

With a little help from my friends:
Benefits and challenges of using peer review
to assist journalism students' learning

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Abstract

Peer learning has become a well-used (and well-researched) learning strategy for tertiary students in disciplines as far apart as physics, music, tourism, dental hygiene and outdoor education. However, while there is anecdotal evidence peer learning is used in some journalism schools, there is almost no academic literature to answer the basic questions: how, when, why, where and who—and importantly, does it help journalism students learn?

AUT University introduced peer review (students giving feedback on each other's weekly news stories) into journalism classes in 2008. This action research study used questionnaires and collaborative group meetings to gather the views of third year News Reporting students and their tutors on the benefits of peer review to student learning, and the challenges of the process.

The study found the students saw benefits arising in two separate areas: those from giving feedback, and those from receiving it. Initially, before the feedback took place, they envisaged more benefits arising from the latter, but this changed when they carried out the reviews, with reviewing seen as the most beneficial. This reflects findings in literature (Falchikov, 2007; Topping, 2009) about the benefits for the 'teacher' in reciprocal peer learning, but also reflects students' perceived frustrations from the process, and from their classmates' engagement in it.

The study concluded there is good reason to believe journalism students can benefit from peer review. However there is a risk with journalism students that the active process of 'peer reviewing' (the giving of feedback on news stories), be confused with 'peer editing' (the more passive journalistic activity where editors make changes to reporters' stories). While students wanted their peers to point out grammar and punctuation errors before their stories were seen by their tutor, there is the risk that such directive or superficial feedback (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) reduces the benefits to student learning; it may even hinder learning in some cases.

The study also found participants believed preparation, training, modelling and monitoring to be crucial parts of the peer review process. Moreover, without the opportunity to discuss the feedback with each other, potential benefits of peer review could be lost. There are also additional benefits for students when they also discuss with their peers their learning from the peer review process itself.

The importance of the structure of the peer review process means that while on the surface, peer review might appear to exclude the tutors, in fact their role is critical. When faced with challenges to the process, the study found many students default to the traditional, passive: ‘teacher, sort this out’ model. However, this research identified the role of the teacher in peer review as someone there to scaffold the student through the process of arriving at learning—not through the learning itself.

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Attestation of authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor any material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

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Prologue

“A student's colleagues often represent the least recognized, least used and possibly the most important of all the resources available to him” (MacKenzie, Eraut, & Jones, 1970, p. 125).

This thesis started with a book and a video.

The book, quite an old book now, a seminal text, was *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (Postman & Weingartner, 1969). I came upon it in 2011 during a tertiary teacher training intensive I was taking as part of a career move from journalism to teaching future journalists. Suddenly, here were academics telling me as a teacher what I should have figured out years ago as a student: that what other students had to say could be as important as what the teacher said.

The video, newer, was *Confessions of a converted lecturer* (Mazur, 2009). This time, a well-respected Harvard professor was telling university lecturers that the opinions of a student's peers might be even more useful than those of his or her lecturers. Now that's subversive.

But perhaps this thesis did not start with academic texts. Perhaps my understanding of the importance of peer learning went even further back, to my own life. Who taught me to climb trees, or play jacks, or ride a horse? Who was the first person to whisper about boys and sex, to show me how to put on lipstick? Later, who showed me how to prune a rose bush, or use Microsoft excel, or fill out an ethics application form? It certainly wasn't a teacher, a parent or a boss. It was a friend, a colleague, a peer.

I started thinking about my own undergraduate university learning. While successful, grades-wise, it was undoubtedly largely superficial on the continuum of deep to surface learning (Marton & Säljö, 1976). I relied almost totally on the words of my teachers and the texts in the library. I hardly ever reflected on what I was learning or how I was learning it; I did not discuss my work with other students or critique their ideas. I did not seek the opinions of my classmates, or value my own. In fact, looking back, I wonder if I ever really thought at all.

Almost 30 years later I did start to think: about my own teaching—and my students' learning. I realised I was using the same teaching method as had been used with me—lecturer as fount of all wisdom. I began to mull over the idea that if I was not the

answer, or if I was only part of the answer, what were other parts of the learning picture? Peer learning—students teaching other students—made sense, was interesting, and was already happening with journalism students at AUT University, where I worked.

I wanted to know more.

Chapter 1: Introduction and context to the study

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This thesis explores tutors' and students' views about peer review as used in AUT University's journalism programme. My purpose was to investigate the perceived benefits for students' learning from the peer review process and the impact of challenges they faced on that learning. As befits an action research methodology, I anticipated the research would inform a process of change, in terms of modifying my own professional practice and potentially stimulating further action, in order to effect greater student learning.

The participants in this study were either studying or teaching on AUT's main Year 3 news writing paper, News Reporting. This paper is compulsory for all students majoring in journalism at AUT. Each week, students research and write a real news story for publication in a local or national newspaper. Students discuss their story ideas with their tutor and fellow students in a weekly news meeting and, once written, the articles are peer reviewed by a classmate using a standardised peer review sheet, before being submitted to a tutor. The tutor corrects the stories (either face-to-face or by email), and the student then submits the story to a newspaper editor.

In seeking to understand the benefits and challenges of the peer review process in terms of students' acquisition of skills and understanding, I asked students and tutors at AUT University for their views. Twenty one students and eight tutors completed a questionnaire, and 13 students and five tutors attended collaborative group meetings to discuss their ideas. This thesis presents an interpretation of the viewpoints of the participants, both in terms of the impact of peer review on students' writing, but also on their acquisition, or otherwise, of wider skills. As such it is intended to promote further discussion of the peer review process at AUT, as well as potentially the use of peer learning in the wider journalism education field.

In this chapter I outline the context of this study, including a background to peer learning, and the results of my preliminary pilot survey, designed to establish how widely peer learning is used in Australasian journalism schools.

1.1 Background to peer learning

Humans, being social animals, learn with and from others from the moment of birth. Much of this learning is informal, particularly in the years when we are not engaged in formal education. During formal education, the teacher takes on an important role, particularly where the learning context is traditional. Peer learning, in which we learn with and from one another, may be less easily observed, but it is rarely absent. (Falchikov, 2007, p. 128)

The concept of learning from one's peers is not a new one. Much of what we learn in our lives we learn not from official teachers, but from friends and colleagues.

In formal education, the value of students as tutors has a long history. Schools in many cultures used their best pupils to teach others (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976). And as education theory developed in the 1930s, Vygotsky (1978) talked of the zone of proximal development and the role of more skilled peers in student learning.

However the theories of peer learning that have prompted this research are both different and more recent. Over the last 40 years there has developed a considerable body of research (among many others, Falchikov, 2007; Keppell, Au, Ma, & Chan, 2006; Mazur & Hilborn, 1997; Topping & Ehly, 2001) which suggests significant benefits can be gained for tertiary students from what Boud and his colleagues at the University of Technology, Sydney called two-way reciprocal peer learning (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999). In this model, students of similar age and/or educational level teach each other (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976), alternately playing the role of the 'teacher' and the 'student', and there is mutual benefit to the parties involved (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001).

These potential benefits have been well-documented. Falchikov found the process (which she referred to as peer assessment, using 'assessment' to refer both to its formative as well as its summative guises) increased students' motivation, responsibility, and development of critical and independent thinking skills (Falchikov, 1986, 2001, 2007). Other researchers (Liu & Carless, 2006) noted peer learning encourages students to express and articulate to others what they know or understand—an important component of learning. Still other literature (Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001 for

example) established that peer learning encourages development of the sort of lifelong learning skills (communication, problem-solving, teamwork, cooperation, self-motivation and the ability to give and receive critical feedback) increasingly demanded by workplaces (Falchikov, 1988) and promoted by universities as graduate attributes (AUT University, 2012; The University of Otago, 2003).

There is also a “pressing pragmatic reason” (Boud et al., 2001, p. 5) for peer learning. Getting students to provide feedback to their peers has the potential to ease the pressure felt by many university lecturers to teach more students with the same level of resources (Boud et al., 1999; Liu & Carless, 2006; Oldfield & Macalpine, 1995). Done well, peer learning is a teaching and learning strategy with the potential to maintain, or increase, student learning without more input from staff.

However, attempts to introduce peer learning or assessment practices into tertiary classes have not always been problem-free. Students often dislike the idea or experience of judging their peers or being judged by them (Falchikov, 2003); they find the process difficult or uncomfortable (Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001); they worry about their own competence or that of their peers (C. Patton, 2011); and they are nervous about criticising friends (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Some grumble that their classmates are too critical, or not critical enough (Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001), that the feedback criteria are unhelpful (Falchikov, 1986) or the process clumsy and time-consuming. At the same time lecturers also can be suspicious of, or hostile to the idea (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976). They too worry about the increased workload setting up peer learning, and that students do not have the necessary expertise to give feedback to their classmates (Liu & Carless, 2006); some may also feel uncomfortable about giving over some control to students (Falchikov, 2003). Others may not be very good at supporting collaborative learning processes (Topping & Ehly, 2001). There is also considerable debate about whether feedback should be anonymous or whether learning to give diplomatic feedback is an important skill in itself (Falchikov, 1995), whether peer review works with a mixed-ability group (Topping & Ehly, 2001), whether students should grade their peers’ work, or just give formative feedback, and whether they should receive marks for their feedback (Keppell et al., 2006).

1.2 Peer learning in journalism education

While literature exists examining the use of peer learning in a myriad of different educational fields, for example physics (Mazur & Hilborn, 1997), music (Latukefu,

2009) anatomy (Krych et al., 2005), outdoor and environmental education (G. Thomas, Martin, & Pleasants, 2011) and computer programming (Sullivan, 1994), I was surprised to find when beginning this study that published research exploring its role in journalism education and the benefits and challenges faced by journalism educators remains minimal. Although we know, for example, that peer learning is one option for journalism educators in the USA, because it appears among various teaching and learning methods listed as being used by some media educators in two American studies (Massé & Popovich, 2004; Peirce & Martinez, 2012), no detail is given in either study. This dearth of information led me, before beginning the main part of this research, to conduct an ethically-approved pilot survey to determine how widespread the use of peer learning is in Australian journalism education. In this preliminary study, I sent questionnaires to the heads of the 28 Australian and six New Zealand journalism schools (not including my university, AUT). I asked if and how the journalism educators used peer learning in their journalism papers, and what they saw as the main benefits and challenges. I received responses from seven schools in Australia (25%) and all six New Zealand programmes. The findings of this preliminary survey, which I will discuss briefly now, gave me valuable background before I embarked on the main part of my research.

It was interesting to note that all but one of the Australian schools that responded used peer learning in their programmes, with all but one of those having used peer learning for at least three years. One participant noted “[peer learning] is fairly common in Australia”. It took both informal and formal guises, from students brainstorming ideas for news stories and helping with suggestions for contacts, to classmates peer reviewing each other’s draft stories (as happens at AUT), to students grading each other’s contributions to the writing and production of a student newspaper or radio news bulletin. Benefits were seen as both specific to journalism news writing training (picking up mistakes in copy, and improving writing and technical skills), and also more general (teamwork, managing conflict and “the complexities and subtleties of interacting with others”, and being able to give and respond to feedback). One Australian educator spoke of improved constructive alignment of course material for students (Biggs, Tang, & Society for Research into Higher Education, 2011). Several participants said the peer learning structures introduced within a teaching/learning environment were important because they mirrored the sort of experience a journalist would get in the newsroom (Boyd-Bell, 2007): editing and being edited; working in a

team; dealing with deadline pressures; and learning to see a news story from a reader or audience perspective. One participant, for example, said he deliberately avoids using terms like ‘peer feedback’ or ‘peer evaluation’ with students, instead focussing on the role of peer learning in preparing students for the workplace:

I prefer to direct the students’ attention to the roles and responsibilities they will take on in the newsroom. So I outline their tasks and discuss them in terms of the titles and descriptions that are commonly applied in industry, such as ‘sub’ [sub editor] and ‘assistant chief of staff’.

There were several challenges identified by the Australian journalism educators in terms of using peer learning with their students. Three participants stressed the importance of the role of the teacher in planning the method of peer learning, engaging the students in the process, and ensuring student feedback is valid and constructive. For example, one noted:

Students are initially reluctant to comment on and edit another student’s work. It takes some time for the tutor to explain that this is part of professional practice, and that overcoming that reluctance is an important step in professional development for a journalist.

Another spoke of problems with student feedback sometimes being sporadic, of varying quality (depending on the calibre of the peer) and even plain “wrong”. There were also issues with students being reluctant to be too critical or award a bad grade “even when they feel a student has not performed well”.

My preliminary survey suggested the situation regarding the use of peer learning in journalism education was very different in New Zealand. Of the six journalism schools outside AUT, only two were using peer learning, and of these only one used it in writing classes; the other used it to provide formative and summative feedback for students about their commitment, professionalism and attitude in workplace situations. In addition, two other schools had tried and then dropped peer feedback, one for practical reasons, and one because tutors saw little benefit. As the programme leader said:

The students’ subbing of each other’s work was terrible and often made the story worse. It was also stressful for them, having extra work put on them.

Two of the New Zealand journalism programme leaders felt that “tutors are often uncomfortable with peer feedback” and that peer feedback is time-consuming for students and tutors. Three agreed with statements that “students do not provide quality feedback” and “editing is best done by journalism tutors”. As one put it:

Copy vetting is a key teaching opportunity and it is in the best interests of students to have expert feedback. Other students cannot provide this. Further, students will inevitably approach those students they perceive to be doing well, which places undue pressure on a few.

The New Zealand school that did use peer feedback for news writing employed an oral system, where students discussed each other’s stories in small groups, or as a class, with the story projected on a screen in front of them. The programme leader saw the process as allowing students to get more feedback on their stories than was available from the tutor alone. It was also seen as helpful for the students giving the feedback, because it allowed them to learn about the roles of an editor and about ways they could improve their own work.

1.3 Peer review at AUT University’s journalism programme

Peer review was introduced into AUT’s journalism programme in 2008, following research by then AUT journalism tutor Ruth Thomas (2009) into the way news writing was taught to New Zealand journalism students. Thomas aimed to provide a view on whether then current practices, which focussed on students “learning by doing” under the guidance (largely one-on-one) of tutors experienced in the media industry, was a successful method of preparing students to write news stories to a professional standard and to gain a deeper and critical understanding of the news media. Thomas concluded that many students failed to show the independence and critical thinking skills necessary for a professional journalist, particularly in a period of considerable turmoil in the media. Thomas urged the introduction of “reflective practices and self-regulated learning” (p. 331).

If such strategies as peer editing and the teaching of strategies for self-evaluation were introduced it . . . [would] encourage students to develop the ability to reflect on and self-evaluate and monitor their own writing. It would also encourage them to become critical thinkers, using their intellectual abilities to consider the most suitable people to interview for a story, to ask the hard questions and to write in a considered and innovative way” (p. 331)

The peer review model introduced into AUT's journalism programme involves students researching and writing a news story, and then showing it to a classmate, who reads the story and gives feedback, with the help of a peer review sheet. When students submit the story to the tutor for editing or marking, they must also attach the peer review sheet. The peer review sheet (the 2013 version is included as Appendix A to this study, on page 143) is in two parts, a self-evaluation section, and a peer review section. This study is principally concerned with the second section. Five years after the introduction of peer review, there have been some modifications to the peer review process, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. However, until this study, no research into its perceived effectiveness in terms of students' acquisition of skills and understanding.

1.4 The professional and personal context

For me to attempt to study attitudes towards peer review at AUT, I first needed to understand my own background relating to the topic; my attitudes and beliefs. For more than 20 years I was a journalist, then I became a journalism lecturer, but my entry into journalism education was largely by accident not design; a chance call from an ex-colleague desperate to fill a teaching hole at a time when I was looking for a change took me into a classroom for the first time in two decades. Moreover, I had not been to journalism school myself, although I had been to university, and at first my teaching mirrored how I had been taught there—from the front. In my eyes, I was the fount of at least some wisdom and my job was to impart my knowledge. My views began to change when I took a tertiary teaching paper, which exposed me to new ideas (for me) about the learning processes of students and the role of teachers. These have led, albeit by a circuitous route, to this research. In particular I began to be aware of the huge variety of interacting, and sometimes contradictory, models available to influence my pedagogy and my understanding of how students in my classes might best learn. Many of the ideas made sense to me from my own experience either of learning or of teaching. One example of many is Mel Silberman's "active learning credo" (1996, p. 1), which adapts Confucius' well-known saying ("What I hear, I forget" etc) to include "What I hear, see, and ask questions about or discuss with someone else, and do, I acquire knowledge and skills [about]. What I teach to others, I master". This seemed to contain important ideas for my teaching. Marton and Säljö's (1976) theories about deep and surface learning also helped me understand why my own tertiary education had been unsatisfying compared with my experience at school; the way I had been taught at university (or perhaps the way I had chosen to learn) had been largely at a surface level.

I was also interested in how other teachers were attempting to move away from the one-way information transfer model of education (Mazur & Hilborn, 1997; McKeachie et al., 1999)—and what I could learn for my own teaching. A model including students teaching other students was philosophically appealing.

The state of present-day journalism was another important professional and contextual factor in this study. No one working in the media could be unaware that it is facing huge challenges, among them falling revenues, shrinking newsrooms, threats to the quality of journalism and the ethics of journalists, and opportunities and issues around social media and citizen journalism. “Journalists must begin the hard process of rethinking who they are, what they do and who their work is actually for” (C. W. Anderson, 2013, p. 5). Meanwhile journalism schools also need to do some rethinking. UK figures show 40% of people calling themselves journalists do not work in the traditional fields of publishing and broadcasting. Moreover, of those employed in journalism fields, 41% work in more than one sector (Spilsbury, 2013). Anecdotal evidence suggests a large percentage of students graduating from New Zealand journalism schools are no longer working as journalists four years later (R. Thomas, 2009). A panel discussion entitled “Why journalism education in Aotearoa-NZ must change” at the 2013 Journalism Education Association of New Zealand conference crystallised my thinking about the role of journalism education in a turbulent industry. Journalism schools may say they want to produce critically-thinking students, said Massey University’s Margie Comrie, but actually they don’t: “They just want to produce workers”. “We need to be empowering journalism students, giving them strength, preparing them for the difficult conditions they will be in when they are in the workforce.”

What Comrie and others are asking is what we should be teaching our students. Is teaching them to write news enough? Or to be good journalists? Or do they need wider skills as well? Should we be moving from concentrating on learning news writing as a product, to seeing it as a process (R. Thomas, 1999). And if the latter, as a process towards what? While New Zealand’s traditional approach (learning by doing, with the assistance of a tutor) has been successful in producing work-ready journalists (R. Thomas, 1999), I was interested in exploring the place of other goals. A second tertiary education course had introduced me to the concepts behind learning outcomes and graduate attributes. A short search brought me to AUT’s own graduate attributes, both for the university as a whole (AUT University, 2012), and for the School of Communication Studies, in which the journalism programme sits (AUT University,

2012, February). The latter document looks for graduates to be able to, for example: critique and analyse new information; synthesise and create new models and paradigms through discussion and evaluation of new and existing knowledge; be committed to their ongoing intellectual development as life-long learners who can adapt to change and develop portfolio careers; communicate ethically and with integrity at all times; and work well in teams on collaborative projects.

It is hard not to agree with such laudable goals, but research within the New Zealand context (Spronken-Smith et al., 2013) also shows how difficult it is to incorporate graduate attributes into tertiary courses and to measure these sorts of outcomes. In theory, a successful peer learning model such as the peer review process being used in AUT's journalism programme might tick several of the graduate attribute boxes. I was interested whether students and tutors thought they did. I was equally interested in being part of a conversation around the benefits and challenges of the model.

1.5 Research questions

These ideas led to the formulation of the following research questions:

What are the benefits and challenges of the peer review system used in AUT's journalism programme in terms of students' acquisition of skills and understanding?

What is the role of the tutor in peer review?

1.6 Summary and overview of the thesis

The aim of this study is not to add further literature to a well-researched field: whether peer learning is, or is not, a good idea for tertiary students. The study takes as read that peer learning, if done well, provides benefits for students. It also takes it as read that most peer learning models will face challenges, particularly in their early iterations. Instead the study will examine more specifically the benefits and challenges of the particular peer review system introduced five years ago into the news reporting curriculum in AUT University's journalism programme. As such, it is envisioned as the tip of an action research spiral, providing a reconnoitre of the territory; the preliminary analysis that would allow an action research change process to begin—for my teaching practice, and possibly for other members of the AUT journalism teaching team. However, given a lack of published research in the field of peer learning in journalism

education, as will be discussed further in the next chapter, this research could also prove of interest for a wider audience of journalism educators.

This research is reported in five parts: literature review; methodology; results; discussion; and conclusion. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature on peer learning, concentrating on aspects perceived as relevant to journalism educators and the particular model of peer review used at AUT University. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach adopted in the study and the research instruments used. It also outlines the procedures followed in collecting and analysing data. Chapters 4 and 5 present key findings from the research data, first the views of the participants on the benefits to their learning of the News Reporting peer review process, and then their views about the challenges. Chapter 6 discusses these findings in the light of the literature into peer learning and the study's research questions. Finally, Chapter 7 sets out the conclusions about the research, and implications for practice: for me as a teacher and researcher; for AUT's journalism programme; for journalism education in a wider context; and for peer learning as a whole. It also provides suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

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The best answer to the question: What is the most effective method of teaching? Is that it depends on the goal, the student, the content, and the teacher. But the next best answer may be: Students teaching other students. (McKeachie et al., 1999, p. 159)

2.1 A definition

There are different definitions and different manifestations of students teaching (and learning from) other students: peer tutoring, peer review, peer instruction, peer-assisted learning (PAL), peer assessment, peer modelling, peer monitoring, collaborative learning and others. This study will use the term ‘peer learning’, meaning students of similar age and/or educational level teaching each other (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976). It will draw on the definition from David Boud and his colleagues (Boud et al., 1999), of peer learning being where “students learn with and from each other without the immediate intervention of a teacher” (pp. 413-414). Processes may be established and monitored by staff, and may even occur in their presence, “but staff are not involved directly in teaching or controlling the class” (p. 414). Boud et al particularly emphasised the use of reciprocal peer learning, where students take on the role of both the teacher and learner. Topping and Ehly’s (2001) definition of “helpers consciously assisting others to learn, and in so doing, learning themselves.” (p. 113) is useful in that it emphasises both the active or conscious nature of the process, but also that learning takes place for both the ‘student’ and the ‘teacher’.

2.2 Introduction

As stated in the introduction to this study, the aim of this research is not to add further theoretical ammunition to the well-researched question of whether peer learning can produce learning benefits for tertiary students. It is to consider its role in a more specific field, the benefits and challenges of using peer review in the teaching of news writing to

journalism students at one New Zealand University, AUT. Having said that, a wider perspective is critical in terms of shedding light on the research questions. I have identified cascading levels of scholarship, whereby relevant literature can be grouped into five key questions:

- **Should students learn from other students?** In this section I look at the background to peer learning, fitting peer learning into some key educational models which have questioned the traditional view of learning as a transfer of knowledge from teacher to student.
- **Why should students learn from other students?** In this section I examine some relevant studies into peer learning and the perceived benefits in terms of students' acquisition of skills and understanding.
- **How can students better learn from other students?** In this section I look at some of the main challenges identified in other peer learning studies and at suggestions of how to overcome these challenges.
- **Should journalism students learn from journalism students?** In this section I examine the literature from a journalism context, looking at how journalists have traditionally learned news writing skills and what are the aspects of journalism education and the situation in the media today which make peer review a potentially relevant teaching and learning tool.
- **Should AUT news writing students learn from each other?** In this section I look at where my study fits into the relevant literature from a New Zealand and AUT University context.

2.3 Should students learn from other students?

The idea that we learn things from our peers is hardly revolutionary. As Falchikov (2007) argues, the formal concept of 'peer learning' in education simply mirrors what happens informally from the time we are born. Nor is it a new idea that there are learning benefits for students from learning with or from their peers. University of Glasgow professor George Jardine was championing what we would now call peer learning in 1825 (Gaillet, 1998). In the early 1930s, Vygotsky's theories around the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) proposed that there is a social element to even the most private cognitive activity and that children's development could be helped by interaction with what he called "more competent peers" (p. 86). Influential educational psychologist Wilbert McKeachie, whose quote is used at the beginning of

this chapter, was talking about the benefits of students teaching students as early as the late 1960s, when the first edition of his book *Teaching Tips* appeared.

2.3.1 How students learn

At the root of the work of these and other theorists, and of the academics and teachers who have developed and used new strategies of teaching and learning, including peer learning, has been sometimes ground-breaking research into how students learn. Over the last 50 years, the theory and practice of tertiary teaching and learning has been the site of significant challenge, not least in terms of the effectiveness of the lecture as a learning tool (Mazur & Hilborn, 1997; McKeachie et al., 1999; Postman & Weingartner, 1969). Fitzgerald (1968) suggested that if the main *raison d'être* for the lecture was the acquisition of knowledge by students, then a well-stocked library would suffice. Meanwhile Kozma, Belle and Williams (1978) argued that the fact the lecture has survived as the most common teaching method in most universities (Edwards, Webb, & Smith, 2001), may have more to do with its relative cheapness and ease of preparation, than its intrinsic pedagogical value.

2.3.1.1 Deep and surface learning

Marton and Säljö's (1976) findings around 'deep' or 'surface' approaches to learning attempted to answer the question: If students are not necessarily learning via information-transfer from their teachers, how do they learn? Almost 40 years later, a model which describes student learning in terms of two categories looks overly simplistic, but much further research has come from Marton and Säljö's work. Laurillard (1979) put forward the idea that individual students are not surface or deep learners *per se*. Instead each student adopts an approach related to their perception of a particular task. The implication for teachers—and for this research—is that a poorly constructed learning activity or assessment can encourage a superficial (or passive) approach, whereas a well-constructed one can promote deep (or active) learning. Entwistle and Ramsden (1983) found that deep learning approaches were more likely in educational contexts characterised by freedom in learning, less formality, good teaching input, a good social climate and clear goals. Meanwhile, Ramsden (2003) suggested that while the same student can—and does—use deep or surface learning depending on the task, many individual students also have a general tendency to adopt a particular approach based on their previous educational experience and the curriculum and teaching approach of the subject area they have chosen. Studies (Marton & Säljö, 1997; Trigwell & Prosser, 1991; Van Rossum & Schenk, 1984) have consistently found that

students who adopt deeper learning approaches tend to have higher quality learning outcomes. They also get better grades (Biggs et al., 2011; Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, & Prosser, 2000), and are more motivated, challenged and involved in their learning (Ramsden, 2003). A quantitative study of almost 4000 first year physics and chemistry students and 46 teachers at Sydney's University of Technology (Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999) found using an information transmission (teacher-focused) approach to teaching was strongly associated with students adopting surface, or passive, approaches to learning, whereas a conceptual change/student-focussed approach was associated, though less strongly, with a deep, or active, approach to learning.

2.3.1.2 Active, self-regulated, reflective learning

Terms like 'active', 'self-regulated', 'student-centred', 'reflective' and 'self-directed' have emerged to describe learners and learning (McKeachie et al., 1999; Schön, 1987; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001, among many others). They involve models where the student plays an active part in and/or takes responsibility for, the management of their learning, including thinking critically about *how* they learn, not just what is learned (Boud & Higgs, 1993; Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999; Schön, 1987). Such learning approaches are more likely to produce effective learners (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) and a deep approach (Boud & Higgs, 1993). While phrases such as "self-regulated learner" may give the impression of solitude, student direction does not equal student isolation (Boud & Higgs, 1993; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). In fact some of the arguments against self-directed learning centre around studies where a student-centred approach has left students feeling alone—un-guided and un-supported (Lea, Stephenson, & Troy, 2003). Heron (1989) argued that the autonomy of the learner entails a context of co-operation with other learners, as well as teachers: "Persons can only be self-directing in reciprocal relations with other self-directing persons" (p. 14). Almost 20 years later, Brockbank and McGill (2007) suggested that while "personal reflection-on-action" (p. 94) is desirable, it is not necessarily sufficient. Instead "reflection-on-action with another in dialogue which encourages critical reflection about the actions a person has undertaken will be more likely to be effective in promoting reflective learning" (p. 94). Boud & Falchikov (2006) argued that if one of the goals of higher education is to equip students for the world, they need the ability not only to work with others, but to take a critical view of others'—as well as their own—work:

Preparing students for lifelong learning necessarily involves preparing them for the tasks of making complex judgements about their own work and that of others and for making decisions in the uncertain and unpredictable circumstances in

which they will find themselves in the future. . . One of the items typically omitted from lists of key skills required by graduates is that of developing the capacity to be an assessor of learning. (Boud & Falchikov, 2006, pp. 402-403)

Several studies (Falchikov, 1995; Sluijsmans, Brand-Gruwel, van Merriënboer, & Martens, 2004) noted that being able to judge the work of peers leads to a higher understanding of the quality of one's own work. Liu and Carless (2006) said the link between peer feedback and self-directed learning is salient because "feedback can enable students to better self-assess themselves, as some skills are common to both" (p. 281). Meanwhile Boud, Cohen and Sampson (1999) believed self-assessment can be enhanced by peer contributions (questions, comments, challenges etc) because these prompt the original student to reflect on what they have done. Moreover Boud (2000) wondered how students could become empowered and develop the self-regulation skills needed to prepare them for learning outside university if formative assessment was exclusively in the hands of teachers. Falchikov (2007) saw peer feedback or assessment as being a means of developing self-assessment skills. "Indeed it has been argued that it is a necessary step towards this end" (p. 135). And Oldfield and Macalpine (1995) suggested "one part of the process of improving self-learning ability lies in learning how to judge the quality of the work of others objectively and hence, eventually, one's own" (p. 125). Finally, Biggs and Tang (2007) included peer teaching and assessment as a "very powerful ally. . . greatly under-utilized" (p. 118) in the toolkit for teachers looking to use the theories around constructive alignment (Biggs, 1999) to produce maximum learning.

2.4 Why should students learn from other students?

There is a relatively large body of research that informs our understanding of students learning with and from each other, in terms of acquisition of skills and understanding. Peer learning has been tried in many different tertiary subjects, and the published literature reflects this. It is also not a single, undifferentiated educational strategy (Boud et al., 2001), and there is research looking at everything from the more traditional proctor model, where senior students tutor junior students, to discussion seminars, collaborative project work and buddy systems. I have tried to concentrate my review of the literature on studies that reflect as much as possible the definition above (of a two-way, reciprocal learning activity (Boud et al., 2001)), the model used for the AUT News Reporting classes. I have therefore focussed largely on studies where students of similar ability assess each other's written work. In this field, many studies involved summative assessment—students marking each other's work—while fewer looked at an

environment where the peer feedback is purely formative. This was potentially a limiting factor, as the peer review system used at AUT is substantially a formative feedback exercise. I nevertheless found many of the studies around summative peer assessment relevant to my own study because the findings from these studies often focussed on benefits and challenges that related to the act of thinking about another student's work and giving feedback on it, not purely the act of giving a mark for that work. For this reason I included them in this literature review. In fact, at least two studies (Falchikov, 1986; Liu & Carless, 2006) suggested the benefits arising from students assessing each other may come principally from the formative rather than the summative side. For example, in a large-scale questionnaire survey of 1740 tertiary students and 460 academics in Hong Kong, supplemented with interview data, Liu and Carless (2006) found the benefits of peer feedback can be obscured when grading is involved, and concluded "peer feedback has greater potential for learning than peer assessment" (p. 280). Boud and Falchikov (2006) made a similar point when they suggested that summative assessment can often inhibit many features of a learning society. Meanwhile, Boud (2000) argued that forms of peer assessment where "peers are used as surrogate assessors to generate grades" (p. 157) are ineffective.

2.4.1 Evidence-based studies

Proponents of peer learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Topping, 2009) claimed the principal benefit when students learn from each other is that 'it works'—students learn or perform better when they learn with their classmates. However finding so-called hard evidence to back up these claims is not easy. This is largely because so few studies into peer learning employ evidence-based methodologies, therefore it is difficult to draw inferences in terms of cause and effect with confidence (van Zundert, Sluijsmans, & van Merriënboer, 2010). In fact, of two studies mentioned by Falchikov (2005) as providing statistical evidence of benefits of involving students in assessment, only one (Bangert, 1995) involved peer learning. Two studies by Harvard University academics (Crouch & Mazur, 2001; Fagen, Crouch, & Mazur, 2002) appeared to provide some quantitative data on learning gains, although results were limited to physics students using the 'Peer Instruction' teaching and learning system (Mazur & Hilborn, 1997). The studies, one with Harvard students, and the other with students from another 11 American colleges and universities, gathered quantitative data from pre- and post-scores on a particular physics test. They concluded the Harvard students using Peer Instruction displayed "increased mastery of both conceptual reasoning and quantitative problem solving"

(Crouch & Mazur, 2001, p. 970) and that students at 90% of the other institutions using Peer Instruction showed larger gains than those taking traditionally-taught courses.

I found only a handful of other studies which made statistical claims of benefits from peer learning and processes. Bangert's (1995) PhD thesis indicated peer assessors scored significantly higher on Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) tasks than students who did not participate in peer assessment activities. Peer assessors also exhibited significant increases in mathematics self-efficacy and significant decreases in test anxiety. Meanwhile, a study by Annis (1983) compared the results in a 48-item test of specific and general competence of three groups of students: one that read a text; one that read it with the expectation of having to teach it to a peer; and one that read it and then actually taught the contents to other students. The 'read-and-teach' group gained more on the test than the other groups and, interestingly, the 'tutors' gained more than the 'tutees'. Finally, a case study of peer learning in aeronautical engineering (Borglund, 2007) compared the final grades for two consecutive years—the first where students took a traditional two-hour exam and the second where the exam was replaced by a report which went through two drafts, the first reviewed by the lecturer, the second by other students. The ratio of students that got a fail or a low pass grade (F or 3) for the whole course, compared with those that received a higher grade (4 or 5) rose from 50:50 to 30:70, with the researcher concluding "it is believed the peer learning approach is the main reason for this improvement" (Borglund, 2007, p. 39). However given that there were other changes, including the tutor reviewing the first draft, this is not the only factor at play.

Moreover, in a contrary finding, another study with a control group (Sluijsmans et al., 2004) did not find measurable learning benefits from peer learning. Students who carried out a series of four peer assessment tasks over a six-week period did not perform better overall on their course than students who did not do any peer assessment.

Moreover, while three quarters of the students in the experimental group felt there had been learning benefits as a consequence of the peer assessment programme, most still did not feel capable of judging the work of their peers.

While the literature is short of studies providing statistical evidence, there is plenty of qualitative research using findings from student and tutor reporting, and analyses of questionnaire data, to support the view that peer learning brings benefits for students.

2.4.2 General benefits

Nancy Falchikov has been one of the pioneers into research into peer learning and its role in improving learning and teaching. Her first published study (Falchikov, 1986) was also the first study of its type to ask students—in this case 48 Biological Sciences students at Napier College, Edinburgh—what they liked and did not like about peer learning. Students felt assessing a peer made them think more (82.4%), made them critical (76.5%), made them learn more (61.8%) and made them structured (52.9%). They found the task challenging (79.4%), beneficial (64.7%), helpful (61.8%), hard (70.6%) and time-consuming (58.8%). One interesting finding in terms of my study was that while the focus of Falchikov's study was on students *marking* each other's essays, looking at her reported findings indicates the students actually perceived most benefit arising from the fact of reading and thinking about someone else's work. Meanwhile, most of the negatives they saw involved having to provide a mark. As Falchikov noted: "In the future, the former could operate without the latter" (Falchikov, 1986, p. 161).

Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) described previous research into the benefits and challenges of peer assessment as "somewhat sparse" (p. 51) and "tentative" (p. 56), and attempted a bigger study—244 third year students taking a health psychology course and assessing each other's essays. Unlike Falchikov, Hanrahan and Isaacs made no attempt to quantify their results, instead concentrating on identifying themes. Students liked the opportunity to compare their own work with that of others, and found it easier to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their own essays after reading other students' work. Some students said they were motivated into putting more effort into their essays knowing their peers would be reading them. They also felt that being provided with—and more importantly thinking about—the marking sheet in terms of other students' essays made it easier to take on board the assessment criteria that would be used to assess their own. Students also said that adding peers into the assessment process meant they got more feedback on their essays than they normally would.

2.4.3 Critical and independent thinking

The issue of whether and how students develop critical thinking skills at tertiary institutions is a thorny issue. Arum and Roksa's (2011) assertion that after two years of college, nearly half of students showed no improvement in their complex-reasoning or critical thinking skills produced a bevy of rebuttals from fellow academics (Attewell, 2011; Pascarella, Blaich, Martin, & Hanson, 2011, among others). Still, few would argue that critical and independent thinking skills are a bad thing and several studies

(Falchikov, 2007; Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001; Sivan, 2000) suggested peer learning can promote these skills. Researchers in the Sivan (2000) study introduced peer assessment into five different classes with a total of just under 200 students. Students commented that involvement with (and of) their peers increased their engagement in the learning process, exposed them to different ways of approaching their work and contributed to the development of their critical and independent thinking skills. In the large-scale study by Liu and Carless (2006) mentioned above, the authors suggested that giving feedback allowed students to articulate recently-learned knowledge, thereby enhancing their learning. For this reason, peer feedback was beneficial not just for the 'reviewed', but for the 'reviewer' (Topping, 2009).

Collier (1980) came to a similar conclusion: as part of the process of giving feedback on a particular concept, the reviewing student translated it into his or her own words to explain it to the student being reviewed. This made it clearer for both parties. In the same way that Eric Mazur (2009) discovered, somewhat to his chagrin, that his students understood complicated physics concepts better when they talked about them to each other, than when they listened to their learned professor, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) made the point that students who have just learned something were often better at explaining it to their classmates than their teachers were.

Moreover, some students preferred to receive feedback from peers, rather than teachers (D. A. Cole, 1991); feedback from the latter was seen as authoritative but ill-explained, but some students believed peers gave richer feedback that was open to negotiation.

While most research mentioned above concluded that there were learning benefits when students got feedback from their peers, this was not a universal finding. For example, one study (Xie, Ke, & Sharma, 2008) into whether students who gave and received peer feedback on their online journals (blogs) showed higher or lower levels of reflective thinking than those who did not give or receive feedback found that the students who were involved in solitary blogging demonstrated a significantly higher level of reflection consistently over time than those in the group involved in peer feedback. The researchers speculated as to whether students' learning from journaling, a self-introspective process, was actually hindered by the thought of someone else reading their words, or whether the result could have been affected by the poor quality of the feedback.

A study into an outdoor environment leadership course (G. Thomas et al., 2011) was interesting because the lead author approached peer learning from the perspective of a former sceptic. He noted he had previously viewed self- and peer-assessment as “gimmicks with limited value” (p. 11) until in 2008 he decided to introduce them into two small written assignments. His aim was to try to help students become independent judges of the quality of outdoor leadership. Twenty eight of the 58 students responded to an online survey, with 64% agreeing and 7% strongly agreeing that the self- and peer-assessment process helped them learn more about outdoor leadership. Seventy per cent of students found the peer assessment very useful, and student comments involved a “pleasing... level of thinking and engagement” (G. Thomas et al., 2011, p. 12). It was not clear from the published findings what comments the researchers were basing their conclusion on, but they noted:

This journey into deeper learning processes appeared to make a positive contribution to [students’] development as critical-thinking practitioners based on the survey responses. This is not only what Boud (2010) encourages academics to do more of, it is also what employers expect our graduates to be able to do (p. 13).

Finally, some peer review research appeared to back up the Piagetian concept (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) of cognitive conflict being beneficial for learning. Several researchers (Falchikov, 2005; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Topping & Ehly, 2001) argued that the challenge that can arise when peers disagree during the peer review process was an important part of learning. As Falchikov (2005) said, peer discussion, alternative points of view, and even constructive conflict, are good:

Two heads really are better than one, even if the second head is not as talented as one’s own. Discussing and explaining are invaluable ways of increasing one’s own understanding and of glimpsing another’s point of view. Cognitive conflict is recognized as a means of stimulating critical awareness and reflection, and structured academic controversy is a recognized form of peer tutoring. (Falchikov, 2005, p. 250)

2.4.4 Promotes wider learning

As workplaces increasingly look for graduates who are good communicators, analytical, versatile and adaptable, work well in a team, are self-motivated and are lifelong learners (British Telecom, 1993; Cleaver, 1991; Leckey & McGuigan, 1997; Tobias, 2004; Watson, 2007), tertiary institutions have tried to work out how to produce these talents in their students (Cleaver, 1996; Falchikov, 1988; Harvey, 1993). Many, including AUT (AUT University, 2012), now have published ‘graduate attributes’ which set out

wider learning goals for their students. The role of peer learning in producing graduates with more than just discipline-specific skills is mentioned in several studies (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991; Kvale, 2006; Sivan, 2000). For example, when asked to identify teaching models most likely to enhance lifelong learning skills for undergraduate students, researchers at Queensland University of Technology (Candy, 1995) put in first place “approaches which encourage students to engage in self-directed and peer-assisted learning” (p. xii).

Although no one has attempted to prove or measure the wider benefits of peer learning, researchers have suggested it is useful in: fostering reflectiveness, active learning, independent thinking, critical enquiry and problem solving skills (Boud et al., 1999; Dochy et al., 1999; Falchikov, 1995, 2007; Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006); promoting cooperation, collaboration and an ability to work in teams (Boud et al., 1999; Boud & Lee, 2005; Cross, 2006; Willey & Gardner, 2009); helping students learn how to learn, and move towards autonomy from their teachers (Falchikov, 2007; Keppell et al., 2006); and promoting communication skills, and the ability to provide and receive feedback (J. Y. Chen, 2012; Keppell et al., 2006; Oldfield & Macalpine, 1995). Sluijsmans et al (2004) argued gaining the ability to assess the work of another person—and to accept their assessment of your work—was an essential life and work skill.

2.4.5 Workplace-ready learning

The Sivan (2000) study was also interesting because it suggested peer assessment is valuable in mirroring what happens in the workplace. The study compared the viewpoints of younger students who had entered tertiary institutions straight from school, with those of adult students who had previously spent some time in the workforce. The mature students were particularly supportive of the use of peer assessment because they saw it as helping provide them with practical skills which would be needed in their job, whether it be face-to-face conversations with colleagues about performance, or the sort of assessment that might be involved in choosing a colleague for employee of the year. Latukefu (2010) made a similar point with respect to singing students, who may begin their performing lives by starting up independent companies or producing short plays or music festivals:

In such a context they are often required to assess work done by their peers. Thus the exercise also fulfilled the need to develop the skills and protocols required when graduates are later in a position to

professionally judge a peer. Recognition by students of this future need meant they took the peer assessment exercise very seriously and were very positive about it continuing as part of the course (p. 72)

2.4.6 Student motivation

While some studies (Davies, 2004; Falchikov, 2003; Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001, for example) talked about the fact that students were often reluctant, at least initially, to take part in peer learning and found the process difficult, several studies (Borglund, 2007; McKeachie et al., 1999; Silberman, 1996) saw benefits from peer learning in terms of increasing student enjoyment, motivation and engagement. McKeachie (1999), for example, suggested peer learning increases motivation and reduces absenteeism, while Borglund (2007) found 60% of the comments from students on the question ‘What was the best aspect of the course’ were related to the peer learning approach. One student’s comments provided a good example of how some students appreciated the new methods: “Hopefully other courses can adapt this approach in a similar manner, to the joy of future students. Often I learn stuff the last week before the exam. Here, I learned something every week” (Borglund, 2007, p. 40). Meanwhile, Davies (2004) said students believed peer learning “really became enjoyable” (p. 274).

2.4.7 More, better feedback

A final area of perceived benefits from peer learning emerged around the opportunity it provided for students to get more feedback than is available from teachers. Quality formative assessment was seen as among the most critical influences on student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, as Boud et al (2001) noted, “there are seldom enough opportunities for formative assessment and getting feedback from staff to develop skills and concepts significantly” (p. 9). A report commissioned by the Australian Government (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005) suggested only 50% of first year students in Australian universities thought staff were usually available to discuss their work, and only around 30% believed their teachers usually gave helpful feedback. Moreover, results from several studies (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Gielen, Peeters, Dochy, Onghena, & Struyven, 2010; Yang et al., 2006) suggested teachers often provided the sort of personal or superficial feedback described by Hattie and Timperley (2007) as generally unhelpful. For example, Yang et al (2006) compared peer and teacher feedback on writing assignments in a Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class. They found that more teacher feedback was incorporated into students’ work than peer feedback, but that peer feedback “appears to

bring about a higher percentage of meaning-change revision, while most teacher-influenced revisions happen at a surface level” (p. 193). At the same time, teacher-initiated revisions were more likely to introduce mistakes into the original copy than peer-initiated revisions, probably because some students blindly put their teachers’ suggestions in, whether they understood them or not. On the other hand, students were more likely to discuss a peer’s comments with them if they did not agree, and this gave the opportunity to “enhance mutual understanding” (p. 193).

Three studies led by Kwangsu Cho (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Cho & Schunn, 2007; Cho, Schunn, & Wilson, 2006) examined the effectiveness of experts and peers in providing feedback that led to valuable revisions in written work. They found that experts provided proportionally more ‘directive’ feedback and peers proportionally more ‘non-directive’ feedback, but that directive feedback tended to lead to ‘simple repair revisions’, which were not associated with any change in quality of the written work. By contrast, non-directive feedback predicted complex repair revisions, which had a positive relation to writing improvement. The authors concluded that while students often preferred teacher feedback (Beach & Friedrich, 2006; Yang et al., 2006), “peer review supports the development of writing skills, [with] novice writers appearing to be better at incorporating peer comments into their revision than at using comments from a subject matter expert” (Cho & MacArthur, 2010, p. 335).

2.5 How can students better learn from other students?

It is very unlikely, said Falchikov (2003), that the first implementations of peer feedback activities will run like clockwork. In this section the focus moves to the challenges outlined in the literature around peer learning—and recommendations from other studies of how to overcome them.

2.5.1 Students find it hard, do it badly, or cannot see the value

As outlined above, peer learning is a radical departure from traditional knowledge-transfer forms of teaching and learning. Some students find this exciting, others are less enthusiastic about the challenges. Difficulty, discomfort, a lack of relevancy in the process, and a lack of value in the peer feedback were common problems identified in the literature (Falchikov, 2003, 2005; Liu & Carless, 2006; Topping, 2009). The number one ‘least liked’ feature of peer assessment for students in Falchikov’s early study (1986) was the difficulty of the task. Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) delved further, breaking the challenges identified by students into higher order themes, including

‘difficult’, ‘discomfort’ and ‘problems with implementation’. In the former category, students found it difficult to be objective and worried that students (including themselves) did not have the expertise to do a good job. Under ‘discomfort’, the authors listed issues such as students worrying about other students reading their work (and perhaps being overly critical), and not wanting to “pick another student’s work to pieces” (p. 61). Under ‘problems with implementation’, several students found the task time consuming, and said that some of their classmates didn’t take the process seriously. Meanwhile, a study involving online peer feedback (van der Pol, van den Berg, Admiraal, & Simons, 2008) suggested feedback providers’ lack of expertise was an important issue preventing students benefiting from *receiving* feedback.

Learning effects of providing feedback will be accomplished relatively simply: as long as students invest time and effort into actively constructing content-oriented reactions, we can expect certain learning gains. The learning effects of receiving feedback, however, are highly depend on its quality, which in its turn hinges on the expertise of the provider. It can thus be expected that asking students—who by definition are not experts on the subject matter they are supposed to appropriate—to effectively fulfil this role, poses great challenges (p. 1816).

Among issues identified by Papinczak, Young and Groves (2007) as causing 23% of students to withdraw from their peer learning trial were students’ scepticism, lack of motivation, and failure to take the peer assessment seriously. Students said they were reluctant to criticise friends and classmates, that students (including themselves) didn’t have expertise to judge their peers, and that fellow students could be overly judgemental or too lenient. Another study with a high attrition rate (Xie et al., 2008), found “students did not engage in meaningful or constructive feedback activity” (p. 23). Rather than provide informative or constructive prompting, the study noted comments were more social (‘good job’ or ‘I agree’).

2.5.2 Solving the engagement challenge

Two studies (Arnold, Shue, Kritt, Ginsburg, & Stern, 2005; J. Y. Chen, 2012) suggested students were more likely to be engaged in peer learning if they understood its usefulness, particularly in terms of the relevance to workplace practice. Medical students in the study by Arnold et al (2005) recognised that the act of participating in peer assessment would prepare them for the potentially difficult task of confronting peers in the workplace whose practice they did not agree with. Meanwhile G. Thomas et al (2011) used the findings from other research studies to get buy-in around peer

learning from students who were initially confused and fearful. They found the opportunity to discuss the previously unfamiliar learning practices also provided “excellent opportunities to engage students’ thinking about learning and assessment. . . and promoted unexpected, but welcomed, higher order thinking” (G. Thomas et al., 2011, p. 14).

Boud (2000) suggested creating a course or even institutional culture where the giving and receiving of feedback from peers was recognised as important was a critical factor in making it work. Cultivating a suitable course climate is also a key factor in mitigating risks for students in peer learning, for example, loss of privacy or face, embarrassment or even humiliation (Liu & Carless, 2006). Students are more likely to be comfortable making their work public “when the rationale for it has been discussed and accepted, positive and trusting peer relations exist, and a collaborative learning climate has been established” (Liu & Carless, 2006, p. 288).

An examination of the literature around peer learning suggests mixed views on whether grading students for their peer feedback is essential to get student engagement. Some students in the Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) study suggested many people did not take peer reviewing seriously because there were no marks attached. Other students in the same study, however, suggested that getting feedback (whether from tutors or other students, or both is not clear) on their peer feedback would have been enough of a motivating factor—a point also made by Arnold et al (2005). Keppell et al (2006) came to a different conclusion. The researchers introduced formative peer assessment into three different classes and concluded that students would not take the process seriously unless their peer assessment efforts were assessed and graded.

Because formal assessment is a direct indicator of importance within courses, university teachers need to account for this student perception. . . . It seems unfortunate that this occurs but the pragmatic nature of students is evident when they begin to prioritise what is important in the course as this directly relates to how much time needs to be committed to the task (p. 462).

2.5.3 Preparing for the process

Many faculty who have attempted peer review claim students are not very good at it because they are not accustomed to doing it. We propose that, with practice, they could get good at it (Ross & Ruhleder, 1993, p. 382).

There can be little doubt that students undertaking peer feedback for the first time may well lack the skill and knowledge to carry it out well. In this they are no different from trainee teachers or, indeed, anyone else involved in a task they are unfamiliar with. Robinson (2002) found a significant fraction—perhaps a third—of student reviewers in his pilot study provided feedback that experts considered inadequate (for example unsupported praise). Students also had a tendency to criticise things that were not incorrect. Experienced peer learning practitioners such as Falchikov (2005) and Goldschmid and Goldschmid (1976) suggested good organisation and planning were key to resolving these issues, and could also help alleviate the stress and lack of confidence that arose when students were faced with a task they felt unequal to. They went so far as to suggest that peer learning situations initiated with little organization and structure “are not likely to survive, nor do they generally offer all the benefits they potentially entail” (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976, p. 27). After initiating two peer assessment case studies, Wheeler, Langan and Dunleavy (2005) concluded the most important factors in avoiding problems were “openness in dialogue, good planning, and close monitoring in the early stages” (p. 15). The literature suggests several aspects to good organisation and structure which can improve learning outcomes for students. I will discuss these now.

2.5.3.1 Training and practice, scaffolding and monitoring

As noted above, educating students and faculty into seeing the value of peer learning was seen in some studies as one precursor for its success. Training (including modelling and exemplars) and practice in evaluating the work of their peers were also well-discussed. For example, a review of 26 studies into peer assessment (van Zundert et al., 2010) found a correlation between students’ training and experience in peer assessment, and their development of peer assessment skills. Meanwhile, although Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) did not implement training in peer assessment with their students (and believed the students nonetheless benefitted from the intervention), they presented *prima facie* evidence that training and practice could have resolved several of the students’ perceived difficulties with peer assessment. These included: students’ uncertainty around their ability to mark; discomfort around the process; and concern that peers could be too critical. Sluijsmans, Moerkerke, van Merriënboer, & Dochy (2001) found practice to be a successful factor on its own. While only 7% of students in their study felt confident when assessing peers at the beginning of the semester, once they had some practice this rose to 70%. Receiving training and experience also made

them think more positively about peer assessment. Training takes different forms. In one study (Rust, Price, & O'Donovan, 2010), students were provided with two practice assignments to mark and there was also an optional 90-minute workshop to discuss their evaluations before they embarked on their own assignments. In another (Cheng & Warren, 1997), training consisted of discussions of the advantages and disadvantages of peer assessment, examining the assessment criteria, and practice assessment. Beaman (1998) went so far as to devise the 'Egg Game', a light-hearted way for students to experience peer assessment in a non-threatening environment. Not all students receive any training before embarking on peer feedback. Cho and MacArthur (2010) demonstrated that at least under some conditions, students can provide useful feedback to their peers with no training beyond a brief explanation of the rubric. On the other side, Papinczak et al (2007) provided practice in peer assessment procedures and exemplars of 'good' and 'poor' work to students in initial weeks of orientation, but still came up against strong negative perceptions to the process. Asked to suggest improvements to peer learning activities, students in Davies' study (2004) requested better initial guidance on matters such as the marking scheme and how to judge a good piece of work from a bad one. They also asked for an exemplar of a good essay to be provided, with the marks given and the comments.

Falchikov (2007) suggested that without 'scaffolding' (Wood & Middleton, 1975) and ongoing feedback to students about their feedback, peer assessment does not add value to student learning. Other studies explored this idea further. In Latukefu's (2010) study of singing students, the lecturer gave examples in class of different standards of achievement of the performance qualities, and then critiqued the students' critiques for the first four weeks, only then gradually withdrawing levels of support and involvement. This tactic, known as 'fading' (Collins et al., 1991) was also used with apparent success by G. Thomas et al (2011). By contrast, time constraints in the study by Xie et al (2008) meant the instructor monitored the students' feedback on each other's blogs only for the first two weeks and, after sending emails to students lagging behind or not providing meaningful feedback, left the process alone. Results and analysis of the blogs showed "a more effortful moderation from the instructor and more structure of constructive feedback could have scaffolded a collaborative development of reflections among students" (Xie et al., 2008, p. 24).

Two issues were canvassed in the literature around the framework provided to students when they evaluated each other's work. Boud (2000) argued that using a criterion- or

standards-based framework is essential, and others emphasised the importance of the criteria being clear, open, genuine and well-understood by students (Latukeyu, 2010; G. Thomas et al., 2011; Topping, 2009). Students in Sivan's (2000) study asked for criteria to be more detailed in future. One of the few to argue against the importance of criteria in peer feedback is Sadler (2002), who found giving students high quality exemplars (mainly outstanding previous student assignments) was more helpful for student learning than a focus on criteria. His research suggested "listing criteria separately invites students to think about *qualities* rather than *quality*" (p. 135). The second debate involving the framework is whether criteria are set by tutors or students. In Willey and Gardner (2009), for example, the academics set the criteria, arguing that this allowed them the flexibility to choose criteria for different tasks and the opportunity to link attribute categories to the professional competencies required for engineering accreditation. Other studies (Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001; Papinczak et al., 2007; Wheeler et al., 2005) argued that large class sizes, time constraints or students' lack of knowledge make it easier for teachers to set criteria. In Papinczak et al (2007), the lecturers later regretted setting the criteria themselves, arguing students' lack of acceptance of the peer assessment process might have in part been because of their lack of ownership of the criteria. This finding was reinforced in the Sivan (2000) study where one of several groups of study participants were involved in establishing their own assessment criteria for their assignment. These students had previously done peer review but in that case their lecturer had set the criteria. The students were enthusiastic about the change, saying that agreeing the criteria as a group made them more engaged with the process, improved their own work, and increased their proficiency in assessing their peers. As one student said:

If I do not accept these criteria, then I would not take the peer assessment seriously. Through the process of setting the criteria, I learned more about the criteria and it helped me to better assess my classmates (Sivan, 2000, p. 204).

Arnold et al (2005) noted that building student preferences into a peer assessment system is difficult, because students will not agree on criteria. Falchikov (2005) argued it is worth the effort:

Some colleagues have been tempted, after conducting a successful peer assessment exercise, to base all future practice on it, and to re-use materials prepared for the first cohort on subsequent occasions. I strongly advise against this practice, although I can fully see why it might be a tempting strategy. It is essential that each new cohort of

students coming to peer assessment take ownership of their own criteria and of any materials developed from them. Although what each cohort ends up with is very likely to resemble its predecessor's, it is the process of getting to that point that is important. As I have said before, reinvent the wheel on a regular basis" (p. 251).

2.5.3.2 Anonymity

Anonymity was one factor seen by academics in other studies (for example, Arnold et al., 2005) as a way to encourage 'without fear or favour' participation by students in peer feedback. Several studies with students in science-related fields (Borglund, 2007; Papinczak et al., 2007; Robinson, 2002) provided details of fairly complex and time-consuming processes used to ensure anonymity of peer comments. However, Arnold (2005) found students were not uniformly in favour of anonymity, with some arguing peers did not take anonymous evaluations as seriously as those that were signed, and that giving anonymous feedback did not prepare students for the important but difficult task of giving and receiving critical feedback in the 'real' world. Moreover, in an interesting comparison to the strong focus given to anonymity in studies mentioned above (engineering and medical students), students of singing (Latukefu, 2010), a much more public profession, were expected to give and receive feedback in person and in front of their classmates from the beginning. In another twist (Wheater et al., 2005), lecturers on a statistics paper using peer assessment abandoned anonymity codes during the year, after they created logistical problems. Students instead had the option of arranging their own code if they wanted anonymity. None did so.

2.6 Should journalism students learn from journalism students?

There is surprisingly little academic literature looking at the issue of peer learning in journalism education. We know from the literature that reciprocal peer learning is common in teaching anatomy, (Krych et al., 2005) and physics (Fagen et al., 2002), for example. We read about its use in computer science (Sullivan, 1994), in tourism (Sivan, 2000), in dental hygiene (Hanson, 2011), in outdoor education (G. Thomas et al., 2011), in aeronautical engineering (Borglund, 2007), in music (Latukefu, 2009), and more. However, finding studies involving peer learning in journalism education was more problematic. Scholarship about journalism education (as opposed to scholarship about journalism by journalism educators, which is plentiful, but quite different) at times appeared to be caught in a time warp of almost existential angst (Bromley, Tumber, & Zelizer, 2001). It is more than 100 years since Joseph Pulitzer defended his view (against an often antagonistic profession) that a college education was necessary

for the preparation of newspaper reporters (Pulitzer, 1904); at which time the first journalism schools were established in the US and Europe. However, much recent literature into journalism education still gives the impression of an academic discipline under siege. Considerable debate still centres around whether tertiary study of journalism and the education of journalists actually matters (Schultz, 2002; Tumber, 2005), whether a journalism degree is a proper preparation for a successful journalism career (Frith & Meech, 2007), and the place of journalism within the academy (de Burgh, 2003; Skinner, Gasher, & Compton, 2001). The March 2013 issue of *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, for example, carried as its introductory article a strong defence of journalism education by its editor (Marron, 2013). This defence followed criticism by powerful journalism education funders about the state of university journalism education in the US today (Newton, 2012).

This anxiety over the ‘whether’ and the ‘why’ of journalism education seemed to leave less room for the more practical ‘how’. Ruth Thomas (2001) suggested her search of journalism education literature to find studies on how students learn to become journalists, and how educators can best help them “reveals an almost empty field” (p. 154). Brandon (2002) noted a lack of focus among journalism educators on the conditions of the learning environment, and proposed using experiential learning (Kolb, 1984)—a suggestion taken up by others (Boyd-Bell, 2007; Steel, Carmichael, Holmes, Kinse, & Sanders, 2007; Tanner, Green, & Burns, 2012). However a search of published literature still found few studies focussed on best teaching practice in journalism programmes; even fewer looked at whether peer review should be part of a journalism teaching mix.

2.6.1 What we know about peer learning and journalism education

I did however find a handful of studies involving peer learning in the context of journalism education. The most useful of these is R. Thomas’ (1999) study, which introduced a process approach (Flower & Hayes, 1980) to learning to write news stories with a group of 13 journalism News Reporting students at a real, but unidentified, New Zealand tertiary institution. Several learning strategies were used, including students peer reviewing each other’s news stories, and weekly workshops where they discussed and critiqued other students’ work as a group. Thomas (1999) found considerable initial resistance, particularly to the peer reviewing, and noted that some students were overly critical, or concentrated on surface errors. However, by the end of the semester, eight of the 13 students in the study said they found peer editing an extremely or very

useful process, with only two finding it not useful at all. Thomas believed all students had achieved the learning outcome of being able to work collaboratively to support peers and develop a team approach to writing. Overall, Thomas found the 13 students in the process intervention group “achieved the learning outcomes for the News Reporting paper in less than half the time taken using the one-to-one [tutor-student] subbing method” (R. Thomas, 1999, p. 194), although given the wide variety of different strategies used it is not possible to judge from the study how important peer review was in this result. More than a decade later, Thomas (2012) again recommended the introduction of reflective practices into journalism education as one way to remedy “students’ apparent tendency to be unaware of the quality or lack of it of their own writing” (p. 161), as well as their reluctance to analyse their work.

In another relevant study (Hodgson & Wong, 2011), journalism tutors established peer review as part of an online journalism course aimed to introduce students to internet-based journalism models. Students posted blogs and then commented on each other’s writing as a way to help them identify standards and expectations and develop critical and independent thinking. The researchers found, somewhat ironically, that students were generally more positive about the benefits of peer reviewing on their writing than about the benefits of the online journalism experience—despite the latter being the primary focus. For example, over 90% of the 22 respondents agreed that they learned more from reading the work of peers, and 82% agreed that “critically reviewing feedback from peers” helped improve their final product (Hodgson & Wong, 2011, p. 203). On the other hand, only 59% said they would use the online news blog again, or that they were “more confident in writing news articles having practised on the online news blog” (pp. 203-204).

In other literature in the journalism education field, peer learning is more peripheral to the research. Sheridan Burns (1997), in arguing for critical reflection and a problem-based learning approach to journalism education, suggested peer evaluation as one line of attack. Meanwhile Massé and Popovich (2004) asked 512 US journalism teachers about the sort of media writing teaching activities they used, differentiating between the ‘teacher-as-editor’ and ‘teacher-as-coach’ styles. They found that while the majority of teachers identified themselves as coaches, many actually appeared to use more traditional (ie teacher-as-editor) practices. Only just over half the teachers said they encouraged peer review or editing exercises for their students. And on a scale of 1 to 5, lecturers rated peer editing activities only 2.85 on average, whereas learning style and

grammar, for example, got 3.83. Whether the teachers not using peer editing knew nothing about it, had a philosophical reason for not using it, or had tried it and decided it did not work in journalism education, is not clear. Three years later, writing about the same study (Massé & Popovich, 2007), the researchers concluded “minimal signs of progressive teaching exist in US journalism/mass communication programs” (p. 155). They found media writing faculty were typically from an older generation (the mean age was 50), reared on traditional newsroom methods, resistant to curricular reform, and finding it difficult to retrofit new technologies and skills into their teaching.

On the other side, when Peirce and Martinez (2012) asked more than 300 journalism instructors for their teaching tips, using peer-to-peer activities when appropriate made the cut. Still, the research does not indicate how many of the respondents had that technique on their list.

Finally, I found one other study evaluating a journalism teaching programme which included peer review as a key component (Maier & Curtin, 2005). The irony is that the peer review is used to teach journalists mathematics, rather than writing skills. (This is despite several studies finding writing deficiencies among US mass communication students and recent graduates (R. Cole, Hembroff, & Corner, 2009; Lingwall, 2010; Treadwell & Treadwell, 1999)). Maths-phobic journalism students were offered ‘therapy sessions’—voluntary weekly gatherings where they worked on practical maths problems together, gave and received feedback, and acted as role models for each other. The results were not conclusive, but provided some evidence that the students attending these sessions achieved better results in their final maths test than those who did not.

2.6.2 Relevance of peer learning for journalism education

As has been stated above, there is little literature on the use of peer learning techniques in journalism schools. However, there is literature from other disciplines that would lead to the conclusion that they are as relevant, if not more relevant, to journalism education as to other areas of study.

2.6.2.1 Benefits for writing professionals

One of the core skills involved in being a journalist is the ability to write, and the AUT University course at the heart of this study is one where students are taught to write news stories. So literature into the use of peer learning in teaching writing skills is relevant here. Flower and Hayes’ (1980) writing model and its spin-off, the process model classroom, saw students discussing and analysing tasks, and benefiting from peer

insight as they examined their writing. McDonald (2013) introduced collaborative workshops into her life writing class, as part of a study looking at the use of reflection by writing students. The purpose of the workshops was for students to receive and provide feedback on their writing and “develop an eye for editing one’s own and others’ work” (McDonald, 2013, p. 138). The findings from the study concentrated mainly on the self-reflection part of the study, so no conclusions were drawn about the success or otherwise of the peer feedback workshops. However, one unexpected result from the study was that the quality of the students’ writing in the unit appeared to be better than that of previous student cohorts. Meanwhile, Flower, Hayes, Carey, Schriver, & Stratman (1986) suggested peer editing can bring about improvements in the quality of student writing. They found novice writers often do not succeed in reviewing their own work well and can benefit from the reviewing of their product by peers—a view shared by van der Pol, Berg, Admiraal and Simons (2008).

The other area of literature of relevance for journalism students is that around the benefits of learning how to give and receive feedback on other people’s work. Several studies (J. Y. Chen, 2012; Falchikov, 1986; Willey & Gardner, 2009) commented on this benefit from peer assessment. Journalism students, whether they end up in the media, a public relations role, freelance work or another field, are very likely to find their writing is visible to—and critique-able by—colleagues, audiences and/or clients. Moreover, if they go into a newsroom, they could relatively quickly after graduation find themselves in editing roles, critiquing other writers’ work and providing feedback. Their journalism education needs to provide them with practice. As Falchikov (1995) said: “It can be argued that learning how to make criticism in a diplomatic manner is a useful skill in itself” (p. 184).

2.6.2.2 Industry on the verge of a nervous breakdown

Part of creating an authentic learning environment (Boud, 2000) is preparing journalism students for an uncertain work environment—and peer learning could be part of that preparation. The huge changes going on in the media and the impact these are having on the journalism profession (Hirst, 2011) is a key factor in terms of deciding how journalism students should learn. Technological changes unimaginable 25 years ago have seen the internet playing a huge role in the gathering and receiving of news, and as the established economic model for journalism has collapsed, so the journalistic workforce has shrunk dramatically (Mensing, 2010). Formerly compartmentalised journalists have had to become multi-media experts, and former non-journalists have

turned into citizen journalists and are providing competition for their trained colleagues (Gillmor, 2008; Henry, 2007). A significant proportion of journalism school graduates will never enter a newsroom (Mensing, 2010). Moreover, informal findings (R. Thomas, 2009) suggested the majority of journalism graduates will not stay in the profession more than five years, meaning journalism schools need to be teaching their students a broader range of skills than just those they will need for a career in news. As has been argued above, peer review is one part of the mix of producing multi-skilled graduates.

A study recommending the introduction of peer learning tasks into tertiary teaching in the information systems (IS) field (Ross & Ruhleder, 1993) is relevant here because that research showed uncanny parallels with the situation in journalism education now. The authors portrayed an industry in a state of flux and transition, like the media industry today. And like professional journalists struggling with the role technology allows their citizen journalist colleagues to play, Ross and Ruhleder described the long term role of IS professionals “becoming increasingly blurred as users become increasingly computer-literate and take increased responsibility for developing and managing computer applications” (p. 380). The authors urged IS educators to move from delivering narrowly-defined skills to producing well-rounded, self-teaching IS professionals, who were at ease working in collaborative, team-based settings and capable of adapting to rapidly changing technological environments. The study suggested peer review as a key part of a learning mix because, as the researchers concluded: “We cannot afford to graduate students who are unable to critically examine their individual actions or their contributions as part of a team” (Ross & Ruhleder, 1993, p. 382).

2.6.2.3 Producing thoughtful practitioners

Two studies (Sheridan Burns, 2004; R. Thomas, 2009) argued that even journalism students who are going to enter the news media as reporters require more from their education than writing and research skills; they need to be active learners and critical and creative thinkers:

In the reporting on ideas and events as they occur, journalism involves criticism, or the conferring of judgement on the shape of things. . . In writing a story that is at once ethical, accurate and attractive to the audience, journalists are held to high benchmarks of thinking (Sheridan Burns, 2004, p. 6).

Both Sheridan Burns and Thomas saw a structured process of self- and peer evaluation as part of the mix for training future journalists in order to encourage critical self-reflection, and produce graduates with the sort of life skills—in particular self-reliance, confidence, problem solving, cooperation and adaptability—they would need in the workforce .

Meanwhile, a comparison of the literature around benefits to be gained from peer learning with lists of key graduate attributes expected from students in journalism and communications studies, produces an interesting alignment. At AUT, for example, communications students are expected to have “motivation, energy and an inquiring mind. . . ability in written, and spoken communication. . . [and] an ability to think creatively, laterally and independently” (AUT University, 2013). At Bond University in Australia (Bond University, 2012), the four relevant university graduate attributes listed for journalism-related papers are:

- Knowledge and critical thinking: Graduates have acquired a sound knowledge of the skills of a broadcast journalist and the ability to critically evaluate and reflect on these skills
- Leadership, initiative and teamwork: Graduates have skills which enable them to contribute to journalism and become effective leaders and members of the fourth estate through an understanding of the power of the written and spoken word
- Communication skills: Graduates have the skills to communicate effectively with other journalists, their interviewees and their audiences
- Responsibility: Graduates are aware of the standards, ethics and values inherent in the role of a journalist in both the local and global context. (Bond University, 2012)

In both these cases, there is a strong level of correlation with four of the main benefits from peer learning identified by other studies and outlined earlier in the chapter:

- Fostering active learning, independent thinking and problem solving skills
- Promoting cooperation, collaboration and an ability to work in teams
- Encouraging critical enquiry and a reflective approach to learning
- Promoting communication skills, and the ability to provide and receive feedback

Moreover, research into the use of graduate attributes in New Zealand tertiary institutions (Spronken-Smith et al., 2013) suggested my study has relevance to what is

happening in New Zealand in this area. Spronken-Smith and her colleagues examined the practical engagement of New Zealand universities with graduate attributes and found it to be low, although the concept is encouraged at a Ministry of Education and university leadership level. They found benefits for students who were taught using a curriculum centred on graduate outcomes, for example, that implemented by AUT's physiotherapy programme. The research noted preliminary findings that physiotherapy students were "thinking differently. . . asking questions. . . really insightful" (p. 73) and called for the introduction of strategies that help students achieve their graduate profiles.

2.7 Should AUT University news writing students learn from each other?

There is little published literature on journalism education in New Zealand, with authors such as Sligo (2004), Oakham and Tidley (2000), and R. Thomas (1999, 2009) among only a handful debating practical issues around how new and developing practitioners should be educated. However, examination of existing research suggests four areas where peer learning is relevant in terms of journalism education within the New Zealand and AUT University contexts:

- New Zealand journalists need to be reflective critical thinkers
- New Zealand journalism education is under financial pressure
- One-on-one peer learning works well
- Practice makes perfect

A fifth area, the relevance of peer review to ongoing New Zealand research (Spronken-Smith et al., 2013) into graduate outcomes, has been covered in the section above.

2.7.1 Reflective critical thinkers

R. Thomas (1999) described the traditional news writing teaching methods used in journalism schools, including AUT's (where a student writes a news story then brings it to their tutor to be 'subbed') as producing students who were overly dependent on their teacher and sometimes took little responsibility for their own learning. As Thomas wrote in her writing notebook:

A lot of demanding students want instant gratification. . . They remind me of birds with their beaks wide open—they won't go out and help themselves—just want more, more. . . (R. Thomas, 1999, p. 188).

A decade later, Thomas (2009) examined how the New Zealand news writing model had developed, describing a situation where journalism schools were dominated by the training needs of the media industry and the powerful influence of New Zealand Journalism Training Organisation unit standards (see also Sligo, 2004). King (1997) suggested media industry representatives had “little enthusiasm” (p. 21) for journalism programmes which encouraged any sort of analysis, worrying that this would produce “students. . . better at analysing the capitalist conspiracy to manipulate the media, than writing a news story” (p. 21). While Thomas (2009) suggested the apprenticeship and one-on-one subbing models are lauded by journalism educators and favoured by students, she argued these methods fail to foster independent and self-regulated learning. They also did not encourage students to monitor and evaluate their own writing and to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses. Thomas (2009) believed journalism students also failed to develop crucial wider skills, such as self-reliance, reflection and critical thinking which, she argued, are particularly important for today’s journalists, as they walk the narrow line between truthfully and ethically providing the facts and writing an interesting and attention-grabbing news story which will be commercially successful.

Thomas (2009) concluded change was needed in the methods used to teach journalism:

If such strategies as peer editing and the teaching of strategies for self-evaluation were introduced, it would relieve the pressure on present staff and also start to change the culture. It would also encourage students to develop the ability to reflect on and self-evaluate and monitor their own writing. It would also encourage them to become critical thinkers, using their intellectual abilities to consider the most suitable people to interview for a story, to ask the hard questions and to write in a considered and innovative way (p. 331).

2.7.2 Financial pressure

As discussed above, one advantage of peer review is it allows students to receive feedback on their work in cash-strapped environments where lecturers are dealing with increasing numbers of students (Boud et al., 2001; Topping, 2009). In this case, both research and informal conversations with colleagues would indicate its value in journalism education in New Zealand. In the late 1990s, R. Thomas (1999) described the situation in New Zealand’s journalism education sector as being one where teaching hours devoted to news writing were down, student numbers were up and teachers were under increasing pressure. She saw the one-on-one staff:student subbing method used to

teach news writing as financially unviable in the long term and urged adoption of an alternative that would serve students' learning requirements. Personal experience and discussion with colleagues would suggest the situation is little changed today.

2.7.3 One-on-one peer learning

An examination of the literature on peer learning suggests the one-on-one nature of the peer review system used with AUT University's journalism students has the potential to produce good learning benefits. Early studies into student-led work (Hare, 1952; E. J. Thomas & Fink, 1963) found small groups (less than six members) were most effective in promoting learning and understanding. The smallest unit, the dyad, was found to be particularly beneficial (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976) because "it allows an easy 'teacher'-'student' role change and prevents passivity of any participant" (pp. 23-24). Larger groups "experience more leadership problems, facilitate the dominance by some members, and frequently run into practical difficulties (e.g., finding a convenient meeting time and place)" (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976, p. 24).

2.7.4 Practice makes perfect

There is some indication that the peer review model used in the news writing programme at AUT University, where peer feedback is given and received every week, may make it a particularly good model for encouraging student learning. I found limited research into the effects of using peer review over a period of time (Falchikov, 2003); however one of the main studies (Willey & Gardner, 2009) reported that almost 70% of Australian students who carried out a series of self and peer assessment and feedback tasks improved their ability to assess their work and the work of others, and also improved their ability to give and receive feedback. On the other hand, Lew, Alwis and Schmidt (2010) compared the accuracy of student *self*-assessment averaged over four consecutive periods and found that the accuracy did not improve over time. This finding may or may not be relevant to *peer* learning. Literature mentioned above examining the importance of training, modelling and practice to get the best results out of peer learning (Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001; Sivan, 2000; Topping & Ehly, 2001)—as well as findings that students come to see the benefits of peer assessment as they grow in confidence and competence (Falchikov, 1995)—suggest that ongoing practice will improve performance. Faigley and Witte (1981) compared revisions to writing made by inexperienced students, advanced students and experts and found the more experienced students were able to pick up twice the number of 'meaning changes' as their

inexperienced colleagues. Work on ‘closing the feedback loop’ (Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell, & Litjens, 2008), and in particular on the importance of ‘feed forward’, where a learner can deploy what he or she may have learned from feedback from one particular task when they undertake a subsequent assignment or assessment, is also relevant here. Logic would suggest that AUT’s weekly writing–feedback model means students could build up their learning gradually using the peer feedback on previous stories to improve subsequent ones. In theory, students should steadily improve in competence, not only in their writing, but in their peer review skills.

2.8 Summary

This chapter has presented a review of the literature about peer learning, in particular what benefits and challenges arise for ‘reviewed’ and ‘reviewer’ when students evaluate each other’s work. Despite challenges shown in many studies, and a shortage of evidence-based literature into peer learning, I would argue that sufficient evidence exists from the many studies over more than 30 years to suggest that done well, reciprocal peer learning—students consciously assisting others to learn, and in so doing, learning themselves (Topping & Ehly, 2001)—has benefits for student learning and achievement. This review has, however, identified significant gaps in the literature, particularly around the benefits and challenges of peer review for journalism students. This study starts from the premise that peer review is being used in news reporting classes at AUT University. Moreover, informal evidence from my questionnaires to Australasian journalism schools suggests other journalism educators, particularly in Australia, are also using peer learning. However I found almost no literature about whether journalism students and tutors see peer feedback as beneficial for student learning, and what the particular pitfalls are. This literature review has shown the need for research to gain an understanding of what might be seen as best practice in terms of using peer learning in journalism education in general, and in New Zealand journalism education in particular. The aim of the present study, which will examine the perceptions of journalism students and lecturers of the benefits and challenges of the peer review model used in the teaching of news writing on AUT’s journalism programme, is to provide some additional knowledge on which further learning can be built.

The next chapter looks at the philosophical approach that underpins this study, and outlines the methodology, study design, data gathering and analysis, and ethical issues.

Chapter 3: Methodology

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3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces, and contains a discussion of, the methodological approach and the study design used to examine the research questions set out in Chapter 1. I propose and discuss an action research method in relation to my research aims, values and the best way to arrive at answers to the research questions. I then outline specific details of the research design, including the stages of the research and the key methods employed. Given the importance of design and validity in the choice of research instruments, I provide justification of the methods used. The subsequent section includes an illustration of the specific process of data collection, followed by an overview of methods used for data analysis. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the limitations of the research process and a consideration of the ethical issues.

3.2 Philosophical approach

Methodology only makes sense if it is grounded in the theoretical ideas of the research, the ontology of the researcher and the epistemology with which the researcher is working (Ball, 2011; St.Pierre, 2006). Or to put it another way, the choice of methodology will be influenced by the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the researcher.

3.2.1 Ontology

I identify strongly with the ontology expressed by Whitehead and McNiff (2006):

We value other people’s capacity to come to know in their own way. . . . We have faith in our own and other people’s intellectual capacities, so we avoid telling them what to do, confident in the grounding of our faith in the philosophies of Polanyi (1958), who says that all people

possess a vast store of tacit knowledge already within themselves. . . . From the grounds of this faith, we value embodied knowledge, the nature of which practitioners come to understand as they work with their practice and create their own theories of education (p. 24).

My ontological values fit well with the aims and nature of this research project, as this study assumes students are able to create their own knowledge, by themselves and together with their peers; they do not need to be told what to think by their teachers. One of the benefits of peer learning is it provides a model to encourage students to engage with questions around how to improve what they are doing (Falchikov, 2007). Similarly, these ontological principles drove the way I wanted to conduct the research. I wanted to draw out the tacit knowledge of the teachers and students in order to build a more effective action, or at least to raise questions that could inform an action.

3.2.2 Epistemology

The underpinnings of this research are a non-traditional epistemology. I do not see knowledge as objective, nor truth as necessarily achievable (Zuber-Skenitt, 1993). More specifically, I do not see students as passive receivers of knowledge and skills. Rather, knowledge is constructed through interaction between people (Burr, 2003), and teaching and learning are about active knowledge acquisition (Zuber-Skenitt, 1993); a quest for understanding of how to improve practice. The basis of this study is an investigation into how knowledge is constructed through the interaction between journalism students.

3.2.3 The position of the researcher

I see myself as being part of a continually-changing story, where there are multiple realities and interpretations, and where knowledge is created in relationship with others. I do not see myself as a “neutral technocrat who has no commitment to the issue under investigation other than to seek the truth” (Newby, 2010, p. 46). Instead, I am a journalist myself, and have until recently working in a teaching team involving other journalism tutors and journalism students. I am committed to the profession and to the role of tertiary institutions in producing good journalists for the future. I want my students to be successful, and recognise that a normal but important part of my teaching paradigm is to be constantly striving to improve my teaching practice. In terms of this study, I am not neutral about the impact of peer learning; I believe peer learning has the potential to be beneficial for student learning, if done in the right way.

3.2.4 Methodology: Action research

After examining a number of potential methodologies suitable to this research, epistemology and positioning, I chose action research. One rationale for choosing action research for this study was its wide and successful use by other researchers in an educational setting (Altrichter, Feldman, Posch, & Somekh, 2008; Cardno, 2003; Costello, 2003; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Mertler, 2012; Mills, 2007; Pine, 2009). Falchikov (2005) found considerable precedent for using an action research methodology in research on the topic of self- and peer-assessment, and saw a link between the topic and the methodology when she suggested: “Most research on the topic of self- or peer assessment is conducted by practising teachers and is, thus, a form of action research” (Falchikov, 2005, p. 251). However, precedent was not the only justification for choosing action research. There are four key aspects of action research which were relevant for my study: it is practical in nature (in teaching it is involved in improving and developing teaching practice); it involves change; it is cyclical; and it is collaborative or participatory (Denscombe, 2010).

3.2.4.1 Real-world practice

Action research is associated with teachers evaluating, and trying to improve, their own practice (Costello, 2003). It involves research from inside a social setting, not research on that setting (Noffke & Somekh, 2011) and it is also associated with work-based learning (McNiff, 2010), and a desire to improve practice within a democratic workplace (Kincheloe, 2003). This study is aimed at a real teaching situation within my own workplace; the use of peer review techniques for AUT’s journalism students.

3.2.4.2 Change

As Marrow (1969) suggested: “No action without research, no research without action” (p. 193). I set out to investigate peer learning in general, and peer review at AUT in particular, with the view to implementing and testing new ideas either as part of my own future professional development, or in collaboration with other journalism staff members.

3.2.4.3 Cyclical form

Action research is often seen as a circle or spiral (Cardno, 2003). It is open ended, beginning not with a fixed hypothesis, but with an idea developed, in its ideal form, by the researcher and the participants (McNiff, 2010). Preliminary findings produce possibilities for change, which are then implemented and assessed, as a precursor to

further investigation. In this case, my idea was to work collaboratively with colleagues and students to identify the issues around use of peer review at AUT, gather and interpret the data, introduce an intervention from the results and test it. While time constraints required a preordained beginning and end to this specific study, it had its beginnings in action research conducted into the teaching of news writing at AUT University by a member of the journalism teaching team 15 years ago (R. Thomas, 1999). Thomas' research led her to more research into how New Zealand journalism students learn to write (R. Thomas, 2009). This second study led, in its turn, to the introduction of the peer review system used at AUT today, which is the subject of this study. I hope findings from this study will allow me or other journalism educators to continue the action research journey as formal research projects or as part of our normal teaching and professional development.

3.2.4.4 Collaboration

Lastly, an important aspect of action research at its best is it is collaborative or cooperative in nature (Stringer, 2007). McNiff and Whitehead (2006) criticised researchers who call their work action research, when in fact it is actually “social science research, where an official researcher observes, describes and explains what people do” (p. 42). This type of research, McNiff and Whitehead said, “reinforces a view of aristocrats and subservients, and asymmetrical relationships of power” (p. 42). Levin and Martin (2007) suggested the practitioner must be able to “initiate and support involvement of self and others in action as well as have the capability to reflect critically on the process and outcomes of the action engagement” (p. 220).

3.3 “Living theory” action research

There are dozens of different models of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005), and much debate as to what counts as action research and who should be regarded as an action researcher (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003). In the initial planning stages, I envisioned a collaborative action research study (Gordon, 2008), where I would be working as a practising teacher, with other journalism tutors and with students, to bring about change or improvement in AUT's peer review model (Falchikov, 2005; Kincheloe, 2003). However, ethical risks raised about me, as a teacher, using my own students in research (see discussion below) precluded me working directly and cooperatively with students I was teaching. Withdrawing from teaching News Reporting classes also limited the sort of collaboration I had anticipated with the other journalism tutors—from exchanging ideas over a cup of coffee, to testing change in our classes, to

running professional development workshops (Altrichter et al., 2008). For this reason, this research is positioned within the “living theory” action research approach developed by Whitehead and McNiff (2006). This form of action research focuses on the ontological ‘I’ of the researcher. It begins with practical questions such as: “What is my concern?. . . What can I do about it?. . . How do I modify my practice in the light of my evaluation?” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005, p. 1). The aim of the researcher in living theory action research is to hold themselves accountable for their own learning and their influence in the learning of others (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). In this study, part of my aim is to construct a living theory of peer review as a way of improving my own teaching and better supporting my students. It is also hoped that the research can stimulate further discussion, and further actions, from me and potentially my colleagues.

Living theory action research places emphasis on monitoring one’s own actions and learning (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). One key action (“What have I done?”) was the data gathering itself—the bringing together of journalism students and tutors to share opinions and build knowledge together. These interactions provide the foundations for “What have I learned?”, while analysis of the fruits of these interactions is important in terms of “What is the significance of this learning?” One of the most important questions: “How will my learning generate new actions” required me not only to think about how the learning from this research would impact my own teaching, but how potentially to widen the discussion. If this was to happen, the act of sharing the results of the research was important. Cardno (2003) and Zuber-Skenitt (1993) stressed making action research public and involving the participants as much as possible. Before the start of the research, I arranged a formal briefing meeting with all AUT journalism staff members, and I have maintained both formal and informal links with members of the team during the research. I saw the collaborative group meetings (see below for more details) as a crucial part of the action research process, as these allowed students and staff to share their views, not only of their experience of peer review, but of changes that might improve that experience. In terms of a broader audience, I have been proactive in sharing my experiences through academic journal articles (two in preparation), conference presentations (Journalism Educators Association of New Zealand, November 2013 and AUT Three Minute Thesis, August 2013) and formal and informal discussions of findings with the journalism team.

3.4 A multi-method strategy

I chose to use more than one method of data collection, notably questionnaires—with a mixture of open questions and Likert-type scales (Likert, 1932)—and collaborative group meetings. I also chose to involve two different groups of participants, students and tutors. Historically, the integration of more than one research approach was viewed with scepticism in some quarters of the international research community (J. Anderson & Poole, 1994; Brannen, 1992), with a particular concern being the integration of the data involved. Brannen (1992) said the multi-methods approach demanded the researcher specify precisely the aims of each method and the nature of the data that is expected to result, and insisted on “care and precision [being] needed at all stages of the research process from designing to writing up” (p. 16). However a multi-method approach has gained traction over recent years, being seen as a useful solution in situations where more evidence is needed—or a better understanding sought—than can be provided by one approach alone (Creswell & Piano Clark, 2011; Somekh & Lewin, 2011). For example, in a study of his postgraduate students, who were all practising teachers, Elliott (2004) found many gravitated to questionnaires, because they saw this method as easy. However, when Elliott looked at the results of his students’ research, he concluded that questionnaires alone were often insufficient to bring out the complexities inherent in studying why children learn, or fail to learn. He found a multi-method approach—often including questionnaires but with other methods used as well—could mitigate the problem. I was also keen to get a deep, rich and meaningful picture of peer review as used in journalism education, in particular at AUT. The importance I placed on a collaborative approach also influenced the decision to involve both students and other journalism tutors as participants.

3.4.1 Triangulation

Triangulation was another reason for using a multi-method approach. In a research context, triangulation can involve the use of multiple observers, multiple methodologies or multiple data sources (Hoepfl, 1997). Collecting information using a variety of sources and methods (Maxwell, 2005) “reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating” (Maxwell, 2005, pp. 93-94). Triangulation allows a researcher to look at a question using more than one perspective or lens, in order to enhance confidence in the validity of the findings (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). These benefits of a multi-method

approach outweighed, for me, the perceived disadvantages (Altrichter et al., 2008): the time and effort required; and the potential threat to the researcher in confronting one's own perceptions with those of more than one group of people. In fact, contrary to what Altrichter believed, I felt it demanded a *higher* degree of self-confidence—or confidence in the research data—to rely solely on one's own data, or on data from only one source.

In this study, I used two key forms of triangulation (M. Q. Patton, 2002). The first is triangulation of data sources, collecting data from student and tutor participants. The second is triangulation of data collection method, using a combination of questionnaires and collaborative group meetings.

3.5 Data collection from AUT News Reporting students

3.5.1 Participants and background

The participants were all third year, AUT undergraduate journalism students taking the (compulsory) semester one News Reporting paper. All News Reporting students are specialising in journalism, are fluent English speakers and are over 18 years old, with the majority being under 30 years old. I decided not to gather demographic data about the participants. I did not see my participants as 'objects of study' (McNiff, 2013), so gathering the sort of information often sought by external researchers (age, gender, length of time studying, where born, for example) I saw as both intrusive and serving no useful purpose in advancing the research aims.

The News Reporting students had weekly one-hour lectures and a four-hour tutorial, involving both theoretical and practical elements. They wrote 12 weekly news stories, sourcing original ideas, and arranging at least two interviews for each story. The students were encouraged to submit their stories for publication in local, regional or national newspapers, although not all stories were successfully published. The first step having written their news stories was for students to show them to a classmate for peer review. The peer reviewing was largely done online, using a peer review sheet in PDF form supplied by their tutor (see Appendix A), although a few students printed out the sheet and the story and worked face-to-face with their peers. Then each student brought or sent their story to their writing tutor for review, before it was submitted to a publication. Students received marks for each story 'signed off' by their tutor, and additional marks were given at the end of the semester when the student submitted a portfolio of stories and photos. Marks were allocated (among other criteria) for the

quality of the stories and the number that had been published. In 2013, for the first time, News Reporting students were also expected to submit evidence of a peer review of each of their news stories, as part of their portfolio, and six marks were allocated to the peer review portion of the portfolio—out of a total of 35 marks.

The students had differing amounts of previous experience of peer reviewing, as the use of peer review in the communications school is not ubiquitous. Of the 21 students who responded to a question on previous experience, only five could clearly remember previous peer reviewing exercises, three said they had not done any peer reviewing before, and 13 were unsure or couldn't remember details of previous peer reviewing processes.

A total of 21 students volunteered to complete the questionnaire about their views on how the peer review worked for their learning. Thirteen students (28%) participated in the two collaborative group meetings. As the questionnaire was anonymous, it is not possible to know how many of the students participated in both the questionnaire and a meeting but it is a reasonable assumption there was at least some cross-over.

3.5.2 Questionnaire

All 46 students taking News Reporting in 2013 were invited to take part in the hard-copy questionnaire, and 21 (46% of enrolled students) did so. The questionnaire was made up of four open questions: what were the main benefits students saw from the peer review process; what were the main challenges or frustrations; whether they saw any differences between the peer review system being used in News Reporting that semester and any peer review they had used before; and what changes they would like to see to the peer review process. There was a space for “other comments”. The questionnaire was anonymous. The limitations of this decision will be discussed in Chapter 7.

3.5.3 Collaborative group meeting

The use of collaborative group meetings fits with the philosophy behind my research—that of the value of peers. I was interested in the insight produced by the interaction between participants (A. Gibbs, 1997). Morgan (1996) suggested smaller groups were more appropriate with emotionally-charged topics that generated high levels of participant involvement, whereas larger groups worked better with more neutral topics (such as peer review). MacIntosh (1993) recommended six to ten participants for a focus group, and I worked with this figure as being ideal for my collaborative group meetings. Initially, only four students said they would be coming to the collaborative

group meetings. I decided it would be better to have more participants, so after discussions with my supervisor I decided to organise two meetings to fit around students' timetables. In the end two students came to the first collaborative group meeting, and 11 to the second—a total of 13 students, or 28% of enrolled students. The uneven split related possibly to timetable clashes, or possibly to the fact that students at the first meeting spread the word. The larger-than-expected number of students in the second meeting caused an unanticipated problem because I was unable to identify individual students in the transcript. The outcome of this issue will be noticeable in Chapters 4 and 5 (the results chapters), where I have not attributed comments to specific participants. The limitations of this will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Discussion at the student collaborative group meetings focussed around the same questions as were in the questionnaire (benefits, challenges, potential changes). Where possible, I planned loosely-phrased questions (Morgan, 1997). For example, "I'm interested in understanding what the main benefits, if any, are for the 'reviewer' when using AUT's peer review techniques. Can you tell me something about that?" The collaborative group meetings lasted approximately 45 minutes each and were recorded to ensure the accuracy of data collection and to allow me to concentrate on the discussions. I used two audio recorders and transcribed both, as a way to ensure I got an accurate transcript. I sent copies of the transcripts to the participants, but no changes were suggested.

3.5.4 Class survey

The final set of data from student participants came from a short questionnaire sent by email to all News Reporting students at the start of the course. As this information had been collected outside the original remit of the research I got separate permission from AUT's Ethics Committee to use it. Students were asked two questions:

- What do you think will be most beneficial to you in terms of using peer review this year – and why?
- What are you most concerned about – and why?

A total of 33 students (72% of the 46 students enrolled in the class) responded.

3.6 Data collection from AUT journalism tutors

3.6.1 Participants and background

The study involved nine AUT journalism tutors, seven of whom were currently teaching on the journalism programme. The other two were former tutors; one had recently retired and one had just returned to full time journalism. Eight of the nine tutors or former tutors were (or had been) tenured staff; one was a contract lecturer. These tutors—three men and six women—had all taught at AUT for at least three years, some for considerably longer (20 years or more). All had worked in the media industry before joining AUT, with most being former print journalists, although there were two tutors in this study with a radio background and one from television journalism. All had been involved in teaching News Reporting—AUT’s flagship Year 3 news writing paper. I invited all AUT journalism News Reporting tutors to participate in the research, and all did so.

The writing tutor’s role is to help students produce a publishable weekly news story by suggesting changes to their draft copy. With the rising use of the internet by journalism students, this review process is now often done by email, although some tutors regret the passing of higher levels of face-to-face tutor-student contact.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, peer review was first introduced into the AUT journalism programme in 2008. Students were expected to get their news stories “peer edited” as part of the route to publication; mostly they sought out another student in the newsroom and swapped stories with them. The 2013 year saw some changes introduced into AUT’s peer review process under the guidance of paper leader Lyn Barnes. These included: providing students with some introductory material about the rationale behind peer review (see Appendix B); adding some aspects of self-reflection (part one of the peer review sheet in Appendix A); asking students to grade their classmates in areas such as content, structure and news writing style (although the grades were used as a guide, rather than going towards a final mark); and prompting students to reflect on what they had learnt for their own writing from their peer review of their classmate’s story. For the first time, peer reviewing could be done online, although it was not anonymous, and students were expected to find a different peer reviewer each week.

While all the News Reporting students in the study were undergraduates, one of the tutor participants was, for the 2013 year, teaching only on the postgraduate News Reporting paper; one tutor was teaching on both. This is relevant because only the

undergraduate peer review sheet and process was changed in 2013, with the postgraduate students still using the previous peer review sheet, and hard copy peer reviews. In writing these results I have been aware of the fact that one tutor in the meeting had no experience of the online undergraduate system with the revised peer review sheet, and have tried to factor this in as much as possible when analysing the data.

As with the journalism students, I made the decision not to gather further demographic data about the participants, as this seemed irrelevant and intrusive in this study. I chose two different research methods: questionnaires and a collaborative meeting.

3.6.2 Questionnaire

Eight of the nine tutors in the study completed the questionnaire, which I sent out before the start of the 2013 semester. I chose a combination of Likert-type scales and open-ended questions. Questions 1-4 were open-ended, intended to produce unprompted responses from participants. For example, Question 1 read: “What do you see as the main benefits of AUT’s journalism peer review system for students in terms of their acquisition of skills and understanding?” Questions 5-9 used Likert -type scales. These questions used the thematic findings from the literature review as the basis for the question. Question five, for example, read as follows:

Current research suggests some potential benefits from peer editing, both for the “reviewed” student and the “reviewer”. Which of the following benefits do you think are provided by AUT’s journalism peer feedback system. (Please answer by UNDERLINING the answer you consider most appropriate.)

- | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| a) Increases students’ news writing skills | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| b) Prepares students to work in a newsroom | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| c) Prepares students for a rapidly-changing work environment | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| d) Gives students wider graduate attributes – eg. ability to be lifelong learners, self-confidence, ability to communicate and collaborate, critical evaluation skills | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| e) Moves students from superficial to deep learning | | | | | |

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

The fact that these were not disinterested, objective participants was both a risk and an opportunity. The participants all had personal experience of the peer review system, and would inevitably bring pre-existing opinions. Their different teaching styles and philosophies would also impact on their answers. However, their ‘interested’ status was also an advantage because their tacit knowledge—and therefore the opportunities for discussion and participation—were greater. In addition, it was an advantage because the questionnaire was long—I estimated it would take participants at least 30 minutes, and possibly as much as an hour to answer fully. I was aware of the ethical considerations around lengthy questionnaires imposing on participants. However, because the staff teaching at AUT were actively using the peer review system and had all attended the (voluntary) early briefing meetings, I decided they were likely to be interested in the outcome of this research. I hoped they viewed this as an opportunity to express and share their views and potentially make a difference to student learning. This optimistic view appears to have been justified, given their thoughtful responses.

3.6.3 Collaborative group meeting

The second data collection method with the journalism tutors was a collaborative meeting, which took place in June 2013, at the end of the News Reporting course. Of the six journalism tutors who had filled in a questionnaire and were still working at AUT, four attended the meeting. Two sent messages saying they would have been keen to come but were not available at that time. One tutor who did not fill in a questionnaire attended the briefing. The meeting lasted an hour and covered three main areas: what the tutors felt were the benefits of the peer review system, what they saw as the challenges, and what changes they might like to see in the future. I again used two audio recorders to ensure accuracy of the transcription and sent the transcription to the participants. None requested changes.

3.7 Limitations of the data collection methods

3.7.1 Questionnaires:

Questionnaires are often seen as a way of getting information from people in a time-efficient and simple way (Altrichter et al., 2008). However I was aware that questionnaire responses can be unreliable because, as Cluskey found in his 1996 work (as cited in McNiff et al., 2003), a participant may give one answer one day, and a

different answer the next day. They can also be unreliable because respondents, particularly in a small group (like AUT's journalism teaching staff) or with participants who can be identified by the researcher (as turned out to be the case with the AUT tutors, who chose not to provide answers anonymously), may give the answer they feel is expected or one that will show them in a good light (Altrichter et al., 2008). A questionnaire is only as good as its questions, and it can also be difficult balancing closed questions (which are easier and quicker for respondents to answer but in a qualitative study may yield less detailed information) with open questions, which respondents may leave blank. In addition, my ontological stance, based on the value of embodied knowledge, rather than objective realities, meant that questions were only going to be valuable if they were a way to bring out tacit knowledge and to investigate points of view and understandings in my participants. I chose not to use closed questions at all, but instead used a mixture of Likert-type scales and open questions. Several practical books on questionnaires (Altrichter et al., 2008; McNiff et al., 2003; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006) recommend piloting a questionnaire first. To some extent, the questionnaire to Australasian journalism schools served as a pilot for the other two questionnaires; however I also showed the draft questionnaires for AUT tutors and students to two colleagues and received useful feedback before finalising them. One obvious problem with questionnaires—that of not being able to follow-up with the participants if you want to clarify any of the points of view expressed—was partially resolved by the use of collaborative meetings later. One final perceived danger identified by McNiff et al (2003), namely that “questionnaires are not neutral [but] can influence their respondents to ideas they had not thought about before” (p. 121), I saw as both a disadvantage and an advantage. On the negative side, I was aware of making subjective judgements about relevant themes, and guiding the participants. On the other hand, I was able to use the tutor questionnaire, in particular, to introduce several of the international themes around peer learning that I had gleaned from the literature review, and that I wanted to discuss further in the collaborative group meeting.

3.7.2 Collaborative group meetings

Many of the issues raised above to do with limitations around the use of questionnaires are also relevant in terms of using collaborative group meetings as a method of data collection. In particular the need for good questions is important, as is the fact that responses can be unreliable. In addition, participants may not feel at ease expressing their ideas in a group situation; some believe participants' true views are more likely to

emerge with one-on-one interviews (Brown, 2001). The experience of being approached by one student after a meeting to give me a viewpoint she did not feel able to express publicly, but which she knew was relevant, is an example of this problem, which was probably far more widespread. On the other hand, conversations and the sharing of stories and experience is one way of activating tacit knowledge (Altrichter et al., 2008), a key ontological foundation of this study.

While the use of triangulation, as discussed above, has the potential to increase validity, it is also important to recognise that the two methods being triangulated (questionnaires and collaborative group meetings) have the potential to have the same biases and sources of invalidity. Triangulation does not preclude a researcher from thinking about particular sources of error or bias and looking for ways to deal with them (Maxwell, 2005).

3.7.3 Existing researcher bias

My acknowledged belief in the potential benefits of peer review for student learning is also a potential issue for the study. Not being a neutral observer (Newby, 2010) meant I might be tempted to subconsciously distort findings. I was aware I needed to step back from the data and be critical of the meaning being created. I also needed to link the evidence to themes from the literature.

3.7.4 Designing the plane while flying it

I was also aware of the limitations in a qualitative research approach stemming from the fact that both researcher and participants are human and limited by being human (Merriam, 1998). Humans make mistakes, miss opportunities and can allow personal biases to interfere. Moreover, research involving humans—particularly humans collaborating together—is unlikely to follow a straightforward and preordained path. In this study, the ideas and the actions of participants did, in some ways, influence both my ideas and the progress of the research design analysis (Oliver, 2004), while at the same time providing richer data and a speedier process of change. It is worth mentioning one example of this, as an illustration of how the evolutionary nature of this research was a complicating factor for a new researcher. In the early stages of the research, as indicated above, I gave a briefing to AUT journalism lecturers on the topic of my study. This led to me being asked by Lyn Barnes, the leader of AUT's Year 3 News Reporting paper, to examine the peer review sheet previously used with students, and to make recommendations as to changes. These suggestions, based on my examination of the peer learning literature, were incorporated into the journalism peer review process for

2013 Year 3 undergraduate students. I was also asked to give a short briefing to students on the rationale behind AUT's use of peer review. These two actions were ones that I had not anticipated happening during my study (although I had hoped that they might form part of a later phase of the action research cycle). They also altered the basic parameters of the research. Sometimes I felt the chapter title used by Herr and Anderson (2005): "Designing the plane while flying it" was not so far from the mark.

3.8 Ethical considerations arising out of the research

3.8.1 The teacher-student relationship

As mentioned above, ethical concerns around students participating in research being conducted by their teachers saw me decide to stop teaching at AUT for the period of the research. However, I was conscious that I might still be viewed as "one of the teachers" because of my past links and that this might put some pressure on students. For this reason, I made sure all communication with the students happened directly, rather than through a journalism tutor, and that journalism tutors were not present when I was talking to students about my research or trying to recruit them for my study.

3.8.2 The researcher-(former) colleague relationship

Another ethical considerations arose during the early part of my study regarding my relationship with the AUT journalism tutors. During a short preliminary meeting to outline my research idea, which was at that stage an evaluation of the use of peer review at AUT four years after its introduction, one tutor felt this could be seen as implying existing flaws. He said in an email:

The research proposal seems to start from the position that the peer edit system needs improving. We're not disagreeing—in fact we think it probably could be quite a bit better—it's just that it's an interesting place to start from (personal communication, on October 2, 2012).

Following this comment, and given the participatory intent of the research, I decided to change the focus from a 'review' of the existing system, however collaborative, to an exploration of how AUT's peer review system assisted in students' acquisition of skills and understanding. I also decided to look at how ideas—from the literature, from what's happening in other disciplines or schools, and from the tutors and students—could impact on the way peer review helped this acquisition of skills and understanding.

As I said in my reply to the journalism team:

In that way, I see us (perhaps I am presumptuous to talk about "us" i.e. the team, but I would hope that others might be interested in playing a part in the process) not starting from something that is 'flawed' and needs 'improving', but from a premise that incorporating new ideas into our discussion and therefore possibly into our peer review process would be interesting and might bring about constructive change (October 3, 2012).

The second ethical consideration that emerged from the initial discussion with journalism tutors involved the introduction of a disputes resolution process. Some tutors who had worked at AUT for some time indicated that past research conducted by journalism staff—staff no longer with the school—had caused some inter-collegial acrimony. For this reason, I drew up a disputes resolution process in conjunction with AUT's human resources department and agreed the wording of the document with the journalism team before the start of any data gathering.

3.8.3 Privacy issues

I was aware of the privacy and confidentiality issues surrounding research and made sure participants' privacy and confidentiality were respected throughout the process. I ensured that I explained the research thoroughly to the participants before the study started using information sheets and face-to-face briefings. I got signed consent from all participants and they were not identified in the transcripts. I told participants that no identifying information would be included in the study and made sure they understood they could withdraw from the study at any time. When the disputes resolution process was established with the journalism tutors, I made it clear that this process in no way affected their normal rights in terms of withdrawing from the study if and when they wanted. As is usual, information will be destroyed at the end of six years, and participants' privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.

3.9 Data analysis

There are several possible approaches to analysing qualitative data from transcripts of focus groups, meetings or open questions from surveys. These include content analysis, pattern analysis and thematic analysis (M. Q. Patton, 2002). My research design meant I needed to analyse the verbatim transcriptions from the student and tutor collaborative group meetings, and what the students and tutors had said on the questionnaires. I chose thematic analysis, involving coding and categorising (G. Gibbs, 2007), as a good way to identify common threads in my material.

3.9.1 Inductive or deductive?

Altrichter et al (2008) suggested that in action research it is “probably most useful” (p. 163) to use a mixture of deductive data coding (when coding categories are chosen from the researcher’s theoretical knowledge and the researcher then searches for relevant passages in the data) and inductive data coding (when categories are derived from the data). My initial coding attempts did indeed involve a mixture of inductive and deductive coding; however using deductive coding I found it hard to move beyond what Richards (1997) aptly refers to as “garden path analysis” (p. 429) to a more meaningful and coherent model or theory (Bazeley, Research Support P/L, & Australian Catholic University, 2009). In the end, my coding was largely inductive.

3.9.2 Coding strategy: metaphors

The first step was to read and re-read my material several times to increase my familiarity with the text and to identify the broader themes and issues identified by the participants (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell distinguished three types of thematic categories: “organizational”, “substantive” and “theoretical” (p. 97), with the former category being more functional, the middle one primarily descriptive and the latter increasingly abstract. One of main challenges of coding identified by G. Gibbs (2007)—a challenge I could relate to—was “identifying chunks of texts and working out what codes they represent, in a way that is theoretical and analytical and not merely descriptive” (p. 41). I started building a thematic framework by jotting ideas in the margin of the transcript, summarising the students’ or tutors’ views about peer review. I then grouped these, allocating the important concepts with a code, for example “confidence” or “process”. I chose an open coding approach (G. Gibbs, 2007) where, as far as possible, codes emerged from reading the documents, rather than being assigned in advance. Coded comments were then copied from the transcript across to a new document.

Initially my codes stayed close to the words used by the participants. This only began to change when I tried a coding method suggested by Altrichter et al (2008), involving identifying, constructing and analysing metaphors. Metaphors, Altrichter et al suggested, “are of a generative character. They cannot replace the analysis of data, but they can stimulate new directions for analysis and in this way enrich the research and development process” (p. 176). Reiners, (as cited in Altrichter et al., 2008) said that it is no good searching consciously for metaphors. However Richards (2005) suggested there can be benefits in chasing metaphors, “sometimes. . . to the point of absurdity” (p. 171). Fruitful metaphors can often come from your participants (Altrichter et al., 2008;

Richards, 2005), and the main metaphors I used for my data analysis were indeed taken (sometimes in an adapted way) from what the students said. When one student talked about the process of peer review as “embracing the cactus”, for example, this seemed to sum up well the potentially transformative, but also potentially painful, possibilities that stem from giving and receiving feedback from one’s peers. Another student talked about a “light bulb moment”, when she had suddenly understood an important idea about her writing, after reading someone else’s news story. I changed the metaphor to “the light comes on” to reflect that some students saw the learning benefits as gradual, rather than abrupt. A third metaphor, “a new pair of eyes” was used by several students. At this stage I developed a second coding document: “*Coding the data using metaphor*”.

Many academics (among them G. Gibbs, 2007; Richards, 2005) advocate the use of specialised computer software to help with coding and qualitative data analysis. However, I decided that the amount of data I had did not warrant computer assistance.

3.10 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined the methodology and research design for this study, and given justifications for my choice. A qualitative approach has allowed the participants’ words and viewpoints to be the main data for the study, and a living theory action research methodology has allowed me collaborate with participants, using our tacit knowledge alongside ideas from wider literature to build learning and understanding, but all the time remaining within the ethical guidelines necessary for safe research. I have explained my rationale for a multi-method approach to data collection, and outlined how I used questionnaires and collaborative group meetings with the two participant groups. I have described how data reliability and validity were achieved through a triangulated approach and how I chose to analyse my data using metaphor as a way of both enriching and simplifying a data coding process. I have also considered some of the limitations and ethical considerations around the research design, including incorporating the concerns of the journalism tutors and adapting the design to meet ethical considerations around the teacher-student relationship. I have outlined how the research process did not always proceed as expected but have suggested that unanticipated happenings are part of an action research approach.

In the next two chapters I will present the findings of this study: in Chapter 4 the perceived benefits of “embracing the cactus” and in Chapter 5 the challenges.

Chapter 4: Perceived benefits of peer review

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4.1 Introduction

There is considerable research evidence to show that effective feedback leads to learning gains (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 204).

In this study I wanted to examine the peer review process at AUT University in terms of its potential benefits and challenges for students' learning. In this chapter, the first of two outlining the results, I look at the perceived learning benefits of what one student called "embracing the cactus"—the process of actively engaging in peer review. The chapter will reflect the finding that participants were generally positive about the peer review process, and will explore the views garnered from both questionnaires and collaborative group meetings, using themes generated from the participants. However, it was also obvious, particularly from the student participants, that there was a level of disillusionment about the way the peer review process worked in practice. This will be considered in more detail in the second part of the results section, Chapter 5, where I look at the challenges.

Participants' viewpoints around the benefits of peer review for students' learning fell into three themes:

- Fresh pair of eyes: Benefits to students' writing from being reviewed
- Turning on the light: Benefits to students' writing from reviewing others
- Wider vistas: Broader benefits

4.2 Fresh pair of eyes: Benefits to students' writing from being reviewed

This thematic category is derived from phrases used by participants, who talked about "a fresh pair of eyes", "fresh eyes", "another pair of eyes", or "a critical eye", when talking about the benefits for students in having someone else (the peer reviewer) looking at their work and giving feedback. This category was seen by students as likely

to provide significant benefits, particularly when they were commenting before the start of the peer reviews. By contrast, tutors put far less emphasis on it.

The perceived benefits from this “fresh pair of eyes” category fell into three main sub-categories:

- Error eradication
- Reassurance/confidence
- Fresh insights

4.2.1 Error eradication

Students were very conscious of this particular benefit of peer review—having someone else, or several different people, picking up grammar and punctuation mistakes in their copy. In this area, the peer reviewer was fulfilling a traditional journalistic sub-editing role, correcting mistakes before the story went to an editor (or in this case a tutor) prior to publication. As one student put it:

Peer editing gives you a chance to get feedback and correct mistakes before giving a copy to your tutor/editor. This saves the embarrassment of minor mistakes that your tired eyes have missed.

Students were particularly mindful of this benefit at the end of the semester, once they had experienced the one-on-one tutor editing process, where emphasis is placed on students having correct style, grammar and punctuation in their stories.

From a learning perspective, the benefits for reviewed students from “error eradication” were largely passive—the peer reviewers corrected mistakes for them. However while this might be seen as an issue in terms of theories around active learning, it was not necessarily seen as a problem by students. In fact, one student was annoyed when a peer reviewer didn’t point out individual errors, instead giving her general feedback that there were mistakes in her grammar:

One person just said: ‘Check though your grammar again.’ I was like: ‘What! What do you mean?’ . . . It’s good to know, but point it out.

Two tutors suggested that the peer review process helped emphasise for students the importance of handing in “clean copy”. It reinforced for students the need to “check, check and check again” basic grammar and punctuation issues. Tutors also said peer review potentially speeded up the process for them because some the mistakes and

problems had already been picked up before the stories reached them (“theoretically” at least). As one tutor said: “[It] saves teachers’ time because students address the easy stuff, at least.”

4.2.1.1 Reassurance/confidence

Linked to the “error eradication” sub-category were a small number of comments from students who said having their stories peer reviewed gave them confidence their work was “good enough” before they submitted it to a tutor or editor. Two students suggested that if a formal peer reviewing system had not been in place, they would have sought this reassurance from an informal peer editor—for example a friend or family member:

I just wanted someone to check it. I don’t really mind about the whole ‘fill in the form and tell me blah blah blah’. But just the point if one of my friends looks at it and says: ‘Look, that’s quite good. Oh actually you’ve made a mistake here.’ Just so someone else can see it before it goes. . . . And then like the gratification you get from someone saying: ‘Oh that’s good!’

4.2.2 Fresh insights

The other main category of benefits mentioned by participants was “fresh insights”—the process by which a peer reviewer passed on insights into areas such as style, structure, newsworthiness and use of language. These insights helped the writer think about their own work and make changes. Unlike the “error eradication” category above, the reviewed student’s role here is largely an active one—using the received feedback as way to improve their own writing. For example:

By taking it to different people I find that I am constantly changing and improving my style due to different suggestions and ideas.

One student gave a concrete example:

I had one story, because I always used lots of commas, it’s my biggest thing, but I’d never noticed before. Like week five the guy who did it pointed it out and said to me like: ‘It breaks things up’ and then I started looking at it and from then on every time I consciously looked at my comma usage. . . . Because he told me ‘It doesn’t flow’ and then I read it and I could see.

Some students mentioned that because their peer reviewer was also learning to be a journalist, their feedback would be particularly helpful. As one said:

Because they are of the same expertise level [they] will be able to offer valuable insight as they view the work from a similar position.

Others saw their peer reviewer providing insight because they played the role of a new reader. They suggested that having worked on a story for a long time, it was hard to look at it objectively. The new reader could point out problems in the story, for example when it did not make sense, if there were questions left unanswered, sources that needed to be included, or if a complex structure made the story hard to follow:

When I get to know a subject too well, I find it hard to recognise whether I am explaining it clearly enough for a first-time reader, and I often over-complicate something simple. An outside perspective can look at it with fresh eyes and help me take a point back to basics.

One tutor suggested that students' feedback was particularly effective when it came to identifying gaps in a classmate's story:

[This is] because the non-expert peer reviewer, as compared with the more expert tutor, is just as able to see questions that haven't been answered in the story, as I am. I am more likely to pick up other things, perhaps, but they are just as likely to identify that as an error, as I would.

A small number of comments related to the fact that students saw their peer reviewer as a reader representing "Joe Public"—someone who might be looking at their story once it was published, and would not necessarily have any previous knowledge of the subject matter. Other students felt that having 12 different peer reviewers over the semester gave them insights from different sources. Moreover, the diverse nature of the other students in the class potentially provided comments from other cultural, ethnic or value viewpoints:

I find [a fresh set of eyes] important to determine what different readers will be seeing when they read my work. Therefore I am able to take the peer reviewer's feedback and develop an understanding of a type of reader and how I can suit my work in a way that can suit them.

Unlike the first two sub-categories, with "fresh insights", the student learning is active—the news writers are processing and using their reviewer's feedback, rather than simply implementing their suggestions. However in this sub-category of benefits, student expectation appeared to exceed reality. Examination of the student data indicated more students anticipated this sort of active benefit before doing the peer reviews than mentioned having actually received it afterwards.

4.2.2.1 Other factors

There were also two smaller sub-categories mentioned by only one student each: shame; and alternative to tutor feedback. One student mentioned that knowing a classmate would be reading their work was a strong motivator to get their writing “super clean and well edited”. The student felt ashamed if a peer found silly mistakes in their copy, so worked hard to avoid this. Another suggested peer review was a good way to receive feedback when tutors were busy.

4.3 Turning on the light: Benefits to students’ writing from reviewing others

The second main category of benefits recognised by participants in the peer review process fitted into the broad theme “Turning on the light”. This refers to the active process whereby a student peer reviews another student’s work, and as part of that reviewing process—either with or without discussion with their peer review partner—learns something that benefits their own work. One student referred to peer reviewing as providing “lightbulb moments”. Others saw the process as more gradual; one student talked about the “learning curve” of reading other students’ stories over a period of time, and picking up ideas for their own stories.

Before doing the peer reviews students did not put too much emphasis on the potential benefits to their own learning from reviewing others; as mentioned above, they thought *being reviewed* was more likely to produce learning benefits. However, the study showed that students’ awareness changed: after doing the peer reviews they talked as much about the benefits of giving feedback (“turning on the light”) as they did about the benefits of receiving it. There was, for example, a chorus of agreement following this exchange:

Student 1: I think I learnt more from peer editing someone else’s [than from being peer edited].

Student 2: Yes, that was more beneficial.

This may be because students recognised benefits for themselves from reviewing, or it may be because of frustrations they found with their classmates’ reviews or their classmates’ attitudes towards the review process, as outlined in the next chapter, or both rationales may be in play.

Comments from journalism tutors suggested they believed their students benefitted from critiquing their classmates' news stories, though some felt this more strongly than others. One tutor mentioned her students making "amazing progress" and believed there was a link between students that did peer review well and those that got their stories published. The tutor believed some students engaged with the peer editing process more than others, saying some were "a bit more thoughtful; they took the full benefit of it". She also said she was "impressed" with the comments students made about their classmates' stories:

They were quite careful. I mean they said things like: 'You know you could tighten your paragraphs,' or: 'This is a really nice story, but I don't think you're selling it well enough – the intro.' I found that, you know they were right.

Another tutor made a similar comment:

"We got past that 'awesome story' stuff. We got way past that definitely. Because they were expected to write some constructive criticism. So they knew they had to do it."

The lecturer commented that students who engaged with the peer review process and "kept themselves on track, they're the students who obviously their work just grew, and they got published." On the other side, she talked about two of her students who she felt did not engage with peer review because, she thought, they did not believe they had more to learn. She believed this "arrogance" and lack of engagement was reflected in the lower quality of their stories.

The two students in the first collaborative group meeting also made a positive connection between doing peer review and improved writing, as measured by a tutor picking up fewer mistakes, or an editor making fewer changes before publishing a story. The students in the first meeting talked about their experience on the field trip (when students nearing the end of their final year spend a week working for a regional newspaper) and saw a connection between active participation in peer review and getting stories into the paper with relatively few or no editing changes. As one put it:

I did notice at the field trip when we were getting our stories subbed. There was one guy in my class who wasn't here last semester and so he hadn't had the peer review stuff done. When he went to hand in his story to the chief reporter, all of his got changed, pretty much. He's like: 'They've changed pretty much all of my story.' And mine, I had like maybe two words changed. And same with another person in my

class who didn't try hard with peer editing, her stories got changed a lot and then the rest of us who would have tried hard, they didn't get to change much at all. . . . Those of us who had taken part in the peer editing thing more and tried hard with it, we were more analytical of our stories.

On the other hand, none of the 11 students in the second collaborative group meeting appeared to see a clear connection between peer editing and better writing. Asked whether their story writing improved as their peer editing improved, the students were very quiet, and one student said it was “hard to differentiate between tutor help and peer editing help”.

While one tutor believed the standard of writing had been “very good this year on the whole. . . much tighter writing than I've seen in the past”, another tutor was disappointed in the quality, describing stories as “weak”. In particular, she mentioned that students' standards of grammar and punctuation were lower than in previous years. I will look at this point in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

The benefits in the “Turning on the light” category fell into seven sub-categories:

- Critiquing (Improving writing by looking at other students' mistakes)
- Mimicking (Improving writing by looking at other students' good writing)
- Self-reflection (Thinking about classmates' work deepens students' own understanding)
- Teaching (Learning from teaching others)
- Collaboration (Learning from sharing ideas and discussion with other students)
- Comparison/Competition (Reading other people's stories allowed students to benchmark their own writing)
- Confidence/comfort (Giving constructive feedback to other students acted as a confidence-booster)

4.3.1 Critiquing

Critiquing was one of the two benefits most often mentioned by participants, particularly students, who believed their writing had benefitted from picking up mistakes in other students' work and applying the learning to their own writing. For example, one student said:

Quite often in the past I've read other people's writing and thought 'this makes no sense and it's too complicated.' Then I've gone back to read my own work and realised it's also a bit too wordy.

Another put it this way:

I would read it and say: 'This doesn't make sense to me; I don't know what they are talking about, they should have added in more explanation.' So then when it comes to writing my stories again I'd look at it and say: 'I need to explain this because people aren't going to understand.' It kind of really made me think about my own writing as well.

A third student commented on how the actual process of peer reviewing someone else's story forced them to actively research the rules of style and grammar, or check with another student, to make sure their comments were correct.

4.3.2 Mimicking

The other commonly-mentioned benefit, particularly by students, was mimicking. Students suggested they picked up ideas from the good things they found in other people's work and then attempted to apply them in their own writing. Specific examples of areas where they had learnt from their peers' writing included sentence structure, use of commas or hyphens, sentence length, active and passive constructions, and different intro styles. One student put it this way:

I felt the same with the sentences. When they were short and sharp I would think: 'Oh man, this reads so well,' and always try and go back to mine.

Another student said that reading other students' work reinforced what the tutor was saying about her own writing—allowing her to see examples of the sort of writing her tutor was advocating.

It's the same with. . . using passive and active voices. . . I think I'm quite a passive writer. And so when I read other people and I think: 'Oh my gosh, it's so much; that's a better way to write something, and so I go back and try it. Mimic almost. . . Mainly because my tutor always told me that I wrote in a really passive way. And I'm like: 'Hey, I really need to learn how to use an active voice'.

There was a considerable change in students' awareness of this benefit before and after completing peer review. While only four students anticipated this being a benefit, it was the most frequently-cited benefit afterwards.

4.3.3 Self-reflection

The third benefit mentioned by participants was self-reflection, although tutors were more likely to mention this than students. In fact, although self-reflection was implied in some comments about the benefits of “critiquing” and “mimicking” (above), it was only mentioned specifically by one student participant, who said reviewing other people’s stories “helps students reflect on their work.” Tutors, on the other hand, talked about the process of doing peer reviews making students “reflective” or “thoughtful”. They mentioned students’ “engagement with the process of writing” through reviewing other students’ stories, with one feeling there was “a bit of deeper learning” going on. Another said students’ comments on the peer review sheets “show they are thinking about the process of writing and structure”.

While students tended to say peer review impacted largely on their writing ability, tutors also saw benefits in terms of wider news journalism skills. For example, they saw benefits for students in seeing what another student judges to be a valid news story. As one tutor said, the student giving feedback “is rehearsing the essential criteria of what makes news and how news is presented, and this deepens their own understanding”. Several tutor comments used the words “reflect” and “engage” for what they saw students doing when they looked at another student’s work. For example: “The idea is that students engage at a deeper level with the process of reporting.”

4.3.4 Teaching

A small number of participants suggested the process of explaining to another student the rationale behind a critical comment helped reinforce that idea for their own stories. One student put it this way:

Once I explain to that person the mistakes in their writing then it further drives it home for me just how important it is.

Interestingly, the one time a student used the actual word “teaching” to describe this process, they immediately retracted it, as if embarrassed to be putting themselves forward as a ‘teacher’:

I just like reading people’s articles and just being like: ‘I’d do that differently or maybe if you worded this differently it would make, it would flow better.’ I don’t know. And then just telling them that. Because I find that I learn a lot better when I teach, well not teach, but like tell someone. Because then if I’m saying: ‘Your grammar here’ or something then that will help me remember mine.

4.3.5 Collaboration

Several participants talked about the potential learning value when students worked with each other, and discussed their work together. Student participants mentioned the benefits from working face-to-face with another student, talking about changes to a story; they compared it with the more hands-off process when peer reviewing was done via computer and the internet. But discussion in this area was largely hypothetical, as students felt the hands-off nature of the online peer reviews had hampered actually benefitting from collaboration. As one student put it:

If you actually work with the person that you are doing the peer edit on and you can tell them what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong and write it down and then discuss it with them, then it is beneficial to both of you.”

One tutor suggested she had encouraged her students to discuss the feedback with their peer reviewer, particularly if they didn't agree with their comments, however it was not clear if students had actually done this. The tutor felt the discussion was “really important, because that's where the learning comes from”. Encouraging students to discuss feedback also helped with the problem of students not trusting their peer reviewer's feedback because it sometimes appeared to be contradicted by tutor feedback. The lecturer said when this happened she would talk to the student:

I went back to them and said: ‘Did you discuss why that change was recommended? And did you talk about it and come to some agreement? If you don't agree with that change, then discuss it with your peer editor about why. Go to the style guide and check it out. It's not a fait accompli.

She said the initial briefing to students about peer review had emphasised the learning benefits of discussion, and even conflict, and she believed students “got that”. Another lecturer commented that getting students to understand this would be “a big step forward”. Another tutor said peer review allows students to discuss and slowly form an opinion for themselves on the benefits of using different styles of reporting “without the authority of tutors telling them that this is the ‘right’ way to do it”.

4.3.6 Comparison/competition

Students also valued the chance to “see how others write their stories” and “compare standards of story ideas and quality of writing against one-another”. One student felt it helped to be able to “see where I'm at”. Another student, who initially felt lacking in

confidence about her writing, talked about receiving a boost in self-esteem when reading other stories and judging they were not as good as her own. One student took the ‘comparison’ idea a step further, suggesting that in a competitive industry such as journalism, there was benefit in being able to judge other people’s stories against your own:

Reading the quality and depth of our peers’ stories can compel us to search harder and deeper for better stories (pushing ourselves further/to be better).

4.3.7 Confidence/comfort

While this benefit was mentioned by only one student (who said that the feeling of being able to critique other people’s work effectively gave “a bit of confidence in your abilities of news writing”), three of the tutors talked about students gaining in confidence from doing peer reviews. One suggested that students who engaged with the peer review process showed increased confidence with their writing, and another felt that the students’ comments “might have got better towards the end, in that they got more confident”. One interesting point was that a tutor who worked with Maori and Pacific Island students used the word “comfortable”, as well as the word “confident” when referring to the learning around peer review. For example, he suggested that students’ ability to carry out peer editing improved “once they became more comfortable with each other”. The same lecturer suggested it was important to take confidence factors into account when designing peer review exercises, because some students, especially those with Pacific Island backgrounds, found it difficult to be critical of others.

One of the other things we need to recognise is levels of confidence, because not every student comes to us with the confidence to critique somebody’s work and I noticed with some of my students, they would go to the same person all the time. . . . I’d say: ‘Well can you go to this other person?’ ‘Oh well, I don’t really know them.’ And they changed that over time. But some students are less comfortable with critiquing other people’s work.

4.4 Wider vistas: Broader benefits

In this study ‘wider vistas’ refers to benefits identified by participants that are not specifically related to improvements in student news writing. With the literature on peer learning providing many examples of benefits which extend beyond students improving their skills in their specific field, it was therefore of interest whether participants in this

study saw any broader benefits. Significantly, students had high expectations before they started in terms of wider learning advantages, including “resilience when you hit the workplace”, getting “a thick skin”, learning the difficult skills of giving feedback, and receiving criticism with equanimity. As one student said:

You are in the wrong profession if you can't take any form of objective criticism. I say embrace the cactus now and I'll be resilient when I hit the rat race.

Other students thought there would be benefits in having to learn how to deal with others, particular those with different viewpoints. One student said that initially, her “heart just sunk” at the thought of other students not finding her stories good enough. However that changed. “Now I am actually kind of excited... I am looking forward to getting out of my comfort zone.” Another appreciated the opportunity to receive feedback from peers of different ethnicities, cultures, countries and values:

It is useful to ask ourselves why comments and feedbacks can be drastically different, and what they mean to the reviewers, instead of the reviewed. All peer reviewed material is not a single discursive product; it shows its relationship with different speech groups and genres. I hope to develop a professional awareness of the media relationship with people and be able to distinguish that from other discourses.

However, students did not necessarily see these wider benefits as having eventuated by the end of the semester. At that stage there was only one unprompted comment suggesting students saw wider learning benefits—and that was the very practical (and writing-related) benefit of peer review potentially helping students get a job as a sub-editor (see below). Instead, there were some noticeable silences during the collaborative group meetings when I asked students about wider benefits. For example, asked whether peer review made them think about their own learning in a reflective way, students said nothing for a while, until one responded: “Not really. Not that deeper extent.” It was only when I prompted the discussion by mentioning several possible wider benefits, that students said they had potentially gained the ability to give and receive critical feedback. Even then, only one student said they had “definitely” become more confident in this skill; others were more qualified in their views. The two examples below are typical:

I think learning how to critique. . . was a big thing. I struggled with giving negative feedback. . . . I didn't know how to do it. . . . I

definitely learnt; it got better. But still, I don't know. I didn't want to give too much.

Student 1: "I think to an extent you learnt to take feedback and criticism, things like that, but

Student 2: "But we are very nice with our criticism. . . . We were like: 'You should probably, maybe, change this'. . . . No one was just like: 'Your intro doesn't make sense, you need to change it.' Which I would have preferred."

Tutors' answers to the Likert-style questions on potential wider benefits also suggested a modicum of doubt. While their responses to other Likert-style questions in the questionnaire showed they were not shy of expressing strong agreement with statements, their answers were more muted when it came to wider benefits. Asked if AUT's peer review prepared students for working in a newsroom, three tutors agreed (with one qualifying the answer with "if done properly"), and three were neutral. The tutors were most ambivalent about the statement that peer review prepares students for a rapidly-changing work environment (four were neutral, two agreed and one disagreed). Meanwhile they were most positive about the idea that peer review gave students wider graduate attributes (for example the ability to be lifelong learners, to communicate and collaborate, and to develop critical evaluation skills), where three strongly agreed, three agreed ("if done properly") and one disagreed. Five tutors agreed with the statement that AUT's peer review moves students from superficial to deep learning.

I grouped the identified benefits in the wider benefits category into two sub-categories, which I will now discuss:

- Preparing for the workplace
- Interacting with others

4.4.1 Preparing for the workplace

Participants noted the parallels between peer review and the sub editing (subbing) process that happens in a newsroom. As one student said: "[Subbing] is going to happen to everyone if they get a journalism job, so they have to get used to. . . sending a story off and getting it changed and getting criticism."

Tutors also saw this as the main wider benefit of peer review. One tutor saw being able to "explain in a constructive way what needs improving" as "a crucial skill for future editors", while another said giving and receiving constructive criticism was hard for

many. “Far better for them to be used to it now before the workplace”. Two tutor participants said that students who became good peer editors might be able to get jobs as sub editors in a newsroom or subbing hub in the future.

One tutor mentioned wider workplace-related benefits. She said peer review “develops critical thinking skills and independence—both very necessary skills for a journalist”. She also said peer review allows students to gain an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and “put in place strategies to deal with them”. Meanwhile, one student felt that peer review was a good opportunity, in the “cut throat world in journalism”, for students to judge their work against that of their peers, who were also their potential competitors in the industry.

4.4.2 Interacting with others

Both student and tutor participants mentioned the fact that the peer review process brought classmates together. Students welcomed the chance to get to know other students, while one also noted the wider learning opportunity in terms of “learning to deal with other people effectively”. Two tutors mentioned peer review and other peer learning activities as being a good way for students to get to know each other, both in terms of combatting isolation (“you think the undergrads know each other, but that’s not necessarily the case”) and also, as mentioned above, because some students find it easier to critique someone they know, so learning is more likely to take place once students are “comfortable” with their peers.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter I presented the views of my participants around the benefits of AUT’s peer review in terms of students’ acquisition of skills and understanding. Students and tutors described benefits in two main areas: perceived benefits for student writing from being reviewed by others, and perceived benefits to their writing from reviewing others’ work. However there was a disappointing lack of indication of students gaining benefits beyond those to their writing. I will discuss these findings further in Chapter 6, following an examination of participants’ views on the challenges of peer review, in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Challenges of peer review

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5.1 Introduction

There is considerable research evidence to show that *effective feedback* leads to learning gains (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 204).

Adding the italics in the same quote used in at the beginning of Chapter 4 can be seen to change it. Now it is not just “feedback” which is beneficial to students, but “effective feedback”. From Chapter 4, it is clear participants overall had a positive attitude towards the peer review process in terms of benefits for students’ learning. However, this generally positive outlook was tempered, particularly in the student comments, by hesitation or even disillusionment about how the system worked in practice. Challenges in the process meant feedback was not always effective, and therefore learning gains were small or non-existent. It was noticeable that students sometimes coupled positive general comments with the words “if”, “but” and “overall”—indicating a level of misgiving. (The italics are mine):

I did benefit from doing the peer review, *but* so many people didn’t do it right. . . . *If* we can figure how to do it right, then it is a good thing to do,

Peer editing is good, *but* often it felt like an unnecessary job.

Feel the system is fine, *but* maybe. . .

If you actually work with the person. . . then it is beneficial to both of you.

A useful process *overall*.

It was noticeable that there was significantly more feedback from students about challenges after they had completed the peer reviews than beforehand. This may indicate that there were far more problems with the process than they had anticipated. In

this chapter I will examine the challenges participants identified in the peer review process and their suggestions for change. The challenges fell into three categories:

- Concerns about hurt from the peer reviewing
- Scepticism about the value of the peer reviewing
- Practical challenges

5.2 Concerns about hurt from the peer reviewing

Noteworthy about this concern is that only students (not tutors) mentioned this, and students were more likely to see it as a *potential* problem (ie to talk about it before they started doing peer reviews), than as an *experienced* problem (from comments after the reviews had been completed). Answering the question about challenges in the initial questionnaire (before the peer reviews took place), students worried about their stories being judged as “not good enough” by other students. Some saw negative feedback as a potential blow to their confidence; others saw it as potentially embarrassing, given that the reviewing students were classmates and possibly friends. One student talked about being “flustered and nervous” about work possibly not being “right in someone’s eyes”. Another student referred to their own insecurity about their work, even though they said they knew the reviewers’ opinion “won’t matter (in terms of my grade or anything like that)”. As the student said:

I suppose I’m a bit conscious of someone reading my writing. I just feel that they might think I’m not as good a writer or something like that; probably because I’m not perfectly confident about my work.

Four students also worried at the start of the process about the impact their own critical feedback might have on other students. They didn’t want to upset another student or discourage them “knowing how attached and excited someone can get about their piece of writing, let alone defensive”. One student was concerned about offending other students and that relationships with friends might be damaged by negative criticism.

It may be that I need to define the line between personal and professional relationships.

However, by the end of the semester, having taken part in peer reviewing, students appeared less concerned. Although four students mentioned some sort of hurt involving the reviewing issue, the language they used suggested they did not see it as a significant problem. For example, one student said she “felt a bit stupid” being told by a fellow student she’d got something wrong, but continued by saying that she still felt the peer

review process “was good, it was good”. Another student said she took the comments “to heart a bit”, while a third said peer reviewing could be “a bit disheartening”, particularly when some students’ comments were opinionated. A few students also mentioned the issue of hurting or offending other students after the peer review, but these were all in the context of how they tended to be overly “nice” with their comments, as a way to avoid any potential offence; no students mentioned worries about having actually hurt another student with their comments.

5.3 Scepticism about the value of the peer reviewing

Both students and tutors mentioned this as a challenge; in fact students appeared more worried about this problem than about the “hurt” category, particularly after the peer review. The viewpoints in this category fell into four main sub-categories:

- Not critical enough
- Did not take the process seriously
- Lack of skill
- Minimal learning

5.3.1 Not critical enough

Both before and after the peer review, students were concerned about their peer reviewer being “too nice” because he or she did not want to hurt their feelings. They also recognised they were often too nice with their own feedback. As one said:

I am concerned that my peers will be afraid to constructively criticise my work, and instead just tell me that it is good. I would rather have criticism that I can improve on than just be told I have written a good story.

Another suggested: “They just say: ‘Good quotes, good punctuation, well done’.” One tutor said that the quality of comments was compromised because students didn’t want to offend or receive offending comments. Interestingly, only one participant, a tutor, suggested some reviewers are “too harsh”, although they qualified this by saying this is a rare problem. This issue was not mentioned by anyone else.

One tutor commented that giving feedback confidentially (with the reviewing student not knowing whose story they are looking at) might allow students to give more objective feedback. She suggested that anonymous feedback was the norm in some other peer feedback processes within the School of Communications.

5.3.2 Did not take the process seriously

Before the peer reviews took place, only two students mentioned concern that their classmates would not take the reviewing seriously. However this appeared to be a far larger problem in reality. Following the reviews, a considerable number of students complained about people being “slack” with their peer reviews—in fact this was the problem most-often mentioned by students at that stage. They felt their classmates had not taken the feedback process seriously, had been lazy, or careless, or had done a quick-flick, “tick-the-box” review. Asked why they thought some peer reviewers didn’t do a thorough job, the students mentioned time pressures, and also that some students “are the kind of people that don’t take much seriously”. One student noted that “lots of people” just treated peer reviewing as a chore:

[It was just] something they had to do, so they didn’t do a good job of it. It was just like: ‘Oh yep, good.’ You could tell how. . . they’d just say anything.

Some students admitted sometimes being guilty of producing slack peer reviews themselves, because they were either too busy or could not be bothered, although none had anticipated this would be a problem. One student said this was a particular problem when she was on deadline for her own story, and she imagined many of her classmates were in the same position:

I did that a couple of times when I had a lot of other things to do and someone came to me and I’d be like ‘Eghh’. So I’d just be like, and not read it properly.

One student in the group meeting suggested her comments were sometimes “too nice”, not because of fear of hurting other students, as in the sub-category above, but because that was a quick and easy option for completing peer reviews. Another felt they put less effort into peer reviews of students they didn’t know. One student talked about feeling angry when she had put time and effort into peer reviewing a story, but this effort had not been reciprocated:

I hated it when I swapped with someone, they did mine, I did theirs, and if I did a good job on theirs and really thought about my review and then gave them lots of feedback and lots of critique and then I got mine back and there would be just two or three things they had mentioned. And I felt really angry, because I’m like: I’ve worked so hard.

The same student noted in the meeting (as did several other students) that she felt she got more benefit from reviewing other students than from being reviewed; yet this comment shows she still expected her peer review partner to give her a variety of thoughtful comments.

Almost all the student participants in the collaborative group meetings talked about students who did not get their peer reviews done each week, but instead left a big percentage until the final week, and then only got them done because it was a requirement for their portfolio. Students commented that this was a total waste of time for both peer reviewer and the student being reviewed—although a couple of students admitted they had done this too, due to time pressures.

Tutors also noted issues with students being slack with their reviews. They thought some students did not take peer reviewing seriously, or did not spend enough time doing the reviews. One lecturer suggested peer reviewing “can become tick box if students don’t engage with the process/think it’s useful”, although the lecturer believed most students did see value in it.

Meanwhile, answers to the Likert-style questions reinforce these tutor perceptions. Commenting on the statement “Most students have a ‘tick-the-box’ attitude to the journalism peer review process”, five of the seven tutor respondents thought this was a very important or an important challenge and only one said that it was unimportant. All tutors thought students not leaving themselves enough time to do peer review was either a very important or an important problem. On the other hand, only two agreed that the peer review process is too time consuming for students.

5.3.3 Lack of skill

The third sub-category involved concerns about students not having the skill to do a good job. Both before and after the reviews some students questioned whether a peer reviewer had “the professional or the academic credibility to provide constructive feedback”. Students worried about their peer reviewers missing errors or changing things that did not need changing. A few worried beforehand about not agreeing with their peer reviewer’s comments, and after the reviews, some students said they sometimes disagreed with the comments they received, or classmates’ comments were contradicted by tutors’ comments. Some students said they went to a trusted source first (normally a classmate they knew well) and only after doing that did they give their story to an official peer reviewer. As one said:

I found three or four, maybe five people that I knew were good peer reviewers and I got them to look at my work every week anyway, but then I just had to go and give it to someone different to pass the criteria.

Tutors also commented about the real or perceived lack of skill of the reviewing students. One tutor said participation in peer review had been strong from students she saw as weaker writers, and she worried about the quality of the feedback. Another tutor said even the stronger writers did not always give good feedback. One tutor put it this way: “Certainly a number of times I said to students: ‘Who peer edited this? You need to find a better peer editor – they have let you down.’” In this case it was not clear whether the tutor thought the poor peer editing was due to the reviewing students not taking the peer editing seriously, or not being able to provide good feedback. However, one comment from another tutor suggested the latter was at least sometimes the case:

One of the problems is that the peer editor sometimes doesn’t really know what he or she is doing, so it’s a read that doesn’t quite end up with ‘Gee this is great, what a wonderful story’, but it’s not a read where the peer editor recognises his or her role as being a responsible person offering constructive criticism.

This issue had improved during the semester, the lecturer said. One tutor wondered if students “know enough to truly provide a critical analysis (ie they think everything is fabulous)” and said it was difficult to create a benchmark for students to judge their classmates’ work.

One tutor was concerned that many of the students’ news stories had contained more basic style, grammar and punctuation errors than in previous years, despite the peer reviewing. This view was reinforced by the results of the compulsory style and grammar test. In 2013, the year of the research, 20 of the 44 students failed this test—a “far worse result than normal”.

They haven’t learnt their grammar, they haven’t learnt their style. I felt that even if they had had them peer reviewed, there’s still a hell of a lot of errors. . . . In the old days, if you had a student sitting beside you, I would see over the progression of the term that they. . . would see the errors before I did by the end of the semester. I don’t feel that that’s happening.

Another issue identified by more than one tutor was that students sometimes didn’t take their reviewers comments on board, even when they were valid. Getting students to trust their classmates’ feedback (or at least discuss it with them) was an important challenge.

Students were also concerned about their own feedback not being valuable, and one tutor recognised this lack of confidence from students as being an issue. Before the reviews, several students worried they might miss an important point in a story, or that a point they made would mislead their classmate:

I'm most concerned about my ability to notice flaws, or places for improvements in my peers' work. . . . I will probably doubt myself when trying to pick out errors etc.

Following the reviews, one student saw her perceived lack of value for her classmate as almost a personal failing:

I personally struggled with it a lot. I'd read it and I was like: 'I can't find anything wrong with it. I don't know if it was because there wasn't anything wrong or because I just blanked. [Did it get better?]
No.

Others saw reasons for finding reviewing hard—that they were tired, for example, or had not been trained in how to do peer reviews:

By the time I was doing most of my peer reviews, it was Thursday afternoon before hand-in and I was so tired! I felt like I could hardly pick anything up or be of any use to the other student!

Responding to a student who suggested in the collaborative group meeting that “it would definitely be good to get more feedback on your feedback”, another agreed: “Because you would know you were on the right track. I feel like some of my peer reviews, I sent them off and I don't even know if that was helpful.”

Three students said that while they did not find giving critical feedback hard in general, they were intimidated when they knew they were reviewing student perceived as “better” or more experienced writers, or students that were known for getting their stories published regularly.

I peer reviewed for someone and I sort of was like: 'Ahh, it's so good, I don't know if I should comment on anything bad.' But then I was: 'Actually there are a few points that aren't that good.' But at the start I definitely, I felt very intimidated.

Tutors working on the postgraduate News Reporting paper suggested students sometimes found it difficult to criticise older students. One tutor thought postgraduate

students might benefit from discussion of this issue—and ways to resolve it—at the beginning of the semester.

The comments in this section were complemented by the answers tutors provided to the Likert-style questions. Six of the seven tutors thought that many students do not provide good quality feedback (the seventh was neutral). Meanwhile, five lecturers felt students didn't like criticising their peers, although only two felt this was a very important problem. Five tutors thought students not trusting each other's feedback was an important or very important challenge.

Commenting on the impact of the challenges identified in the three sub-categories above, students had differing views on the percentage of peer reviews they felt were “good” compared with “bad”. Some estimated only 30% of reviews they had received were valuable, while others thought the percentage of useful peer reviews was closer to 60%. One student noted:

I think 50:50. I had one story that went through a peer editor and he was kind of, I think he was in that kind of mind-set of: I just have to do this kind of thing. And I went to my tutor and she was saying: ‘Look at this! Oh, this doesn't make sense.’. . . But it depends who you go to I guess. Because you had to, last semester, you had to go to someone different every week so sometimes it was just a matter of finding someone different and then they might not have been as good as the person the week before.

5.3.4 Minimal learning

Some students recognised that being peer reviewed was not valuable for their learning when other students made changes to their work and they just accepted the feedback without thinking about it. A story told by one of the students in a collaborative group meeting is salient here. The story was about tutor feedback, but was used to demonstrate a point regarding student feedback. I include the previous comment from another student for context:

Student 1: Sometimes they were just like: ‘Change it and this sounds better, but you didn't get there yourself through the process; they just did it. Which is the same as what some of us were doing in the peer edits, I guess.

Student 2: It's like one of my stories, a tutor put a word in it, and it got published with that, but I didn't even know what the word meant like that well—I couldn't explain it. And my mum was like: ‘That's such a good word to use’, and it was like that one word and it didn't feel like it was my own. The shame.

One student suggested some weeks she might learn from her peers picking up mistakes, because she would go through the story in detail later. Other weeks there might be very little learning from a similar scenario, because she was just too busy:

If you've had to kind of do a bit of a last minute you just go: 'OK, I'll just change this.' But then next week you've had time. You've been through it properly and you learn from that. So it's very individual.

5.3.5 Other challenges

Three other challenges also arose, each mentioned by one participant only. One was plagiarism (reviewing students might steal stories or ideas); another was the perception that giving critical feedback to another student felt like “creating conflict”. The student making this comment felt uneasy with peer review given their background from “a country that tries to stay away from conflict”. Meanwhile, one tutor believed that successful peer reviewing required a difficult change in attitude by some journalism tutors, from “being the fount of all knowledge” to being “someone who can gently guide a student to develop journalism skills”.

5.4 Practical challenges

So far, the challenges pinpointed by the participants in this study have involved the students' attitudes or feelings about peer review, their aptitude for the task, or the way in which they carried it out. The concerns were centred on the students, and often the solution was seen to lie with the students too. Learning benefits would increase if students were less casual about their reviews, for example, or tougher with their critique.

The third category of challenges related to areas where, largely, participants felt the *system* was at fault for the problems. These were practical issues with the way the peer review was carried out. None of the student participants, and almost none of the tutors, foresaw any of these challenges before the peer review took place—which is not surprising; until you've driven the car, how can you know that the indicators don't work or the handbrake sticks. However they emerged as the category where students were most vocal about challenges. Often participants had ideas about a solution to these practical problems, but student participants in particular sometimes saw the solution as lying outside their control. Instead they looked to their tutors, to the course design, or even to the university as a whole to make changes so their learning from peer review

would be enhanced. Whether students were, or should be, as powerless as they often perceived themselves to be will be discussed in the next chapter.

The practical challenges fell into three sub-categories:

- Process
- Preparation and training
- Motivation

5.4.1 Process

This sub-category provoked more comment than any other, and students were particularly concerned with problems here. Most of the comments from tutors about the process were simply reports of what their students had said, rather than being from their own experience. There were many complaints, for example, about logistical issues with the peer review sheet, in particular students said it was difficult to coordinate their stories, which were in blog form, with the peer review sheet, which was a PDF or a Word document. Students talked about the system as “clumsy”, “clunky”, “frustrating” or “hard”. As one said:

It’s really hard because you had to copy and paste every time. . . and lots of people were just copying and pasting from the other peer reviews, and so there were comments still from the other ones, so you’d be like: ‘What’s this?’

Others complained that some of the questions on the peer review sheet were repetitive or unnecessary, or that some questions were missing from the form. Students wanted the process to be made easier, quicker and more flexible; one felt the peer review sheet should be less rigid “to make allowances for the different ways people peer edit”. One tutor suggested the process needed to be “more engaging and comprehensive”.

Another tutor working with postgraduate students suggested they too found the process frustrating:

What they said was that they got value out of the peer reviewing, but when we touched on the form, you know, it was as if it was a kind of bureaucratic process they have to go through ticking boxes that just seems to take time. . . I think the students all felt that they, at least in the first half of the semester, were getting value out of sharing their stories. I think if anything the only negative I heard was about the form and the bureaucracy of filling the form in.

A significant section of comments were about the fact that the on-line process, while convenient (because students could do it from home) did not allow for interaction or discussion between reviewing and reviewed students. Several students said the process should be done using hard copies of stories, so reviewers could write their comments in the margin. In addition, many wanted there to be some face-to-face component to the reviews. Two of the comments are representative of others:

I would benefit from one-to-one with someone and having a hard copy and just nutting it out.

I think again it comes down to sitting down with the person you are reviewing. Because I sometimes get peer reviews and I want to know why they said that, but then I want to give an explanation as to why I wrote it that way in the first place and to see if that would change, like, their opinion. And you just didn't really have that communication through the internet or through the blog.

In both the tutor and the student collaborative group meetings, participants discussed using virtual face-to-face discussions or interactive editing software as a way to achieve feedback discussions without students having to be in the same room as their peer review partner. They discussed, for example, Google Docs, Facebook Chat, or editing programmes like Adobe Reader on an iPad. A few students suggested they had used these applications informally for their peer reviewing, or with other subject papers, and they suggested a similar system might work if introduced for peer review. These are some examples of the suggestions:

I [peer reviewed] someone's story in second year through Google Docs so he was on line at the same time, and so it was like live—like he could see me deleting something and then like I'd write in red or something and he'd write back.

I personally think online reviews are convenient because you could do it in the weekend; you didn't have to come to uni, and make sure you had a time. But it would probably be best if we were all live, we were chatting on Google or something, so we could explain it to each other but have the convenience of being at home.

I know that a few of my friends, sometimes you just gave each other a story to read on your Facebook Chat before peer edits and you're like: 'OK change this, change that.' That's just an example of how you would do it live.

Another process-related issue raised by students and tutors was the difficulty students found having to use a different peer reviewer each week. While students understood the

rationale behind the stipulation—that it provided variety in the feedback during the semester and allowed students to see a selection of other students’ work—several commented that particularly at the end of the semester it could be difficult to find a new person to look at stories.

It was frustrating towards the end finding a different peer review and especially when everyone has lots of things on, they don’t want to when you ask.

As a proactive way to solve this problem, the journalism students set up a Facebook page where they could link up with potential peer reviewers. While this was helpful, students commented that it was still sometimes difficult to find a peer reviewer before the deadline. Several suggested more flexibility in the system—for example, being able to use the same person twice. This was, in fact, implemented in 2014.

Finally, a few comments revolved around the timing of the peer review. Two students worried before the peer reviewing that the feedback would come too late to be useful; others commented afterwards that peer reviewing was “lengthy” and “time-consuming”. Several students mentioned the difficulties of fitting peer reviewing into the news writing process, when students were already having to work around trying to set up interviews with sources, and meeting tutor and editor deadlines. Interestingly, however, tutors felt that the timing and deadline pressures associated with peer review had actually served to make students more organised. Students were much more likely to hand their stories to their tutors on time than their cohorts in previous years, and this organisation had improved over the course of the semester as students adapted to the system.

5.4.2 Preparation and training

A significant number of students appeared to want more proactive direction or help—from their tutors or sometimes from “AUT”—in terms of allowing them to get maximum learning from peer reviewing. Student questionnaire answers revealed more than half of respondents either hadn’t done peer review before or if they had done it, couldn’t remember enough about it for previous experience to be useful. Many students suggested introducing training and/or modelling at the start of the peer review process—or bemoaned the lack of it. They felt they did not know what they were meant to be doing, and said that impacted on the value of their—and their classmates’—edits.

Student 1: “We didn’t really get any training.”

Student 2: “Yeh, the first couple of weeks we were all kind of lost. We were kind of like: ‘Oo, what kind of stuff are we picking up on? Are we allowed to change their whole story structure, or are we just doing grammar, or are we. . .?’”

The use of the word “allowed” implies a set of rules governing the process, but the students do not know what these rules are, let alone how to follow them. Nobody is guiding them.

One tutor suggested an information sheet “which very simply explains to students (and staff) why peer review is important and effective in training journalists. After all, in practice, journalists are reviewing each other’s work daily”. One tutor mentioned the introductory session on peer reviewing that had been implemented for the first time in 2013 had been useful:

That’s where when you [the author] came in and spoke to the students and took them through the four levels [of feedback]. I think the kids that were there for that got the benefit of it. In fact, it would be interesting to see if the ones that missed that lecture, were the ones that tried to shirk, basically, doing peer edits.

Another tutor believed: that:

[For peer reviewing to be successful] it requires the introduction of a training programme for the students that will allow the slow development of good skills. . . . This training may require a change in the structure of tutorials so that students are encouraged to think critically about their own writing and to easily accept and provide criticism of their peers’ writing. Tutors need to provide a framework for students not only to understand how to be a good peer reviewer but [to understand] this does not come immediately and needs to be developed.”

Both students and tutors in the collaborative group meetings suggested initial modelling sessions, where the tutor worked through examples of peer editing with the class.

Student 1: If we all sat down and [the tutor] gave us out an article and we all had to peer edit it and then [they] went through it and picked out things.

Student 2: I think that would have been a good start.

A lot of students also wanted to receive feedback on their feedback, because they felt that would help them judge if they were doing a good job. Again, the students saw this as their tutor’s role.

I think after the first couple of weeks, have a look at them and say: ‘You need to focus on this, or no one’s being mean enough. Then check back again in a couple of weeks and see if it’s been improved.

Several of the Likert-style questions in the questionnaire for tutors touched on these areas. Tutors were unanimous about the importance of early-stage discussion and training for students and teachers around peer feedback, with most classing it as “very important”. They were also virtually unanimous in terms of the importance of tutors providing both modelling to students and feedback on their feedback. Asked to comment on the statement that “students do not receive enough training in the benefits of peer review”, five tutors thought this was a very important issue, the remaining two that it was important. Asked about the statement “Students do not receive enough feedback on the quality of their peer reviewing”, six tutors thought this was an important issue.

Tutors were unanimous that it was important for them to understand and discuss the rationale behind peer feedback, as well as receive training on how to use student feedback to heighten learning. Given the statement “Tutors do not receive enough training in the benefits of peer review”, four tutors thought this was important and one considered it very important; one thought it very unimportant. Training for tutors was also discussed by tutors in the collaborative group meeting. One saw the task of trying to establish whether students had done an effective peer review or not as “overwhelming”, given the short amount of time available during the one-on-one tutor-student sessions. She suggested that guidance would be helpful as to which were the most important parts of the peer review sheet in terms of student learning, so she could check if her students were filling them out well.

5.4.3 Motivation

The final group of comments in this section related to ideas about how to change the peer review system in order to get students more engaged and motivated so that they carried out their peer reviews in a way to promote learning. Suggestions fitted into three categories:

- Monitoring
- Marks
- Ownership

5.4.4 Monitoring

Students said that the peer reviewing had become “more slack” as the semester progressed. One suggested this was because students realised the peer review process was not being carefully monitored:

We were probably slack because the system was slack. . . . If the system’s improved and you have to do it a different way that makes you not be slack and actually do it properly, then it’s good. And you’ll benefit from it. You won’t benefit from it if it’s crap. If you are just going through the motions of doing it it’s not going to help.

A number of comments called upon the tutors to enforce the peer review process, to make sure it was being done properly—or even being done at all. These are examples of comments from two students:

And check that they are actually peer edited. Because honestly about 75% of the people in our class left half or more of their peer edits until the last day. So that’s not a fair peer edit.

I definitely think [tutors] need to upkeep the peer review and make sure it’s being done and to a fairly high standard; I guess, every couple of weeks.

Three students thought the peer reviews should be done in class, rather than outside. The implication was that this would allow the tutor to oversee and guide the process.

Several tutors felt a successful peer review system required a “reasonable amount” of encouragement, monitoring and commitment from them to ensure students took it seriously and “effective peer review occurs”. Otherwise “it holds little value for students and staff and is just a hassle”. Some said they liked to check the peer review sheets alongside the story, to emphasise the importance of the peer review.

Tutors should always look at the peer review sheet, at least briefly, and comment on it. This sends a message that we value the process and it’s not just a bureaucratic requirement.

On the other hand, one tutor felt that the student-to-student learning was important and thought, particularly given time constraints, that the tutor should not be involved.

In the Likert-style part of the questionnaires, tutors were asked if some tutors being “unenthusiastic or uncomfortable” about peer review was a challenge; two tutors saw this as a “very important” issue, two felt it was important, and three were neutral.

5.4.5 Marks

Both students and tutors discussed whether students would be motivated to do their peer reviews better—and potentially get more benefit to their learning—if the peer review process had meaningful marks attached to it. One student suggested that in the mark-based environment of the present university system, students were mainly motivated by marks.

I think making it worth more marks is going to get people to do it. It sounds really mean, but I care more about my own mark than helping other people. It sounds horrible, but you know what it's like.

There was a short but lively discussion in one of the student collaborative group meetings about how many marks might make peer reviewing worthwhile, with students appearing to agree that 15% would be enough to motivate them, rather than the 6% allocated.

Tutors also talked about marking issues in their collaborative group meeting, including discussing the students marking each other's peer review, rather than them being marked by tutors. Answers to a Likert-type scale question on whether students should be marked on their peer feedback elicited a range of responses from tutors—the most disparity for any question. Two tutors thought marking the peer reviews was very important, two that it was unimportant and two tutors were either neutral or didn't know.

Interestingly, both tutors and students independently brought up the idea of adding a graded reflective essay on the peer review process in order to motivate students to think about peer reviewing and its impact on their learning. When this suggestion was made by a student in the second collaborative group meeting it led to an outburst of opinion; however it was hard to tell if other students were for or against the proposal. One student commented that it would be thought-provoking for students, but also provide helpful feedback to tutors on the peer review process. Tutors linked their ideas about a reflective essay to ideas about ownership, as outlined below.

5.4.6 Ownership

I asked tutors, both in the questionnaire and in the collaborative group meeting, to think about the issue of students taking greater ownership of the peer review process by setting their own peer review criteria. In the questionnaire, which was completed before the semester started, tutors were asked to rank various options for setting the peer

review criteria. These were: tutors providing a ready-made sheet (the existing model); students setting the criteria as a group (with or without tutor guidance); students setting their own individual criteria (with or without tutor guidance); and feedback criteria being modified during the semester as students' knowledge and understanding changes.

Only one of the seven tutors chose the existing model as their preferred choice and two placed it second; however three tutors ranked this option low among their preferences, with one placing it as the least preferable option. The option which received most "top three" placings was the one where students worked with their tutor to choose group criteria; the other model which involved students working with tutors (in this case setting individual criteria) was also fairly popular. Options where students worked without tutor involvement tended to be low-ranked by tutors. The option where criteria were modified during the semester was picked as the preference or second preference by two tutors, but was low-ranked by others.

Unfortunately, I did not bring this issue up with the student participants in their collaborative group meetings; however in the tutor collaborative group meeting, several tutors wondered if this might make students more motivated. As one put it:

I think if I was allowed to design my own peer review form, I would be much more engaged with it than if I just had to take the one off the shelf that I feel doesn't really apply to my writing.

One tutor suggested that if students were involved in setting the criteria (particularly if this occurred at the beginning of the semester), tutors would need to oversee the process. Another tutor thought giving students the opportunity to put the peer review criteria together collaboratively—"sharing round the class, what works, what doesn't work"—would be beneficial. Another suggestion was for tutors to set up a discussion board for students to talk about issues around peer learning as a precursor for setting the peer review criteria.

Tutors discussed the possibility of students getting marks for adapting the peer review sheet part way through the semester, in order to meet their own learning goals. This could potentially involve a graded reflective essay component, which would motivate students to think about their strengths and weaknesses. Tutors also discussed whether switching peer review sheets half way through the semester might be "too complicated"; an alternative might be for the cut-off point between a general class peer review sheet

and an individualised one being the end of the first semester, with the start of a new news writing paper.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter I presented the viewpoints of my participants around the challenges posed by the peer review process in terms of enhancing student learning. In particular, there were frustrations about a lack of engagement from some students, a perceived lack of value in some of the feedback, and practical issues around the peer review process. However, there were also proposed solutions to these challenges. In the next chapter, Chapter 6, I will explore these themes further, as well as those raised in Chapter 4, with reference to the research questions and existing literature.

Chapter 6: Discussion

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6.1 Introduction

This chapter is a synthesis of my research findings from Chapters 4 and 5 and the relevant literature. I show where these findings support those of earlier studies, and where they diverge from them or offer alternative understandings. The chapter is structured into sections reflecting the major thematic groupings in Chapters 4 and 5.

6.2 Useful, but not enjoyable

Perhaps the most significant finding from this study is that both student and tutor participants believed that the peer review process had been useful—it had produced learning benefits. Of the 21 students who filled out the questionnaire following completion of the peer reviews, and the 13 students involved in the collaborative group meetings, only one called for peer review to be scrapped, suggesting it was “not productive at all. . . lecturers should do it”. Far more students saw it as “a good thing to do”. This supports a number of previous studies (Cheng & Warren, 1997; Falchikov, 1986; Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001; Sivan, 2000), where perceptions of peer learning are largely positive; even former sceptics (G. Thomas et al., 2011) conclude that there is considerable value in peer learning. Borglund (2007) is in “no doubt that the peer learning approach did lead to improved student learning” (p. 41).

At the same time, students in my study did not describe peer review as ‘enjoyable’ (Davies, 2004), or motivational (McKeachie et al., 1999), or ‘the best aspect of the course’ (Borglund, 2007). When one student suggested peer review “was good, it was good”, she might have been saying “it was useful, it was useful”. One student described it as “a tad dreary”, another as “a bit of a pain, to be honest”. Interestingly, I did not find other literature where students described peer learning or assessment in such terms—a necessary chore—although in other studies (Falchikov, 1986; Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001; Liu & Carless, 2006) students reported it as hard, uncomfortable or irrelevant. It may

be that the process-related frustrations acknowledged by the participants, frustrations which were outlined in Chapter 5 and will be discussed later in this chapter, led to the negative sentiments in terms of enjoyment of peer review, while not affecting the generally positive attitudes around the learning benefits. This would appear to support Wheeler, Langan and Dunleavy (2005), who claim that peer learning activities work best for students when there is good organisation, open dialogue and scaffolding from teaching staff.

6.3 How did students benefit from peer reviewing?

My aim in this research was to explore the benefits and challenges of the peer review system used in AUT's journalism programme in terms of students' acquisition of skills and understanding. The first part of the research question explored the perceived *benefits* of the process. Although I found very few published studies examining the use of peer review in journalism education, and none looking at any benefits in details, I was interested to know whether the participants in my study would identify similar benefits to those noted by researchers in other disciplines. To some extent this proved to be the case; most of the benefits identified by participants in this study mirrored those found in other studies. The difference with other studies appeared to be one of omission—many of the wider benefits identified by other studies were not identified by my participants, particularly the student participants. I will now examine some of the main ideas that arose from the findings around the benefits for students from peer review.

6.3.1 Benefits from reviewing and being reviewed are different

Goldschmid and Goldschmid (1976) believed the most profitable peer teaching situation “would be one where roles of ‘teacher’ and ‘student’ are alternated” (p. 13). The implication for my study was that there were benefits to be gained from both being reviewed and reviewing, and it was noticeable that students in my study clearly saw the benefits from the peer review system as having two parts: benefits from having their work reviewed by others; and benefits from reviewing their classmates. They saw the two sets of benefits being largely different and commented on them separately. This was an interesting finding, though not totally unexpected in hindsight; although authors of other practical studies tended not to identify this aspect of the results, it was clear when I looked at students' comments reported in other studies that they also saw the peer learning process as involving two parts and having separate benefits. For example, in their study of peer feedback in fashion design students (Keppell et al., 2006), one

student talked about the benefits of peer critique as “[making] us. . . review our design work. As a result, our final version looks very different from our first draft. The improvement is really remarkable!” (Keppell et al., 2006, p. 457).

The comment is very similar to this one, from my study:

I find that I am constantly changing and improving my style due to different suggestions and ideas.

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) also talked about the benefits for the reviewed student when they noted one advantage of peer feedback was the opportunity to learn from someone who has just learned something and so is “often better able than teachers to explain it to their classmates in a language and in a way that is accessible” (p. 211), as well as exposing them to alternative perspectives, tactics and strategies. This is very like the view of one of the students in my study:

Because they are of the same expertise level [they] will be able to offer valuable insight as they view the work from a similar position.

In other studies (Falchikov, 1986; Latukefu, 2010, for example), students focussed more on the act of *reviewing*. For example, the students in the Falchikov (1986) study liked “learning about mistakes and subsequent possibility of improvement” (p. 157), and suggested “being able to read another essay and see someone else's work resulted in learning something extra” (p. 158). In the Latukefu (2010) study, the singing students liked, for example, “being able to critically evaluate my peers” (p. 67), and the opportunity “to put myself on the other side of the table; the judging side and see what it is that judges view as important in a performance, which helps me reflect on what I need to work on” (p. 67). A third singing student said:

I feel like I have a better grasp and am more competent in terms of assessing someone's ability to perform well and now have a set of criteria I can apply. . . to my own practice as I can be careful not to do things that impair performance that I have noted in others” (p. 69).

As Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) said, peer learning forced the reviewing student to transform knowledge in such a way as to make it understandable, and to develop “detachment of judgement” (p. 211) about work in relation to standards, which was transferred to the assessment of their own work. In my study, students mentioned similar ideas (outlined in Chapter 4 under the sub-categories ‘critiquing’, ‘mimicking’ and ‘self-reflection’). They suggested their writing improved from being able to reflect

on their classmates' work and apply learnings from both the good and the bad that they found.

6.3.2 Active learning matters

What appears to unite both sets of benefits (with one notable exception that I will examine later in the chapter) is that participants believed students benefitted from the active and conscious nature of the learning from peer review. For example, in the 'fresh insights' sub-category described in Chapter 4, the writing students are actively and consciously using their reviewer's feedback to improve their own stories, rather than simply inserting their suggestions. Meanwhile, from the reviewing side, the main themes: 'critiquing' (improving writing by looking at other students' mistakes), 'mimicking' (improving writing by looking at other students' good writing), 'self-reflection' (thinking about classmates' work as a way to deepen own understanding), teaching, and collaboration all involve active and thoughtful learning processes.

Comment from students in the 'fresh insights' sub-category is that feedback from peer reviewers allowed students to think about their writing and make changes not only to that particular story, but to future stories. In their book on peer-assisted learning, Topping and Ehly (2001) found students were able to use peer feedback to extend their learning from the specific (one particular comment or example) to a wider range of contexts, although they were not necessarily aware at the time of what was happening. Instead, they gradually became conscious of their own learning processes as they developed learning relationships with their peers; learning from their peers eventually helped students become self-reflective. This process could be seen in my study when, for example, one student deliberately thought about her use of commas every week, after feedback that they made her work disjointed.

Even a seemingly passive benefit, such as students seeing their peer reviewers as an impartial set of eyes when they have long since ceased to see their story objectively, with closer scrutiny involves students in the active process of seeing their work from someone else's viewpoint. This is particularly relevant in the context of journalism, when a piece of writing is destined not only for a lecturer or examiner's eyes, but for a wider public. Some of the student participants commented that they saw their peer reviewer as representing "Joe Public", and through the feedback process they tried to develop "an understanding of a type of reader and how I can suit my work in a way that can suit them". According to Hays' 1981 study (as cited in Flower et al., 1986) students

with a strong understanding of who their audience was wrote better papers than those who did not. The audience-focused students were also better able to make substantive revisions to their work.

It was noticeable in reviewing the literature around peer learning that the focus was more often on the benefits for reviewing students than for reviewed ones. This is potentially because this is where the new and interesting findings occur—no one who has gone through the education system will be particularly surprised at the idea that getting feedback from others (from teachers, for example), is potentially beneficial to your work. However, the reason for other research focusing on *reviewing* rather than *being reviewed*, may also be that participants and researchers see more active benefits to the reviewer student than the reviewed one. Goldschmid and Goldschmid (1976) believed the peer teacher role was important because it potentially involved more “action” and therefore fostered active learning. As Topping and Ehly (2001) noted, “the cognitive demands on the helper in terms of monitoring learner performance and detecting, diagnosing, correcting and otherwise managing misconceptions and errors are great—and herein lies much of the cognitive exercise and benefit for the helper” (p. 126). When two Hong Kong-based academics (Liu & Carless, 2006) examined data from a broad study into feedback and assessment (1740 tertiary students and 460 of their teachers), they found that examining the work of peers “offers meaningful opportunities for articulating discipline-specific knowledge, as well as criteria and standards” (p. 281). Other studies (Latukefu, 2010; Oldfield & Macalpine, 1995) had similar findings—students assessing their peers had to actively engage with the criteria for success and judge whether their peers had met those criteria. That process enabled the students to be more aware of the quality of their own work. Moreover, in the same way that some of the students in my study appreciated the opportunity for teaching others as a way of reinforcing what they had learned, Borglund (2007) reported a comment from one of his students, comparing the learning from a peer-focussed approach to that achieved with an exam: “I think it was better because we really had to understand what we learned to be able to explain it in the best possible way” (p. 40).

These findings are reflected to a large extent in my study. While journalism student participants often focussed more on the benefits arising from being reviewed in their comments before the peer review took place, afterwards they found more benefits from reviewing others. Here too, the active role they played as a reviewer is an important factor. As the ‘reviewed’ student, they were subject to the vagaries of their peer review

partner, who might be busy, lazy, incompetent, or in some other way produce a review that did not benefit their learning. As the reviewer, however, individual students had control of the time and effort put into the process and therefore to the quality of the learning. Several participants, both tutors and students, saw a correlation between active engagement in the peer review process, and an improvement in writing skills; lack of engagement was reflected in the lower quality of those students' stories.

6.3.3 Tutors saw a wider picture

In contrast to the students in my study, who saw particular benefits—mostly to their writing—stemming from particular parts of the process, tutors also saw a wider picture, with their comments aligning fairly closely with themes identified in other studies. For example, they believed peer review made students “reflective”, “thoughtful” (Boud et al., 1999), and “confident” (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976). They said peer reviewing helped students engage more deeply with the process of writing (Sivan, 2000), and talked about students’ “deeper” and “higher” levels of learning (Falchikov, 2001; Timpson & Wright, 2001). They saw the process helping students get to know each other (Timpson & Wright, 2001) and preparing them for a workplace where critical thinking (Sheridan Burns, 1997; R. Thomas, 2009) and the giving and receiving of feedback was inescapable—and could be a primary part of your job . While the tutors were referring specifically to jobs in the media, other studies suggested there is a wider benefit. Falchikov (2007) noted that “peers are a key feature of learning in the workplace” (p. 130). Other researchers (J. Y. Chen, 2012; Oldfield & Macalpine, 1995) argued that throughout their working lives people need to assess the quality of the work of their subordinates, their peers and their superiors—and to be assessed by them. However, they suggested that apart from learning to accept feedback from teachers, these critical skills are not widely taught in universities. Boud & Falchikov (2006) stressed that preparing students for lifelong learning necessarily involves preparing them for the tasks of making complex judgements about their own work and that of others. Yet “developing the capacity to be an assessor of learning”—other people’s, as well as one’s own—is “one of the items typically omitted from lists of key skills required by graduates” (p. 402).

The tutors in my study also saw peer review in the news reporting class in the wider context of other peer learning activities going on in different areas of the journalism programme, an idea espoused by Boud (2000), who recommends development of a course climate in which the giving and receiving of peer feedback is a normal part of

teaching and learning processes. In my study, five of the seven tutor participants in the questionnaire thought wider integration of peer learning into the journalism curriculum would be very useful or useful and only one did not value this integration. Tutors also saw pragmatic advantages to peer learning in terms of the decreasing quantities of tutor-student time (Boud et al., 1999; Oldfield & Macalpine, 1995).

6.3.4 Collaboration

On the other hand, there were some benefits often mentioned in other studies on peer learning that were conspicuously absent in this study. There was considerable weight put in previous studies on the benefits to student learning of cooperation, collaboration and the ability to work in teams (Borglund, 2007; Boud et al., 1999; Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976; Keppell et al., 2006). Goldschmid & Goldschmid (1976) compared a peer teaching tertiary environment to a traditional instructional programme and found “an increase in cooperation, accompanied by a decrease in competitive behaviour” (p. 12). Meanwhile Cross (2006) suggested “the opportunity to foster mutually-supportive and collaborative relationships at all stages of professional development is fundamental to successful engagement with the changing world of workplace learning” (p. 1). The application of this idea to journalism education is interesting. News journalism has traditionally been seen as thriving on a climate of competition (being the first to get the story) and journalism educators have tended not to see cooperation and collaboration as necessary attributes for news writers (R. Thomas, 1999). However, while I was not able to find literature on the subject, it is clear that newsrooms, as much as other workplaces, need their staff to be able to work in teams. Major breaking stories such as the February 2011 Christchurch earthquakes, for example, saw media outlets assigning more than one television crew or newspaper reporter to work together covering the news. At other times, small teams of journalists work on important social issues stories or investigative reports. Peer review is one possibility for helping journalism students move away from a competitive mentality and develop collaborative and team-building skills. As reported in Chapter 1, Australian journalism school leaders surveyed in my preliminary study included teamwork and “the complexities and subtleties of interacting with others” as benefits for students from their peer learning activities. For this reason, it is disappointing that in my study this potential benefit from peer review was not mentioned by tutors and was only mentioned by students with reference to it being absent with the online-based system they were using. The students said the way the peer review system was structured meant that students tended to do their peer reviews online,

often from home, so there was in most cases little discussion, cooperation or collaboration between students, even though they were working on each other's stories. In the same way that there is little collaboration when a teacher marks a student's work, so tutors and students did not see these essential workplace skills (Boud & Lee, 2005; Cross, 2006) as being fostered in the process examined in my study. I will address this issue further in this chapter when I talk about the role of discussion in the peer review process.

6.3.5 Lifelong learning

Another theme regularly mentioned in the literature in relation to peer learning is 'lifelong learning', and the associated ideas, including promoting students' confidence to take responsibility for their learning, the move towards autonomy from teachers, and 'learning how to learn' (Falchikov, 2007; Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976; Keppell et al., 2006; Sivan, 2000). Again, these were not mentioned by tutors or students in my study, although the reason for this is less clear. It is hard to tell whether AUT's journalism students are not receiving these learning benefits, or whether the participants did not think to mention them. The former would certainly be of concern, particularly in the media industry; Boud and Falchikov (2006) could have been talking about journalism when they argue that the challenges that will face students in the future will not be addressed simply by disciplinary or inter-disciplinary knowledge because students need to be prepared "for a future that to a significant extent is unknown both to themselves and to those who design and conduct higher education programmes" (p. 407). On the other hand, it is possible that ideas like lifelong learning, while explicit in documents put together by the tertiary establishment, including AUT (AUT University, 2012, February), are not top-of-mind for tutors and students at the New Zealand coal-face. Spronken-Smith et al (2013) noted that the understanding of, and engagement with, wider graduate attributes is still low at AUT and other New Zealand universities.

6.3.6 Paucity of wider benefits noticed by students

If some wider benefits of peer learning were not mentioned by tutors in this study, this finding was even more noticeable with the journalism students, and this is also potentially of concern. As examined in Chapter 4, before the peer review took place students anticipated a few wider learning benefits, particularly around developing resilience, and learning skills that would be helpful in the workplace, for example the ability to give and receive critical feedback. However, in the collaborative group meetings after the peer review, students did not appear to believe that even the small

number of anticipated wider benefits had actually been realised. In particular they worried that the tendency for students to be “too nice” with their feedback meant they had not really learnt how to give and receive critical feedback. Meanwhile students neither anticipated, nor believed they had gained, skills in areas like critical enquiry, independent thinking, self-directed learning and a reflective approach to learning. One could argue that students *did* receive some or all of these wider benefits, but did not recognise them; certainly the tutors felt they had become more reflective. However even if this is the case, this lack of understanding by student of their own learning could also be seen to be a problem, since one of the goals of peer learning is to encourage a critical, thoughtful and reflective approach. It may indicate that further work is needed to achieve goals recognised in R. Thomas’ (2009) research on New Zealand journalism education; research which prompted the introduction of peer review into AUT’s journalism programme. Thomas suggested a need to broaden the scope of journalism courses away from a focus on teaching students to write news stories, towards a wider brief of encouraging skills like reflection and critical thinking.

6.3.7 Impact on learning basic style and grammar

So far in this chapter, the findings on benefits for the journalism students have remained relatively close to findings suggested in studies in other disciplines. However it is worth examining one finding which is interesting not only because it relates particularly to the journalism peer review process and therefore has not to my knowledge been studied before, but also because it may suggest a correlation between peer review and a *decrease* in performance for a particular skill in the journalism programme—learning of grammar and punctuation.

Peer learning at its best is an active learning approach, designed to help students think critically about their learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Yet for students, and some tutors, in my study, one of the key advantages (*the* key advantage, according to one student) of peer review was ‘error eradication’—the largely passive process whereby students corrected each other’s grammar, punctuation and stylistic mistakes before stories were shown to their tutors. Students said they relied on their peers to point out errors to save them from being embarrassed or growled at by their tutors in one-one-one editing sessions. In fact this was so important as a face-saver and confidence booster that some students said even if the formal peer review process did not exist, they would do it informally with their friends. It is not surprising students placed a high value on accuracy in grammar and punctuation; the whole media industry from editors

downwards puts considerable store on reporters producing “clean copy”, and for this reason journalism educators place a high regard on accurate style and grammar in their students (Massé & Popovich, 2004, 2007). At AUT, Year 3 News Reporting students must pass the ‘Style and grammar’ test or they cannot graduate from the course. Yet Faigley and Witte (1981), in their research into student writing and revision processes, said that pointing out grammatical errors was a ‘surface change’ process and recommended trainee writers looked to being able to detect ‘meaning changes’. Their study showed that experienced writers often ignore surface changes altogether, concentrating on ‘meaning changes’. Meanwhile Couzijn (1999) spelt out the important difference between the act of writing, whose goal is to produce a text, and the act of learning to write, which has a cognitive aim. AUT journalism students suggested peer reviewers tended to concentrate on grammar mistakes, because that was easier and less time-consuming to pick up, but ignored more complex areas of revision.

[They would say] ‘You missed a capital here, you need to put a full stop here.’ Not: ‘It would have been good if you had interviewed this person, or taken this angle.’

While this ‘error eradication’ function of peer review presumably produced a cleaner text, it did not necessarily help achieve the thoughtful and self-regulating learner writers the peer review exercise was aiming for.

There is considerable irony in this finding. On the one hand, students said they wanted active learning benefits from reviewing other students’ work and from reflecting and acting upon the good comments they received from others. Yet on the other hand, they were influenced by the emphasis put on good grammar, punctuation and style by the media (editors and often readers too) and therefore by journalism educators. This produced a contradictory pull for the students—to achieve ‘clean copy’, even if it meant shifting their learning into a largely passive mode.

Even worse news for the students (who put considerable store on getting their peers to correct their mistakes, to the extent of complaining if their peer reviewer did not point out individual errors) is that there is anecdotal evidence from my study and conversations with tutors at their collaborative group meeting, that this type of peer review may actually make students *worse* at grammar than they would have been without peer review. One tutor believed that students’ knowledge of grammar and punctuation rules was poorer than in previous years, an opinion that was reinforced by

the fact that 20 out of the 44 students in the 2013 journalism class failed the style and grammar test at the first attempt – an unprecedented bad result. While tutors recognised this might be a function of several unrelated factors—including the knowledge of grammar of the particular 2013 student cohort—an examination of the literature on effective and ineffective feedback might indicate a connection. I will briefly look at this idea now.

6.3.8 Some feedback is more useful than others

In their guidelines on types of feedback, Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest ‘feedback about the task or product (FT)’—to use an AUT example: ‘You’ve got the apostrophe in the wrong place here.’ Or: ‘The AUT style is recognise, not recognize, isn’t it?’—is one of the least useful forms of feedback in terms of student learning. This is because only rarely does this type of feedback help the student not make the same mistake next time. One student in my study suggested that ‘peer editors maybe looked more at grammar and stuff’, rather than other areas, which may indicate that ‘error eradication’-style feedback is allowing students to hand in clean copy (so they don’t get growled at), but is not forcing them to learn the grammar and punctuation rules themselves. Cho and MacArthur (2010) have a different name for FT-type feedback involving explicit suggestions of specific changes in a student’s paper: directive feedback. The opposite, non-directive feedback, involves non-specific observations that could apply to any paper; for example a comment that the disjointed flow of a student’s writing makes the sense of the story hard to follow. Beach and Friedrich (2006) suggest students prefer directive comments, because they provide specific suggestions for improvement, and comments from the students in my study confirm this. Yet importantly, Cho and MacArthur (2010) found that directive comments mainly predicted mechanical changes that were unrelated to quality improvement, whereas non-directive comments led to more complex repair revisions and a more improved product. This finding appears to be salient in what happened with students in my study: when peer reviewers used FT or directive feedback (for example when they corrected another student’s grammar mistakes), the other student was pleased, but the learning was poor—as noted above, almost half the students failed to get to the required standard in terms of the style and grammar test. Instead, the implication is that students need to be encouraged to use non-directive feedback, or what Hattie and Timperley call ‘feedback about the process used to create a product or complete a task (FP)’.

Interestingly, both Cho and MacArthur (2010) and Yang, Badger and Yu (2006) found that ‘subject experts’ or teachers were most likely to provide the less beneficial directive (or superficial) feedback to students, whereas novice peers were more likely to provide the more useful, non-directive feedback, which led to meaning change revisions. In my study no attempt was made to examine the quality or type of feedback provided by peer reviewers, or to compare it with that provided by tutors (though this might be a useful research topic for the future). However, a conversation between two students (quoted in the “minimal learning” section of the previous chapter) suggests there is at least some directive feedback (and blind acceptance of that feedback) occurring with both tutor and peer feedback.

Some students said they had developed peer assessment practices outside the overt curriculum in the classroom, showing their stories to family or friends. This is not unusual (Orsmond, Merry, & Callaghan, 2011), with these “patterns of participation in communities of practice and in defined social networks [contributing] to their learner identity” (p. 739). However, in this case, it is important to be aware of these informal peer relationships and the fact that unless students are aware of different types of feedback and their usefulness, informal editing could also lead to unintended consequences in terms of directive feedback and potentially a lack of benefit to student learning.

Having looked at issues around the benefits involved in peer review, I will now move on to explore the second part of my research question—the perceived challenges of the peer review process.

6.4 Challenges involved with peer review

Falchikov (1986) suggested peer assessment is not always easy; there may be pain along the way. In her study, students found that peer learning was challenging (79.4%), hard (70.6%) and time consuming (58.8%). Almost 20 years later (Falchikov, 2005), she suggested that even with good preparation of staff and students “total success cannot be guaranteed on a first run through” (p. 250). As with the benefits of peer review, most challenges identified by participants in my study reflect findings from studies in other disciplines. In Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001), for example, students found the process time-consuming and, like students in my study, they worried about hurting and being hurt by feedback. Again like my participants, they called for peer reviewing to be worth marks (to improve student engagement) and for tutors to give them feedback on their

feedback, so they knew if they were doing a good job. In the Hanrahan and Isaacs study, as well as in two studies (Papinczak et al., 2007; Xie et al., 2008) where peer assessment was found to be unsuccessful in terms of improving learning, students were frustrated that their classmates were lazy, slack or did not take the process seriously—another problem in my study. Meanwhile, the concern from both student and tutor participants in my research about the ability of some students to provide valuable feedback was also a common theme elsewhere. The leader of one of the New Zealand journalism schools surveyed in my preliminary study said peer review had been abandoned because “the students’ subbing of each other’s work was terrible and often made the story worse”. Other studies (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Dochy et al., 1999) found the quality of feedback was crucial, while a review of the literature (van der Pol et al., 2008) argued that successful uptake of peer feedback hinges at least partly on the quality of the feedback. G. Thomas et al (2011) quoted a student who was deeply sceptical about their classmates’ ability to understand an assignment topic enough to give valuable feedback:

From marking some assignments I can recognise that certain people do not have much of an idea of what they are writing about, therefore when they come to marking other people’s papers they may think theirs was correct and mark the right people wrong (p. 13).

The challenge of students giving valuable feedback raised several issues—and possible solutions—in my study, which I will discuss now, with reference to the relevant literature.

6.4.1 Preparation and training

As discussed in Chapter 5, participants in my study saw adequate preparation and training for students and tutors before peer review, and monitoring of engagement and standards during the process, as being crucial. These challenges are also reflected in recommendations from other studies (Rust et al., 2010; Topping, 2009; Topping & Ehly, 2001, among others). Researchers recommended that students (and often tutors too) should understand the purpose, rationale and expectations behind peer learning before they started, and teachers needed to allocated time for training, examples, modelling and practice. Guidelines, criteria, scaffolding, monitoring and feedback were important during the process (Falchikov, 2003; Liu & Carless, 2006; Topping, 2009). G. Thomas et al (2011) warned other teachers to expect resistance from students, peers and supervisors when developing peer learning processes. His solution was for teachers to

“do the research” (p. 14) and be prepared with arguments and examples from the literature to persuade doubters about the validity of the exercise. Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001), who did not provide modelling and practice for their students before launching them into peer assessment, suggested a mixture of training, practice, exemplars and robust criteria could have addressed almost all the challenges raised by students in their study—including lack of skill and confidence. Meanwhile, Sluijsmans, Moerkerke, van Merriënboer and Dochy (2001), who let students practice peer assessment beforehand, found that this factor alone increased students’ confidence in assessing their peers from 7% of students feeling confident beforehand, to 70%.

6.4.2 Too nice or too critical?

One issue identified in my study—that of students being “too nice” with their comments—is not widely reported in other studies; in fact the reverse is often a problem. Students in the Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) study worried about being too harsh in their comments; one felt bad about “picking another student’s work to pieces” (p. 61). Other students in the study felt their peers were overly critical; one even talks about being “savaged” (p. 61) by a classmate. Interestingly, before the peer review started, students in my study also worried about potentially being hurt by feedback, but in the end felt the opposite had happened; their peers had not been critical enough.

6.4.3 The role of discussion

Literature around students teaching other students suggested an important part of the learning from peer feedback comes from the opportunity for what Boud (2000) called “reflective assessment with peers” (p. 157). This learning potentially comes in two areas—discussion of the feedback itself, and discussion of the peer learning process—both of which I will examine here.

6.4.3.1 Discussion of the feedback

Several studies (Boud, 2000; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Royce Sadler, 1998) proposed the importance for students of having the opportunity to discuss feedback together. Boud (2000) and Sadler (1998) found traditional written feedback, whether from tutors or peers, could be complex, unhelpful or difficult to decipher, and when students do not have the opportunity to actively construct an understanding of the feedback, through discussion and asking questions for example, they do not necessarily benefit from these feedback messages or improve their practice. Comments in my study reflected the frustration many students felt at the lack of opportunities for discussion

with their peers, because (as noted above) the reviews process was done online and did not involve a discussion component. Almost the first comment from the first student collaborative group meeting was about the potential benefits that could have been gained from peer review if students had met together:

If you do it right then you learn things from other people. And if you actually work with the person that you are doing the peer edit on and you can tell them what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong and write it down and then discuss it with them, then it is beneficial to both of you.

Yang, Badger and Yu (2006) also focussed on the important role discussion plays in the peer review process. They compared the effectiveness of teacher-initiated versus peer-initiated revisions to student writing and found students were more likely to incorporate teacher feedback into their writing, but that these revisions tended to be more superficial and less successful at producing a better text. Sometimes incorporating teacher revisions actually made the writing worse. The researchers concluded this was probably because “negotiation of meaning during the peer interaction helps to enhance mutual understanding and reduce misinterpretation and miscommunication” (p. 193). Put another way, students’ reservations about their peers’ comments prompted them to verify their ideas by discussion or other checking mechanisms. As a result, students were far more thoughtful about their learning and acquired a deeper understanding of the subject.

One Pākehā student (student of non-European descent) in my study commented that giving critical feedback to another student felt like “creating conflict”. In fact, Topping and Ehly (2001), in their discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of Peer Assisted Learning (PAL), suggested cognitive conflict (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) was one of five cornerstone features that would maximise learning benefits from PAL. Several researchers (Falchikov, 2005; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Topping & Ehly, 2001) argued that the disagreements that can arise during the peer review process can lead to important learning. As Falchikov (2005) said:

Discussing and explaining are invaluable ways of increasing one’s own understanding and of glimpsing another’s point of view. Cognitive conflict is recognized as a means of stimulating critical awareness and reflection, and structured academic controversy is a recognized form of peer tutoring (p. 250).

Introducing an element of discussion (whether online or face-to-face) into the peer review process could be one way of resolving several of the challenges raised about the AUT peer review process. For example, students could be encouraged to discuss feedback they did not agree with, or they thought was too nice, or too critical. In addition, discussion would help avoid students blindly making changes to their copy resulting from the feedback, without thinking about them.

G. Thomas (2011), suggested discussion could also be a solution to issues he found in his study, where some students did not think their classmates capable of giving useful comments—another issue discussed by participants in my study, including teachers who worried about how well weaker students were able to review their peers. Importantly, this issue may well be valid; a study of more than 3500 students (Lew et al., 2010) suggested that less academically competent students were not as good at self-assessment as their more competent peers, and it is quite possible the same inaccuracy in judgement would be true for peer assessment too. However this lack of skill may not in fact matter, as long as there is the opportunity for students to discuss feedback together. Mazur (2009) found that when two students discussed a physics problem, the one with the right answer was far more likely to convince the one with the wrong answer to change their mind than the other way around, because the former had logic behind their argument. Willey and Gardner (2009) went further, suggesting from their research that participation in peer and self-assessment activities in a team with at least one weak team member was *more* beneficial than when the whole team was functioning well. “It does appear. . . that having to provide feedback on and/or resolve performance issues. . . allows students to engage with learning opportunities” (p. 371). It may be that by asking a peer reviewer for clarification of their feedback, even a sceptical receiver of that feedback is learning something. As Falchikov (2005) put it: “Two heads really are better than one, even if the second head is not as talented as one’s own” (p. 249).

6.4.3.2 Discussion of the process

Another area where discussion may be important is the opportunity for students to reflect on the learning process that arises from peer learning. Brockbank and McGill (2007) argued that the “interaction brought about by dialogue” (p. 94) might be essential to produce the deep learning that is an essential part of reflection-on-action (Schön, 1987). This discussion can take place before, during and after an action. Willey and Gardner (2009), for example, introduced a de-briefing process after students had completed self- and peer assessment. Students were encouraged to identify the strengths

and weaknesses of their own performance in self- and peer learning activities, and also to give feedback on how their peers could have improved their performance and achieved a better result. The study suggested initial results of this ‘feedback on the feedback’ process were encouraging in terms of student learning. In the G. Thomas et al (2011) study, student discussion around the rationale and working of the peer learning process was a key part of that process, and the study recommended this discussion to others as being critical to the learning itself:

Such discussions provide excellent opportunities to engage students’ thinking about learning and assessment and in our initiatives these discussions promoted unexpected, but welcomed, higher order thinking. We also found. . . that these discussions addressed students’ concerns and anxieties. . . and made explicit our hopes for the way these processes would contribute to future learning (p. 14).

G. Thomas et al (2011) talked about students’ “journey into deeper learning processes [appearing to] make a positive contribution to their development as critical-thinking practitioners” (p. 13), based on the survey responses he received. The research suggested even the students who did not think the peer review process was successful (for example those who believed other students’ feedback to be lacking in value) may in fact be benefitting from the critical-thinking processes necessary to come to that conclusion. Thomas et al (2011) noted this student ‘journey’ is what Boud (2010) recommended for tertiary students, but also what employers expect graduates to be able to do.

In my research, this opportunity for students to reflect on the learning processes involved in peer review was provided by the study itself; students who participated in the questionnaires and collaborative group meetings had the opportunity to think about and discuss their learning. (Tutors had a similar opportunity to think about the value of peer learning for students and its part in a teaching mix during their collaborative group meeting.) It is interesting that students did not tend to see peer review as making them reflective in their learning, however the process of talking about doing the peer review for this study did make them reflective. Their comments in the questionnaires and collaborative group meetings suggested they were thinking about their learning. In the same way that feedback allows students to close the gap between where they are with their learning and where they want to be (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), ‘before’, during’ and ‘after’ discussions helped students close the gap between the goal of an exercise (‘What do we want to get out of this?’) and

whether it is achieving that goal. At present, AUT journalism students have very different assumptions about the role and aims of the peer review process, and there is no shared understanding or agreement about what they expect from it, or how it should be done. There is also no process (outside this research) whereby students can think about whether it is achieving its aims. It is worth investigating introducing discussion about the peer review process into AUT's News Reporting paper in the future as a core part of the paper.

6.4.4 Engagement/motivation

Motivation and engagement were seen as important challenges to peer learning in my study—as they were in others' research. Van der Pol et al (2008) noted that receiving good quality feedback fulfils an important motivational function; investing time into providing feedback for others is only worthwhile if students also receive useful comments in return. Students in my study complained about “slack” classmates, who did not care about peer review or did not understand the point in doing it, and therefore did not do it “properly”. Willey and Gardner (2009) see engagement in the process as central to successful peer learning; their study into self- and peer assessment in engineering classes concluded (somewhat to their surprise) that the benefit that individual students gain from these practices was more a function of how they engaged with the process than how competently the members of the team performed. In order to increase students' engagement, Willey and Gardner (2009) linked the peer assessment criteria with the professional competency criteria for engineering accreditation. This gave the process and the criteria more credibility for the students and allowed them to use their feedback scores in their e-portfolios to demonstrate competence to prospective employers. In the Latukefu study (2010), singing students were seen as motivated to take their peer reviewing seriously because many of them start their performing lives by setting up independent companies or producing plays or music festivals—all activities where they may be required to assess work done by their peers.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the visibility of journalists' work in the media, and the important part played by others' feedback on that work, makes peer review a very relevant activity for journalism students. Making sure this relevance is well understood could help improve engagement and motivation.

6.4.4.1 Anonymity

Linked with the issue of engagement, is that of whether the AUT peer review should be done anonymously or not. Making one's work public may sometimes be threatening or embarrassing (Liu & Carless, 2006), and this problem is mitigated, according to studies in disciplines such as economics, engineering, statistics, or medicine (Borglund, 2007; Papinczak et al., 2007; Robinson, 2002; Weaver & Esposto, 2011), by peer feedback being done anonymously. Lecturers in these studies decided anonymity would improve student engagement with the process and make sure comments were valuable. In my study, participants saw the issue of it being hard for students to give critical feedback to friends and classmates as a problem, and although the journalism students did not mention anonymity as a potential solution, one of the tutors did. However introducing anonymity in AUT's journalism classes as a way of solving the problem of students not being critical enough with their reviews would need to be weighed against students not gaining the benefits of becoming used to giving and receiving open feedback.

6.4.4.2 Students setting the peer review criteria

Liu and Carless (2006) suggested “a further important reason for engaging learners with peer feedback is that learning is likely to be extended from the private and individual domain, to a more public (i.e., to one or more peers) domain” (p. 281). They believed one significant way students learn is through expressing and articulating to others what they know or understand. As they said: “in this process of self-expression, we construct an evolving understanding of increasing complexity” (p. 281). Their research and that of other studies (Falchikov, 2005; Sivan, 2000) recommended giving students opportunities to explore standards by setting their own peer review criteria.

Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter 2, my study did not ask students about the potential impact on their engagement of being part of the criteria-setting process, although some of the tutors (who *were* asked) thought it would increase engagement. One of the impacts of this study was the trial introduction for the 2014 News Reporting class of student-set criteria, and it will be interesting to try to gauge the impact of this on student engagement in the future.

6.4.4.3 Allocating marks to the peer review process

Most of the literature around peer assessment focuses not on whether students should be marked on their provision of feedback, but whether they should provide grades (summative assessment) to their fellow students, or simply give formative comments. On this debate, several studies established that students are reasonably reliable assessors

(Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000, for example); however other research (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Falchikov, 2001, 2005; Liu & Carless, 2006) suggested the allocation of grades can distract both the reviewer and the reviewed students from engaging with feedback, thus obscuring its benefits. As Falchikov (2007) said: “The mark is the academic equivalent of Gollum’s ‘precious’. It has the power to corrupt all that come into contact with it, not least the learner. Assessment should always be seen as more than marking” (p. 134).

Of more interest in this research is the debate over whether students should be marked for their peer review efforts. As noted in Chapter 5, one of the students in my study thought that giving marks for feedback would motivate students to work hard on their peer reviews because of the importance she (and others) placed on grades. Boud et al (1999) made a similar point that (whether we like it or not) students see the allocation of marks for a particular piece of work as an expression of its perceived value—and therefore of the amount of effort that should be put into that work.

If students are expected to put more effort into a course through their engagement in peer learning activities, then it may be necessary to have this effort recognised through a commensurate shift in assessment (Boud et al., 1999, p. 416).

Bloxham and West (2004) awarded 25% of the marks for one assignment for the quality of peer marking in order to encourage their students to carry it out seriously. In my study students proposed 15% of the marks for the whole paper would be enough to improve motivation. Tutors were divided on the issue of whether peer reviewing should be marked, with two agreeing strongly with the idea of marking peer reviews, three disagreeing, and two not expressing a view in the questionnaire. One potential problem with allocating marks for peer reviews would be the increased workload for lecturers, so another suggestion (from both tutors and students) was instead to get students to write a short, graded, reflective essay on the peer review process, in conjunction with reassessing their peer review criteria. This idea is also being trialled in the 2014 year.

6.5 The role of the tutor

My second research question was: What is the role of the tutor in the peer review process at AUT? Given my initial definition of peer review as a system where “students learn with and from each other without the immediate intervention of a teacher” (Boud et al., 1999, pp. 413-414), it is ironic that this study found that the role of the tutor is in fact crucial in peer review. Far from being able to leave students to get on with

reciprocal learning alone, my study confirmed what other literature had already found (Falchikov, 2005), that without detailed planning and groundwork from the teacher, including the students being thoroughly prepared, “most ventures are doomed to failure or very limited success” (p. 251). Staff may not be involved directly in teaching (Boud et al., 1999), but it is clear from my study and others (Falchikov, 2007; Topping, 2009) that without teachers’ active involvement in peer review at key stages, student learning is at best not enhanced and at worst has no value added (Falchikov, 2007). In the same way that one of the Australian journalism programme leaders in my preliminary study said the process of overcoming reluctance from students takes time and effort from the tutors, Oldfield and Macalpine (1995) noted:

Students must have concepts introduced to them in absorbable and achievable steps, they must receive understandable feedback at each stage and their confidence must be built from experience. Attention to detail has been found to be essential at each stage for overall success (p. 126).

Sivan (2000) emphasised the importance of tutors and students talking together about peer assessment processes when they are set up, and Goldschmid and Goldschmid (1976) suggested that strong internal organisation and structure were essential to successful peer learning, which should also be integrated into the total learning experience of the student. They concluded:

It is difficult to imagine how all this can be accomplished without the full support and active involvement of the faculty. Peer teaching does not mean an abdication of the teacher's responsibility, but rather implies a new role for him (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976, p. 25).

Vygotsky (1978) talked about the importance of support and scaffolding from a more competent other, and my study suggests that however much the teacher desires to cede control to the students, it is control of the *learning* that can (or must) be ceded, not control of the structure. Most of the suggestions for improvement from the students—from the introduction of training and modelling, to monitoring the quality of the reviews, to introducing marks for reviewing, or ensuring discussion and feedback take place—require the teacher to play a part. Topping and Ehly (2001) found their dyadic peer assisted learning (PAL) process required teachers to take what they called a “managerial role” (p. 128) to maximise learning for students.

For all pairs some active monitoring and management of the PAL interaction by the teacher will be necessary. The teacher is likely to

need to engage in scaffolding, pedagogical engineering, and extension work for all to some extent (p. 128).

How much control of the process can be given to students and how much should be left in the hands of staff is not clear, however. One student in my study called for close monitoring to ensure the quality of the reviewing remained high:

I definitely think [tutors] need to upkeep the peer review and make sure it's being done, and to a fairly good standard, I guess, every couple of weeks.

Yet, active management by tutors—including checking on the quality of the peer reviews and providing feedback on the feedback—is potentially time-consuming for them. It may also not be the best way to encourage students to develop skills like self-reliance, confidence, problem solving ability, cooperation and adaptability (Sheridan Burns, 2004; R. Thomas, 2009).

The concept of fading of support (Collins et al., 1991), applied to peer assessment by Falchikov (2007) is relevant here. Students in my study asked for—and could be provided with—support and help at the start, but this support could be reduced over time. In addition, I would argue that the students in my study have demonstrated—through the thoughtfulness of their comments and the perspicacity of their suggestions—that they are capable of understanding the issues surrounding their own learning (or lack of it) and coming up with solutions to problems they encounter. The tutor's role should be to adequately design and plan the structure and prepare the students in terms of training and modelling, and then manage a process which includes the students in much of the decision-making (Boud, 1988). Earlier in this chapter I suggested that several studies advocated students being involved in setting peer assessment criteria, but perhaps the role of students in the process could be wider. Although some students in my study automatically looked to an authority figure (their tutors or AUT) to 'fix' problems (perhaps an automatic default to the traditional power-dependence model of teacher-student relationships (Heron, 1988)), I found that when given the chance to discuss the issues, they in fact recognised most of the challenges raised by experts in the literature, and most of the potential solutions. In fact they also raised several practical solutions—like using Facebook chat or Google Docs to allow interaction between students—that were not suggested in the studies I found. This indicates they might be well-placed for a more active role, for example setting their own standards around what is acceptable peer reviewing, and/or establishing a process for

discussing and resolving problems with their peers' reviews and with the process as a whole. This study revealed that to some extent students were already taking proactive steps to resolve problems. A good example is the Facebook page they set up independently when they found difficulties getting weekly peer review partners who could look at their stories in time for their deadlines. Other peer learning studies (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976; Topping & Ehly, 2001) indicate precedents for using students to monitor the performance of their peers, as well as provide feedback with respect to the instructional materials and learning environment. One possibility at AUT would be for the teacher to simply facilitate the process of students coming up with their own rules and guidelines, including setting up a framework that students can refer back to. In this model the teacher controls the framework, but not the discussion or the process.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter I discussed the key themes arising from my data with respect to my research questions and the available literature. I explored some of the issues around the benefits of peer review in terms of the students' acquisition of skills and understanding, including the finding that students see the benefits of reviewing and being reviewed as separate and different. I also looked at some of the challenges of peer review, including the importance of discussion and engagement. Finally I examined the role of the tutor, finding it critical to the success of the process. In Chapter 7, the final chapter, I provide an overview of the key findings and explore the implications of the study in terms of my own professional practice, both as a teacher and researcher, and the real and potential impact on the teaching of journalism at AUT University and further afield. I look at areas where this study may add value to the wider field of peer learning research, and evaluate limitations for the study. Finally, I make recommendations for further research.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

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7.1 Introduction

In this study I sought to capture the views of students and tutors about the benefits and challenges of the peer review system used by the News Reporting class at AUT's journalism programme in terms of students' acquisition of skills and understanding. A secondary aim of the study was to explore the role of the tutor in peer review. In order to explore participants' viewpoints, and also in order to triangulate the themes, I used mixed methods—questionnaires and collaborative group meetings—and two groups of participants: students and tutors. While the research was specific to a particular class in a particular school, and the living theory action research methodology focused on the ontological 'I' of the researcher and on modifying my own teaching practice, I nevertheless hoped that given the lack of research on peer learning in journalism education, there would be wider value.

7.2 Summary of key findings

It was significant that the themes which emerged from the data analysis were relatively homogenous across the data sources (tutors and students) and the collection methods (questionnaires and collaborative group meetings). In addition, participants in my study identified many of the same themes that were identified in the literature. These results strongly suggest that the benefits and challenges recognised in studies into peer learning in other disciplines are relevant to the peer review process at AUT and potentially to peer learning in journalism education more widely. Journalism students benefitted from the dyadic model of peer learning (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976), where they were able to be both 'teacher' and 'student'; indeed they identified different learning benefits from the two roles. In addition, as anticipated in Chapter 2, the study revealed areas where peer review was particularly relevant to journalism students; for example around preparation for a workplace where writing will almost inevitably be a key part of your job, where such writing is generally visible to the outside world, and where people are often expected to judge their peers' work.

On the other hand, it was concerning that participants in my study did not appear to achieve—or at least recognise—the wider learning benefits from peer learning found in other studies. R. Thomas (2009), in the key study which precipitated the introduction of peer review at AUT, advocated teaching and learning practices in New Zealand journalism education which would produce thoughtful, critical practitioners with a wide range of non-industry-specific skills. Neither students nor tutors in my study appeared to believe that peer review had produced many of these wider benefits.

Also concerning was the fact many students appeared to rely on their peers to pick up basic grammatical and punctuation mistakes in their stories; the sort of mistakes that might annoy tutors or editors. This traditional editing role was also identified by at least one tutor as being useful in helping produce “cleaner copy”. However an examination of the literature would suggest this type of surface, directive, “error eradication” feedback may not be effective in terms of producing learning benefits for students (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Faigley & Witte, 1981; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). One recommendation from this study is that the processes of peer editing (correcting another’s work) and of peer review (giving, receiving and discussing feedback) should be separated. While learning to edit another student’s work is considered an important skill for a future journalist, it is clear from this study that when students peer edit each other’s work during a peer review process, particularly if there is no dialogue between them, the reflective learning from the peer reviewing process is undermined.

Furthermore, a tentative indication from my study was that the unusually high failure rate among the 2013 journalism cohort at the style and grammar test might suggest peer learning actually made students less successful at learning grammar. However, any correlation between the two findings is far from being established in this study, and would be a useful field for further research.

The study confirmed findings from other research (Boud, 2000; Falchikov, 2005; Liu & Carless, 2006) that discussion plays a key role in peer assessment and that without the opportunity for discussion some of the benefits from peer learning are lost. Many of the challenges identified by participants in my study related to the lack of opportunity for student-to-student interaction around the feedback they provided each other. The study also revealed the importance of students being actively engaged in group discussion about the peer review process—and the learning involved—before, during, and after it takes place. This finding suggests that the most important learning for students from

peer review comes not from the process of reviewing each other's work using criteria from a peer review sheet. Instead, it comes from the process of engaging with each other around the giving and receiving of feedback on stories. A valuable peer review process appears to be one which stimulates discussion and allows students to reflect—with each other—on their practice and that of their classmates. Put another way, it appears from this study that a peer review process involving giving students a peer review sheet and instructions to fill it out each week for another student's story does not automatically produce learning. In fact, in a group of students with different abilities, there are risks arising from weaker students introducing errors or students ignoring other students' suggestions because they do not trust their feedback. However, a carefully structured and scaffolded process which brings students together (face-to-face or online) to discuss their stories and their learning does produce student learning at a deeper level.

Alongside this, the critical role of the tutor in scaffolding the peer review process emerged from the study. While the peer reviews take place outside the classroom, without direct teacher intervention, it appears that for students to receive maximum learning benefit, tutors need to provide a comprehensive framework in terms of preparation, training, and allocating time for review and reflection.

7.3 The contribution of this study

In this study I identified a lack of research into the use of peer learning in journalism education, and attempted to fill this gap. The study had implications for my practice as a teacher and researcher, but also had wider implications. I will consider some of these here.

7.3.1 Implications for my professional practice

The living theory action research approach developed by Whitehead and McNiff (2006) and the idea of "I-enquiry" (McNiff, 2013), emphasise the importance of the researcher and his or her quest for knowledge and improved practice.

If you feel you have developed your understanding of practice and possibly improved a situation, you would be entitled to say so, provided you can support that claim with validated evidence. Your right to make a claim to knowledge revolves around whether you feel you know something you did not know before and can validate that knowledge. The knowledge may not be new for someone else, but it is new knowledge for you. You are contributing to the wider body of

knowledge when you say, 'I understand my work better than I did before' (McNiff, 2013, p. 98).

This study has served to confirm my fundamental belief in the value of peer review as beneficial to learning; however ideas and issues emerged from the findings that will help improve my practice. There has, for example, been a shift in my understanding with regard to where the learning occurs for students when they do peer review. As discussed above, I initially saw the learning coming purely from the act of reviewing and being reviewed; I had not anticipated the role the actual study—or more specifically the imposition of discussion and reflection about peer review that was part of the study—played in the student learning. The views of the participants suggest that doing the peer reviews was indeed beneficial in terms of helping journalism students improve their news writing skills. However, it is significant that the thinking about their learning that came from answering the questionnaire and participating in the collaborative group meetings provided wider learning benefits.

The implications for my practice are important firstly in a practical sense—useful ideas emerged that I will test in my teaching to hopefully produce a more valuable peer review process. Equally interesting, however, is that the study has produced a shift in my understanding of my role as a teacher. For example, I have come to see that introducing peer review will not, of itself, produce learning for my students. Instead, my role in the process is as someone who scaffolds the learning, and provides a framework through which the students can understand and engage with the process and then actively reflect on, judge and advance both their own learning—and their understanding of their learning.

I am aware that validating this knowledge is not easy, but is important (McNiff, 2013); thus I have been careful at key points in the research, particularly during and just after the analysis of the data, to involve other members of the present and former journalism team as critical friends to scrutinise my data, reflect on my findings and agree (or not) that I have the right to make my claim to knowledge.

The second implication of this research for my professional practice is for me as a researcher. On this front, my personal gains in terms of knowledge and improved practice (McNiff, 2013) have been significant, including a better understanding of the issues arising from research design. For example, I appreciate the use of triangulation of both data sources and data collection methods in providing me with greater confidence

in my findings given the qualitative nature of the study. I also understand more clearly the advantages and disadvantages of different data collection methods. I discuss one issue that emerged from the use of collaborative group meetings in the limitations section below; however as an example of my personal learning around research design, this study made me recognise one disadvantage of the collaborative group meeting format—particularly with a larger group. This is that it is hard to gauge strength of feeling on a particular issue. Once someone hears their own view expressed, they often do not feel the need to mention that issue, so as a researcher you do not know whether other people have similar views.

Meanwhile, in terms of the use of questionnaires, in retrospect I have some sympathy with McNiff and Whitehead (2005) when they warn that they “are notoriously difficult to construct and should be used with caution” (p. 65); and that the data that emerges should be viewed “with a degree of scepticism” (p. 65). While my questionnaires produced interesting ideas about my participants’ perspectives of the benefits and challenges of peer review, I recognise the limitations, particularly in terms of Likert-type scale questions. In future research if I used Likert-type scales in a questionnaire I would follow this with one-on-one interviews, where I would be able to ask participants why they chose specific points on the scale.

7.3.2 Implications for practice at AUT

While I used an action research methodology, I was aware that my research formed only one, very exploratory, tip of one action research cycle in the spiral (Cardno, 2003), and that implementing and testing the findings from the study (Marrow, 1969) would be an important next step in this research. As discussed in Chapter 3, some of the main reasons for choosing action research as my methodology was that it was practical in nature, it involved change, it involved a cyclical and continuing process, and it was collaborative/participatory (Denscombe, 2010). I was in close contact with other members of the journalism teaching team throughout this research, in particular with the head of the News Reporting paper, Lyn Barnes; as mentioned in Chapter 3, some changes were made to the peer review process early in 2013, influenced by, although not part of, my study. Following the completion of data gathering and analysis in early 2014, Lyn Barnes and I made more significant changes to the peer review process, including making some changes to the background notes for students on the rationale behind peer review. I also went to AUT in week one of the News Reporting programme (before the peer review took place) and led an in-class discussion with students on the

learnings from those background notes. For the following week I provided writing tutors with background notes (see Appendix C) and an introductory lesson plan (see Appendix D). This latter included suggestions for stories tutors could use for a modelling exercise for students around giving feedback on other students' stories. It also included an exercise where tutors could work with their students make changes to the peer review sheet. Following discussion with me, Lyn Barnes also introduced changes to the way the peer review was conducted, to encourage the students to get together (online or face-to-face) to discuss the feedback they were giving and receiving. Moreover, there were changes made to the way marks were allocated for the peer review part of the course and there are plans for students to write a reflective essay on their learning from the peer review process during the semester, as well as having opportunities to provide feedback and discuss learning at the end of the paper. In the future I am keen not only to continue the cyclical change process (Cardno, 2003) through continuing evaluation and action as part of my own professional development, but also in collaboration with other AUT journalism staff members.

7.3.3 Implications for the New Zealand tertiary sector

If, as appears inevitable (Spronken-Smith et al., 2013), New Zealand tertiary institutions will over the next decade embark on a path of closing the gap between institutional rhetoric around graduate attributes and the reality of engagement with these attributes at an individual programme level, I believe peer learning and peer assessment should be looked at closely as part of the pedagogical mix. My research suggests a relatively strong level of correlation between the potential learning outcomes from peer review and the looked-for graduate attributes on the journalism programme. However, the relevance of my research may be wider. A comparison of graduate outcomes across a range of New Zealand tertiary institutions and programmes (Spronken-Smith et al., 2013) suggests a cross-over between disciplines in terms of common graduate attributes—for example, communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, autonomy and an active and reflective approach to learning. In this way the implications from my study for the use of peer learning/review as part of a teaching and learning mix may go beyond journalism and/or AUT University.

7.3.4 Implications for journalism education

The findings of the present study have confirmed the proposition put forward in Chapter 2 (but untested in previous literature) that the use of peer learning is as relevant, if not more relevant, to teaching journalism as to teaching in other disciplines. Journalism

students recognised benefits to their writing from the peer review process and were thoughtful about benefits they might receive in the future if the challenges they identified were resolved. Tutors saw increased reflection and thoughtfulness from their students, and commented on the way peer review might resolve some of the practical time and financial issues facing journalism education and the media industry. Findings from my preliminary study outlined in Chapter 1 and from a small number of published studies which mention the use of peer learning outside Australasia, reveal few New Zealand journalism schools are using peer learning—some have tried it but abandoned it as unsuccessful—but that it is an integral part of the curriculum in several Australian schools, and is used in some way elsewhere (Massé & Popovich, 2004, 2007; Peirce & Martinez, 2012). For journalism schools or educators advocating peer review/learning, my study provides some reinforcement for their choice and some practical ideas. For those who are not using it, my findings could provide theoretical underpinnings for the benefits of using peer review in journalism education, thoughts on how to implement a peer review process in a journalism programme, and ideas about the importance of discussion and of the critical role of tutors in preparing for and scaffolding the process.

In addition, this study has also raised one possible new, but potentially important finding specifically related to the use of peer learning in journalism education. I believe this study suggests there is the possibility for students and tutors to confuse the process of peer review (the giving of feedback on the stories), with the process of peer editing (the making of changes to the stories). The temptation for some reviewing students—particularly those short of time, or who see themselves moving into editing or sub-editing roles in the newsroom once they leave university—will be to *edit* their classmates' work. This temptation is all the more powerful because evidence from this study suggests their reviewees may particularly want them to do this. However this study, combined with evidence from the literature, suggests the peer editing process may be less effective in producing wider learning benefits for the reviewed students than the peer feedback/review process; it is even possible that it is detrimental to one important practical part of students' learning—the mastery of grammar and punctuation. While development of the sort of skills that can come from peer review should not come at the expense of the development of other professional skills, such as editing, this study suggests the two processes should be separated.

7.3.5 Implications for wider peer learning research

In terms of knowledge into peer learning, this study makes some contribution to the wider literature in that it provides further backing for findings around the benefits and challenges of peer review, the importance of discussion and the role of the teacher in the process. In addition it adds to a body of literature in a less well-researched field, dyadic peer review (Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976). One finding of potential interest is the idea that students see different benefits and challenges from peer review coming from the two distinct processes—reviewing and being reviewed. There are implications for practice in this, both in terms of preparing and motivating students, and also in terms of scaffolding the reflective, or debrief phase of the process to take into account the two areas of learning.

As discussed in Chapter 2, much research into peer assessment has focussed on summative assessment, students marking other students' work. However there are indications from other studies (Boud, 2000; Falchikov, 1986; Liu & Carless, 2006) that it is in the formative feedback area where students can have the most impact on each other's learning. This study provides more ammunition for the argument that the process of reviewing another's work, being reviewed in turn, and in particular discussing and reflecting on that feedback, provides at least as many learning benefits as the process of grading that work, if not more.

7.4 Limitations of the study

One possible perceived limitation of this study was that of sample size. While tutor participation was high in percentage terms, total numbers were small. This small sample size and the qualitative nature of the study means it is not possible to generalise from these findings or to easily replicate this study. However, in evaluating the impact of this limitation on this study, it is important to recognise that I was attempting to produce a depth of understanding, rather than statistical analysis or a generalisable result.

A second possible limitation arose from the fact that I did not use a random representative sampling model for the student participants in this study; instead students self-selected both for the questionnaires and for the collaborative group meetings. While in keeping with the collaborative intention behind the study, this self-selection meant participants were potentially more representative of those with strong views either for or against peer review. It also led to a situation where, for example, my student participant group for the collaborative group meetings was made up of 12 female students and only

one male student, which was not representative of the group as a whole. Moreover, as there was no control group in this study, this meant that it was not possible to compare the results from students using peer review against those from students not using peer review, for example. On the other hand, using a control group might have raised ethical considerations.

Another limitation, mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, arose from the student collaborative group meeting and stems principally from my inexperience as a researcher, plus reluctance on my part to stymie discussion by making participants identify themselves each time they spoke. This meant that when transcribing the second collaborative group meeting, which unexpectedly contained 11 students (as opposed to two in the first meeting) I found myself unable to identify individual voices. This was unfortunate when I came to analysing the data, particularly when combined with the fact that the questionnaires were anonymous. These two factors meant that I could not link comments made in the questionnaires and collaborative group meetings to individual participants. With the benefit of hindsight I might not have used anonymous questionnaires and would have established some system to identify participants. I would also reconsider my decision not to take demographic data from participants. While this was a deliberate attempt to avoid asking for intrusive personal details, it proved a disadvantage when it came to analysing students' comments. In particular, it might have been interesting to have been able to distinguish the views of male and female students, students who had experience of a work environment and those without that experience, and what ethnic background a student had. For example, other research (Sommer, 2000) suggests a person's cultural background plays a part in the seeking of feedback, and a small number of comments in my study suggested some cultural barriers to giving and receiving feedback with non-Pākehā students. However without identifying demographic data I could not pursue this potentially influential aspect.

7.5 Recommendations for further research

As I discussed in Chapter 1, one of the challenges of this research was fact that I found very few previous studies into peer learning in journalism education. However this research gap was also one of the exciting features. It also means that my study leads to a number of possibilities for future research. Some of the main ones are outlined below.

The most immediate idea for future research, given the circular/spiral nature of an action research methodology, is to do a similar study again (with some improvements to

the research design) with AUT journalism students, having introduced changes to the peer review model suggested by the findings from this research. The process, repeated over a number of cycles should produce a peer review model with more recognised benefits and fewer challenges.

The nature and quality of the feedback received in the peer review process emerged as a significant factor in this research and this leads to potentially useful areas for future research. Student participants in my study believed feedback from their peers on their news stories—including providing basic grammar and punctuation changes—was useful and potentially gave them insight into their writing. However we know from other studies (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) that some types of feedback are more useful than others in terms of producing learning. It would be interesting to examine the sort of peer review feedback given by AUT journalism students against, for example, Hattie and Timperley's (2007) feedback model. Further study in this area of useful and less useful feedback is particularly timely given the tentative question raised in this study about a possible link between students performing grammar/punctuation correction-type revisions to their classmates' work, particularly when this occurred without discussion, and a greater-than-normal failure rate in the course style and grammar test.

There would also be benefit in examining the role of factors such as number and type of comments in terms of the influences on successful improvement of the reviewed students' stories. Such research could take advantage of studies in other disciplines (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Faigley & Witte, 1981) examining the nature and value of peer revisions to written work, sometimes in comparison to expert, or teacher revisions.

It would be interesting to examine further the participants' view that their writing improved if they conscientiously participated in peer reviewing other students' work. Thomas, R (1999) introduced a self-regulated learning approach to a group of journalism students and compared the achievements of that group against an industry standard for news writing, as against students who were taught using the traditional approach. A study using a similar method to examine the results against the news writing standard for students who actively participated in the peer review process compared with those who were less conscientious would further understanding of the benefits of peer review for news writing.

While I am confident my study confirms the benefits of students discussing the feedback they give and receive, it is not clear whether there is an advantage of face-to-

face discussion over online feedback methods (or vice versa) and whether synchronous or asynchronous online discussions (or both) are more useful. Several students in my study liked the flexibility that was available using online peer reviews, and several suggestions were made as to possible online discussion options—Google Docs, Facebook chat or Skype, for example. The Taiwanese study into teacher professional development (Y. Chen, Chen, & Tsai, 2009) suggested several participants did not find online synchronous discussions as useful for information exchange as face-to-face discussions. However this result might be different for today's students, who are likely to be more familiar with communicating with each other online. A study examining students' views on the perceived benefits and challenges of face-to-face feedback discussions, versus various online options would provide useful practical information for students and tutors putting together peer review processes in the future.

As mentioned above, a study into the cultural barriers and/or motivational issues around peer review for students of Māori, Pacific Island or other cultural heritage could provide insight into how to make these potentially uncomfortable practices more beneficial and acceptable. This issue is of particular importance given the so-far largely unsuccessful attempts to encourage non-Pākehā students into New Zealand journalism—and New Zealand journalism schools ("Media's crucial role in promoting diversity," 2014, February; "Time to build Pacific voices in mainstream media," 2013, October).

Finally, the mechanics of the AUT peer review process, where students provide feedback every week for a period of 12 weeks, makes it a good model for a future study into the impact of repeated peer learning exercises over time; an area without extensive published research (Falchikov, 2003). While a study by Lew, Alwis and Schmidt (2010) found that their students' skill in *self*-assessment did not increase with time, research by Willey and Gardner (2009) came up with almost the opposite result with *peer* learning. Topping and Ehly (2001) suggested continued reciprocal use of peer student–helper pairs should move the benefits implicit in peer learning from the unconscious and surface level to the strategic and on to the deep level. It is possible therefore that repeated peer review exercises allow students to gradually gain an understanding of the learning process, not just what they have learnt (Heron, 1988). It would be interesting to examine this idea in more depth.

Chapter 8: Epilogue

As explained in the prologue to this study, I set out 18 months ago to find out more about some radically new (to me) ideas around the role of peers in teaching and learning. My particular focus became an exploration of the learning benefits and the pedagogical challenges of the use of peer review in journalism education at AUT University. At that time I did not expect to find my study a pioneer in this area—I was surprised that such a well-explored pedagogical idea appeared to be so under-researched in my discipline.

My research design was, from the beginning, firmly directed at one teaching and learning process, in one course, at one institution. My living theory action research methodology (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) was even more focussed—on the ontological ‘I’ of the researcher. Yet it was exciting to see the research potentially having wider relevance: to the education of journalists in the tumultuously changing world of the media in the 21st century, for example; or to the less tumultuous, yet equally profoundly changing world where graduate outcome-led curricula are beginning to supplant a focus on discipline-specific skills (Spronken-Smith et al., 2013).

However, in the same way that this study started with my own experience, so the most important benefits to come out of this research are for me. I have gained much understanding as a researcher; I have also gained much as a teacher. Still, I hope my increase in understanding may have some influence on the learning of others, as I hope this study will promote discussion and further actions—from me and others.

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Appendix A: Peer review sheet



NEWS REPORTING 2013: PEER REVIEW

(This is a two-part process)

PART ONE: Self evaluation *(To be filled in before submitting for peer editing)*

Once your weekly news stories are complete, you need to have them subbed by a peer editor. Choose a different person each week. This process should take 15-20 minutes.

Name:

Week:

1. Describe who you are writing for/who is your **reader**? What outlet (newspaper/online) have you written your news story for? How will you 'sell' your story? (Attach evidence of pitch to an editor)
2. Write a tweet, summing up what the story is about
3. How did you find your story? Where did you get the idea for it?
4. What did you find easy or hard about writing this story? That is, what have I learnt?
 - a. (Two things I did well)
 - b. (Two things I could do better)
 - c. (Two things that went well this week)

5. What news values are included?

Tick below

• Timelessness (news is now!)
• Meaning (easy to understand)
• Significance (how many affected?)
• Proximity (news is near)
• Unusual or odd (news is quirky)
• Human interest (warm fuzzies)
• People (politicians to celebs)
• Conflict/negativity (winners and losers)
• Continuity (ongoing story)

Based on Galtung & Ruge (1965) and Robie (2001)

CHECKLIST before peer-edit

Have you read your story aloud? Does it flow?

Does it makes sense? Easy to read? Simple words? Is interesting? Got all the facts?

Is my writing clear/direct/brief?

Does every word serve a purpose (no surplus words/no jargon?)

Simple facts/No unattributed opinion?

Checked for accuracy, grammar, style & punctuation

Added sources and contact details

Added evidence of story idea

Evidence of pitching the story for publication

PART TWO: Peer editing *(To be filled in and signed off by peer editor)*

Peer editing is about learning from other people making mistakes! It helps you to become more astute with your own writing.

(Have you edited this person’s work before? If so, they need to find someone else to do it this time.)

1. Who cares? Who would want to read this story?

Comment on the relevance to the target audience? (see Q1 on self-evaluation)

2. Does the story include all the necessary facts?

(who/what/when/where/why/how?)

Was there anything further you wanted to know as a reader after you had finished reading?

3. Is there evidence of research? What?

Is there anyone they could have talked to that would have added to the story?

4. Comment on how well it reads

Now, work through the article:

1. Intro

The intro tells the story; it is clear, concise, grammatical and draws the reader in	3
Intro tells the story but is not as clear, concise or grammatical as above	2
Intro is too wordy/ungrammatical/unclear/does not draw the reader in	1

Comments: (Why I gave this mark)

2. News writing

Paragraphs are short and contain active language; each sentence has one main idea only; no unnecessary clauses or phrase	3
News writing is basically sound but not as good as above	2
News writing could be improved considerably	1

Comments: (Why I gave this mark)

3. Content and structure

Story contains no obvious gaps in information, makes sense, shows evidence of thorough research and is structured logically	3
Story has gaps in information and/or research; structure could have been better	2
Story has several holes and much more work is needed	1

Comments: (Why I gave this mark)

4. Grammar, style & punctuation

Story has no more than two grammar, punctuation or common style errors	3
Story has three to five grammar, punctuation or common style errors	2
Story has six or more grammar, punctuation or common style errors	1

Main areas to work on:

Main areas where student is doing well:

5. Quotes

The quotes add impact to the story and have been used to their best advantage. Student has followed correct quoting style and punctuation	3
Quotes are adequate and used correctly, but could be more exciting/add more colour to the story	2
There is inadequate or very poor quoting	1

What have I learnt (for my own writing) from this peer review?

PEER EDITOR'S NAME (if printed, write clearly)

Week:

Date:

(Both parts of this peer review must be completed before your tutor sees your final story)

NOTE: Your tutor MUST see your finished story before it is sent to an editor.

Appendix B: Introductory material for students on peer review

(Copy of the PowerPoint presentation and questions sent to students before the peer review took place)

Peer review - Why exactly do we have to do that?

And will it really help me learn?

A quick summary of the literature by Nikki Mandow
nikki@goodcontent.co.nz

How we learn stuff



- Think about your own life. How did you learn to climb a tree or play backyard cricket? How did you find out about Facebook or the latest viral YouTube video, get the first whispered facts of life, or work out how to use a new computer programme. Maybe it was from a book or the internet, from your parents or teachers, but very likely at least some of these things you learnt from a friend or classmate.

“Humans, being social animals, learn with and from others from the moment of birth. Much of this learning is informal, particularly in the years when we are not engaged in formal education. During formal education, the teacher takes on an important role, particularly where the learning context is traditional. Peer learning, in which we learn with and from one another, may be less easily observed, but it is rarely absent.” ([Falchikov, 2007, p. 128](#))

This is how the wonderfully-named Wilbert James McKeachie, arguably one of the most influential educational psychologists ever (his book *Teaching Tips* is in its 14 edition was first published in the 1960s and the latest one just came out last year) wrote about the concept of peer learning:

“ The best answer to the question: What is the most effective method of teaching? Is that it depends on the goal, the student, the content, and the teacher. But the next best answer may be: Students teaching other students.” ([McKeachie et al., 1999, p. 159](#))

First, a bit of background in terms of research into how students learn:

In the 1970s Marton & Saljo ([1976](#)) “discovered” there were two approaches to learning: deep learning and surface learning. They found for any individual learning task, university students chose one of these two approaches. For many students, which they chose depended not on an innate deepness or superficiality, but on what their perceptions were of the task and of the expected outcomes from their teachers. So, if they saw the task required simple regurgitation of facts, for example, they just rote learnt stuff. But when the task “forced” them to think deeply, they did.

Time and again researchers find students using deep learning are better learners and do better at university and in the workplace.

So it is crucial for teachers and students to find teaching and learning strategies and activities which maximise effective (deep) learning and minimise ineffective (surface) learning ([Biggs, Tang, & Society for Research into Higher Education, 2011](#)).

BUT HOW??

What about learning via lectures?

I once heard lectures described as “a way to transfer information from the notes of the lecturer to the notebooks of the student without it passing through the brain of either”. Many researchers now believe lectures aren’t a particularly good way to encourage deep learning.

The theory is that students need to DO stuff to learn. Have a look at this You Tube video, from the University of Aarhus. The first part is enough, but the other two parts are interesting too:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMZA80XpP6Y>

Introducing peer learning

One day, Professor Eric Mazur, a well-regarded physics lecturer at Harvard University, discovered to his considerable chagrin that his students weren’t gaining much fundamental understanding of physics in his classes, though they were learning lots about how to pass physics exams.

His story – “Confessions of a converted lecturer”, which he tells in this You Tube video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwslBPj8GgI> – is about how he came to adopt what he calls “peer instruction” in his classes. It is very interesting, but also VERY LONG (over an hour). So while it’s well worth watching (he’s an entertaining speaker), you could just read the annotated version in this article – <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/tomorrows-college/lectures/rethinking-teaching.html> and watch this SMALL PORTION (ONLY WATCH from 33m40s to 35m40s) of Professor Mazur talking at a different conference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JEUstTQG0M>

Education for the rest of your life

ALSO... Remember the media environment these days is an exciting, but an uncertain world (Do you know what you are going to be doing in 10 years? Does the job you will be doing then even exist now?)

Researchers have started to understand that learning at university needs to prepare students for more than just (in your case) writing newspaper articles or producing TV bulletins etc.

For example, education should “help students to be ‘self-starters’, and to take more responsibility for their own learning, to be questioning and self-critical, to pool information and share tasks” ([Stephenson, 1989, p. 527](#)). Because that’s what they will need to be able to do in the workplace.

Journalists, in particular, need to be thoughtful practitioners in the workplace

Future reporters need to be active learners and critical and creative thinkers to ensure they are ready for the workplace.

- “In the reporting on ideas and events as they occur, journalism involves criticism, or the conferring of judgement on the shape of things... In writing a story that is at once ethical, accurate and attractive to the audience, journalists are held to high benchmarks of thinking.” ([Sheridan Burns, 2004, p. 6](#))
- The development of critical reflection is the key to training a good journalist, and so the job of a journalism education is to encourage critical reflection, in order to produce graduates with the sort of life skills – in particular self-reliance, confidence, problem solving, cooperation and adaptability – they will need in the workforce. ([Sheridan Burns, 2004](#)).

Criticism is all part of the job...

Journalists are reviewing each other’s work on a daily basis. Editing is a crucial part of the newsroom. Journalists’ stories are also under the wider spotlight from readers, listeners and viewers – and they won’t hesitate to tell you if they don’t like something. Feedback is a big part of the job, but it isn’t always easy.

As one News Reporting student put it in 2013:

“You are in the wrong profession if you can’t take any form of objective criticism. I say embrace the cactus now and I’ll be resilient when I hit the rat race.”

There is now quite a significant body of research which says that both self-reflection and peer-assisted learning (the two parts of AUT's peer review process) help with the two areas discussed above: encouraging deep learning; and helping students develop the life skills they are going to need when they leave university.

“Preparing students for lifelong learning necessarily involves preparing them for the tasks of making complex judgements about their own work and that of others and for making decisions in the uncertain and unpredictable circumstances in which they will find themselves in the future... One of the items typically omitted from lists of key skills required by graduates is that of developing the capacity to be an assessor of learning... Graduates in the workforce will not in general be taking examinations or writing academic essays. They will be puzzling over what counts as good work and how they will be able to discern whether they are producing it. ([Boud & Falchikov, 2006, pp. 402-403](#))

(Stuff by either David Boud or Nancy Falchikov (or both) is a good start if you are interested in finding out more about peer learning. For example, Boud's book *Peer learning in higher education : learning from & with each other* is in AUT's main campus library at 378.1794 PEE)

What is peer learning?

- “Peer learning refers to the use of teaching and learning strategies in which students learn with and from each other without the immediate intervention of a teacher.” ([Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999](#))
- Boud & Cohen particularly like what they call “reciprocal peer learning”, where “students within a given cohort act as both teachers and learners” and both benefit in terms of their learning.

Benefits to the “reviewed” student:

- “There is considerable research evidence to show that effective feedback leads to learning gains.” ([Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006](#))
- Several studies show that students who have just learned something are often better at explaining it to their classmates than their teachers are (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).
- Moreover, some students say they prefer to receive feedback from peers, rather than teachers ([D. A. Cole, 1991](#)); feedback from teachers was seen as authoritative but ill-explained; some students believed peers gave richer feedback that was open to negotiation.
- It would be great to have a journalism tutor available 24/7 (or even 0.5/7) to discuss your stories, but that isn’t normally possible. The great thing about your peers is that they are a) more numerous and b) more available than your tutors.

“A student's colleagues often represent the least recognized, least used and possibly the most important of all the resources available to him.”

[MacKenzie, Eraut, & Jones, 1970, p. 125](#)

Benefit for the “reviewer”

Personal experience (25 years as a writer and editor) tells me that it is much easier to pick up errors, omissions, inaccuracies or structural problems in someone else’s work than in my own (which is obviously always perfect!) But once I have picked up a problem in someone else’s work, I am more likely to see it in my own work too.

It’s easier to learn from teaching and discussing than it is from being taught



- What I hear, I forget
- What I see, I remember
- What I experience, I understand
- What I hear, see, and ask questions about or discuss with someone else, and do, I acquire knowledge and skills [about]
- What I teach to others, I master

Mel Silberman’s “Active learning credo” (1996), adapted from Confucius, China’s most famous teacher and philosopher (551-479BC)

Or to put it another way...

“For all participants, they might never have truly grasped a concept until they had to explain it to another, embodying and crystallizing thought into language ([Topping & Ehly, 2001](#))

Interestingly, last year’s students started off thinking they would benefit most from having their work reviewed by others. They ended up thinking they got most benefit from reviewing others’ stories.

Now to your bit...

Answer these questions

- What do you think will be most beneficial to you in terms of using peer review this year – and why?
- What are you most concerned about – and why?
- Look at last year's peer review sheet. Which two areas do you think will be most relevant for *your own* learning and /or *your own* writing. Which do you think will be least relevant?

- **SEND THE ANSWERS TO Nikki Mandow:**

nikki@goodcontent.co.nz

By the end of the day Thurs 27 February

She will be discussing peer review, and in particular your feedback, at the first tutorial (Tues 4 March)

Appendix C: Backgrounder for News Reporting tutors

Copy of a PowerPoint presentation sent to tutors

Peer review - Why exactly do students do that?

And will it really help them learn?

A quick summary of some literature and some findings from my 2013 research.

How we learn stuff



- Think about your own life. How did you learn to climb a tree or play backyard cricket? How did you find out about Facebook or the latest viral YouTube video, get the first whispered facts of life, or work out how to use a new computer programme. Maybe it was from a book or the internet, from your parents or teachers, but very likely at least some of these things you learnt from a friend or classmate.

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Background: A couple of YouTube videos on how students learn

The students look at these as part of their background on peer learning. Possibly a bit grandmother and sucking eggs, but I found them interesting.

This one is about deep and surface learning (Marton & Saljo stuff) and constructive alignment (John Biggs) - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMZA80XpP6Y>. It's quite entertaining too – watch parts 2 and 3 if you are interested.

This is Harvard physics professor Eric Mazur's story – “Confessions of a converted lecturer”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwsIBPj8GgI>. He talks about how he came to adopt what he calls “peer instruction” in his classes. It is interesting, but over an hour long. So while it's worth watching if you are interested (he's an entertaining speaker), you could just read the annotated version in this article – <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/tomorrows-college/lectures/rethinking-teaching.html> and watch this small portion (from 33m40s to 35m40s) of Professor Mazur talking at a different conference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JEUstTQG0M>

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Interestingly, last year's students started off thinking they would benefit most from having their work reviewed by others. They ended up thinking they got most benefit from reviewing others' stories.

This stems partly from perceived challenges with the peer review system...

Challenges to peer review identified by students in 2013 – and questions for us as tutors

- Students were (increasingly) slack/lazy/too busy etc (this was the biggest gripe). How can we motivate students to see the benefits and ensure it doesn't become a tick-the-box exercise?
- Students were too nice. How can we get help them be more (constructively) critical?
- Quality of the peer reviews. How can we help students? Training/modelling early on? Feedback on their feedback? Do students understand that they won't be perfect to start, but that getting better at giving and receiving feedback is part of their learning – and the skill will be v useful in the workplace?
- Discussion is important but doesn't always happen. How can we adjust the system so that students have the opportunity to talk to each other about their feedback – in person or online?
- The system was clunky. Can it be refined?
- OVERALL: How can we get students to take responsibility for challenges they find and come up with solutions that will enhance their learning from the exercise?

Feedback v editing

- Fact one: Students wanted their peer reviewer to correct their grammar before their stories went to their tutor, so they didn't get growled at
- Fact two: Student standards of style and grammar were lower than normal in 2013, as measured by the S&G test

Are these two things linked? Who knows. BUT... it makes sense that if students are blindly getting grammar and punctuation mistakes corrected by their peers, they may not be actually learning the basic rules themselves.

So... It is important students understand the difference between editing (correcting mistakes for the other student) and feedback (helping them learn it for themselves). They won't necessarily like it, but it's important!

NOTE: This research about feedback is interesting (next slide). How can we encourage students to give useful (rather than not useful) feedback?

Also, can we put together a pool of resources on grammar (on-line apostrophe exercises, quotation style exercises etc) that students can direct each other to when they recognise mistakes - instead of making the changes?

Not all feedback is equal (in terms of its usefulness)

Hattie & Timperley (2007) describe four types of feedback – some effective, some ineffective in terms of helping learning.

1. **Feedback directed at the person/the "self" (FS).** For example: "You are a really good writer" or "That's a great story, well done".

FS is the easiest feedback, but **pretty damn useless** in terms of helping either reviewer or reviewed with their future learning

2. **Feedback about the task or product (FT).** For example, "You've missed a full stop out here." Or "It's *Albert Einstein*, not *Fredrick*, isn't it?"

FT feedback is **kind of useful** when it comes to learning, but often doesn't help the student not make the same mistake next time

3. **Feedback aimed at the process used to create a product or complete a task (FP).** For example "You probably need to have a look at the AUT Style Book and check the way you have to write dates". Or "Does the story follow the inverted pyramid structure? It seems to me that some of the best information is quite far down your story."

FP is **great** feedback, as it doesn't just tell the reviewed student what is wrong, but allows them to work out how to improve next time

4. **Feedback focused at the self-regulation level (FR) – ie aimed at increasing a student's confidence in their ability.** For example, "The way you structure your quotes in this part of the story shows you know how to do it. Could you do the same with this quote here?" Or "The tweet for your story is great, it shows you really get the crux of what you are writing about. It might be worth checking if the early part of the story really backs up what you say in the tweet."

FR is **great feedback** too, but not that easy to give!

Practical issues raised by students

- Online or face-to-face (or both?)
- How to encourage discussion but also have the ease of being able to do reviews from home (FB chat? Google docs? An interactive online editing programme?)
- Could there be a time set aside when students are encouraged to gather in the newsroom and work on their stories. This would create a pool of available students to do peer review. A logical time might be Monday afternoon after the lecture. Students could come and go depending on their other lectures/commitments
- Ask for a volunteer to set up some kind of online forum (FB page?) where students can find classmates to peer review their stories

Practical timeline for News Reporting 2014

- **Week 0** – Lyn to email peer review backgrounder for students. Get them to think about potential benefits and challenges and email replies to Nikki
- **Week 1** – Nikki discusses student answers (in particular re challenges) with them in tutorial.
 - Students complete first peer review using 2013 peer review sheet
- **Week 2 tutorial** – Writing tutors talk with students about issues that arose during first peer review
 - Writing tutors work with their groups on peer review training/ modelling exercise using old news stories. Pairs then wider group?
 - Students (with tutor scaffolding) discuss and put together group peer review sheet
 - Tutors identify a couple of points from the peer review sheet they can use as a weekly check to ensure students are completing peer reviews effectively
- **Week 5 tutorial** – Students (with tutor scaffolding) review how the peer review is going and come up with solutions to any challenges. This includes rekindling discussion on good and bad ways of giving feedback. Are students being critical enough?
 - Students asked to adapt the group peer review sheet to make it more relevant for their own learning. Each student will use this adapted sheet for all remaining peer reviews.
 - Students submit a 500-word reflective essay on why they made the changes (minimum 3 changes) they have, in terms of what they have learnt about their own writing. This essay is marked as part of their portfolio (6 marks)

Appendix D: Draft lesson plan

Draft lesson plan for peer review part of second news reporting tutorial

Tues 11 March 2014

It would be good, if possible, for this segment of the tutorial to involve all the writing tutors as well as the main news reporting tutors. This would give them the opportunity to think (along with their students) about the benefits and challenges of peer review, but also about giving feedback versus editing etc.

It would also be good for the students to be in smaller groups (each led by a tutor) doing the modelling exercise and discussing the format for the peer review sheet, as more students will be involved in discussion that way. In terms of the peer review sheet, you could decide whether each smaller group has its own version of the peer review sheet, or whether the smaller groups feed into a bigger group to put together a peer review sheet for the whole class.

Lesson plan

Part 1) Brief backgrounder

- Students discuss their experience with peer review over the past week (their first story)
- Tutors reinforce important issues around giving feedback

Eg. Beefburger feedback – positive comment (the bun), then constructively critical (the burger in the middle), then positive again. Discuss that one of the issues last year was people being too nice, which doesn't provide maximum learning

Also discuss the four different types of feedback (Hattie and Timperley from the backgrounder PPT – they will have seen this too). Could even give this out as a handout for students

- Remind them that peer review is about coming up with ideas/feedback on how the story could be improved. They are not editing/making the changes for the other student (however much the other student might want them to!). Could mention about the 2013 S&G test results, and how just making grammar changes for other students didn't help anyone. Talk about (online? other?) resources available to students in terms of improving S&G

- Talk about how this is a work in progress. Peer review can be hard and a bit scary at first and they won't be perfect at it at the beginning. However it will get easier and they will get better at it. And being able to give and receive constructive feedback is a great skill to have in a newsroom or other workplace.
- Talk about the fact that if they don't agree with the other student's feedback, that's OK. They can discuss it, or ask another student. That's all part of the learning. In fact, peer learning guru Falchikov is big on constructive conflict being a great learning tool!

Lastly, brainstorm ideas about what sort of thing students can be looking for when they are looking at a classmate's story – eg :

- Is it the most interesting angle? Is it the angle you would rush home and tell the family about?
- Is the structure clear and easy to follow?
- Is there info missed out that is making it hard to understand what's happening
- Is it written in "normal" language? Would you really talk like that?
- Are some parts unnecessary/waffly/wordy
- Is all the background there?
- Is there opinion?
- Style and grammar (but that's not the most important part!)
- Etc etc

Part 2) Modelling exercise

Take some or all of the stories attached. (They are all early stories from 2013 news reporting). One idea would be to give each story out to a pair or small group of students to have a look at for a few minutes, using the brainstormed criteria above. Then come together, put each story up on the board, and discuss each story, with someone from each pair leading the discussion on what they found.

Part 3) Designing the peer review sheet.

Using the 2013 sheet as a starter, if you want, students come up with a shorter (2-3 pages max) peer review process. Discussion should focus on what criteria should be used, but also on the practicalities of the process. Eg

- Online or face-to-face (or both?)
- How to encourage students to discuss the feedback but also have the ease of being able to do reviews from home (FB chat? Google docs? An interactive online editing programme?)

- Could there be a time set aside when students are encouraged to gather in the newsroom and work on their stories? This would create a pool of available students to do peer review. A logical time might be Monday afternoon after the lecture. Students could come and go depending on their other lectures/commitments?
- Ask for a volunteer to set up some kind of online forum (FB page?) where students can find classmates to peer review their stories

Talk about the fact there will be a chance to review the peer review process in week 5 (what's working, what isn't and what can they do about it). At that time they will be expected to personalise the peer review criteria to reflect their own strengths, weakness and learning, and write a reflective essay. This will be submitted at that time, but will be marked as part of the portfolio.

[Examples for modelling\Labtests.docx](#)

[Examples for modelling\Shortland St coffin.docx](#)

[Examples for modelling\Low Cost Housing.docx](#)

[Examples for modelling\Wheelchair rugby.docx](#)

1) Are there any changes you would like to see to AUT's journalism peer feedback system? If so, what are they?

2) Any other comments?

Please return this questionnaire to my supervisor—dean.nugent@aut.ac.nz. He will give me your answers, but NOT your name or any contact details

**MANY MANY THANKS FOR YOUR TIME AND ALL THE
BEST FOR YOUR INTERNSHIPS AND THE SECOND
SEMESTER,**

Nikki

Appendix F: Tutor questionnaire



16 November 2012

How does the peer review model in journalism education assist in students' acquisition of skills and understanding?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR AUT UNIVERSITY NEWS REPORTING TUTORS

This questionnaire aims to explore your experience of AUT's peer review system and your thoughts about ideas arising from current research literature around peer review.

Please complete the survey and return to me: nikki@goodcontent.co.nz or for anonymity, please return to my supervisor: dean.nugent@aut.ac.nz. If you have any questions about the survey, don't hesitate to call me: 021 174 3142.

- 1) What do you see as the main benefits of AUT's journalism peer review system for students in terms of their acquisition of skills and understanding?

- 2) Are there other benefits? (If so, what are they?)

- 3) What are the main challenges of the journalism peer review system?

1) Are there any changes you would like to see to AUT's journalism peer feedback system? If so, what are they?

2) Current research suggests some potential benefits from peer editing, both for the "reviewed" student and the "reviewer". Which of the following benefits do you think are provided by AUT's journalism peer feedback system. (Please answer by UNDERLINING the answer you consider most appropriate.)

a) Increases students' news writing skills

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

b) Prepares students to work in a newsroom

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

c) Prepares students for a rapidly-changing work environment

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

d) Gives students wider graduate attributes – eg. ability to be lifelong learners, self-confidence, ability to communicate and collaborate, critical evaluation skills

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

e) Moves students from superficial to deep learning

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

3) Current research also suggests other aspects which can impact on the experience of peer review. Please rate how you see their potential relevance/importance for AUT's journalism peer review system. (Please answer by UNDERLINING the response you consider most appropriate.)

a) Discussing with students the rationale behind peer feedback

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

b) Discussing with tutors the rationale behind peer feedback

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

c) Providing students with training on how to give and receive feedback

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

a) Providing tutors with training on how use student feedback to heighten student learning

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

b) Feeding back to the reviewer on the quality of their reviewing

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

c) Using exemplars to illustrate good feedback

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

d) Assessing students on their feedback/allocating some marks for their provision of feedback

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

1) International studies also suggest different ways of setting feedback criteria. Thinking about the benefits for AUT news writing students, please rank the following in terms of producing benefits for AUT news writing students. (1 being your first choice, to 6 being your last)

Tutors set the group feedback criteria (as at present with the journalism peer review sheet)

Students work with tutors to set the group feedback criteria

Students set the feedback criteria for the group without input from the tutor

Students set individual/personal feedback criteria with tutor involvement

Students set individual/personal feedback criteria without tutor involvement

Feedback criteria is modified as the semester progresses and students' knowledge and understanding changes

1) Current research reveals challenges for tertiary institutions when they instigate peer review processes. Some are listed below. Thinking about AUT's journalism peer review process, please indicate how important a challenge the following potential problems are. (Please answer by UNDERLINING the most appropriate response.)

a) Many students do not provide good quality feedback

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

b) Students don't give themselves time to give and receive good quality feedback

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

c) Most students have a "tick-the-box" attitude to the journalism peer review process

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

d) Students feel uncomfortable criticising friends'/classmates' news stories

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

e) Some tutors are unenthusiastic or uncomfortable about the journalism peer review process

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

f) Students question the authority/competence of their peers to give feedback

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

g) Students think editing is the tutor's job

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

h) Students think peer editing is not worth doing if there are no marks attached

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

i) Some students do lots of "reviewing" (ie are often called on to be the peer reviewer); others do none or very little

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

j) Students worry about a discrepancy between peer and tutor comments

Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

k) The peer review process is too time consuming for students

a) Setting up the peer review process is too time consuming for tutors
 Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

b) Students do not receive enough training in how to give and receive feedback
 Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

c) Tutors do not receive enough training in the benefits of peer review for student learning
 Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

d) Students do not receive enough feedback on the quality of their journalism peer reviewing
 Very important Important Neutral Unimportant Very unimportant Don't know

9) Peer feedback should be integrated more widely into the journalism curriculum, for example, group presentations, journalism law and ethics, Te Waha Nui etc

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

10) Please add any other comments

MANY MANY THANKS FOR YOUR TIME,

Nikki