	Learner and teacher discuss (***with learner taking the lead***) ***what*** needs improvement and ***how*** to go about this, with reference to: - learning goals/criteria/ expectations ☐ - generic aspects of literacy learning ☐

Record evidence to support judgement

4.3 Opportunities for peer feedback   N/A ☐

4.3.1	**4.3.2**	**4.3.3**
Learners initiate engagement in peer feedback *Note: The teacher has not deliberately included an opportunity or activity for this*	Teacher reminds learners to talk with peers about how work has met goals/criteria/ expectations and how work can be improved in relation to goals/criteria/expectations	Teacher includes an activity where learners talk with peers about how work has met goals/criteria/ expectations and how work can be improved in relation to goals/ criteria/expectations

Record evidence to support judgement

4.4 Opportunities for self-assessment   N/A ☐

4.4.1 Learners engage in self-monitoring activities	**4.4.2** Teacher reminds learners to look at how their work has met goals/criteria/expectations and how their work can be improved in relation to goals/criteria/expectations	**4.4.3** Teacher includes an activity where learners are asked to look at how their work has met goals/criteria/expectations and to make improvements in relation to goals/criteria/expectations
Note: The teacher has not deliberately included an opportunity or activity for this		

Record evidence to support judgement