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TE REO POHEWA: ENGAGING PRIMARY-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN WRITING POETRY

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Abstract

Prior to the March, 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in New Zealand I was invited to offer professional development on ways that the writing of poetry could be facilitated in a Rotorua primary school. In March/April of that year, I engaged around 18 teachers (including the school principal) in four, two-hour PD sessions using Zoom. A year on, in May 2021, I conducted a small-scale case study with teachers who had participated in all four of these sessions to find out what they had taken away from this PD. In part for my own instruction, I was interested in what “stuck” and what they saw as working in their classrooms. This article offers a brief overview of the shape of the PD that was offered and teachers’ views on its impact one year on.

Keywords

Writing; poetry; workshop; teacher development

Introduction

Mad Poets Rotorua is a group of enthusiasts that has met weekly since 1994 to share poems members have written themselves (typically in response to a suggested theme) or found and enjoyed (Locke, 2018). The group also has a proud record of publishing local poetry, including the poetry of young people, and at the end of 2019 resolved to encourage young people in Rotorua to submit to a collection that would be published in 2020 with myself as editor. At this time, COVID-19 was still a rough beast slouching towards Wuhan to be born.

In the course of my contacting Rotorua schools to gain support for the project, I was invited by the principal of a local primary school to conduct four, two-hour evening professional development sessions on the teaching of poetry in primary schools. This was a first for me, even though I am a published poet and have conducted many creative writing workshops for adults and writing workshops for teachers (e.g., Locke, 2015b). I was excited by the prospect, especially when the principal informed me that 18 teachers (including herself) would be participating. I was also intrigued. There is widespread avoidance of engaging with poetry as a form of writing in both primary and secondary schools (O’Neill, 2006) in New Zealand. In addition, in my own experience, “many teachers are crippled with uncertainty in relation to *what* features of poetry warrant comment” and *how* they might be spoken about and evaluated (Locke, 2013, p. 24).

Then COVID struck, Aotearoa went into lockdown, and a decision was made that the professional development would be conducted via Zoom.

In the first part of this article, I offer a succinct overview of the four sessions and reflect on some of the affordances associated with the Zoom platform. I then share the findings of a small case study I conducted one year on from the PD—in May, 2021—where I asked six of the original participants to share with me their views on the experience, its impact on them as writers, and what changes they made in their classroom practice (if any). I conclude with a number of reflections on these findings and on the status/plight of the writing of poetry in our primary schools.

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Teaching and writing poetry in four sessions

My approach to these four sessions was consistent with work I had done with teachers who participated in research investigating the implementation of writing workshops with New Zealand teachers based on a model of professional development pioneered in the US (Locke et al., 2013). The approach was characterised by a number of principles:

1. to teach writing, you need to be able to write;
2. students should respond to each other's writing;
3. the teacher should act as writer alongside the students, and be prepared to undertake the same assignments as the students;
4. there is research about the teaching of writing that needs to be considered and applied, where appropriate, in the classroom;
5. teachers can be their own researchers in the classroom;
6. the best teacher of writing teachers is another writing teacher; and
7. various stages of the writing process need to be mapped and practised: these include pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, conferencing (see no 2 above) and publishing. (Andrews, 2008, p. 8)

There were also other assumptions at work as I planned the programme represented in Table 1. I expected teachers to be anxious about their own identities as writers. In fact, my own experience and research indicated that teachers were reluctant to assume the identity of writer, regardless of how well they wrote and/or taught writing (Locke, 2019). For this reason, the question of writing anxiety and its causality was addressed early in session 1. A second assumption, related to the first, was that teachers were likely to feel anxious about sharing their writing with a peer. For this reason, since teachers were expected to respond to each other's writing in response groups of 3–4, the protocols for response were carefully articulated in the first session (see Locke, 2015a, pp. 144–149). A third assumption was that in general teachers don't know *what to say* in response to a person's writing, typically because they have never had effective responses modelled to them (Locke, 2013). Fourthly, then, I assumed that teachers needed to be equipped with a "metalanguage" to talk about poetry as a form. Lastly, I assumed that it was likely that their prior classroom experience of poetry as a form would have been negative, for example, by virtue of teachers' tendency to focus on "error" in the revision process, their lack of a poetic metalanguage and sometimes their sheer lack of interest in the pupil's ideas.ⁱ

Table 1 will give readers a sense of how these principles and assumptions were realised in a programme.ⁱⁱ It will be seen that teachers were guided into writing five poetic texts during the sessions themselves (and sometimes at home) and that there were five separate response groups that took place during session time. For response groups, we used Zoom break-out rooms, enabling me to "move" easily from group to group and for teachers to share their drafts via the "share screen" facility. I used a series of PowerPoint slides to present a sequence of topics related to writing and poetry in particular. These presentations enabled me to introduce a basic metalinguistic vocabulary (i.e., a language to talk about various aspects of poetry, such as diction (imagery, sound devices, figurative language), syntax, rhythm, structure, voice, tone and so on. I also modelled task design, i.e., the development of a "brief" for establishing a writing task, and addressed the use of rubrics for assessing poetry (see Locke, 2013)

Four Sessions: Structure

Session One

Introductions.
 PD overview.
 Addressing the issue of writing anxiety, with a particular focus on poetry.
 Poetry writing apprehension survey.
 Some definitions of poetry.
 Thinking about response and feedback.
 Protocols (kawa) for our work in response groups/pairings.
 Pre-writing: A focus on concrete language.
In class writing: A close-up on place.
 First feedback session.
 Homework: Pre-writing exercise: Ways we might approach the topic of “I am from ...”
 Developing a brief.

Session Two

Session overview.
 Group sharing: Homework from last session.
 Poetry and form: The importance of maximising choice.
 Voice, persona and point of view.
 Individual task: Modifying brief on the basis of possibilities for point of view.
 The connection between point of view and audience.
 Tone and language: Why are images central to this?
 Making decisions about my “I am from ...” poem.
In class writing: “I am from” poem.
 Second feedback session.
 Reflections on second feedback session.

Session Three

Session overview.
 Poetry and form.
 Developing ideas with the help of formulas.
In class writing: Quick writing to a formula.
 Third feedback session.
 From literal to figurative.
 A focus on the person: Pre-writing.
In class writing: Addressing a person in a poem.
 Fourth feedback session.
 Homework: Language and sound exercise.

Session Four

Session overview.
 Group sharing: Homework from last session.
 Rhythm in poetry.
 Poetry and notation: Thinking of the page as a space.
 Types of poetry with a focus on the ballad.
 Listen to Sharon Olds: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4en5YkXyuc>

In class writing: Fast ballad with intuitive line-breaks.
 Fifth feedback session.
 Thoughts on poetry and structure.
 Revision and revisioning.
 Revisit fast ballad poem.
 Evaluating poetry (and any other kind of writing): The pros and cons of rubrics.
 Group sharing: Critique a rubric.
 Group sharing: Concluding thoughts.

The teacher as writer of poetry

The six participants were an experienced group of teachers, as the table below indicates:

Table 2: Participants.ⁱⁱⁱ

| Teacher | Years teaching | Country of origin |
|-----------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Michael | 10 | Ireland |
| Christine | 8 | Aotearoa |
| Hazel | 22 | Aotearoa |
| Sandy | 32 (16 as a principal) | England |
| Rachel | 31 | Aotearoa |
| Amber | 17 | England |

Christine and Sandy had never written a poem, with the latter indicating that she “actively avoided poetry. ... I think that probably, somewhere, I’ve been taught poetry very badly at school, and it’s put me off forever”. Hazel remembered writing haikus in her primary school “somewhere in the dim past”, while Amber recalled writing a poem when her grandfather died when she was a 15-year-old secondary student. It was her one and only poem. Rachel didn’t write poetry except to model certain features when modelling to her pupils what they “needed to learn”. In stark contrast to the others, Michael recalled an interest in poetry stemming from his earlier life in Dublin where he was well acquainted with the poetry scene. This was a time (“at least 20 years ago”) when he wrote poetry regularly for personal pleasure.

On a scale of 0–10, with 10 indicating very confident in writing poetry, only one participant gave themselves a number more than five (unsurprisingly, Michael at 8) prior to the PD. As mentioned previously, the PD involved participants writing poems and sharing them with colleagues in response groups. As it turned out, their experiences were hugely varied.

At one extreme, Michael loved re-experiencing the intrinsic pleasure of writing, where he found himself connecting back to and reflecting on various memories which led to a series of “interconnected” poems.

For Michael and Rachel, an aid in confidence was the availability of scaffolding (in the form of PowerPoint slides and handouts) to provide ideas for revision.

I just wrote literally what came into my head to start with, and then started tweaking it around, so I think that a lot of the prompts that you gave us kind of inspired me into where I was going for my first rough draft. (Michael)

For Amber, having the slides in advance meant that she had more “thinking time” for what was sometimes a situation of writing under pressure (a kind of flipped learning).

Both Rachel and Amber found themselves having a deepened appreciation of difficulties their own students might experience regarding the writing process. For Rachel in particular, being expected to

write and share a poem was a reminder of her own struggle to identify as a writer: “I wouldn’t say that it’s something I find easy or comes naturally.” This is despite the fact that “my writing *has* developed ... that my children in my class love writing. I’ve got data that says that their favourite subject is writing.”

Sharing poems in the context of a response group

All teachers rated the sharing of writing in a small response group at seven or higher on a 10-point Likert scale as contributing to a climate of trust and cooperation, finding it a valuable and (mostly) enjoyable experience.

A key reason was the reciprocity involved in sharing a poem with others, and responding to others’ poems in return, i.e., connection with another person via *what* was being shared. As Hazel said,

I enjoyed it because we got to share a piece of ourselves or an experience that we’d had, and then we could hear other people’s experiences as well ... you might connect to that experience, and it helps you understand them as a person as well ...

I can remember Michael wrote a poem about his dad. ... It was really interesting to hear, and the way that he’d written it ... the perspective that he had or how he felt, his love, his feeling for his dad came through in what he chose to showcase.

Michael referred to “the personal insight for people that you get”, and after a moment’s hesitation suggested that this was “the function of poetry”.

Like others, Sandy experienced a degree of apprehension at the commencement of the PD, drawing attention to the vulnerability which accompanies the sharing of personal writing.

I found it really hard, and I think it’s because you’ve got to be open and to be vulnerable to write really good poetry ... to be a really good writer actually. ... You learnt more about people’s stories by them doing that sort of work ... and who they are, and what they value, more than you would from any piece of writing, probably because poetry kind of distils things down more intensely.

Of all the participants, Sandy was the one to highlight the importance of the experience of sharing through poetry to the lockdown context:

The PD came at a time when we’d all been separated through the biggest trauma of our lives probably, being locked down by Covid. We were all separated in our own homes. I was living on my own. Lots of other people living on their own. The weekly PD was actually the only time a lot of us got to see each other in that time. And then on top of that, and it was in the evening, when a lot of us were feeling a bit odd because we were on our own in lockdown ... but then also seeing each other in their houses, and people doing things like the “I am ...” poetry which was really opening into them—it all sort of came together at a really intense and vulnerable time for all of us. And I think it was perfect timing accidentally.

As someone who struggled to identify as a writer, Rachel brought her own particular lens to the experience of seeing and hearing colleagues share their drafts: “... there was a bit of wonder and awe that those people could come up with such amazing things when I don’t see them in that light.” For her, the experience consolidated her belief that she *wasn’t* a writer. “I *did* feel, and still *do* feel, that I’m not the writer they are. I don’t have that skill.”

Hazel, Sandy and Amber in different ways commented on the challenges and rewards of receiving feedback from others on and subsequently improving a draft. Hazel “... found that kind of small group and sharing really valuable as far as giving each other positive ideas about how we could make it sound better than it already did”. Amber noted:

The first time you do it it's very nerve-racking, then ... but the benefit of having the same group and you develop a relationship over time ... so that you can get straight down to the work, and it's supportive, and you *do* get that team of writers.

Like Amber, Sandy commented on initial nerves. "I think after the first couple of edits-through, when I realised that no one was going to say, 'Oh, that's not really that good', I felt braver to go and re-edit." She'd spend a few days ruminating before changing a particular word. "And then I felt really confident to share that with the other people in my little tutorial group and say, 'What do you think of this?' and they would give me some really good, critical feedback." Like Amber, she valued the sense of being a part of a team. Christine drew attention to the way the feedback protocols didn't oblige participants to adopt suggested changes.

But a lot of the ideas that they gave me made me see it from another point of view, and so long as you're open then I found that I was able to edit and ... it made it actually really better.

For her, the experience of having received and acted on feedback herself enhanced her ability "to empathise with exactly how they were feeling [receiving feedback] and ... negate some of these feelings because I'd felt them myself". Even Rachel found the group comments helpful and appreciative: "They said what they liked. They said what I could possibly do. I think it was quite robust."

In various ways, some participants felt upskilled by the response group experience. Amber talked in terms of what some scholars refer to as "think-aloud protocols".

When people make their thinking visible and talk about how they were deliberate in their choices and why, that sort of upskilled me a lot more. ... I learnt so much more from how different people had applied the tools than just by myself. That was the rich experience that I would never have expected before then.

She also identified a growing confidence in the use of metalanguage—"particular devices, and knowledge about metrical verse, assonance and alliteration ... all sorts of aspects"—noting that this enabled her to be more deliberate in her use of metalanguage with her pupils. Hazel commented that she would have liked the focus on metalanguage to have been stronger in the course because of the way it enabled a responder to be more specific in the provision of feedback.

Confidence as a writer of poetry

In terms of Likert-scale responses, there was a significant shift among the participants following the PD in terms of confidence in writing poems: while one put themselves at five on the 10-point scale, three put themselves at seven and two at eight. The interview response served to elaborate on and make sense of these numbers.

As might be expected, the PD made no difference to Michael's rating. "I didn't really have a mental barrier about the idea of having to write a poem." However, getting feedback was "nice for the confidence". Nor did it change Rachel's self-rating—something I will return to in the discussion. "I felt very inept in my group because some people just said things beautifully. And said it well. ... But I've always felt like that."

The other four made a shift for differently nuanced reasons. The most salient of these related to the sense of being a part of a team. Amber, for example, found sharing "unexpectedly unthreatening ... because we were all in the same boat together". Once the group mastered the protocol it was "brilliant". While she was "definitely *not* a poet", she was along a continuum towards being one and could now share her poems with others. "I'm much more confident to *play* with language without the same anxiety and fear about getting it wrong ...". For Hazel, increased confidence came from a development in craft knowledge, i.e., "how to *write* poems", as well as the sharing experience ("I can do this"). Christine was "really nervous" prior to sharing her first draft but developed confidence as the result of "supportive

comments”, knowing the people in the group and trusting that they would not put her down for her efforts. With each sharing she grew in confidence. Following the PD she wrote more poems, specifically to share with her pupils. “I had the confidence to do that ... I’d never think of doing that. I would always just go to a book of poetry and use that as my example.” Sandy described her group as becoming more willing to be innovative and more personal in their writing and attributed this to the positivity and teamwork.

The teacher of writing poetry

Prior to the PD, only two teachers rated their confidence in teaching the writing of poetry higher than three on a 10-point scale (one rating their confidence at 7 and the other at 8). Having said that, one of the participants, Amber, had for some years been delivering PD in writing in this particular school, having been strongly influenced by her experience of workshoping with Gail Loane in 2013–14. Her subsequent practice included “a regular diet of poetry [including] observational poetry and free verse”, the use of exemplars, the exploration and application of a “particular tool or literary device”, independent writing that made “connections to their own lives”, the use of “buddies”, and the use of a “helping circle” (Gail’s term) for “revision and recrafting”. Both Michael and Rachel explicitly acknowledged Amber’s influence in their introducing poetry writing into their classroom programmes.

Christine had included the writing of short, simple poetry forms in her classrooms, e.g., acrostics, four-line poems with rhyming couples and haiku. There was, she acknowledged, “nothing as free as what I did after your PD”. Likewise, Hazel had used poetic formulas such as cinquains and haiku to build up small anthologies of poems. Sandy, recalling her teaching practice in London, was obliged by the curriculum to “teach” poetry but without enthusiasm, describing it as prescriptive and uninspiring, dependent on “stalwarts” (Wordsworth, Yeats). “We did some dreadful acrostic poems from time to time.”

Four teachers indicated that they had never written a poem *alongside* their pupils. It had never occurred to Sandy. Christine “normally grabbed one out of a poetry book”. Michael was vague, recalling that he may have written a sample memoir. Amber indicated that “at most I might have ... written a couple of lines to model how the literary tool could be used in the effect of it ... as a transitional stepping-stone so that the children could write their own poems”. Since she did not consider herself a writer, Rachel engaged in think-aloud demonstrations in relation to a range of texts, showing her students how she “needed to think about using words that really described what [she] wanted to say”. In response to this prompt, Hazel recalled writing a poem about her nana, not alongside her pupils, but on the occasion of the school’s Grandparents’ Day. She recalled vividly her enjoyment in sharing it.

It was really engaging ... for the children as well, I think, to hear that aspect of my life and then to make a connection to it. ... And then be able to write a poem with their grandparent actually being there was quite purposeful.

Hazel confessed to feeling nervous, “because you’re sharing a part of yourself ... a kind of private part of yourself”.

Following the PD, on the same 10-point scale, two teachers rated themselves at seven, and four at eight in their confidence in teaching the writing of poetry. The average change in confidence for the six participants in the same scale was 3.33. In part this change in confidence derived from an enhanced knowledge of poetry as a form—both an art and a craft. For all her misgivings about herself as a writer, Rachel indicated that it “gave me a bit more rounding”. Christine described herself prior to the PD as believing that poems had to be “quite structured” and “easier to teach because they were quite prescriptive ... like writing a recipe”. The PD introduced her to a less formulaic and open-ended approach to writing, where “each poem could look completely different”. Hazel felt enabled to “look at poetry ... from a different perspective” and noted specifically the effectiveness of understanding the difference between concrete and abstract language.

Sandy remarked that she had “no pre-knowledge about how you might teach poetry” and found the PD “transformational”. She now had structured ways of “getting into it”:

I wouldn't have even known how to get engaged myself and how to introduce anything to do with poetry with children in a way that was beyond, you know, writing rhyming limerick things. I think my view of poetry [h]as changed. I always put it in a box as being inaccessible, complex, and hard to engage with ... I guess it was that it was the first time there was an emotional connection with poetry I'd never felt before.

Sandy talked about her ignorance of New Zealand poetry, shared her experience of attending the Featherston Book Fair and meeting poet Paula Green in a workshop where she discussed her new book *Wild honey* (2019). She described the experience of hearing a poet read their work as “incredible” and ended up buying Paula's book: “The first poetry I have ever bought in my life.” Amber liked big ideas, such as the notion of poetry as “best words in the best order” and “a way of holding something still and making sense of it”. She referred to the way participants got the “precision of language choice in an invitational way, as opposed to using more rigid criteria which often stifled creativity, sincerity and personal voice”. She found it helpful that each session was introduced with reference to a tool, such as figurative language, that was subsequently played with. “What I learned about writing poetry is actually that the collaborative recrafting and revising afterwards was where the real magic happens.”

Participants were asked to rate specific PD activities on a 10-point scale regarding their likelihood of using them in their own classrooms (with 10 being very likely). Results are tabulated below:

Table 3: Participant Ratings of Activities regarding Likelihood of Classroom Use

| Activity | Range | Mean |
|--|-------|------|
| Peer group responses in groups. | 5-10 | 8.3 |
| The use of “Author's chair”. | 2-10 | 7.0 |
| Writing poems yourself alongside your pupils. | 0-10 | 6.5 |
| Engaging students in pre-writing activities. | 2-10 | 7.0 |
| Using formulas as poem prompts. | 2-10 | 7.7 |
| Having students write a poem from a point of view other than themselves. | 2-10 | 6.3 |
| Writing a “close-up on place”. | 5-10 | 8.0 |
| Writing an “I am from ...” poem. | 2-10 | 8.7 |
| Writing a poem about someone you have a particular feeling for. | 7-10 | 9.3 |

I don't want to read too much into these results. However, as facilitator, I found some of them noteworthy. Firstly, there was still some resistance to the idea of writing poems alongside one's students. (Interestingly, in another table not reported on here, the item that rated *most* highly as a workshop feature contributing to participant learning about poetry and teaching poetry, was “Having the presenter modelling the writing of poetry himself” (9.2).) Second was the relative non-commitment to having students write a poem from a point of view other than themselves. I would explain that as related to participants' enjoyment of the PD as offering an opportunity for in-depth sharing in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown. Thirdly was the high mean score for writing a poem about someone you have a particular feeling for. This activity occurred in the latter stages of the PD, at a time when trust had been established and when some very moving poems were written.

A year on from the PD, teachers varied in terms of their reflections on the impact of their PD on the classroom practice. Michael, who had focused on memoir following the PD, found it hard to separate practices encouraged by me and those already embedded in his practice owing to his work with Amber. For Sandy, a major impulse was to ensure that students would not experience what she had gone through in England, i.e., “admiring” elite models and being intimidated to the point of not believing they could write poems themselves. She found the “I am from ...” brief a “great starting point” because any child could engage with it based on their own experience. From that starting point she would introduce them to published poets such as Paula Green (2019).^{iv}

Christine, Hazel and Rachel all referred to introducing the “I am from ...” brief into their classroom programmes, in part because there was potential for publication in a collection of Rotorua young people’s poetry. Christine’s class of 5- to 6-year-olds ended up spending three weeks working on their poem, “refining and changing and editing”. “We did a *lot* of pair-share”, which she felt worked better because she herself had experienced feedback during the PD. Her description of her class is worth quoting at some length:

I had the kids at a stage where they were happy to read their poems to anyone in the class, take on feedback ... sometimes make changes, sometimes not. ... But we ended up refining our poems so many times over that period of time ... and when we looked back from our first draft to our last draft, they looked so much better. ... And the kids were keen to just keep on revisiting ... they weren’t getting bored with it. Some of them added extra verses.... I used one of my example poems that I’d written with you for that ... and I specifically mentioned many of the techniques that I’d been using in my poem ... and the kids would go away and give that a try. When they tried it with a line, if they didn’t like it, they didn’t need to use the line in their poem, but they had to give it a try. ... So they were able to try lots of different things.

Rachel did considerable work with her students based on an “I am from ...” exemplar that had been given out in the course to which she gave an Anzac Day twist where the pupils “had to say where they were from if they were a soldier”. They also wrote poems on other topics: “Poetry probably *is* quite a big part of my writing programme.”

Amber commented on “especially looking to develop the community of writers, and that value of recrafting using the Author’s Chair where the student’s writing was valued by having an audience and the response”. The concept of a “community of writers” underpinned many of the reflections of the participants on their practice, especially their use of the “helping circle” (a kind of response group but utilising the whole class). It was also clear that focus on response and feedback produced the uptake of a metalinguistic vocabulary. Christine noted: “... They were using things like activating nouns and they were using all that terminology, but not only were they using it; they were kind of knowing what it meant.” With reference to the helping circle, Rachel would draw attention to

all the things that you want them to notice, how they’ve used good choice of words, whether they’ve activated nouns or whether they’re doing “show not tell”, whether they’re using metaphors, whatever the part of the writing that you want them to notice.

Conclusion

On the face of it, the publication of *Te Reo Poweha* (Locke & Evans, 2020) was a resounding success. At the launch of the book in the Rotorua Library in November, the venue was packed with pupils, teachers, parents, grandparents and relatives. Children read their poems, and audience members applauded and were sometimes reduced to tears. The book went to two extra editions. In reality, despite offers of professional development and the provision of resources, less than half of Rotorua’s schools showed any interest in the project. Among those that did, it was rare for more than one teacher to engage her class in the writing of poetry. A book could be published based on the excuses offered for this unwillingness to engage.

In the paragraphs below, I will confine myself to two topics: revision and teacher efficacy as writers. Finally, I will share a few comments on the impact of the PD I offered, from my own perspective.

An enduring memory for me from my interviews with these teachers was Christine's account of her young pupils' enthusiasm for revising their "I am from ..." poems over a three-week period. How might this be explained? There is a clue, I think, in the statement made by Myhill & Jones (2007), "that many studies of revision concentrate on error detection, which is a somewhat reductionist view of the complexity of the act of writing and meaning making" (p. 324). Listening to these teachers, the focus on revision had little to do with error detection. Christine's triad of "refining, changing and editing" sums up the practice of these teachers, all of whom had become skilled at managing the process of peer-based, supportive feedback, focused not only on content, but also on linguistic devices which the children could name as a result of a growing, metalinguistic vocabulary. At a young age, they were already members of writing communities and actually enjoyed the challenge of shaping and sharing poems they were truly proud of.

One of my hopes in offering this PD was that all teachers would in some way identify as writers (of poems) as a result of the course. In my heart, however, I would have been surprised had this occurred. In a recent study of 15 English teachers in Australia, Emily Frawley (2018) found that though her participants were all accomplished and mostly published writers, a significant number resisted identifying as writers with their students. In a project I led in 2010 and 2011 on *Teachers as writers*, involving both primary and secondary teachers, the research team was interested in ascertaining teachers' changes in self-efficacy as writers as a result of intensive engagement in writing workshops (two week-long retreats and two days). Like Rachel in this project, one of the teachers, also an effective *teacher* of writing, whom we called Rebecca, did *not* have her self-efficacy as a writer enhanced. In an interview, Rebecca noted: "I guess it might have made me feel I was a bit rubbish as a writer having had to do with other teachers who are quite talented" (Locke et al., 2013, p. 61). Even the most supportive response group is not guaranteed to enhance a participant's self-efficacy as a writer. This is especially true in relation to the self-efficacy source of "vicarious experiences" (Bandura, 1997) when the group participant views a gap between her own talent and the talents of other participants.

Overall, at least for these six participants, this PD to a large extent fulfilled the aims I had set for myself. Was there a "COVID effect"? I think so. As Sandy and others suggested, the writing and sharing of increasingly personal poems enabled participants to enjoy the joy of connection to an extent that may have been different had the PD occurred outside of the lockdown. The enforced resort to Zoom, I think, was generally a positive thing. Participants were engaging in writing in the familiarity of their own home settings. In technical terms, certain Zoom-related affordances became positives for us all, especially break-out rooms and our ability to share screens for feedback purposes. Finally, based on participants' comments, the PD reinforced and added to work that Amber was already doing with the school's staff and, as the principal Sandy remarked, it strengthened the staff sense of itself as a team. Overall, it strengthened their confidence as teachers of young writers of poetry; it gave them additional courage to model the identity of poem-writers in their classroom, and for some it was a step along the road to claiming unselfconsciously the identity of one who writes poems for pleasure and personal satisfaction.

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ⁱ See Locke, 2018, for my favourite horror story on how a child’s love of writing poetry can be destroyed by a teacher’s response.

ⁱⁱ I’m happy to share specific handouts to readers who contact me at locketj98@gmail.com

ⁱⁱⁱ These are pseudonyms.

^{iv} The “I am from ...” brief was developed for use by teachers having their children write poems for a proposed collection of Rotorua young people’s poetry published in November, 2020 by Mad Poets Rotorua with the title *Te Reo Pohewa*. (See <https://loveinthetimeofcovidchronicle.com/2020/11/27/i-am-from-rotorua-young-peoples-poetry-ed-terry-locke/>). I am happy to share this brief. (Contact me at locketj98@gmail.com)