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# Language matters: Developing inclusive, strengths-based practice in an RTL cluster

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*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education, The University of Auckland, August 2019*

## Abstract

Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) are a school-based service comprised of clusters of itinerant, fully-registered teachers working within schools and across Kāhui Ako (Communities of Learning) throughout New Zealand. RTLB are envisaged as agents of change who work with educators to identify learning and behaviour needs for students who are experiencing significant barriers to educational success (Walker, 2013). As teacher consultants, RTLB work in collaboration with school communities to promote and support inclusion (Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013).

The way in which educators respond to any situation is significantly dependent on the language used to make meaning of the events and is key to improving educational outcomes for all learners (Mentis & Annan, 2013; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Smith, 2014). In addition, language used has a significant influence on the development of perspectives in any given situation (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994; White & Epston, 1990).

The aim of this research was to firstly examine the extent to which inclusive, strengths-based language was in use by RTLB in the Initial Meeting phase of the collaborative problem-solving (CPS) process. The Initial Meeting is held with an educator as the first step of RTLB involvement and is initiated as a result of a request for RTLB support in relation to student learning and/or behaviour difficulties. The purpose of an Initial Meeting is to establish a positive working relationship between the RTLB and the educator, clarify the nature of the problem and identify further data-gathering requirements.

Secondly, the research examined whether shifts could be made in RTLB language through professional learning and development (PLD). The PLD focused on developing language that was consistent with an inclusive and strengths-based paradigm. It included opportunities for RTLB to reflect on their own practice. The research involved asking RTLB to audio record Initial Meetings prior to and following participation in the professional development sessions. The RTLB were also asked to provide reflections on both Initial Meeting transcripts and respond to a reflective questionnaire after both Initial Meetings.

The results indicated that prior to the PLD the RTLB appeared to have difficulty applying relevant knowledge or skills with respect to the use of inclusive, strengths-based language. The results also indicated that RTLB language use at the Initial Meeting was able to be improved through targeted PLD and opportunities to learn, reflect and practise the requisite skills. The evidence shows that through an iterative PLD process RTLB increased awareness, knowledge, and skills with respect to inclusive, strengths-based language. Enacting change is not an easy task. Change can be uncomfortable and often requires disrupting long held understandings and beliefs (Butler, 1996; Schön, 1987). These findings indicate that there is a need for ongoing, focussed PLD for RTLB on the knowledge, language and skills of CPS. Further, the demonstrated effectiveness of the PLD in creating a notable shift in the language used by RTLB has implications for further professional development.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my thanks to all who have made this study possible and have supported me immeasurably on this journey. Special acknowledgement and sincerest gratitude go to my supervisors, Dr Joanne Walker and Dr Frauke Meyer for their patience, wisdom and insight.

To my RTLB colleagues, thank you so much for your support, trust and willingness to join me as we learnt together. This project was only possible because of your commitment and passion for the work we do. Your encouragement and interest throughout has been so appreciated. You inspire me every day to improve my practice and work to make a greater difference for our most vulnerable students.

My heartfelt gratitude to my family and friends. To my friends who know just the right time to send just the right meme, thank you so much for minimising the eye rolling when I get on my soap box, and for always being there for me. To my beautiful children and grandchildren, thank you for your unwavering belief in me and encouragement. To my mother, Valerie, I am forever grateful for your wisdom, inspiration and unconditional support. Finally, to my wonderful husband, Craig, supplier of endless cups of tea, meals, wine, chocolate (and who even did the dishes on more than one occasion), thank you for the incredible support you give me and for all that you do. Craig probably now knows far more than he ever wanted to know about the fine grain of RTLB practice but he has patiently listened and has encouraged me every step of the way.

Manaakitia a tātou tamariki  
Manaakitia ngā mea ka rongō  
Manaakitia ngā mea ka kitea  
Manaakitia ngā mea ka aria  
Ko te tupuria o ngā tamariki  
Arā ko te kanoahi o Aotearoa

Take care of our children  
Take care of what they hear  
Take care of what they see  
Take care of what they feel  
For how the children grow  
So will be the shape of New Zealand

Dame Whina Cooper

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis describes my research within one Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTL) Cluster. The focus of the research was on developing RTL's inclusive and strengths-based language during the Initial Meeting phase of their case work. An awareness of language is important for RTL in order to enable them to recognise and respond to deficit or judgemental language and supports clear identification of the nature of a problem. Further, a practitioner's deeper conceptual understanding of strengths-based practice promotes positive expectations of students through an attention to language associated with strengths, resiliency and accomplishment (Bozic, Lawthom, & Murray, 2018).

As a Practice Leader in an RTL cluster, I have responsibility for the induction of new staff and the ongoing practice development of all staff. I have an interest in providing the best support possible and engaging in a continuing cycle of improvement for both my own practice and that of the RTL. I had come to the RTL role from a background as a mathematics and science teacher and had spent some time as a coach and assessor for a globally implemented programme called "Future Problem-solving". The importance of the need for clear, fact-based data was ingrained for me in any situation where solutions are being sought. I began the two-year RTL training programme in 2006 which allowed me further opportunity to develop the skills required for each phase of the collaborative problem-solving sequence. In the Initial Meeting phase, these included explicit opportunities to practise paraphrasing, testing assumptions and clarifying the nature of the problem through asking open questions. This established for me a clear sense of the foundations of effective RTL practice.

Very early in my career as an RTL I was also fortunate to encounter professional learning on language we use and the way we use it. It highlighted that the way in which educators and parents talk about and with students can serve to either empower or disempower students. Language is more than simply a representation of thoughts and perspectives, it has also been shown to have a direct influence on shaping thoughts and perspectives (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Maynes et al., 2008; Senge et al., 1994; White & Epston, 1990). In addition, how educators view students and the ways in which they speak to students

and about students have a notable impact on the students' likelihood of achieving long-term positive educational outcomes (Mentis & Annan, 2013; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Smith, 2014). Inclusive language speaks of the strengths students have and the responsiveness of environments to their needs. Exclusive language speaks of the inherent deficits within a student, which educators then endeavour to fix or manage.

I developed a strong interest in the words used to describe the nature of a problem. I became interested in the possibility that purposeful use of language which is inclusive and strengths-based could shift educators thinking and promote an inclusive, strengths-based view of the nature of the problem. RTLB reliably recognising and using this kind of language has the potential to encourage the same within schools.

Through case-consultations and a review of case data, I saw evidence of RTLB continuing to use language which indicated deficit theorising and was neither inclusive nor strengths-based. The quality of practice at the Initial Meeting phase is crucial to ensure successful, long-term outcomes for students. In addition, our behaviour is tightly linked to our assumptions and beliefs expressed in our language. If the language used when framing and inquiring into the problem is deficit or judgmental and based on assumptions, then the processes and steps following will be flawed. When working alongside RTLB, highlighting the use of deficit theorising and coaching the use of strengths-based language, I found that RTLB were able to acknowledge the difference. They believed that they were generally acting in congruence with this intent. However, these one-off professional learning opportunities I facilitated appeared to have limited effectiveness in shifting perceptions and supporting RTLB to develop the skills to transfer this knowledge to practice in the field.

The aim of this research was twofold. First, it examined current practices of RTLB in Initial Meetings. Second, it examined if shifts could be made in RTLB language through professional development. The professional development focussed on developing language that was consistent with an inclusive and strengths-based paradigm. It included opportunities for RTLB to reflect on their own practice based on authentic evidence.

## **Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis is organised in five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to the thesis, and an overview of the chapters that follow. Chapter 2 focusses on the development of the RTLB service and practice expectations with specific emphasis on the Initial Meeting phase. The second part of this chapter draws on national and international literature on inclusion and strengths-based practice in education. It then focusses on features of collaborative consultation and the collaborative problem-solving (CPS) model. The third section of this chapter then uses the reviewed national and international literature to discuss the language use at an Initial Meeting. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and research design, providing information on the professional development, participants, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research. Chapter 5 discusses the major findings from the research in regard to the research literature. Limitations of the research and implications for future practice and research are identified and discussed. The chapter then closes with a discussion on conclusions, recommendations and final comments.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

There have been marked shifts in the way special education is viewed in New Zealand since the development of the New Zealand Government's special education policy (SE 2000) (Ministry of Education, 1996). The trend has been away from 'special' schooling, which conceptualised students with difference as requiring something other than mainstream education. As a result, building teacher knowledge, capacity and skills has become an increasing focus as classrooms and student needs continue to become more diverse. RTLB play a key role in supporting teachers to build knowledge and capacity to create inclusive classrooms (Brown et al., 2000; Hoyle, 2001; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013).

The first section of this chapter discusses the RTLB service, role and training framework. The following section discusses the Initial Meeting and current research on RTLB practice. It then summarises the empirical and theoretical literature around inclusion, strengths-based practice, collaborative consultation and collaborative problem-solving (CPS) and the implications of these for RTLB practice. For the purposes of clarity, these aspects are discussed separately, however they are in fact inextricably connected. The final section of this chapter then summarises research in regard to language use and links this research to the language used by RTLB when they initiate support and identify the nature of the problem during the Initial Meeting phase.

### **The RTLB Service**

Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) are a school-based service comprised of clusters of itinerant, fully-registered teachers working within schools and across Kāhui Ako (Communities of Learning) throughout New Zealand. RTLB have undertaken specialist teacher training to enable them to provide effective support to teachers and learners in inclusive learning communities. RTLB are envisaged as agents of change who work with educators to identify learning and behaviour needs for students who are experiencing significant barriers to educational success (Walker, 2013). As teacher consultants RTLB work in collaboration with school communities to promote and support inclusive practices (Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013).

The RTLB service was introduced in 1998 following the development of the *Special Education 2000* policy (SE 2000) (Ministry of Education, 1996). The SE 2000 policy was informed by an investigation initiated in 1994 by the Education and Science Committee of the New Zealand House of Representatives into children at risk of poor educational outcomes as a result of poor attendance and behavioural problems. The resulting report by the House of Representatives (1995) made a range of recommendations, including further research into the effectiveness of interventions in schools and Kura Kaupapa Māori, amendments to suspension regulations and development of a more cohesive approach to addressing the learning and/or behaviour needs of students at risk of school failure. The RTLB service was created with the intention of addressing this final recommendation in particular, with a focus on those students with moderate learning and behaviour difficulties. An additional broader aim was to impact positively on teacher practice in order to nurture inclusive practices for the benefit of all students.

The RTLB service was initially established with approximately 500 itinerant special education teachers, with a further 250 teachers recruited to join the service shortly thereafter. Local RTLB services were managed by lead school principals within approximately 200 geographic clusters supporting schools across New Zealand (Education Review Office, 2009). On average 2–5 RTLB worked within a cluster with staffing ratios determined by school rolls and decile ratings, with some consideration given for geographical isolation. There was on average one RTLB allocated per 750 enrolled students.

In 2012, RTLB clusters were realigned into 40 clusters with, on average, 20 – 30 RTLB. The practice expectations of the service, however, remained the same: to work within a school community to promote inclusive, strengths-based practices, which improve outcomes for students (Dobson & Gifford-Bryan, 2014; Holley-Boen, 2017; Macfarlane, Medcalf, Rangi, & Glynn, 2003; Mentis & Kearney, 2018; Sebastian, 2013; Thomson, 2013; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013). The clusters are hosted by a lead school. Two new positions were created, the Cluster Manager and the Practice Leader. In partnership with the Lead School Principal, the Cluster Manager is responsible for the strategic leadership and management of the RTLB team. Practice Leaders are responsible for supporting RTLB in their professional practice, this includes: ensuring RTLB receive role specific PLD, providing professional support e.g. coaching and mentoring, and facilitating induction of new RTLB

(Ministry of Education, 2018). This research focusses on a Practice Leader providing PLD for RTLB in one cluster.

**The RTLB Role.** The RTLB role can be described as that of the scientist practitioner. Owen et al. (2014) describe a scientist practitioner as one with an excellent knowledge of what effective teaching and learning constitutes, who views student difficulties as a natural aspect to learning, as opposed to taking a deficit perspective of those difficulties. Scientist practitioners aspire to a practice which encourages a collaborative, data-led and learner-centred approach, that is not ‘one-size-fits-all’ and engages teaching staff with problem identification, analysis, and supports their own learning needs to turn “information into meaningful actions” (Earl & Katz, 2010, p. 9). RTLB are expected to work in collaborative consultation with educators and parents. Collaborative consultation involves working in partnership with educators and parents to identify the nature of the problem which is impacting students, gather relevant data, and develop and implement an appropriate plan which addresses the problem situation (Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb, & Nevin, 1995; Kurpius & Fuqua, 1993). The aim of RTLB work within schools is to support the development of effective solutions to often complex issues (Brown et al., 2000; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013).

There are several foundational beliefs underpinning all RTLB work. The first of these is that student outcomes are enhanced by a focus on a student’s strengths. As a result, an expectation is that RTLB work to increase teacher capacity to focus on student strengths, ability and potential. Second is the belief that reflective practice promotes improvement and all case work should be seen as a learning opportunity. Finally, RTLB case work is underpinned by the belief that differentiation and classroom adaptations can effectively support all learners within an inclusive school community (Ministry of Education, 2018). At all times RTLB are expected to keep learners’ needs and achievement central to their work.

**RTLB Training.** Registered teachers, with a Bachelor’s degree or higher, can apply for RTLB positions prior to gaining the RTLB qualification. Within two years of gaining their first permanent RTLB position, they are required to undertake training towards a specific professional qualification. Since 2011, newly appointed RTLB complete a Postgraduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching while working as an RTLB in schools. They are



provided with one day per week release for study. The Diploma incorporates a theoretical and research-based study of specialist teaching. The programme takes an inquiry-based inter-professional education approach using a range of learning options (Massey University, 2019). While there are seven different possible endorsements through the Diploma, RTLB undertake a specialist endorsement in learning and behaviour. No specific model or approach to collaborative problem-solving is prescribed, however the principles that underpin all collaborative consultation are woven throughout the programme. Students are encouraged to use frameworks which are most appropriate to their work context and their expertise (M. Mentis, Associate Professor Massey University, Coordinator of Postgraduate Special Education and Specialist Teaching Programmes, personal communication, March 13, 2019). The Diploma students identify professional learning goals aligned with established competencies with principles based content covered over four courses (Mentis et al., 2016). In the last course of the Diploma the RTLB undertake a practicum, which includes collaborative problem-solving as a foundation of successful case work (M. Mentis, Associate Professor Massey University, Coordinator of postgraduate special education and specialist teaching programmes, personal communication, March 13, 2019).

Prior to 2011, RTLB undertook the Graduate or Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Special Needs Resource Teaching). Walker (2013), who as National Director, was involved with the development and delivery of the RTLB programme from 1999 to 2010, notes that one of the significant features of the qualification included learning about the CPS model and developing the requisite skills for each phase through course assignments and case work.

Common themes from both courses of study have been that the principles of collaborative problem-solving are foundational to RTLB practice. RTLB are seen as agents of change, working with schools and teachers to foster inclusive learning environments which ultimately improve educational outcomes for all learners.

## RTLB Practice

RTLB should take a collaborative problem-solving approach to case work. The CPS phases are called the RTLB Practice Sequence and as described by Ministry of Education (2018) are briefly outlined below:

1. **Initial meeting:** RTLB develop collaborative relationships with educators, establish roles and responsibilities and clarify the nature of the problem. In addition, RTLB facilitate development of a data-gathering plan.
2. **Data gathering:** Data are gathered by RTLB and educators to further inform clarification of the nature of the problem and provide baseline (pre-intervention) data.
3. **Analysis:** All available data are evaluated by the RTLB in collaboration with educators and other relevant members of a collaborative team. Contextual factors influencing learning are identified and the nature of the problem is further refined.
4. **Goal setting:** RTLB facilitate identification and prioritisation of outcomes in collaboration with all team members. Solutions are identified and goals are established which aim to meet the agreed outcomes.
5. **Planning:** RTLB guide development of a collaborative action plan (CAP) which aims to achieve the agreed outcomes.
6. **Implementation:** The CAP is implemented with the support of all team members.
7. **Review, reflect and refine (monitoring):** CAP implementation is regularly monitored and reviewed by the RTLB to evaluate effectiveness and fidelity of implementation. Agreed adaptations to the plan are made, if needed.
8. **Post implementation data gathering/follow up:** Post implementation data are collected by the RTLB and the team.
9. **Review, reflect (and either move to step 10, or return to an earlier step):** The team reviews and reflects on the plan and achievement of outcomes. If the outcomes are not achieved the team may cycle back to an earlier phase e.g. data analysis.
10. **Close:** If no further intervention is required the RTLB will close the case. If there are further needs identified the team will cycle back to an earlier phase e.g. data gathering.

This research focusses on the Initial Meeting which is the first phase of the practice sequence. The following section discusses this phase in more detail.

**Initial Meeting.** The Initial Meeting is the first point of contact with respect to a request for support and the development of a collaborative working relationship with those closest to the student. A Request for Support (R4S) to the RTLB is where the school indicates a concern regarding student learning and/or behaviour. The consultee may be a classroom teacher, the school Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) or, possibly the principal. Establishing rapport is crucial with respect to the consultee being willing to share information about the nature of the problem (Cleven & Gutkin, 1988; Idol et al., 1995; Lambert, Hylander, Sandoval, & Spielberger, 2004). The meeting should be an active and purposeful probe of the problem situation in order to identify the concerns in very specific, observable terms (Gutkin & Curtis, 2009). In addition, it should be viewed as an interaction between the student and their environment (J. Annan, Priestley, & Phillipson, 2006; Brown et al., 2000; Sebastian, 2013). Requisite consultant skills include paraphrasing to clarify understanding and questioning to probe deeper. The Initial Meeting is seen as an important step towards designing the most appropriate intervention and as such successful outcomes are heavily reliant on clear identification of the key issues (Newman et al., 2017; Sandoval, 2014). In order to effectively identify the nature of the problem the language should be clear and concise, avoiding any assumptions and judgements (Gutkin & Curtis, 2009). Data should also be collected in relation to when problem behaviours happen, how often they occur, and when the behaviours do not happen (Cleven & Gutkin, 1988; Graesser et al., 2018; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013; Zins & Ponti, 1996). The specific problem situation should be clarified and an interim hypothesis established (Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013). Student strengths should be identified and a plan for further data collection developed. An expectation is that participant/s should be “engaged, welcomed, empowered and affirmed in their expertise and knowledge of the ākongā [learner] throughout the process” (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 23).

The Initial Meeting should take the form of a semi-structured interview. Using a semi-structured framework is beneficial as it includes guiding questions in order to establish key information while allowing for the adaptation of questions to better suit the context. In addition this approach allows the interviewer to probe for further information and greater

clarification (Elliot, Fairweather, Olsen, & Pampaka, 2016; Ratner, 2002). An interview is more than a conversation. A conversation flows with little direction, purpose or plan while an interview is “a person-to-person interaction that has a deliberate purpose that is recognised and accepted by both participants” (Kadushin & Kadushin, 2013, p. 7). For the purposes of this research the term “Initial Meeting” is synonymous with “Interview”. As Gillham (2000) notes, an interview does not need to be called an interview, to be considered an interview.

In order to ensure the purpose and goals of the Initial Meeting are met, the RTLB, as the interviewer, should hold a clear intention to identify the key issues related to the problem situation. As an interview, the Initial Meeting should also be a structured and strategic interaction with the interviewee (Kadushin & Kadushin, 2013). A key purpose of the Initial Meeting is to clearly establish the “nature of the problem” (Walker, 2013, p. 29). To this end, it would be expected that the RTLB utilises an established questions framework as a foundation, with further probing and clarifying as relevant. It is important for RTLB to have the necessary knowledge and skills to conduct the meeting, as they are more likely to feel confident and to achieve the intended purpose of the meeting (Kadushin & Kadushin, 2013). The language used at the Initial Meeting should mirror the RTLB principles of inclusive, strengths-based practice. The language used at this phase is the specific focus of this research.

**Inclusion.** An RTLB’s role is to support educators, in the expectation that students’ diverse abilities and contributions are valued. As the RTLB Toolkit (Ministry of Education, 2018) notes specifically, the role of the RTLB is to work with educators to recognise and respond to any barriers to inclusion. In addition, RTLB are expected to support educators to develop classroom practices which enhance all students’ learning, sense of self and active engagement in learning. As the Ministry of Education (n.d.) Inclusive Education website notes, students’ educational outcomes are optimised when they have a sense of belonging and connection, and affirming relationships with teachers and peers. Engagement within inclusive learning environments can be beneficial to all students through promoting a sense that all are active participants and that their contributions are valued within their school community (Giangreco, Cloninger, Dennis, & Edelman, 2002).

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) which was a product of the Salamanca World Conference in Special Needs Education has arguably had a significant influence

internationally on furthering conversations around inclusive schooling. The statement contended that regular schools with an “inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (UNESCO, 1994, p. 10). There is, however, confusion and limited clarity regarding what inclusion means both in the literature and policy (Walker, 2013). What inclusion looks like in an educational setting is to some extent impacted by the context, cultures and history (Ainscow, 2005). Ainscow (2005) defined inclusive practices as involving “attempts to overcome barriers to the participation and learning of students” (p. 112). To achieve this, inclusion could be viewed as a continual effort to improve schools’ responses to diversity and students with differences (MacArthur, 2009). Ainscow (2005) noted that this is most effectively achieved through shared learning opportunities which influence thinking and as a result impact an educator’s actions towards more inclusive practices.

Inclusion “is a fundamental way of seeing and responding to human difference for the benefit of everyone involved” (Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2014, p. 4). Excluding our most vulnerable students will have far more significant long term effects than those brought about by a failure to succeed academically (Wearmouth, Berryman, & Glynn, 2009). As Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin (2014) note “schools characterised by structures of inclusion rather than exclusion can be life-affirming catalysts for change” (p. xi). When discussing the degree to which students feel included within a school community, Wearmouth et al. (2009) identified the following factors which should be considered: students’ perception of themselves, how they communicate this perception, how others portray the student, and their learning journey. These four factors are intrinsically linked to the focus of this research, the importance of the language RTLB use when discussing a problem situation.

When RTLB support a classroom teacher, they can provide a positive influence towards perspectives, practices and language. Idol et al. (1995) acknowledge the benefit of the specialist teacher working in a consultative and collaborative way with the classroom teacher to indirectly support improved outcomes for students. Nevin, Thousand, Paolucci-Whitcomb, and Villa (1990) note that classroom teachers tend to be more willing to include students with diverse needs if they believe that they can make a positive difference for those students, and that they will receive the requisite supports from school leadership and

educational specialists. Kivirauma, Klemelä, and Rinne (2006) affirm that working in this way is consistent with the fundamental premise of inclusive education - that students receive an education which addresses their individual needs within their class community.

Inclusive education provides the basis upon which RTLB, as educators, establish effective educational interventions for students who are marginalised. Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin (2014) note that inclusive education requires a “critical pragmatism” (p. x). They suggest that in order to support inclusive practices, teachers should critically analyse their assumptions about their role in supporting students and in particular marginalised students. Further, foundational to effective engagement with inclusive practices is the importance of recognising that educators are motivated by their core assumptions and beliefs regarding their goals for the educational outcomes for students as well as their assumptions about their own and their students’ ability (Donnellan, 1984). Nevin et al. (1990) remind us that within an inclusive paradigm these core assumptions are that all children can learn, all children have an unalienable right to have their educational and socio-emotional needs met at their local school in a diverse class of their same-age peers, and finally, that it is a school’s responsibility to ensure this. Therefore, as Mentis and Annan (2013) note, how educators perceive events and interactions within schools is key to furthering inclusive practices. Providing opportunities to discuss and examine these perceptions allows for shared critique of otherwise accepted interpretations, assumptions and judgements of students with diverse needs and abilities (Ainscow, 2005). The language used by RTLB during the Initial Meeting may or may not promote inclusion or support perceptions of events which align with the core principles of inclusion.

**Strengths-based practice.** Strengths-based practice (SBP) is founded on the principle that student difference and diversity are strengths not deficits and are inherently linked to principles of inclusion. It is only through valuing and embracing difference that a truly inclusive culture can be created within schools (Ainscow, 2005). SBP is more than just citing a student's strengths. SBP asks "What can Sally do? Can she dress, play, read a level 5 book?" In contrast, taking a deficit perspective focusses primarily on what a student cannot do. Sally would be described terms such as "She is delayed, behind, failing or not achieving." As Einstein is famously quoted as saying "if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will spend its entire life believing it is stupid." SBP is a paradigm and perspective shift with all students being valued for what they are able to do (Elder, Rood, & Damiani, 2018; Smith, 2014). Smith (2014) describes strengths-based practices as making the primary assumption that the student is competent. When educators assume competence they first and foremost see a student's abilities, their strengths and the positive contribution they make to a school community.

The work of Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin (2014) recognises that if educators fail to value the backgrounds, experiences and strengths of students who are experiencing challenges, it is unlikely the students' potential for significant positive contributions to the school community will be realised. Skoning and Henn-Reinke (2014) acknowledge the importance of seeing all children as valued and capable "with differing voices, strengths, abilities, and contributions" (p. 118) and urge educators to get to know their students. In knowing a student's strengths, educators are best able to identify the most effective way to address problems. RTLB enacting unbiased, reflective and culturally responsive practices at the Initial Meeting helps to ensure that difference and diversity are also viewed through an uncritical and strengths-based lens.

An attention to language associated with strengths, resiliency and accomplishment can promote positive expectations of students (Bozic et al., 2018; Wilding & Griffey, 2015). Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin (2014) recognise that student outcomes are impacted by educator expectations and the quality of the student teacher relationship. In addition, Mentis and Annan (2013) note that how students and classrooms are viewed by teachers will determine whether inclusion is interpreted from a strengths-based or a deficit perspective.

Therefore, it could be suggested that in order to enact strengths-based practices, how educators talk about and with students is of critical importance and must be considered.

Diagnostic labels such as autism, dyslexia or ADHD are at times used to describe student difficulties. The use of such labels is a barrier to clear, unbiased acknowledgement of a student's full self and minimises the perception of a student's ability. Van der Klift and Kunc (1994) recognise that in education there is a tendency to see people as their label, with that one aspect taking on a disproportionate significance, rather than seeing students as complex individuals who have their own unique strengths, skills, challenges and interests. In other words, when students are viewed simplistically and globally in terms such as 'the dyslexic student' or 'the autistic student,' there is a failure to see them as their true selves.

Taking a deficit perspective of the nature of a problem locates the difficulty as internal, i.e. the problem resides within the student and, to a great extent, defines them. Alternatively, a strengths-based perspective sees the issues as a challenge they may be experiencing and as external to the student. Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin (2014) describe internalising the problem as 'functionalism' with the dominant perspective being that the issue is not with the educational system per se, but within those individuals who are not experiencing success. This view that deficits reside within the child pervades much of the decision making around interventions implemented within schools (Ainscow, 2005; Kozleski & Atkinson, 2014). Trent, Artiles, and Englert (1998) note that a deficit view is one where a child with difference is seen as inherently deficient in some way. The logical progression of this thinking is that a student's difficulties must then be 'fixed' or, at worst, are beyond fixing. Interventions then focus predominantly on a student's difficulties or perceived 'deficits' and do not promote a student's strengths (Skoning & Henn-Reinke, 2014; Thomson et al., 2003). Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin (2014) urge educators to adopt a critical perspective by rebuffing the more customary deficit-oriented perspectives which view any student differences as being lesser or abnormal. Ainscow (2005) supports this stance, noting that it is essential to develop the ability within schools to expose and contest these "deeply entrenched deficit views" (p. 117). It is therefore necessary to be vigilant in scrutinising how deficit assumptions may be influencing perceptions of students. The use of language, which describes a problem situation as external to the child and signals a student's strengths and abilities is essential to shift perceptions of the student from deficit towards a strengths-base.



Educators who take a more deficit view and believe that their conclusions about students are correct, often do not feel the need to question or seek confirmation or disconfirmation of the validity of their perceptions and assumptions (Argyris, 1991). Jumping to conclusions at an Initial Meeting before developing a clear fact-based understanding of the nature of the problem can be as a result of what Katz, Earl, and Jaafar (2009) identify as falling into the ‘activity’ trap. RTLB may feel pressure to provide a ‘quick fix’ and deliver interventions to schools. However, it is important that RTLB ensure a non-deficit, fact-based identification of the problem before moving forward at the Initial Meeting phase.

**Collaborative consultation.** RTLB work within a collaborative consultation framework which aligns with an ecological model as opposed to functional limitations/deficit models (Dobson & Gifford-Bryan, 2014; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013). An ecological model views student difficulties as an interaction between an individual and their environment whereas the functional limitations or deficit model views the student difficulties as residing within the individual (Brown et al., 2000; Reynolds & Gutkin, 2009). The focus of this research aligns to this ecological view of collaborative consultation with a focus on the language used at the Initial Meeting phase of an RTLB’s consultation and engagement with educators. Kurpius and Fuqua (1993) note that how consultation is interpreted and operationalised will impact on how it is enacted and how effective it is.

Collaborative consultation within an ecological paradigm sees the consultant, here the RTLB, working in partnership with an educator to identify the problem situation and plan an appropriate response to concerns (Kurpius & Fuqua, 1993). Responsibility for next actions are negotiated. This negotiation supports the notion of partnership. Collaborative consultation is not about being prescriptive, or an educator merely adopting the consultant’s perspective as the expert (Hylander, 2003; Nevin et al., 1990). The key is that there is a mutuality between the educator and the consultant (Idol et al., 1995; Sundqvist & Ström, 2015) and that the process is beneficial for everyone involved (Nevin et al., 1990). As a result, these open cooperative conversations have the prospect of greatly improving student outcomes with regards to students with additional needs. This could suggest that RTLB language, which models and nurtures inclusive, strengths-based practices, will have greater effect by encouraging a culture of open communication and partnership at the Initial Meeting.

Successful collaboration, as stated previously, is essential in the Initial Meeting phase but it is not without its challenges. Sundqvist (2012) points out that time pressures, scheduling, interpersonal relationships, teacher experience, beliefs and outlook can all negatively impact the ability to develop a constructive collaborative relationship (as cited by Sundqvist & Ström, 2015). An RTLB having an awareness of these challenges, and the skills to mitigate them is important (Brown et al., 2000; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013). Schools are a rich tapestry of diverse perspectives, experiences and strengths, which must be acknowledged to build solutions of equivalent richness and influence.

Due to the specialist nature of the RTLB role and their knowledge, there is a risk of the RTLB being seen as the expert, knowing more than the teacher. Sundqvist and Ström (2015) raise the notion of the need for a “built-in symmetrical” relationship (p. 324) between the consultant and the consultee, here the RTLB and teacher. Without a purposeful approach, there is a risk of an asymmetric relationship, with the discussion being seen as too authoritarian on the part of the RTLB. Conversely should the RTLB take a more passive, laissez-faire approach to the Initial Meeting, they run the risk of missing key opportunities to reframe and probe more deeply to identify the problem situation.

When one participant in the conversation is placed predominantly in the role of the expert, it could imply a lack of knowledge, skill or experience on the part of the other participant. In the case of an Initial Meeting, this could be either the RTLB or the teacher. This one-sided ‘consultation’ does little to promote a culture of partnership and equity. In such a partnership the ‘non-expert’ has been shown to likely experience feelings of helplessness, incompetence, inferiority and resentment (Nevin et al., 1990). It is therefore important that the RTLB approaches the Initial Meeting with a clear idea of what they are bringing to the partnership and how they can best conduct the meeting in order to maximise contributions of all parties. Collaboration provides a forum for developing an understanding of differing perspectives.

As Owen et al. (2014) state, it is through well-crafted questioning and an openness to hear all views that collaborative consultation successfully provides an opportunity to develop an understanding of participants’ perspectives. Classroom teachers hold the contextual knowledge and expertise to adapt the curriculum in response to student needs. RTLB, as

consultants, hold knowledge around the application of specific assessment, instruction, and strategies in relation to learners with additional needs (Nevin et al., 1990). A successful collaborative consultation occurs when the knowledge and expertise of both the teacher and the RTLB are valued and both contribute to the partnership.

A goal of the collaborative consultation is developing a problem definition which is tangible and describes observable behaviours that are able to be quantified (Gutkin & Curtis, 2009). Lambert et al. (2004) found that teachers alone struggle to frame student difficulties in this way. She found that teachers have a tendency to identify students' problems in ways that are non-specific, judgemental and unclear and that they find it difficult to clarify student difficulties objectively. An effective way of achieving greater clarity is to request more specificity regarding the nature of the problem. For example, the statement "Freda never wants to do any work" is vague and non-specific. Asking questions such as "What leads you to think that Freda never wants to do any work?" or "What more can you tell me about that?" helps elicit more information and aids clarification (Gutkin & Curtis, 2009).

Effective collaborative consultation, however, requires specific skills. Gutkin and Curtis (2009) note that skilled consultants have been shown to increase the consultee's participation at all phases of the intervention process. Nevin et al. (1990) carried out a meta-analysis on the essential skills of the collaborative consultant. They identified interpersonal communication, problem-solving and evaluation skills along with a sound knowledge of consultation research, theory and actions as the most significant skills for a collaborative consultant. Nevin et al. (1990) urges readers to "join the challenge of developing this promising practice into an effective science without losing the beauty of its art" (p. 54). Sandoval (2014) notes that consultants skills should include the ability to take a lead role, asking clarifying questions regarding the nature of the problem and ensuring a clear definition of the problem is developed. Further, B. Annan, Kuin Lai, and Robinson (2003) in a review of research on promoting effective 'teacher talk' to improve practice acknowledges that while teachers, as consultees, must take responsibility for their own learning needs, they do need expert support to develop the kind of learning talk which encourages significant positive shifts in practice. When consultees develop a new perspective of a current concern, they increase their capacity to manage similar concerns in the future (Truscott, Kearney, Davis, & Roach, 2017).

Although RTLB commonly report high levels of relational trust with educators within their schools, it is equally important that perspectives and assumptions are disclosed openly and tested when seeking to truly clarify any problem situation. This requires development of professional trust which moves beyond simply getting on well and requires being able to openly discuss perspectives and beliefs about the nature of a problem (Timperley & Robinson, 2001). Collegial relationships based on openness and trust have been shown to be “more likely to disclose more accurate, relevant, and complete data about problems” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 581). Thus, more effective solutions might be found in an environment of rich dialogue and openness (Fullan, 1996, 2003; Zimmerman, 2006). Hallinger (2003) suggests that a culture of open collaboration and respect for a teacher’s input promotes ownership of the solutions developed.

Owen et al. (2014) identifies more specific behavioural strategies for effective collaborative consultation, which include, but are not limited to: (a) being positive and affirming of the process; (b) creating a welcoming atmosphere that encourages participation; (c) acknowledging other’s frustration and emotions with respect to the problem situation; (d) endeavouring to minimise jargon words and overly influence outcomes; (e) acknowledging all contributions. Collaborative consultation is a problem-solving process (Sundqvist & Ström, 2015). RTLB, as consultants, therefore require knowledge of these strategies and an ability to enact the requisite skills in order to successfully establish a collaborative problem-solving approach (Idol et al., 1995; Sheridan, Meegan, & Eagle, 2002; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013).

**Collaborative problem-solving (CPS).** Within collaborative consultation RTLB focus on a collaborative problem-solving model (CPS). Thomson et al. (2003) note that an expectation of the RTLB role is to work within schools to facilitate change through the use of CPS approach. Collaborative problem-solving is described as two or more people collectively involved with a unique problem (i.e. rather than a routine undertaking), where the quality of the solution is evaluated by all team members, the team members have different tasks or roles and an interdependency between the team members exists (Graesser et al., 2018). A clear identification of a problem situation by the team is key to the development of successful solutions. As Bergan and Tombari (1976) note “without problem identification, problem-

solving cannot occur” (p. 5). The RTLB role is to "establish a more complex conceptualisation of the problem" and positively impact a problem situation (Walker, 2013, p. 23).

Newman et al. (2017) point out that “coherent consultation” (p. 33) prioritises concerns and implements clear problem-solving steps. The first, critical step in this process is the identification of the underlying problem situation and what is contributing to the difficulties a student may be experiencing (Gutkin & Curtis, 2009). Thomson et al. (2003) note that the classroom teacher must play a key role in this problem definition for significant, enduring change to occur within the classroom. As the consultant, an RTLB’s ability to implement an effective Initial Meeting with a non-judgemental approach should increase the likelihood that the teacher will identify problems which are of most significance to them (Gutkin & Curtis, 2009).

Graesser et al. (2018) note that within CPS there are requisite cognitive and social skills. The thinking required of participants engaged in CPS involves: clearly identifying and articulating the problem, identifying what is currently known and what additional information may be required, developing relevant solutions and monitoring progress. Graesser et al. (2018) go on to explain that successful CPS requires social skills which allow for the establishment of a shared understanding of the problem situation and an ability to work both alongside and together to develop mutually agreed solutions. A noteworthy finding in Bergan and Tombardi’s (1976) study was that it was at the initial problem identification phase that consultant skills and practices had the greatest influence on the problem-solving process. They noted that when the consultant lacked requisite skills at that initial phase “there was a substantial likelihood that problem-solving would never be initiated” (Bergan & Tombari, 1976, p. 10). The need for effective PLD regarding CPS skills and practices, such as has been developed in this research, is supported by qualitative meta-synthesis of consultation process research by Newman et al. (2017). The meta-synthesis highlighted a widespread concern that consultants are either receiving insufficient training or are unable to apply appropriate skills.

Gutkin and Curtis (2009) note that a problem is best defined in tangible terms and describes observable behaviours that are able to be quantified. A collaborative problem-solving approach has been shown as more effective when practitioners resist the temptation

to act hastily before spending sufficient time analysing the problem (Katz et al., 2009; Walker, 2013). Graesser et al. (2018) identified that having a consultant take the time to elicit teachers' perspectives more fully promoted successful CPS.

Gutkin and Curtis (2009) point out that consultees (e.g. teachers) are most likely to have little knowledge or experience in the use of a problem-solving process and that consultants need to be not only aware of what is being discussed, but they also need to guide the process. For example, asking further probing questions to ensure clear, fact-based articulation of the problem situation and guarding against becoming waylaid by assumption, inference or opinion (Giangreco et al., 2002). Adding further significance to the need for a consultant to skilfully guide the problem identification, is the frequent mismatch between consultant and consultee initial expectations. Oftentimes a teacher's response to student difficulties, particularly if the student carries a diagnostic label, is the expectation that the solutions will be found outside of the classroom, e.g. a treatment plan, external supports, and that the problem resides with the child (Lambert et al., 2004). In contrast, viewing the context through the lens of inclusion and strengths-based practice, the consultant might perceive the most effective solutions as the student's needs being accommodated from within the class.

The key phases of the CPS model used by RTLB are; clear identification of the problem situation; establishment of a hypothesis; joint data-gathering; implementation of a collaboratively agreed upon, evidence-based, data-informed intervention and monitoring (Walker, 2013). The Initial Meeting phase is the RTLB's opportunity to set the tone and to model a respectful, collaborative consultative approach to identifying the current puzzle or concern.

**Current research on RTLB practice.** A key tenet for RTLB is to take an inclusive, strengths-based approach and therefore to use inclusive, strengths-based language. However, there currently appears to be little research to show if this approach is embedded in practice, particularly at the Initial Meeting phase. A review of the current research literature shows a number of studies examining RTLB practice within schools. However, many of these evaluated the impact of RTLB work rather than focussing on changing RTLB practice. For example, Dobson and Gifford-Bryan (2014) focussed on the principle of collaborative consultation as it relates to RTLB practice. The study evaluated collaborative consultative

practice in RTLB support of students transitioning from a special education class into a mainstream setting. They found that RTLB working within a collaborative consultation model improved the likelihood of successful outcomes. However, the study only focused on a sample of nine students. Littek (2013) discussed the importance of evidence-based practice in the RTLB role. They investigated evidence-based practice (EBP) and critiqued their own EBP practice through reflection on an intervention conducted with 26 students diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. The intervention involved the students participating in an evidence-based social skills programme. Littek (2013) found there was a notable positive impact on developing social skills and supporting inclusion for a group of students who have autism through use of an evidence-based intervention. Similarly, Pillay and Flanagan (2011) discussed the RTLB role and undertook an evaluation of the long-term effects of short-term RTLB involvement for a group of six secondary school students. These studies differ from my research in that they evaluated the outcomes for students on an intervention conducted by RTLB. They did not investigate the shifts in practice for RTLB or skill development of RTLB in relation to their work.

Aydon-Pou (2010) studied the impact of RTLB support in shifting teacher beliefs and practice to a strengths-based framework. The findings provided supporting ideas for the focus of this study. The study's intervention centred around gathering student and teacher voice and subsequently reframing the language used by the teachers and the students into language which was strengths-based (Aydon-Pou, 2010). The study noted a number of positive shifts in teacher practice, which as a consequence improved student engagement. Aydon-Pou (2010) was able to show significant shifts from a fairly punitive stance to a far more positive approach through a focus on strengths-based language and practice, actively engaging the teacher in their learning and providing them with an opportunity to reflect on their language. These successful shifts lead to the focus of my research on strengths-based language and active engagement of the RTLB in their learning through a reflective process.

There is also literature which focusses on the RTLB role. For example, Foster (2014) discusses the barriers and enablers to evidence-based practice for RTLB. Higginson (2003) sought to identify the characteristics of teachers who moved into the RTLB role at its inception in 1998/1999 and what influence those attributes had on those personnel. They found that there seemed to be four distinct categories of teachers employed, which were

founded on the teachers' different core beliefs and previous experience. These differences seemed to impact on the ease with which they settled in to the new RTLB role. Hoyle (2001) evaluated the original establishment of the RTLB role in a group of rural schools through interviews with RTLB and the school staff they were working with. A key finding was that there seemed to be limited understanding within the schools and by the RTLB as to the expectations of the role when it was first established. Hoyle (2001) reported that the RTLB training programme helped to provide RTLB, and as a result schools, with guidance in this respect. Soljan, Stanghan, and Henry (2013) discussed theory relating to reflective practice and evaluated a RTLB community of practice (CoP) as a framework for reflective practice. The discussion and findings of Soljan et al. (2013) provided support for this research as they indicate that actively and intentionally providing RTLB with opportunities to reflect more deeply on their practice encouraged greater depth of understanding in their case work, brought into the open any underlying assumptions and improved RTLB practice as a result. However, while these studies (e.g. Foster, 2014; Higginson, 2003; Hoyle, 2001; Soljan et al., 2013) did focus on the role of the RTLB, they did not focus specifically on RTLB language at the Initial Meeting.

A review of the literature also reveals a number of papers written on the rationale and content of the RTLB training programmes. In their paper, Macfarlane et al. (2003) describe the RTLB training programme which had been in place from 1999 to 2010. They focus in particular on the bicultural component of the programme. In addition, Thomson et al. (2003) describe the development of the RTLB training from the inception of the role. Mentis and Kearney (2018) discuss the rationale and content of the specialist teacher training programme developed in 2010. Brown et al. (2000) describe the content of the programme and went on to describe the expectations of practice with respect to an ecological approach, collaborative problem-solving, culturally responsive practice and reflective practice. They then evaluate the effectiveness of the training programme and consider the future direction of the training. Brown et al. (2000) found that the training programme was viewed by RTLB as challenging and helpful. They also found, however, that many new RTLB found it was particularly challenging to adapt to a more supportive consultant role with a collaborative problem-solving focus. Brown et al. (2000) note that this may have been due to their work as a teacher being quite different as they may have previously only worked with groups of children or in 1:1 teaching situations. This has a link to my research as it indicates that the



RTLB role requires CPS skills which, as classroom teachers, RTLB may not have had the opportunity to develop prior to commencing employment as an RTLB. However, while the research by Brown et al. (2000), Macfarlane et al. (2003), Mentis and Kearney (2018) and Thomson et al. (2003) evaluates the expectations of RTLB practice and therefore informs development of this research, it does not look specifically at whether these expectations were enacted in practice.

A further review of the literature reveals several studies specific to RTLB which evaluate RTLB practice and approaches. Walker (2013) investigated the collaborative problem-solving approach and practice of a group of RTLB in their work alongside classroom teachers in two studies. The first study evaluated RTLB practice in ten contrasting cases retrospectively through interviews with RTLB, teachers and school leadership. The second study evaluated current practice and application of a collaborative problem-solving (CPS) model by nine RTLB through analysis of transcripts of taped meetings. Collaboration between RTLB and teachers was taped at three different CPS phases: initial meeting, intervention planning phase (following data gathering) and at or near the end of the intervention phase to check effectiveness and outcomes for teachers and/or students. The findings of Walker's (2013) research suggests that RTLB were successful in using CPS to resolve problems reported at referral and able to foster inclusive practice in classroom contexts. The analysis of the interactions between RTLB and teachers suggests that as a result of the use of their knowledge and use of the CPS process, RTLB took more time to paraphrase teachers' comments, checked assumptions and asked questions which tended to be more open. Walker (2013) also found that using CPS allowed for greater partnerships and strengthened relationships between RTLB and teachers.

Thomson (2013) evaluated teachers' experiences of working with RTLB through the CPS process. RTLB practice was examined closely through interviews with six experienced RTLB and teachers they worked with. The findings show a high degree of satisfaction by teachers for the support provided by RTLB in developing inclusive practice. Thomson (2013) outlines the components the teachers in the study identified as supportive of successful engagement by RTLB. Thomson (2013) also notes that CPS can be highly effective in achieving positive outcomes for students and teachers. Their research did not, however, examine the language used by RTLB at the Initial Meeting phase of the CPS.

The research of Thomson (2013) and Walker (2013) provides an umbrella for the focus of this research. Their research also provides evidence of the effectiveness of CPS as a model of practice for RTLB. Further, the literature on collaborative consultation and CPS mentions the need to explicitly teach CPS skills (e.g. Graesser et al., 2018; Idol et al., 1995; Sheridan et al., 2002; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013). As part of her research, Walker (2013) used transcripts of Initial Meetings, however the data was viewed in the wider context of the whole CPS process. Notably in her discussion of implications for further research, Walker (2013) suggests that a “more in-depth examination of particular phases of the CPS process such as entry meeting or feedback meeting dialogues and documentation” would be beneficial (p. 189). This research, with a focus on the Initial Meeting as the entry to the CPS process, addresses this call for further research. In addition, several studies (e.g. Graesser et al., 2018; Idol et al., 1995; Sheridan et al., 2002; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013) highlight the importance of clear identification of the nature of a problem to the development of interventions and subsequent successful outcomes. In addition, the literature on collaborative consultation and CPS notes the need to explicitly teach the requisite skills (e.g. Bergan & Tombari, 1976; Brown et al., 2000; Graesser et al., 2018; Gutkin & Curtis, 2009; Nevin et al., 1990; Sandoval, 2014; Walker, 2013). This speaks to the focus of this research on language and the attempt to shift RTLB language use at the Initial Meeting phase of CPS. No research was found which examined the Initial Meeting phase of CPS and specifically evaluated RTLB language at this phase. This research seeks to address this gap.

## **This Research**

In summary, a significant amount of literature and research found on inclusion cites the negative impact of deficit-theorising and the importance of strengths-based practice (Ainscow, 2005; Dobson & Gifford-Bryan, 2014; Elder et al., 2018; Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2014; Mentis & Annan, 2013; Thomson, 2013; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013; Wearmouth et al., 2009). In turn the literature on strengths-based practice shows strong links to inclusive schooling practices (Dybiczy, 2011; Elder et al., 2018; Hammond, 2010; Wilding & Griffey, 2015). The significance of inclusion and strengths-based practice to improved outcomes for students and the clear links between them informed my decision to focus on inclusive, strengths-based language in this research.

Given the dearth of research on RTLB practice and especially the Initial Meeting phase, there is a clear need to conduct further research in this area. The review of the literature has shown the importance of language use and inclusive, strengths-based practice in the Initial Meeting, which this research will examine further. This study will also examine whether RTLB practice and language use can be shifted through PLD.

The specific research questions for this study were the following:

1. What language are RTLB using in the Initial Meeting phase of a collaborative problem-solving process?
2. How can RTLB language be shifted through PLD focussing on inclusive, strengths-based language?

There are different linguistic aspects in language one can examine. The reviewed literature indicates four specific language aspects that seem to be key components of inclusive, strengths-based language (e.g. Ainscow, 2005; Donnellan, 1984; Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2014; Mentis & Annan, 2013; Owen et al., 2014; Skoning & Henn-Reinke, 2014; Thomson, 2013; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013). This research will focus on these four specific aspects: avoiding/making assumptions, open/closed questioning, strengths-based/deficit language, external/internal problem attribution. These language aspects are explained further in the following sections.

## **A Focus on Language**

Previously in this literature review, I have identified the key components and importance of inclusion and strengths-based practices to ensure positive outcomes for students. I have also identified the reasons for collaborative consultation using a CPS model being an effective framework. However, what has not been fully detailed is “What will this look like when thinking of an Initial Meeting between an RTLB, as consultant, and an educator, as consultee, who is close to a student (or students) experiencing difficulties?” In the following section, I will discuss the importance of language at an Initial Meeting. The specific language discussed is: making and avoiding assumptions, open and closed questioning, external versus internal problem attribution and strengths-based versus deficit.

Language not only provides a concrete representation of our thoughts and perspectives, it also is a powerful tool which informs thoughts and perspectives (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Maynes et al., 2008; Senge et al., 1994; White & Epston, 1990). There is much research which highlights the significance of a teacher's perceptions when addressing student difficulties. Mentis & Annan, 2013, Rubie-Davies, 2006 and Smith, 2014, note that how educators perceive students and the ways in which they speak to and of students are strong predictors of a student's likelihood of achieving long-term positive educational outcomes. Further, Rubie-Davies, 2006 suggest that teacher interactions are in part determined by their own experiences, perceptions and cognitive bias. Maynes et al. (2008) notes interactions impact, and are impacted by, the language used to conceptualise and articulate behaviour. Smith (2014) urges educators to "delete negative problem-based terms from their vocabulary, such as resistant, non-compliant, unmotivated, maladaptive, inappropriate, and normal" as these terms are based on assumptions and opinion (p. 158). Walker (2013) notes that "an inflexible belief system can bias observations as people tend to look for and find what they are looking for" (p. 31). Senge et al. (1994) points out that it is through increased awareness we are able to review our interpretations and see new possibilities.

A foundational tenet in RTLB work is that all behaviour is communication, including behaviour labelled as 'problem behaviour.' It is through clarifying the underlying message of the behaviour that the true needs of the student are discovered (Donnellan, 1984). Further, Greene (2018) urges educators to avoid 'first-pass' assumptions and judgements and to evaluate the behaviour for its deeper meaning. Smith (2014) encourages educators to become "language/behavior detectives" to make sense of behaviour they do not immediately or fully understand (p. 154).

During an Initial Meeting, as discussed previously, factual language, based on observable actions, which avoids making assumptions, comparisons and opinion-based statements is foundational to developing a clear sense of the nature of the problem. The Initial Meeting is an opportunity to establish rapport and drill down to discover the heart of the problem situation (Walker, 2013). It is clear, non-judgmental, fact-based language which identifies the current difficulties and contributing factors that guide an educator's next steps and ultimately successfully addresses the problem identified.

The way in which educators respond to any situation is dependent on the language used to make meaning of the events and is key to improving educational outcomes for all learners (Mentis & Annan, 2013). What is noticed, or not noticed and the conclusions drawn can be unwittingly biased by an educator's personal perspective. It is therefore essential to explicitly challenge and reflect upon any assumptions and conclusions in order to effect positive change in the ways in which educators address student needs (Mentis & Annan, 2013; Senge et al., 1994). Through RTLB use of language at an Initial Meeting which avoids assumptions, asks open, probing questions, acknowledges what a student can do and externalises problem attribution, educators are supported to create an inclusive, strengths-based conceptualisation of the nature of the problem that informs subsequent actions.

**Assumptions.** An assumption is a statement or belief that is considered true with no evidence to support it (Oxford University Press, 2019a). Assumptions are often created when implicit attitudes impact our interpretation of events. An implicit attitude is a judgement that is automatically generated with little awareness of the source of that attitude (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Further impacting the creation of assumptions is cognitive bias. Cognitive bias is defined by Wilke and Mata (2012) as a “systematic error in judgment and decision making common to all human beings which can be due to cognitive limitations, motivational factors, and/or adaptations to natural environments” (p. 531). S. S. Taylor (2015) notes that we are often quick to evaluate an event and act, however, we are often incorrect. Eberhardt (2019); Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt (2016) suggest that the impact of cognitive bias can be minimised by knowing what our biases are, discussing their implications and being aware of them in the moment.

While many forms of cognitive bias exist, there are a few which are particularly pertinent to this discussion and it would be worthwhile being more aware of their potential for affecting perceptions. We are all impacted by biases due to the way our minds process information and this results in flaws in our thinking (Welsh, 2018). Table 1 presents examples of the cognitive biases which may have some influence at an Initial Meeting.

**Table 1***Examples of Cognitive Biases Which May Influence Assumptions Made*

Cognitive bias	Short description
Anchoring bias	A tendency to anchor a subsequent perspective or judgement to the first piece of information given when making decisions
Attribution bias	A tendency to make attributions about the reasons for someone's own and others' behaviour which are founded on perceptions and not on reality
Confirmation bias	A tendency to selectively perceive or interpret information in order to confirm previous beliefs or understandings
Halo effect	A tendency for someone's positive or negative qualities to be perceived as extending to other areas of the person's life
Illusory correlation	A tendency to make a connection between a particular action and an effect where no connection exists

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Adapted from Wilke and Mata (2012)

To infer is to reach a conclusion based on evidence and reasoning (Oxford University Press, 2019b). The concern therefore, and an issue which underpins this research, is that the evidence and reasoning which form the basis for inference and informs our perspectives, is critically impacted by cognitive bias and assumptions. Further, the role that beliefs, assumptions and values play when we infer meaning for others' actions has a direct influence on how we then respond to those actions (Argyris, 1990; Mentis & Annan, 2013; Senge et al., 1994).

However, Argyris (1990, 1991) and Argyris and Schön (1974) also note that one's beliefs, assumptions and values are resistant to change and it is only through small and ongoing shifts that a new paradigm will emerge. Coolahan (1991) found that educators often made 'inferential' comments when noting students' difficulties. They note that a consultant's use of non-inferential language had a positive impact on the language used by their consultees and increased their use of non-inferential statements (cited by Gutkin & Curtis, 2009, p. 612). In addition, cognitive bias confirms untested assumptions and skews perceptions, increasing the disconnect between perception and reality (Le Fevre, 2010; Le Fevre, Robinson, & Sinnema, 2015). While perception will always be informed by belief and

assumptions, safeguarding against these becoming fixed and unchallenged requires purposeful consideration of thoughts and actions (Butler, 1996; Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2014; Mentis & Annan, 2013). It is through checking with others and publically testing key beliefs and assumptions that others' perspectives are evaluated (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Robinson, 2016, 2014; Schön, 1987). As Argyris (1991) notes, the input from others is "a valuable opportunity for learning" (p. 109). The focus of this research is to enhance RTLB awareness of the factors which impact their thinking and lead to a shift in the language they use.

**Questioning.** A second focus of this research is practice with regards to questioning in order to evaluate and improve the way in which RTLB elicit information, and probe for clarification and meaning. An open question allows consultees to fully respond. It also encourages a response of more than just a few words. It allows the inclusion of more information, thoughts, feelings and perspectives in relation to a subject (Hargreaves, 1984; Lee, Kinzie, & Whittaker, 2012). In contrast, a closed question can elicit a simple yes or no response, limiting the information gained by consultants. Closed questions can also be described as leading when the respondent is led to provide an answer which is based solely on limited options provided by the interviewer (Schein, 2013). For example "Do you think he is being defiant or does he not care what happens to him?" This question allows no scope for the interviewee to provide their own perspective of the nature of the problem and could therefore be considered leading.

As noted previously, the Initial Meeting can be likened to a semi-structured interview. The central questions should be open, guiding the process but giving the respondent scope to reply in their own words (Schein, 2013). The questioning is active and includes probing, for example "what leads you to say that?" or "what else can you tell me about that?". In general, open questions will begin with who, what, where, when, why, or how. Asking questions which are open can help a consultant move the meeting towards greater understanding and clarity (Lambert, 1976; Truscott et al., 2017), "penetrating beneath immediate, superficial responses to comprehend true motives, perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and personality traits" (Ratner, 2002, p. 147). The research of Bergan and Tombari (1976) indicates that consultants who actively guided the process through questions which were designed to elicit information, were more effective in identifying the nature of the problem at hand. An open

question can both serve to clarify or extend a response into new territory (Ratner, 2002). In addition, Hughes and DeForest (1993) found that there was a notable negative correlation between teachers' satisfaction with the consultation process, as consultees, and the use of closed questioning by the consultant. Schein (2013) also suggested that questioning, which is closed and indicates little interest in the consultees perspective and knowledge, can stifle trust.

**Problem Attribution.** The beliefs people hold about behaviour and how learners develop influence the ways in which they respond to learner difficulties (Mentis & Annan, 2013; Walker, 2013). Internal problem attribution sees the difficulty as a deficit within the learner and the consequent response is likely to be to either 'fix' the learner or manage them (Thomson, 2013; Thomson et al., 2003). External problem attribution is an ecological perspective and sees the difficulty as a result of a mismatch between the learner and their environment. As a result educators will strive to adapt the environment to address this imbalance.

Language used can either infer internal attribution, locating the difficulty within the person and therefore fixed in place, or it can externalise the nature of the problem. Language which externalises the problem locates it at a position external to the person. For example, to say a student is dyslexic locates the condition as being part of the student. Alternatively, to say a student has dyslexia is locating the problem externally to the student.

Studies have shown that teachers, when considering the source of learner difficulties, have a tendency towards attributing the difficulty to the inherent disposition of the learner or their home circumstances, and they undervalue the effect of teaching, class and school-related factors (Christenson, Ysseldyke, Wang, & Algozzine, 1983; Medway, 1979). This has the potential to impact directly on problem identification, for if the focus is on factors external to the classroom, other significant factors may be overlooked and not addressed (Zins & Ponti, 1996). Further, J. Annan et al. (2006) note that the continued prevalence of internal problem attribution for learners experiencing difficulties in education, is a stance that is in contrast with an ecological view.



Distancing the person from the problem allows a liberation from the problem and empowers effective action (J. Annan et al., 2006). Freeman, Epston, and Lobovits (1997) note, attention then moves from the problem to the student's relationship with the problem. RTLB language at the Initial Meeting which is consistent with an ecological approach and signals external problem attribution is important in order to promote a culture of inclusion and possibility.

**Strengths-Based Language.** Identification of a student's strengths and interests at the Initial Meeting phase of the CPS process shifts the focus away from what is not working towards what is working and what might be possible. As Calderhead (1987) pointed out, one of the aspects of teacher understanding which is pivotal to effective teaching is the teacher's deep knowledge of student strengths. Mentis and Annan (2013) note that the identification of positive characteristics better supports appropriate intervention planning for students. However, Elder et al. (2018) suggest that while SBP is not new, the use of SBP at the initial phase of a plan to develop support for students with additional needs has been limited. Their concern also is that only 'surface-level' recognition is given to noting student strengths as opposed to the primary focus being on seeking the opportunities that are inherent in recognising what a student can do.

To illustrate, the following are two different framings of the nature of a problem. The first is from a non-strengths, deficit perspective, the second is from a SBP perspective:

1. Freda is a year 6 student who is dyslexic and intellectually disabled. Freda is achieving well below her peers for literacy and numeracy.
2. Freda is a friendly student who enjoys horse-riding and construction toys. Freda is currently reading level 9 text with 92% accuracy and 100% comprehension. She is at early level 1 for her numeracy. Freda has dyslexia. She has difficulty remembering instructions, however when she uses a graphic organiser and has peer support, she is more-able to recall information.

The description of Freda in the first paragraph is limited and non-specific. In contrast, the description of Freda in the second example paints a fuller picture identifying her strengths

and what works. The identification of students' strengths and the use of strengths-based language at the Initial Meeting phase should be a significant feature of RTLB practice.

A further issue is with respect to the use of labels to describe student difficulties. While awareness of any underlying diagnosed difficulty may have relevance, when identifying the nature of a problem it is important that the diagnostic label does not promote assumptions and links to stereotypical behaviours associated with the diagnosis. In addition, a diagnostic label may be used to in effect define the student as somehow not 'normal' as opposed to seeing the student as an individual with their own unique strengths, skills, challenges and interests (S. J. Taylor, 2006; Van der Klift & Kunc, 1994). Strengths-based language is language which is non-stigmatising and enhances self-worth. A student is not ADHD, a student has a mixture of strengths, abilities and some of these strengths can at times, and in certain contexts, create difficulty. For example, being highly energetic is a significant strength when engaged in outdoor activities, however, this could also create some difficulty when required to sit quietly for an extended period of time.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This research was designed to examine RTLB language in the Initial Meeting and evaluate shifts in RTLB language towards an increased use of inclusive, strengths-based language following professional development. The specific language aspects examined are: making and avoiding assumptions, open and closed questioning, external versus internal problem attribution and strengths-based versus deficit. The research focussed specifically on providing RTLB with professional learning and opportunities to reflect on their actual practice. The latter was enabled through guided analysis of their language use during the Initial Meeting phase on transcribed audio-recordings. The transcriptions and the RTLB reflections form the data for this research.

This chapter provides a description of the research context and the research paradigm. This is followed by a description of the research design, participants, data collection methods and data analysis. The chapter then concludes with the ethical considerations for this research.

### **Research Context**

The research setting was the RTLB cluster where I am employed as Practice Leader. One of my responsibilities is facilitating the cluster's professional learning and development (PLD) aimed at specific practice needs. The PLD offered for this research was planned as part of this role. The RTLB cluster involved in this research services schools in an area which includes primary, intermediate and secondary schools in an urban setting, primary and secondary schools in rural townships and isolated rural primary and area schools. The cluster is housed across several host schools. Liaison RTLB are identified to work across approximately two to five schools with a key role of developing strong, collaborative relationships, supporting school-wide identification of student needs and strategic support for those needs. At times, one or two RTLB may work alongside the Liaison RTLB either with their own casework or in a co-worker situation. RTLB also work closely and collaboratively with Ministry of Education Learning Support staff.

## Paradigm

In my research, I have taken a multi-paradigmatic perspective. Paradigms which denote the design of my research can best be described as post-positivist/critical (Medina & Taylor, 2013). Traditionally, critical paradigms in research are associated with qualitative data as opposed to positivist paradigms, which are seen as reliant on quantitative data. Valsiner (2000) notes that the significant distinction between these paradigms is not whether the data is qualitative or quantitative, rather it is about the fundamental beliefs and frameworks of each paradigm. As opposed to viewing these two paradigm groups as contradictory, Valsiner (2000) reasons that quantitative data is derived from qualitative data.

Positivism endeavours to “investigate, confirm and predict law-like patterns of behaviour” (Medina & Taylor, 2013, p. 2). Although post-positivism subscribes to the same ideals, it employs additional methods like surveys, interviews and observations (Creswell, 2012). As Willis (2007) notes, a post-positivist paradigm is a softer version of positivism with the same underpinning principles, however, there is a greater degree of interaction between the researcher and the research participants. This aligns with my role of practitioner researcher where I am synchronously seeking my own learning and practice improvement and engaging with and documenting RTLB professional growth as research participants.

Medina and Taylor (2013) note that a critical paradigm “involves identifying and transforming socially unjust social structures, policies, beliefs and practices” (p. 6). In a critical research paradigm, a process of inquiry contributes a key component and allows for analysis and critique of policies and practice (McNiff, 2010). As Brookfield (1998) notes, critically reflective practice engages practitioners in an inquiry process endeavouring to discern and critique the assumptions that form the basis of their work. The researcher’s role becomes “one of advocacy, a change agent who argues for and leads the way towards a more equitable, fair and sustainable society” (Taylor & Medina, 2013. p. 6). A critical paradigm asks that I raise my own critical consciousness (Brookfield, 1998) and hold an expectation of improvement which is a fundamental driver for me in this research.

The words we use to describe a problem situation not only describe our conceptualisation of the problem, but also inform and shape our understanding and evaluation

of that problem situation. There is an inherently reciprocal relationship between the words we use and our thinking (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Maynes et al., 2008; Senge et al., 1994; White & Epston, 1990). Central to the study was whether the PLD I facilitated had an impact on the language used by RTLB at Initial Meetings towards a greater use of inclusive, strengths-based language. When considering the best approach to achieve this end, I considered the features of quantitative and qualitative data collection.

While both types of data collection can utilise interviews and observation Creswell (2012) describes quantitative data collection as predominantly closed where the response options are fixed and determined by the researcher. The data is commonly numeric and analysis primarily involves some form of statistical analysis. The conclusions drawn are quantifiable and, when possible, generalisable (Bell, 2010). Creswell (2012) describes qualitative data collection on the other hand, as a predominantly open approach where more general questions are asked and the participants are allowed the opportunity to respond in their own way. The interest is in understanding participants' view of their world (Bell, 2010). The approach selected for this research aligns with the position taken by Valsiner (2000) that the two paradigms are not necessarily contradictory and for the purposes of this research, quantitative data has been derived from qualitative data through the analysis and coding of RTLB language and reflection. Collection of qualitative data has, however, been the primary approach used through questionnaires, audio-recordings and participant reflection.

## **Research Design**

This research was designed to examine the language used by RTLB at the Initial Meeting phase of the CPS and to evaluate the shifts made as a result of targeted PLD. The Professional Learning and Development (PLD) involved two 3-hour sessions in which RTLB learned about language use. As a basis for follow-up analysis and reflection, RTLB recorded Initial Meeting conversations prior to the first PLD session and subsequent to the second PLD session. There was a period of approximately 3½ months between the first and second PLD session. This research sits within a wider PLD focus conducted within the cluster regarding RTLB practice expectations at an Initial Meeting.

The Initial Meeting transcripts served two purposes. Firstly, RTLB used their transcripts of the two Initial Meetings as an opportunity to observe and reflect on their own

language through guided analysis. Secondly, my analysis of RTLB language within the transcripts provided data for this research.

The first Initial Meeting was recorded prior to PLD Session 1 and provides baseline data. Baseline data are collected before an intervention commences and provide information on practice prior to the intervention (Creswell, 2012). The second Initial Meeting was recorded after PLD Session 2 had been completed and provides the post-intervention data. I transcribed all audio-recordings myself in order to be as familiar as possible with the content. Table 2 below shows the PLD timeline and outlines the data sources used in this research.

**Table 2***Timeline in Relation to PLD and Description of Data Sources*

Time point	Intervention	Data collected
Pre PLD Session #1	Initial Meeting 1 audio recorded	Initial Meeting Transcript 1 (IMT-1)
PLD Session # 1	PLD Session #1	
Post PLD Session #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RTLB analysis of own transcript</li> <li>• RTLB noted reflections on transcript</li> <li>• RTLB completed reflection questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial Meeting Transcript Reflection by RTLB (IMTR-1)</li> <li>• Initial Meeting Reflection Questionnaire by RTLB (IMRQ-1)</li> </ul>
PLD Session #2	PLD Session #2	
Post PLD Session #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial Meeting 2 audio recorded</li> <li>• RTLB analysis of own transcripts</li> <li>• RTLB noted reflections on transcript</li> <li>• RTLB completed reflection questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial Meeting Transcript 2 (IMT-2)</li> <li>• Initial Meeting 2 Transcript Reflection by RTLB (IMTR-2)</li> <li>• Initial Meeting Reflection Questionnaire by RTLB (IMRQ-2)</li> </ul>

**Background to PLD development.** The focus of the PLD was based on my observations over time of the language used in Requests for Support to the RTLB service and by case discussions with RTLB. The content of the PLD was informed by a literature review on the principles of inclusion and strengths-based practice and the language used when situated within this paradigm. I had also attended three presentations on narrative theory by Branka Vasilic, a Ministry of Education Educational Psychologist, which resonated with me. Her workshops highlighted the importance of the narrative and the significance of how we

use language to frame the nature of a problem. In addition, I drew on my experience as a presenter of The Incredible Years Teacher programme developed by Carolyn Webster-Stratton (Webster-Stratton, Reinke, Herman, & Newcomer, 2011) and a variety of other PLD workshops I had facilitated to develop a format which was intended to be engaging, interactive and enabled the RTLB to reflect on the content.

The development of the first workshop and associated PowerPoint was iterative (see PowerPoint 1 in Appendix A). I developed a draft and invited feedback from my supervisors, amended, adapted, gathered other resources and re-sent for feedback. The development of the second PLD (see PowerPoint 2 in Appendix B) was similarly iterative with the addition of RTLB feedback during and subsequent to PLD Session 1.

The PLD was designed to present the information and then allow the RTLB to ‘learn in action’ themselves, reflecting on their own language to promote improved understandings and practice. This is shown to be a far more powerful and effective way to learn. Huberman (1992) speaks of the benefit of providing an opportunity for practitioners to observe themselves. He notes that “we actually find out who we are when we watch ourselves act and what we think when we hear ourselves say something” (Huberman, 1992, p. 9). Reflective practice provides an important opportunity for RTLB to develop as practitioners (Brown et al., 2000). As Butler (1996) notes, reflection is influenced by what we do and what we do is influenced by reflection. This reflection on action is defined by Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) as “those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciation” (p. 19). Through providing a reflective activity new understandings connect with prior knowing, thoughts and feelings are evaluated and new skills and knowledge develop (Butler, 1996). As Butler (1996) continues, this results in ongoing opportunities for improved action and reflective practice which could be seen as a primary driver for improvement. Therefore, the intention of the PLD was to provide an “invitation to think” in a systematic way (Aydon-Pou, 2010, p. 29).



**PLD session 1.** All RTLB in the cluster participated in the three-hour whole cluster PLD session. The session focussed on learning about and discussing the different language concepts: cognitive bias, narrative, assumptions, subjective or emotive language versus objective, neutral language, paraphrasing, open and closed questioning, external or internal problem attribution and strengths-based versus deficit theorising. The RTLB were then introduced to a code book which had been developed (See Code Book: Analysis of Initial Meeting in Appendix C). The development of the code book is described in a later section. The code book showed the four language themes being coded and provided illustrative examples. These themes were avoiding or making assumptions, open or closed questioning, strengths-based or deficit language and external or internal problem attribution. The RTLB undertook a practice analysis of a mock transcript with which they had been provided, worked on coding the transcript individually and then discussed their findings in groups.

An aim of the practice analysis was for RTLB to develop an understanding of the concepts presented and have an opportunity to practise identifying the language within a transcript of an Initial Meeting before undertaking the exercise with their own Initial Meeting transcript. A second aim was to encourage RTLB to familiarise themselves with the code book. They were encouraged to ask clarifying questions and ensure they understood how to undertake the coding of their transcript. In addition, group discussions and an opportunity to sense-make with colleagues were intended to enhance their practical understanding and ability to apply the learning at a later time.

**PLD session 2.** The second PLD session covered in greater depth the elements of best practice for an Initial Meeting. This session began by recapping the previous PLD session. The purpose of the PLD was reiterated and there was discussion on the purpose of an Initial Meeting to establish a shared understanding. Subsequently, the RTLB principles of practice were discussed in relation to the Initial Meeting phase. The RTLB undertook two group activities specifically related to inclusive and strengths-based practice and what this would look and sound like at the Initial Meeting phase. The CPS model was then discussed in relation to key understandings and latest research.

As a result of discussion at the first PLD, it became evident that there was not a single guiding template for RTLB to use at an Initial Meeting which supported their practice and

provided a clear framework for the interview. There were several templates available, in addition to RTLB having developed their own. In following a collaborative consultative problem-solving model, it is important that RTLB are responsive to the context (Brown et al., 2000; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013). The practice expectation therefore is that there is not a 'one-size-fits-all approach' and RTLB are expected to adapt to the context as appropriate. It is equally important, however, that key elements of practice are present.

In order to provide a framework which incorporated the key elements, RTLB developed a revised Initial Meeting template during PLD Session 2. Based on the learnings within the PLD regarding the purpose and expectations of an Initial Meeting, RTLB worked in groups of four reviewing three existing Initial Meeting templates. RTLB provided recommendations for an updated format based on the PLD, discussion and a synthesis of the three templates. I collated these recommendations and shared the revised document with the RTLB team via an online document platform for final input and endorsement. This new Initial Meeting template was used by all RTLB as a guiding document in their second Initial Meeting. It provided a scaffold for improvement at this phase. Included here are some examples of questions contained in the Initial Meeting Template (See Appendix D):

1. What are your concerns?
2. What is the challenging situation?
3. What impact is this having for the student/for you?
4. What factors within this context may lead to the difficulties occurring?

**Participants.** Twelve RTLB agreed to participate in this research. The participants were asked to fill out an online questionnaire noting how long they had been practising as an RTLB and where and when they had completed their RTLB training. To avoid identification of the research participants, I have aggregated this information and have not presented this in relation to individual RTLB.

The participants' experience ranged from a newly employed RTLB with one year in the role to an RTLB who had been employed as an RTLB for 16 years. The average length of time working as an RTLB for research participants was seven years. All participants completed their training post-2010 and therefore had undertaken, or are undertaking, the

Post-Graduate Specialist Teachers Diploma through Massey University or Canterbury University as opposed to the Diploma in Education (Special Needs Resource Teaching) taught through the University of Auckland and Victoria University prior to 2010. There were six RTLB in the 45 –54 age band, four in the 55 – 64 age band and two in the 65 – 74 age band. No one was under 45 years old. There were nine female and three male RTLB in the study.

Another participant group were the teachers who participated in the Initial Meetings. The RTLB identified interviewees from the requests for RTLB support, which were submitted approximately two to three weeks prior to the Initial Meeting. All interviewees were invited to consent to the audio-recording, however they were not the focus of this research. The majority of the Initial Meetings were with one interviewee; however, three Initial Meetings were with two interviewees.

## **Data Collection**

The research drew on three different data sources with all twelve participants providing data for these. These data sources included: Transcripts of Initial Meetings, RTLB reflections on the transcripts of these Initial Meetings and RTLB reflection questionnaires. These three data sources are further described below.

**Transcripts of Initial Meetings.** RTLB undertook Initial Meetings with the interviewee in their role as a Liaison RTLB in a school. These meetings lasted approximately 30 minutes. I asked RTLB to audio-record Initial Meetings prior to PLD Session 1 (IMT-1) and subsequent to PLD Session 2 (IMT-2) to enable pre- and post-intervention analysis of RTLB language when describing the problem situation and context. The two recordings were for separate requests for support.

The audio-recordings were transcribed by myself and provided to the RTLB. The transcripts served a two-fold purpose. In the first instance, RTLB coded their transcripts themselves as an element of the PLD to support reflection on and analysis of their own language. It was hypothesised that this would increase awareness of their own behaviour and therefore increase incidence of inclusive and strengths-based language. For the purpose of

this research, and independent of the RTLB coding, I analysed and coded the transcripts for incidence of focus language. These data are evidence of RTLB language and understandings “in the field”. The data from IMT-1 provides a view on RTLB practice before the intervention. The comparison of IMT-1 and IMT-2 allowed an evaluation of the effectiveness of the professional development provided.

Transcripts varied in length from just over seven minutes long to just under an hour. The average length of a transcript was 27 minutes for the first audio recordings and 21 minutes for the second audio recordings. The range for the first Initial Meeting length was 7 minutes to 59 minutes. The range for the second Initial Meeting length was 11 minutes to 38 minutes. As can be seen by these times the most significant outliers in recording times, and therefore contributing to the greater range, occurred in the first Initial Meeting. The second Initial Meetings were more consistent in length. It is notable that the lengths of the meetings decreased between the first and second Initial Meetings. This result shows links to the research conducted by Zins and Ponti (1996) which suggests that improving CPS skills at the initial phase may reduce the amount of time needed for the consultation.

**RTLB transcript reflection.** The RTLB were also asked to note their reflections on the Initial Meeting transcript (IMTR-1 and IMTR-2). This data source was based on a strategy developed by Argyris and Schön (1974) which they called the “left hand column.” Participants are asked to write the thoughts and feelings they had during the conversation but did not express, in a left-hand column on the transcript. This was adapted for the purposes of this study and RTLB were asked to note any reflections on the Initial Meeting, both thoughts they had at the time of the meeting and those thoughts they had as a result of the transcript analysis. The purpose of this was to provide evidence on whether RTLB increased their reflective comments with respect to the four language themes.

**RTLB Reflection Questionnaire.** The RTLB completed a reflection questionnaire (IMRQ-1 and IMRQ-2) for each of their Initial Meetings. The questionnaires provided an additional opportunity for the RTLB to reflect on the two Initial Meetings conducted. The reflection questionnaire provided data on the ability of the RTLB to reflect on their language at the Initial Meeting phase.

The questionnaire was based on a format developed by Walker (2013). The original questionnaire was developed as an entry (initial) meeting checklist for RTLB during training. I adapted the checklist to form a reflective questionnaire for RTLB. The development was iterative, I sought input from my supervisors on initial drafts and continued to adapt the questionnaire as I developed the PLD sessions and refined the research design.

This research has been situated within a wider whole cluster PLD focus on the Initial Meeting phase of CPS. The questionnaire's purpose was to provide RTLB with an opportunity to reflect on the Initial Meeting and identify the presence, or absence, of the key elements of this phase. The Initial Meeting Questionnaire can be found in Appendix E.

IMRQ-1 contained twelve questions and took RTLB approximately 15 minutes to complete. IMRQ-2 contained a further two questions (see below) which took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The questions aimed to promote RTLB reflection on their conduct of the Initial Meeting and provided a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire items, which were not part of the data analysis in this study focussed on participation, relationship development, problem identification, avoiding solutions, data collection and identification of next steps. The questionnaire items, which provided data relevant to this research were:

- Question 1: What were your impressions/feelings about the meeting?
- Question 11: What would you do differently next time?
- Question 12: What are your thoughts regarding this opportunity to review your transcript and reflect on your Initial Meeting?
- Question 13 (*IMRQ-2 only*): What are your thoughts about this Initial Meeting compared to your first recorded meeting?
- Question 14 (*IMRQ-2 only*): Any other comments?

## **Data Analysis**

I used discourse analysis of the coded transcripts and coded RTLB reflections to explore RTLB language use in the Initial Meeting. Discourse analysis allows a clear identification of the perspectives evident and shows what meaning is given to problem

situations (Gee, 2014; Thomas, 2006). It has a focus on language as it is used in communication as opposed to language that would be seen in a text book, for example (Mills, 2004). A code book was constructed to allow systematic analysis of the qualitative data (Wilson, 2017). Using a codebook allows the researcher to organise text of varying size from single words up to whole paragraphs into “units of meaning” (Bell, 2010, p. 221). Initial Meeting transcripts for the twelve research participants were coded for language as per the code book. I coded the transcripts independent of the coding the RTLB had completed as part of their PLD. Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data derived from the RTLB reflections on (IMTR-1 and IMTR-2) and the questionnaires (IMRQ-1 and IMRQ-2) for evidence of reflection on the four identified themes. Questions 13 and 14 were not present in IMRQ-1 and therefore were not coded in IMRQ-2. These questions did, however, provide qualitative evidence on RTLB reflections on the PLD.

Focus language was coded using primarily a deductive approach. Vogt (2014) proposes that most, if not all, social research is in part deductive and in part inductive. Vogt (2014) describes a deductive approach as the researcher going to the literature first to review relevant theories and general understandings. Further, Vogt (2014) describes an inductive approach as first undertaking research in the field and then undertaking a literature review which is relevant to the context and findings.

Each transcript was analysed and coded with the relevant phrase colour coded to link to the letter code. Language aspects coded as positive (+) were: avoiding assumptions, open questioning, external problem attribution and strengths-based. The specific language aspects coded as negative (-) were: making assumptions, closed questioning, internal problem attribution and deficit. The frequency for each code was collated for each transcript. Subsequent to the analysis of each individual RTLB’s IMT-1 and IMT-2 the number of instances for each language category was then collated across all 12 transcripts to show overall shifts in language. This was converted to a percentage of the total number of instances of either + or – language using the following formula:

$$\text{Collated Aspect (+ or -) \%} = \frac{\sum \text{Aspect Frequency (+ or -)}}{\sum \text{Total Aspect Frequency (+ \& -)}} \times 100$$

The RTLB reflections in IMTR-1, IMTR-2, IMRQ-1 and IMRQ-2 were reviewed and coded with the relevant phrase colour coded to link to the letter code. The frequency for each code was collated for each transcript. Subsequent to the analysis of each individual RTLB's IMT-1, IMT-2, IMRQ-1 and IMRQ-2 the number of instances for each language aspect was then collated across all twelve transcripts to show overall incidence of and shifts in reflection on focus language. No statistical testing was done due to the small sample size.

**Initial Meeting Transcripts: Development of the Code Book.** Through an iterative process, the code book was developed to support consistent analysis of the language used during the Initial Meeting. Establishing codes systematises the data in order to identify separate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). A review of literature and anecdotal information gained in my role as a Practice Leader informed the initial development of the code book. As observations of RTLB language in the field informed the development of the codes an inductive approach had some influence. This was shared with my supervisors for feedback. The feedback informed the next iteration of the code book.

To aid clarity and to check RTLB understanding of the code book, it was tested by the RTLB. During PLD Session 1, RTLB were provided with a mock transcript and asked to provide feedback regarding the ease of use of the code book and any suggested edits or amendments. Adaptations were made as a result to ensure the code book could be applied with fidelity. The code book contained sections on each of the four language aspects with a description of these and illustrative examples of the language. The code book was formatted with the left side of the page describing the inclusive, strengths-based language and the right side of the page describing the language which was not inclusive or strengths-based.

The specific language coded for was:

- Assumptions made or avoided (A+/-)
- Questions open or closed (Q+/-)
- Strengths-based or deficit language (S+/-)
- Problem attribution external or internal (PA+/-)

As part of the professional development phase RTLB were asked to use the Code Book: Analysis of Initial Meeting to code IMT-1 and IMT-2 for language described by the

code book. They were asked to code all language in the transcript. It is through insight into their own and others' language that awareness is raised and change is possible (Boud et al., 1985; Brown et al., 2000; Butler, 1996).

**Initial Meeting reflections: Development of the codes.** With respect to coding the RTLB reflections on transcripts (IMTR-1 and IMTR-2) and the questionnaires (IMRQ-1 and IMRQ-2), I used a deductive approach when coding the data in regard to the four language aspects I had identified. As Braun and Clarke (2006) point out, in the field of qualitative research thematic analysis can be considered a useful and flexible tool. Analysis of the RTLB reflective comments on the transcripts revealed evidence of RTLB reflection in relation to the four language aspects. The IMTR-1 and IMTR-2 were coded for all reflective comments made about assumptions made or avoided, open or closed questions, strengths-based or deficit language and external or internal problem attribution. Both positive and negative aspects were coded as evidence of RTLB reflection on each of the four aspects.

**Trustworthiness.** All transcripts were coded twice by me. The second coding was completed to ensure consistency of application through all transcripts and to check all calculations. In addition, a randomly selected transcript set (IMT-1 and IMT-2) was sent to both supervisors for an independent cross-checking of the coding. As MacDonald and Weller (2017) suggest, I used a process of critical self-reflection to also ensure trustworthiness by consulting regularly with my supervisors and engaging actively with all feedback. This helped to widen my perspectives and drew attention to any bias or flaw in my thinking.

Triangulation of data through employing several different methods of data collection aided data reliability (Shenton, 2004). The data collection methods employed were transcripts of Initial Meetings, RTLB reflections on transcripts and questionnaires. Triangulation also occurred through a wide range of contexts in evidence in the Initial Meeting transcripts. Further, reliability is supported by an "audit trail" which enables the reader to follow the progress and development of the research step-by-step (Shenton, 2004). Trustworthiness was further enhanced through participation being voluntary and having participants who were willing to be involved (Shenton, 2004).



## **Ethical Considerations**

Researchers need to be mindful of ethical issues at all times during their research. As McNiff (2010) points out ethical considerations are a significant contributor to the worthiness of the research. Ethical considerations are particularly important at the data collection and report writing phase (Creswell, 2012). The following section discusses the ethical issues taken into considerations for this research.

**Position of the researcher.** I conducted research within the RTLB cluster where I am employed as a Practice Leader and am therefore positioned as an insider. The RTLB who were invited to participate were my colleagues. It was important that the research took place within my own cluster, because this research focussed on the interpersonal skills and behaviours used in the practice of the participants. As the practice leader, I had built a rapport with the RTLB and the discussion of one's own interpersonal practice and behaviours is a sensitive topic.

Participants in such contexts have a greater need to feel safe with the researcher and the research process. I have been the Practice Leader since 2012 and I have established professional relationships with participants based on trust and integrity, which enabled my research to be conducted in a familiar, safe, comfortable and non-threatening manner.

The professional and trusting relationships I have with my participants could, however, have led to perceived coercion to participate. It was important that I stressed the voluntary nature of the research. Furthermore, the existing relationships between myself and the participants could have weakened the objective nature of the study. I kept in close contact with my university supervisors who acted as 'critical friends' in regard to following rigorous procedures and processes, and with inferring potential findings. The supervisors were available as advisors throughout the study to ensure that the research was conducted with rigour while maintaining respectful relationships.

**Potential risks to participants.** RTLB and teachers were made aware that their participation was voluntary. Signed consent was sought from all participants - RTLB and teachers who were involved in the Initial Meeting (see Consent Forms in Appendix F).

Participants were not pressured or coerced into participating. To avoid the risk of feeling pressured into participation, I only issued one invite to all potential participants and did not send reminders. Participants were fully informed as to the project purpose, design, outcomes and the expectations on them in the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (see Appendix F). They were given every opportunity to consider their involvement and the potential benefits or risks.

**Confidentiality.** All data has been stored securely. Paper documents have been stored in a locked cabinet in a room which is also locked. Electronic documents have been stored on a password protected laptop. The consent forms included information on who will have access to the data and where the data will be stored. Participants are entitled to confidentiality and every effort was made to ensure the participants are not exposed to any potential harm as a result of their involvement in the research project. Pseudonyms have been used for all names with no information included which could identify participants.

**Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw.** Participation in this research was voluntary RTLB could choose to not give consent to have their data used for research purposes. They were also informed they could withdraw their data at any stage before data analysis had begun, one month after submitting their second audio-recording.

The Teachers who participated in the meeting that was audio-recorded were made aware that participation was entirely voluntary and they had the right to withdraw their consent at any stage until one month after the RTLB submitted the second transcript for transcription. The Cluster Manager and I, in my role as a practice leader for this RTLB Cluster, gave an assurance that their participation or non-participation would have no effect on their relationship with the RTLB services.

## Chapter Four: Findings

As outlined in Chapter Three, this study has focussed on the language used by RTLB in the Initial Meeting phase of their case work. This chapter consists of two sections as through the course of my research it became clear that there were two distinct foci – language used and reflections. Thus, section 1 discusses the findings from the analysis of the Initial Meetings transcriptions for the use of language and the shifts in language as a result of the Professional Development undertaken by the RTLB. This section therefore discusses the ‘language used’ component of my research. Section 2 discusses the RTLB observations and reflections on the Initial Meeting transcript and the Initial Meeting Reflection template. This section therefore discusses the “reflections” component of the research. Within both sections, my interest lies in identifying shifts and is guided by both research questions.

These questions are:

1. What language are RTLB using in the Initial Meeting phase of a collaborative problem-solving process?
2. How can RTLB language be shifted through PLD focussing on inclusive, strengths-based language?

This research is about supporting a shift in practice and evaluating the effectiveness of the targeted professional development provided. The importance of practice that is inclusive and strengths-based has been shown in a review of the literature. Further, the literature highlights the importance of the knowledge and skills used in collaborative consultation and CPS. This research has focussed on professional development aimed at increasing RTLB skills at the Initial meeting phase of the CPS.

### **What We Say: Language Used During the Initial Meeting**

A comparison of the data indicating the shifts in RTLB use of language is presented below. These data were derived from a collation of the coding of the twelve Initial Meeting transcripts and is presented in Table 3. This table provides the raw data and percentages of the incidence of the four language codes in the transcripts of the Initial Meetings. It shows these raw data and percentages for the Initial Meetings conducted prior to PLD Session #1

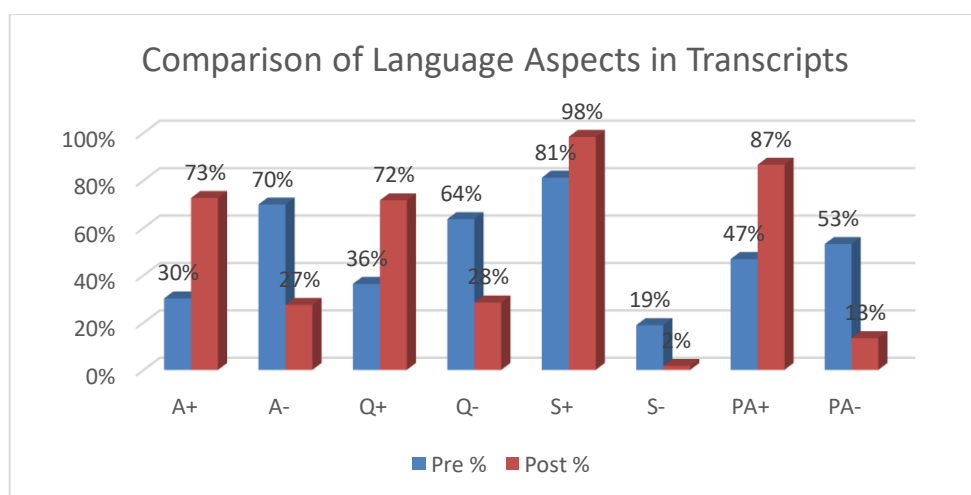
(Pre PLD) and subsequent to PLD Session #2 (Post PLD). The table indicates the shift in the incidence of focus language used by the RTLB in the Initial Meeting following their participation in the PLD. These results and some examples are discussed in separate sections on assumptions, questioning, strengths and problem attribution.

**Table 3**

*Collation of Instances of Language Aspects Across All Transcripts.*

Code	Pre PLD		Post PLD	
	Frequency	% of coding	Frequency	% of coding
A+	93	30%	222	73%
A-	215	70%	84	27%
Q+	218	36%	390	72%
Q-	382	64%	155	28%
S+	73	81%	116	98%
S-	17	19%	2	2%
PA+	37	47%	71	87%
PA-	42	53%	11	13%

In Figure 1 below these results are visually presented. The figure indicates visually the shift in use of the language aspects by RTLB following the two PLD sessions.



**Figure 1**

*Comparison of Language Aspects in Initial Meeting Transcripts Collated for All Transcripts*

**Assumptions.** Overall RTLB increased their language towards avoiding assumptions from an average of 30% to an average of 73%. This is an average increase of 43% between IMT-1 and IMT-2. An example of a statement which makes assumptions can be seen when RTLB6 commented in IMT-1 “so you obviously have a very high influence with him.” The language made assumptions about the level of influence effected by the interviewee on the student in addition to drawing a conclusion (“obviously”) between the behaviour reported by the interviewee and any influence they may have without testing this belief.

A statement by RTLB6 in IMT-2 shows an example of avoiding assumptions - “[are] there any other triggers that you might see other than the things that are taken away or broken or damaged?” The language was qualifying i.e. “might see” as opposed to definite “will see” statements. Additionally, the behaviours were described in terms of what was observable, with no assumption as to intent or purpose when “things are taken away or broken or damaged.”

A further example of a question asked which avoided assumptions is shown below when RTLB1, in IMT-2, asked “So, what sort of behaviours are you seeing? and “When you say frustrated, what do you mean by that? What do you see happening?” The questions encouraged avoiding assumptions through asking for behaviours “seen.” In addition, the RTLB asked the interviewee what they meant by “frustrated.” This allows for factual gathering of information and avoided assumptions creeping in which quickly, if not careful, could assume the mantle of fact.

*RTLB1: So, what sort of behaviours are you seeing?*

*Interviewee: You know he becomes... what I have noticed with the young fellow is that sitting there observing him... he loves to sit there and he will listen to stories, he will listen to ideas, he will observe the clips that have been displayed to him but as soon as it's putting to paper he becomes frustrated*

*RTLB1: When you say frustrated, what do you mean by that? What do you see happening?*

An example of reframing a statement in order to avoid an assumption is illustrated by RTL9 in IMT-2:

*Interviewee: But not incredibly empathetic [laughs]*

*RTL9: Mmmm*

*Interviewee: That sort of fails him a wee bit.*

*RTL9: You feel that he doesn't really show any empathy or kindness.*

*Interviewee: Not very often. Not very often,*

*RTL9: No we don't see the empathy very often.*

The teacher described the student as being “not incredibly empathetic.” The RTL9 reframed and paraphrased. The initial part of the paraphrase, “you feel,” takes the comment away from a statement of fact towards a statement of opinion. RTL9’s next comment “we don’t see” allows for the possibility that the student may have empathy. The statement moves away from deficit theorising and avoided assumptions i.e. it is not that he is unable to show empathy or kindness, it is a matter of the RTL9 and interviewee not seeing the student often showing empathy or kindness in their context.

**Questioning.** When comparing IMT-1 and IMT-2 data, occurrences of RTL9 asking open questions increased from 36% to 72% of the questions. A statement made by RTL9 in IMT-2 which gave a strong example of open questioning was “What are the possible triggers... the factors within the context that may lead to these difficulties occurring?” The language was open, allowing a full response from the teacher and cannot be responded to with a simple yes or no. Additionally, the question avoided leading i.e. telling the teacher what they should or should not think.

An example of a closed question asked by RTL9 in IMT-1 was “Do you think that there is comfort for him in being at a level where he is achieving?” This question may elicit a simple yes or no answer. It led the interviewee towards a particular stance and allows anchoring bias to influence their response i.e. there is more comfort for him being at the level he is achieving. A more open framing could have been “what do you think about him being at a level where he is achieving?” This would have encouraged the interviewee to provide their own perspective without the influence of anchoring bias.

**Strength-based language.** In regard to strengths-based language, there was generally a high incidence in both IMT-1 and IMT-2. RTLB did, however, increase their use of strengths-based language from 80% to 98%. This was an increase of 18% in the number of strengths-based statements between IMT-1 and IMT-2. An example of deficit language can be illustrated by a comment in IMT-1 with RTLB3 (emphasis added):

*Interviewee: Yep, I would say interacting with peers yeah because he is often quite isolated because nobody wants to play with him.*

*RTLB3: Because he is quite rigid is I think what you ... shared.*

*RTLB3: Difficulties with transitions from activities, from play across the school day just in general and Mum has concerns about personal safety, no boundaries when it comes to kids and adults and he has difficulty interacting with peers.*

The highlighted words in the excerpt above i.e. “no boundaries” is an example of an absolute statement. If the student has “no boundaries” inherent in this statement is the total lack of possibility that there are some boundaries. Such statements allow little room for the other person to point out positive possibilities i.e. that in some contexts the student has some boundaries. In addition, explicit statements are made regarding the students perceived deficit as illustrated by the RTLB noting “he is quite rigid.” The RTLB is paraphrasing to check for understanding and reiterating the teacher’s words, which does support the teacher to feel heard. However, in situations such as this the RTLB role in an Initial Meeting is to reframe through paraphrase in such a way as to shift deficit perspectives towards strengths-based language. An example of reframing the above statements towards strengths-based could be:

*RTLB3: Because he works well when he knows exactly what will be happening next is I think what you ... shared.*

*RTLB3: Difficulties with transitions from activities, from play across the school day just in general and Mum has concerns about personal safety, in some situations [student] appears to have difficulty recognising other people’s boundaries when it comes to kids and adults and he has difficulty interacting with peers.*

An example of framing something that could be viewed as a deficit, into strengths-based language can be seen in IMT-2 when RTL4 stated “Okay you mentioned his strengths... you said oral language is a strength. You said working 1 - 1 is an interest as well.” Based on the comment from the teacher, the RTL could have said, “You said he is attention seeking and will only work 1 – 1.” Instead the comment had been framed in the positive i.e. what worked for the student and what they can do. During IMT-2, RTL3 illustrated the use of strengths-based language to paraphrase a comment by the teacher (pseudonym used):

*RTL3: All right cool, so let's talk about his strengths because I know that you said that initially we really think Joe's a neat kid and has a lot of strengths so just let's talk about what's working, what's working now for him?*

Further in IMT-2, as illustrated below, RTL3 picked up on a deficit phrase, “it is all the time” and highlighted the student’s developing strengths as noted previously by the teacher by saying “Oh if he has lost, you said he is getting better at handling?” (emphasis added):

*RTL3: Well it's good that he has made progress and getting better any way from what you have noticed which is good.*

*Interviewee: [Unintelligible]*

*RTL3: Because I was going to ask does this happen all of the time or sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't?*

*Interviewee: Ah, I would say it is all the time if he has lost.*

*RTL3: Oh if he has lost, you said he is getting better at handling?*

The use of diagnostic labels to define a student’s difficulties fails to see the students’ full self with their own unique strengths, skills, challenges and interests. An example of language, which communicates a perspective that the diagnosis defined the student’s difficulties can be seen in IMT-1 with RTL1 (pseudonym used):

*RTL1: Is there any particular disorder that Annie has that Mum is concerned about?*



This statement implies that identifying the disorder names the concern and defines the student's difficulties. The concern should be described as the difficulties the student may be experiencing and indicate any need for adaptations within the classroom environment. RTL9 in IMT-1 provided an example of language that recognises the uniqueness of the student through paraphrasing (pseudonym used):

*RTL9: He doesn't have a formal diagnosis of autism does he?*

*Interviewee: Doesn't he? I am not sure.*

*RTL9: I am not sure either but as you say Albert is Albert.*

**Problem attribution.** Between IMT-1 and IMT-2 RTL9 increased the number of times their language promoted externalising problem attribution. As a percentage of the total incidence, externalising problem attribution increased from 47% to 87%. This is an increase of 40%. An example of language which internalised problem attribution is illustrated by RTL8 in IMT-2 as seen below with the comments "may have outgrown the school," "too complacent," "he thinks he is the top dog." These statements conceptualise the problem as being part of the student, internal, of their choosing and infer little contextual responsibility for the difficulties. The RTL9 is paraphrasing the teacher and did not initiate the comment, however the RTL9 could have shifted the language from internalising to externalising the problem situation by first unpacking the comment further e.g. "What behaviours have occurred that lead you to think that?" They could then have reframed once greater understanding is gained e.g. "So it seems that he has some struggles at school with the behaviour."

*RTL8: Aaah, we have got may have outgrown the school, too complacent.*

*Would you... would that complacency do you think is the elements of boredom or... are we...*

*Interviewee: He feels like he is top dog because he is the oldest. He's the staff proclaimed favourite child so it's I think it's more of a power struggle.*

*RTL8: Okay, he thinks he's top dog*

Ideally, RTL9 will model language which invites the teacher to respond in a way that describes the challenging situation not the challenging child. An example of this which

supported attribution of the problem to an external aspect can be seen in IMT-2 when RTL B2 asked “So tell me about that challenging situation, what does that look like?”

### **What We Think: RTL B Reflections on the Initial Meeting**

RTL B were also asked to note their reflections when they reviewed their transcripts. These reflections were noted on both Initial Meeting Transcripts (IMTR-1 and IMTR-2). In addition, they were asked to complete an Initial Meeting Reflection questionnaire (IMRQ-1 and IMRQ-2). These reflections formed the second data set “What we think.” Findings from the analysis of these data are presented in this section.

The transcript reflective comments (IMTR) were coded for language which noted incidence of the four aspects. A comparison between the frequency with which RTL B referred to these in their reflections on IMTR-1 and IMTR-2 revealed increases in all four areas which may indicate enhanced awareness of these aspects. RTL B8 in IMTR-2 noted that they were “consciously trying to ask open questions, avoid assumptions, be strengths-based and attribute problems to the situation not the child.” Table 4 below shows the frequency of language aspects referenced in the reflective comments made by RTL B across all twelve transcripts for IMTR-1 and IMTR-2.

**Table 4***Language Aspects Referenced in Reflective Comments for All Participants*

<b>Language aspects referenced</b>	<b>Initial Meeting Transcript Reflection 1 (IMTR-1) Frequency</b>	<b>Initial Meeting Transcript Reflection 2 (IMTR-2) Frequency</b>
Assumptions Avoided or Made	31	44
Open or Closed Questions	15	41
Strengths-Based or Deficit	27	37
External or Internal Problem Attribution	1	3

The RTLB responses in the questionnaires (IMRQ) were also coded for language which referenced the four aspects. A comparison between the frequency with which RTLB referred to these in their responses in IMRQ-1 and IMRQ-2 revealed an increased reference to these four aspects. This also supports the suggestion that RTLB showed increased awareness of the four aspects which were the focus of this research. As RTLB9 noted in IMRQ-2 “I can reel off the four categories to people who ask so they must be a part of how I think now!” Table 5 below shows the frequency of language aspects referenced in the responses by RTLB across all twelve transcripts for IMRQ-1 and IMRQ-2.

**Table 5**

*Language Aspects Referenced in Questionnaire Responses for All Participants*

<b>Language aspect referenced</b>	<b>Initial Meeting Reflection Questionnaire 1 (IMRQ-1) Frequency</b>	<b>Initial Meeting Reflection Questionnaire 2 (IMRQ-2) Frequency</b>
Assumptions avoided or made	7	17
Open or closed questions	7	14
Strengths-based or deficit	5	7
External or internal problem attribution	1	2

**Assumptions.** A review of IMTR-1 for RTLB reflections provided insights into the impact of the PLD and their increasing awareness of statements made which signalled assumptions being made or avoided. Insight was evident in RTLB2’s reflection on a comment they had made in their IMT-1 - “transient by the sounds and causes trouble in the classroom socially.” Their reflective comment highlighted the developing awareness of their language:

*RTL2: I did not know [student] was transient and should never have made this statement, but was influenced by having seen several schools on the enrolment form.*

In addition, RTL2 evidenced an increased awareness of interviewee language. The interviewee noted [student] “does some physical something to them if he wants the attention.” RTL2 noted in IMTR-1 that the [interviewee] appeared to be making judgements and that “[interviewee] doesn’t know this for sure. [Student] may hit for another reason.”

In IMT-1 RTL1 asked “what do you see happening?” Their comment with respect to this in IMTR-1 evidenced an awareness of the need to gain factual information and therefore avoid assumptions “I want [interviewee] to provide information based on what he has seen/observed.” Further in the meeting the RTLB asked “so when you say negative behaviours what do you mean?” and reflected in IMTR-1 they wanted the [interviewee] to

“elaborate on what negative behaviour means.” An additional example of awareness of avoiding assumptions was seen in RTL5’s IMTR-2 where they reflect on an interviewee’s comment:

*RTL5: Although this statement is in some ways negative it includes “it feels like” and it is an honest reflection for the [interviewee] who is feeling frustrated.*

Reviews of transcript reflections showed RTL awareness of the importance of using paraphrasing to check accuracy. RTL7 commented in IMT-1 “so, it sounds like you are very confident that you can sustain the improvements that have been made...” and reflected that they wanted to “check/paraphrase that [interviewee’s] confidence had actually improved.” RTL10 noted that they had “paraphrased to check for accuracy.” RTL3 observed that they were “paraphrasing/clarifying while documenting.” Further, RTL8 commented that they were “checking if I am being understood and on the right track, and not just assuming that I am.”

Increasing awareness of assumptions being made can be seen in further comments by the RTL. RTL5 recognised that assumptions were being made as to what could be considered major and minor events. While the teacher considered an event to be minor the student’s reaction to “lose the plot” suggested the student did not consider the event to be minor. In addition, RTL5 recognised that “lose the plot” is “quite emotive language.”

RTL2 showed greater awareness of the impact of their assumptions when reflecting in IMTR-2. They noted an early statement they had made to the interviewee, “I am sure you would much prefer to be at an assembly with your students” which elicited a response from the interviewee indicating this was not the case. RTL2 reflected that they had “made assumptions as to what [interviewee] valued and how she was feeling.” RTL7 recognised in IMTR-2 that they had made “a big assumption on [their] part” when they commented that “we don’t really have any difficulties, it’s just minor little things that will probably be ironed out quite quickly.” RTL8 acknowledged in IMTR-2 that there was an “assumption made here, without the facts to back it up perhaps?”

Turning to the IMRQs, there were further examples of reflection and awareness of assumptions made or avoided. In response to IMRQ-2: Q1, RTL2 noted that they felt there were missed “opportunities for me to paraphrase for clarification.” RTL2 did, however, endeavour to “take all statements at face value” and therefore avoid making any assumptions as to the underlying thoughts or attributions of the interviewee.

RTL2 showed increasing awareness of paraphrasing, a desire to become comfortable with its use and endeavoured to use this tool more often. In their response to IMRQ-2: Q12 RTL5 felt that it was “a bit confronting to see how ready [they were] to make assumptions and agree with the teacher.” RTL4 also recognised, when responding to IMRQ-2: Q12, that they “were a lot more astute with paraphrasing.” In response to the same question in IMRQ-2 RTL3 felt that they “could have paraphrased better what [interviewee] said.” In response to IMRQ-2: Q1, RTL4 noted that “we got some good information down and [interviewee] seemed quite ok with my paraphrasing.”

**Questioning.** A review of IMTR-1 and IMTR-2 provided insights into the impact of the PLD and RTL’s increasing awareness of their language with respect to open and closed questions. When receiving a fairly flat “no” from the [interviewee] in IMTR-2 RTL2 recalled thinking “how silly of me to ask a closed question. I should have asked ‘what do you want to ask?’” and noted they subsequently asked a closed question which they “had to amend to obtain information.” RTL2 showed further insight when reflecting on IMTR-2 “once again, I have asked an open question, and because I didn’t get an immediate answer, have followed with a closed question.” This was an interestingly common occurrence, with several RTL noting their tendency to follow up an open question with a closed one when they did not get an immediate response from the interviewee or, as RTL3 noted, “asking too many questions at once.” RTL 5 noted on IMTR-1 that “there are three questions here – all are closed – I didn’t pause to get each answer.”

In light of similar behaviour, RTL12 recognised in IMTR-1 the importance of “asking one in depth question and giving [interviewee] enough time to answer.” RTL2 reflected that they “only needed to ask the open question to get the answer [they] wanted.” Furthermore, RTL6 reflected on IMTR-1 that their intent when using the open question was “probing, wanting to know more.” On their IMTR-1, RTL4 noted behaviour which caused

them to reflect on their response to an interviewee; they wondered “did I clarify or coerce?” when responding to an interviewee’s response to a closed question:

*RTL4: “Does he participate in group work?”*

*Interviewee: “Ah, no”*

*RTL4: “Not really?”*

*Interviewee: “Actually I was going to go ‘sometimes’”*

An open question “How does he participate in group work?” could have avoided language which could be considered leading or coercive.

Shifting towards increased use of open questions seemed to be a focus for the participants. RTL3 celebrated their success on IMTR-2, “I asked an open question! Yay!” They also recognised when they asked an open question which was “specific and allowed [interviewee] to give a more detailed response.” Further, RTL5 recalled on IMTR-1 that they had asked an “open-ended question to illicit more information,” however they also subsequently noted that they “could have made [the] question more open.” When reflecting on their thoughts on the IMTR-1 transcript, RTL8 noted that they asked an open question “allowing the [interviewee] to identify the issues as [they] see them, not guided by the RTL.”

When reviewing the Initial Meeting Reflections Questionnaires, there is further evidence of reflection and awareness of the use of open or closed questions. In response to IMRQ-1: Q11, RTL3 noted that, in future, they would ask “more open questions. Ask one question at a time rather than stacking them together.” In response to the same question RTL6 reflected that they would “ask why and why not?” RTL12 felt they needed to work on their questioning by “framing [their] questions clearly, asking one question at a time, giving the teacher enough time to answer the question” in addition to “being very clear as to what [they] are asking.” RTL12 also felt they had listened well but not asked “enough probing questions.” When also responding to Question 11 on IMRQ-2, RTL8 noted that what they would do differently next time is rely on “open questions to elicit adequate responses.” Similarly, RTL2 reflected that in future they “would be very conscious of sticking to asking open questions and waiting, rather than, if there isn’t an immediate

response, jumping in with a closed question...just to get a response.” RTLB11 noted that they would spend more time “prompting for thoughts rather than getting yes/no responses.”

When reviewing the reflections on the IMRQ-2, in response to question 12 “what are your thoughts regarding this opportunity to review your transcript and reflect on your Initial Meeting?” RTLB1 noted that the exercise “shows the importance of open questions that allow the teacher to make full statements and allows for clarification and/or elaboration.” Also in response to Question 12 RTLB3 noted that they rethought again how they might “approach the questions better in future.” RTLB9 felt it was “fantastic to really spend time thinking about the impact of [their] questions and words [they] chose. Afterwards the [interviewee] said it helped him clarify his thoughts.”

For IMRQ-2: Q13, RTLB responses indicated that they felt a positive shift in the quality of their questions towards more open questions, which elicited a fuller response. RTLB1 noted that they felt that having an opportunity to review their questioning “has meant there were a lot more open questions” and that “the teacher was able to contribute more to the discussion.” RTLB8 was pleased with “the high proportion of positives regarding questions.” Further, RTLB10 felt that they were aware that they were “concerned about trying to ask the right questions in the right way.” RTLB12, in response to IMRQ-2: Q14, said that in their first reflection they had noted “I needed to ask more questions – well I certainly did that.”

**Strengths-based language.** A review of IMTR-1 and IMTR-2 for RTLB reflections with respect to strengths-based language provided insights into the impact of the PLD. Reviewing the RTLB comments in IMTR-1 showed there was already an awareness of strengths-based language. The first set of reflections showed 27 incidents of RTLB noticing strengths-based language. However, some increase was evident in the second set of reflections with 37 relevant comments.

When reflecting on their IMTR-1, RTLB2 noted that they were thinking “how positive [interviewee]’s words were, looking forward, being hopeful and building positive growth mindset.” On their IMTR-1, RTLB4 picked up on a comment made by the [interviewee] and thought “I’ll try to clarify that, could be a strength” and that the interviewee was “trying to think positively.”



When reviewing the IMTR-2 there was further evidence of an awareness of strengths-based language. RTL B5 noted that the [interviewee]’s comments “were affirming and strengths-based” and that the [interviewee] “knows this student and can easily identify his strengths, [interviewee] has a positive view of the student.” Further, RTL B7 reflected that “the teacher is so strengths-based. Always giving the benefit of the doubt. Viewing concerns as genuine difficulties.”

Further, in IMTR-2, RTL B1 endeavoured to model strengths-based language. RTL B1 wondered “what works for these [students]? What are their strengths?” RTL B6 recalled reminding themselves to “focus on strengths-based language.” RTL B7 reflected that they were “really pleased as to how the meeting was progressing within a strengths-based framework. Lots of positives being recorded.” Further in the transcript RTL B7 also noted that there were “so many strengths to capitalise on. [Student] needs his emotional tank filling!” RTL B8 recalled that they were “consciously trying to....be strength-based” and RTL B10 wondered “what are [student]’s strengths? Is [student] seen to have strengths?”

There was also evidence of RTL B reflections on language which was not strengths-based. When considering a comment by the interviewee in IMTR-1 RTL B5 felt that “considering what [student] is doing as a ‘random thing’ is maybe not strengths based” and they endeavoured to “explore specifically what [student] can do, looking for strengths.” Further, in IMTR-1 RTL B6 noted that they thought “Transfer skills, ask the [question] ‘What are [student] strengths?’” and RTL B10 pondered “What are some of the positives?” RTL B11 recognised the need to “identify strengths, find positives” in their discussion with the interviewee. RTL B2 observed that “the [interviewee] stated ‘[student] cannot do anything by himself’ when [interviewee] had previously mentioned several of [student]’s independent capabilities.”

Recognition of the benefit of finding a student’s areas of interest and strengths at this Initial Meeting phase to uncover what was working well or what might be of use going forward was also evident. In IMTR-2, RTL B2 was “hoping to hear [student]’s Lego interest was used for maths and literacy motivation.” Further, RTL B10 wondered whether the student’s love of particular characters could “be a strategy to use for learning.” RTL B12 reflected that “[interviewee] talks about [student] strengths and I wonder if [interviewee] can incorporate [student] strengths in the other subjects?”

When reviewed, the IMRQ-1 dataset contained five responses with regards to strengths-based or deficit language aspects. There were slightly more in IMRQ-2 with seven references to strengths-based or deficit aspects. RTL7, in response to IMRQ-2: Q1, recognised that they were “fortunate that my [interviewee] is very strengths-based and always looks for the positive.” When responding to IMRQ-2: Q11, RTL1 reflected that in future they would “try to gain more information about the strengths of the student and what works well.”

In response to Question 12 (*What are your thoughts regarding this opportunity to review your transcript and reflect on you Initial Meeting?*) RTL5 summed it up well when they reflected that:

*RTL5: To slow down and really think about what each person said and whether our language was mana [status] enhancing, positive and supportive was important. The student we are discussing is someone’s much loved [child], they want the best for [them] and it’s important we treat everyone with respect.*

**Problem attribution.** A review of RTL reflections with respect to external or internal problem attribution in pre-PLD and post-PLD transcripts provided insights into the impact of the PLD and increased awareness of the RTL language with respect to problem attribution.

An overall review of the material at hand (IMT-1 and IMT-2) indicated a lesser incidence of explicit comments on problem attribution relative to the other three categories, however there were some insightful observations and comments. There was one comment in IMTR-1 and three in IMTR-2 which referenced problem attribution. On IMTR-1, RTL2 recognised that their comment had been misleading and recalled thinking they “certainly didn’t mean that the ‘whole child’ was the problem... [they] certainly never saw [student] as the behaviour.” RTL8 noted in IMTR-2 that they were endeavouring to “emphasise that the potential problems issues are external [to the student] not internal.” RTL2 noted in IMTR-2 that they were “attempting to form a description of [student] in relationship with his behaviours/difficulties” (emphasis added).

Reviewing RTL5's IMTR-2 showed a heightened awareness of problem attribution when they recognised that the interviewee's comment was "both a strengths-based statement and an external problem attribution. The [interviewee] is open to considering if [interviewee's] actions could be causing the difficulties" and further in the passage they noted that they were "still referring to the problem as the problem not the child."

There was also evidence of RTL recognising language which indicated internal Problem Attribution. RTL11 noted on IMTR-1 their concern that from the [interviewee] comments it appeared that the student was "being 'placed in a box' by their teacher and peers." When reviewing IMT-2, RTL5 noted that a statement by the teacher "assumed the student simply wanted to avoid the tasks." In response to making the comment in IMT-1 that the student was "being ridiculously immature on occasions" RTL9 coded this statement as PA- and put a simple "Oops!" in the thoughts column to highlight their awareness that this could be considered an internal problem attribution. In addition, they noted in IMTR-1 that they would definitely endeavour to avoid phrases such as "ridiculously immature" in future.

The IMRQ-1 and IMRQ-2 were reviewed for comment in relation to problem attribution. When reviewed, IMRQ-1 held one specific reflection. IMRQ-2 contained two comments. RTL2, in response to IMRQ-1: Q1, noted that they were keen to ensure they were "externalising the conversation, orienting the problem to be divorced of the student." RTL8 noted in response to IMRQ-2: Q13 that they were "pleased with the high proportion of positives regarding.... problem attribution." In addition, RTL9 noted that they were "proud of using more external problem attribution this time."

## Chapter Five: Discussion

*Thought...it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem. (Foucault, 1984, p. 388)*

This research has been undertaken to allow RTLB the opportunity to step back and think about what they say and do and to consider the importance of language. As noted, language and the way it is used has a significant impact on, and is significantly impacted by, people's perceptions and beliefs (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Fausey & Boroditsky, 2010, 2011; Fausey, Long, Inamori, & Boroditsky, 2010; Holley-Boen, 2017; Majid, Bowerman, Kita, Haun, & Levinson, 2004; Maynes et al., 2008; Senge et al., 1994; White & Epston, 1990). Therefore, this research has focussed on the language used in the Initial Meeting in order to promote positive change.

This study investigated the language used by RTLB at the Initial Meeting phase of the CPS process and how this language can be shifted through PLD focussing on inclusive, strengths-based language. The transcripts of Initial Meetings conducted by RTLB, RTLB reflections on the transcripts and reflection questionnaires completed by RTLB were used to identify the incidence of focus language in speech and RTLB reflection on this language.

There were two key findings from the research, which are discussed below: firstly, the degree to which RTLB used inclusive and strengths-based language prior to the PLD; and, secondly, the degree to which RTLB language shifted as a result of the PLD. A discussion of limitations of the research conducted and implications for further research and practice concludes this chapter.

## **What Language are RTLB Using in the Initial Meeting Phase of a Collaborative Problem-Solving Process?**

The first key finding was that the RTLB appeared to have difficulty applying relevant knowledge or skills prior to the PLD with respect to the use of inclusive, strengths-based language. This finding is in line with the qualitative meta-synthesis of consultation process research by Newman et al. (2017) which suggested that consultants are either receiving insufficient training or are unable to apply appropriate skills. As discussed previously, the Ministry of Education (2018) espouses a vision and principles of inclusion and strengths-based practice for RTLB. In addition, the work of Holley-Boen (2017); Thomson (2013); Thomson et al. (2003); and Walker (2013) highlights the need for RTLB to possess requisite skills in order to engage effectively with educators to promote positive outcomes for students with additional needs. However, there is limited literature on RTLB inclusive, strengths-based practice with respect to the skills required for effective collaborative consultation and CPS. The findings in this research show that the skills to enact the espoused vision and principles may not always be present in RTLB practice and that there is a need for purposeful, focussed knowledge and skill development in this area.

The findings revealed twice as many observations of RTLB making assumptions than not. This finding is notable as Coolahan (1991) found that educators commonly made comments which could be considered ‘inferential’ when noting students’ difficulties and found that a consultant’s careful use of language at this point had a significant positive impact on the language used by these same educators (cited by Gutkin & Curtis, 2009, p. 612). At the Initial Meeting it is therefore important that RTLB are mindful of the language they use and avoid making assumptions about the problem situation. The purpose during this phase is to clearly understand and articulate the nature of the problem. To achieve this end, it is essential to be aware of and challenge assumptions in order to avoid false assumptions impacting on the development of understanding (Brown et al., 2000; Graesser et al., 2018; Gutkin & Curtis, 2009; Mentis & Annan, 2013; Senge et al., 1994; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013).

The Initial Meeting transcripts revealed that RTLB were also asking twice as many closed than open questions prior to the first PLD session. This finding appears to indicate that

the RTLB skill or knowledge could be improved with regards to the use of questioning ‘in the field.’ This is noteworthy as an RTLB’s skilled use of use of open questions is important in order to clarify the nature of the problem. As a number of authors note, the use of open questioning is effective in eliciting more information and developing greater understanding (Bergan & Tombari, 1976; Gutkin & Curtis, 2009; Lambert, 1976; Ratner, 2002; Schein, 2013). Interestingly also, Hughes and DeForest (1993) note that the increased use of closed questioning in consultations with teachers showed links to reduced teacher satisfaction which may impact negatively on the consultant-teacher relationship.

Language which was strengths-based was evident in the first Initial Meeting transcripts. RTLB made four times more strengths-based than deficit statements. This is reassuring. Use of language which is associated with strengths, ability and accomplishments fosters more positive expectations (Bozic et al., 2018; Wilding & Griffey, 2015). It is important that students’ strengths, experiences, culture and interests are valued (Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2014; Skoning & Henn-Reinke, 2014). Further, Mentis and Annan (2013) note that the recognition of strengths and what is working leads to more successful planning and outcomes. When considering this result, it may be that noticing a student’s strengths and interests is more easily enacted. This is also currently supported by the Initial Meeting frameworks used by the RTLB. It has to be noted that the focus on strengths-based language was explicit in the title of the research and may have had an impact on raising awareness when RTLB were invited to take part.

The incidence of language which indicated external problem attribution suggests that RTLB were more aware of this aspect, using language which located the problem as external to the student. However, RTLB were observed as equally likely to use language which indicated internal problem attribution. This is noteworthy because the consequent response of viewing the problem as internal and located within the child is to endeavour to ‘fix’ the child, overlooking the impact of the teaching environment on the nature of the problem (Christenson et al., 1983; Medway, 1979; Mentis & Annan, 2013; Thomson, 2013; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013; Zins & Ponti, 1996). Whereas viewing the problem as external and a result of the interaction of the student in their environment is inclusive and empowers effective action (J. Annan et al., 2006; Thomson, 2013; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013).

Given these findings, it seems that the principles of the RTLB service are not always fully enacted in practice.

## **How Can RTLB Language Be Shifted Through PLD Focusing on Inclusive, Strengths-Based Language?**

The second key finding in my research was that RTLB language use at the Initial Meeting was able to be improved through targeted PLD and opportunities to learn, reflect and practise the requisite skills. The evidence shows that through an iterative PLD process RTLB increased awareness, knowledge and skills with respect to language use in all four areas. This finding is discussed below. The first section discusses the findings that a shift occurred with respect to the language used by RTLB. The second section discusses the finding that a shift occurred in RTLB reflection on the language used.

**What we say: Language used by RTLB during an Initial Meeting.** The language observed by RTLB in the two Initial Meeting transcripts showed a notable positive shift subsequent to their involvement in the PLD. The RTLB were observed to increase language which avoided assumptions by twice as much in the second Initial Meeting compared to the first Initial Meeting. During the second Initial Meeting, RTLB were observed using language which avoided assumptions three times as often as language which appeared to make assumptions. This is noteworthy as it is important that RTLB possess the skills to manage the meeting in a way that does not allow assumptions to be put forward as unchallenged statements of fact. As a number of authors note, an inclusive educational paradigm is promoted when perceptions and assumptions about students, particularly those who could be considered marginalised, are critically analysed and exposed (Ainscow, 2005; Donnellan, 1984; Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2014; Nevin et al., 1990). However, exposing and analysing these perceptions and assumptions requires an awareness that they are in fact assumptions. This is not an easy task, particularly with regards to deeply held or ingrained beliefs. The evidence showed that the PLD in this research appeared to be effective in raising RTLB awareness of assumptions in their language and promoted shifts in language used.

The findings with regard to RTLB questioning were equally encouraging with twice as many open questions asked across the second Initial Meetings compared to the first Initial

Meetings. The evidence shows that RTLB asked on average three times more open questions than closed questions in the second Initial Meeting. Through heightened awareness of their practice in regards to the types of questions asked the PLD appeared to have been effective in increasing the number of open questions asked. As Argyris (1991) and Giangreco et al. (2002) point out, use of open questioning guards against the discussion becoming waylaid by assumption or inference. As Hargreaves (1984) and Lee et al. (2012) note open questions enable more information on thoughts, feelings and perspectives to be uncovered. An RTLB's skilled use of open questions therefore enables greater effectiveness in clarifying the problem situation.

An analysis of the data on the observations of RTLB with respect to strengths-based language prior to the PLD showed there was already a high incidence of strengths-based language. However, there was room for improvement and the second transcripts showed an increase in RTLB displaying strengths-based as opposed to deficit language. There was also evidence that the quality of the practice improved. For example, RTLB showed evidence of reframing possibly deficit comments as a student's strength and actively sought strengths, which could be incorporated in to future plans. Attention to language, which speaks of a student's strengths, resilience and accomplishment promotes a culture of hope for what is possible (Bozic et al., 2018; Wilding & Griffey, 2015). As a tenet of RTLB practice, this was espoused and to some extent enacted, however the PLD has supported further improvement.

The observations of language showed that prior to the PLD the RTLB were equally likely to use language which indicated internal problem attribution as external. External problem attribution is important in RTLB practice. Locating the problem as an interaction between the student and their environment enables a more thorough investigation of the contributing factors and therefore a deeper understanding of the nature of the problem (J. Annan et al., 2006; Freeman et al., 1997; Thomson et al., 2003; Walker, 2013).

**What we think: RTLB reflections on the Initial Meeting.** The RTLB reflections on the Initial Meeting Transcripts provided evidence of an increase in reflection on and awareness of the language used. While the data does not allow analysis of RTLB reflection prior to the first PLD session, it does show an increase in awareness and reflection between the first and second PLD sessions. This is particularly notable as the actual lengths of the transcripts decreased between the two meetings, there was therefore less overall talk time but



a greater number of reflective comments made about the type of language used. The reflective comments also indicated that prior to the PLD the RTLB had limited awareness of their practice and appeared surprised by what they observed in the transcripts.

The evidence indicates that an opportunity to understand assumptions, open questioning, strengths-based language and external problem attribution and their impact on an RTLB's ability to develop a clear articulation of the nature of a problem, improved RTLB practice in this regard. Further evidence of the heightened awareness is seen in the increased frequency of reflective comment on this language. As noted, reflection is influenced by what we do and what we do is influenced by reflection (Butler, 1996). This reflection with respect to improvements in practice is noteworthy. Providing an opportunity to reflect on practice in a systematic way allows for the development of new understandings, skills and action (Boud et al., 1985; Brown et al., 2000; Butler, 1996).

This research showed an increase in reflection on the language used across all focus areas, however the reflections and shift with respect to reflecting on their questioning elicited some interesting observations and has the potential to positively impact practice in a significant way. Skilled questioning has the potential to reach the very heart of a matter (Bergan & Tombari, 1976; Gutkin & Curtis, 2009) and provides the opportunity to probe, clarify and reframe (Hargreaves, 1984; Lambert, 1976; Lee et al., 2012). Further, open questioning communicates to the consultee that their thoughts matter and allows them to respond in their own words (Schein, 2013). Equally, when used poorly, questioning has the power to stifle discussion and disenfranchise consultees.

A majority of RTLB reflected on their questioning and recognised a need to further develop their skills in this regard. Several RTLB reflected on the negative impact of this and their desire to improve their questioning skills as a result of participating in the PLD sessions. The reflective comments also indicate that prior to the PLD RTLB had limited awareness of their practice in this area.

## **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

This research was limited by the difficulties in quantifying the RTLB reflections. While there were many insightful comments which indicated RTLB were reflecting on the language used, this shift may not have been accurately quantified. I was able to show an increase in the reflective comments made, however the actual frequency might have been higher as not all RTLB necessarily noted all reflections in this regard. The implications for practice improvements are noteworthy when practitioners are encouraged to reflect on their practice. It would therefore be beneficial to explore further the extent of the impact of professional learning on RTLB awareness and reflection.

Use of the audio-recording proved to be effective with few technical difficulties encountered. A number of the participants noted their initial discomfort at hearing themselves on audio, however, they also noted that they soon adjusted and subsequently found the experience beneficial. Several RTLB noted that they would like to undertake this exercise again by video-recording the meeting as they felt some of the nuances of communication were missed. For the purposes of this research audio-recordings and transcripts of these were sufficient as they provided accurate data on the specific language used. This research has shown positive results from the opportunity for RTLB to observe and reflect on their own practice and it may be beneficial in future to extend this to focus on other aspects of practice which can be better observed through the use of video-recording e.g. non-verbal communication or behaviours.

This research has also highlighted the need for RTLB to engage in role specific PLD in order to competently engage in inclusive, strengths-based practice through a CPS approach. This research has focussed on one aspect of the Initial Meeting phase of the CPS: inclusive, strengths-based language. It has shown that RTLB knowledge and use of this aspect can be improved through PLD which provides opportunities for observation, practice and reflection. As Walker (2013) notes, the CPS process is complex and it is important that there is an awareness of the factors which promote its successful implementation. This research supports the findings of Walker (2013) which indicate that engaging in opportunities to reflect and develop appropriate skills enhances effective application of CPS in practice. Creating and sustaining change is no easy task however. Argyris (1990, 1991) and Argyris

and Schön (1974) note that it takes incremental shifts over time to change practice. Schön (1987) points out that enacting new learnings requires the unlearning of deeply held beliefs. A comment by RTL2 in their second reflection illustrates this challenge:

*RTL2: Trying to improve upon my first recorded experience, I endeavoured to be more precise and to the point, only to find myself habitually following open questioning, that was not instantly answered, with a closed question.*

Will this language be in use in a year's time? Will it be embedded in RTL2 practice or will they have slipped back to using their 'old' language? It would be beneficial to explore the continuation of the shifts made and in what ways this practice improvement can be sustained.

There are further implications with respect to other aspects of RTL2 practice. Firstly, what impact does this shift in language have on the other aspects of the initial meeting? For example, would this shift in language improve the relationship between the RTL2 and the interviewee? The research conducted by Hughes and DeForest (1993) shows that increased use of closed questioning decreased the level of satisfaction reported by the teachers during a consultation. Would the same hold true at an Initial Meeting? Further, clear and accurate understanding of the nature of the problem has been identified as pivotal to the subsequent development of interventions (Dewey, 2002; Graesser et al., 2018; Gutkin & Curtis, 2009; Walker, 2013). It could be hypothesised that there is a link between the evidenced shift in language and improvements in describing the nature of the problem. It would be beneficial to conduct further research as to whether this does in fact hold true. Secondly, what impact does this shift in language have on RTL2 practice at the subsequent phases of the CPS? For example, what impact would this increased focus on strengths, external problem attribution, reduction of assumptions and deeper understanding of the nature of the problem have on the development of interventions or on student outcomes?

Research supports the contention that a shift in RTL2 language will have a positive impact on teacher practice. For example, research by Coolahan (1991) shows that the way in which a consultant talks about students does have an impact on the way teachers then talk about those students (cited by Gutkin & Curtis, 2009). Argyris (1982) research highlights the

positive impact on outcomes for students when educators are supported to challenge their beliefs and perceptions about students. Further, studies by Timperley and Robinson (2001) and Symes, Jeffries, Timperley, and Lai (2001) show that a consultant's challenge of teachers' beliefs about students was shown to be effective in changing teacher practice. While this research provides evidence that there has been a shift in RTLB language, the impact on teacher practice is yet to be determined. Do these shifts link to improved outcomes for students? What difference has it made? Further research into using improved phrasing could investigate what impact this shift in RTLB language has had on the ways in which the teachers talk about and perceive student difficulties.

In a review of the research literature, Zins and Ponti (1996) suggest that researchers in future may be interested in investigating whether improving the skills relevant to describing the nature of a problem lessens the amount of time needed for the consultation. Although not a primary focus of this research, anecdotal RTLB comments, e.g. "When I had a clearer idea of what I needed to do the meeting didn't seem to take as long," and data showing shorter overall transcript lengths do appear to support this hypothesis and the suggestion to investigate it further. Anecdotal comments from the RTLB provide some clues as to why this may have been the case. Several RTLB suggested that they felt they were more purposeful and focussed in their approach. One RTLB also noted that they listened more actively and did not interrupt as often. In addition, RTLB asked more open questions, which had the potential of eliciting fuller responses and therefore did not seem to have the need for further questioning.

A further implication for research was with regards to the different language areas evaluated. Within each focus area there lay greater nuance which suggests that each would be worthy of further investigation in their own right, for example, improving the nature and quality of questions asked. The evidence suggests that RTLB became aware that they would often allow insufficient time for a response. As Schein (2013) suggests, "questioning is both a science and an art" (p. 18). With respect to strengths-based language, Elder et al. (2018) notes concern that there often appears to be only superficial recognition given to noting a student strengths. What impact would there be if interventions focussed primarily on identifying student strengths, and what they can do? Further research regarding RTLB knowledge, skills

and implementation of strengths-based practice through the CPS phases would be of benefit.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Change is not easy, it can be uncomfortable and often requires breaking from entrenched understandings and beliefs (Butler, 1996; Schön, 1987). In my role as Practice Leader, I had regularly exposed RTLB to the concepts of inclusive, strengths-based language at the Initial Meeting phase through workshops, discussion and case consults. The first finding in this research indicates that my work with them had had a limited effect in practice. The second finding, however, suggests that the PLD the RTLB have undertaken for this study was particularly effective in creating a notable shift in practice with respect to the language used.

While this was a study with just twelve RTLB, it has shown that PLD can be effective. It seems it is not sufficient, however, to conduct a workshop, deliver a PowerPoint and then expect fundamental changes to the way someone approaches a task in practice. When considering the possible reasons for the effectiveness of this PLD an important feature was the provision of opportunities to fully engage in an iterative way through a learning cycle; learning, practising, observing themselves, reflecting on their own language, learning some more, practising, observing, reflecting, etc. The RTLB were not merely passive recipients of information, but were supported to observe and reflect on their own practice in the field. In addition, as a researcher/practitioner I was well positioned to “notice and adjust” through the course of the PLD. I developed the PLD in an iterative way based on learnings and discussion with the RTLB. I suggest this helped the PLD to be more meaningful, responsive and relevant to RTLB. Anecdotal comments by the RTLB in relation to the PLD are discussed in the next section. This section discusses the general comments and reflections made by RTLB about the experience of recording an Initial Meeting, the PLD they undertook and their perspective of the opportunity to review the transcripts of their Initial Meetings. Their comments and reflections have been taken from IMRQ-1 and IMRQ-2.

**Anecdotal reflections on the PLD by the RTLB.** While the use of language, which is inclusive and strengths-based, seems to be something which should be straightforward and something which RTLB espouse, it seems that in practice it is a lot more difficult than

thought. Anecdotal evidence seems to confirm this. For example, after the first PLD session one of the RTLB approached me and commented that they had found the PLD valuable and they had “got a lot from it.” They noted that they had initially thought this looked “pretty basic, we know this, why spend time on it?” However, not long into the PLD session they had cause to reflect and thought “Oh, I think Fiona has a point here, this is not as easy as I thought.” A number of RTLB noted that the opportunity to reflect on their practice provided a greater awareness of the language they used and enabled them to enact positive changes to this practice. This is consistent with Brown et al. (2000) who identified reflective practice as an effective tool to help RTLB to develop their practice. This opportunity for reflection on their practice was an important feature of the PLD in effecting positive change.

Joyce and Showers (1980) note that in order to change the way someone responds in practice they need to learn new ways of thinking. As Argyris (1990, 1991) and Argyris and Schön (1974) highlight, beliefs, assumptions and values are often fixed and it is only through small and ongoing shifts that changes in practice are implemented. The evidence indicates that the PLD programme implemented has been effective in supporting RTLB to increase awareness of their language. It is likely that a ‘one-off’ PLD session would not have resulted in a shift of the same magnitude and a component of the success of this PLD has been the provision of multiple opportunities to reflect over time. Changes in the field appear to have resulted from the opportunity to analyse and reflect on their own language in an iterative way.

The positive effect is supported anecdotally by comments from the RTLB. A number of the RTLB noted specifically that they found the transcript analysis a worthwhile opportunity for reflection. In response to IMRQ-2: Q11, RTLB5 commented that “taking the time to analyse what was said at this meeting did allow me to reflect on the conversation.” Others commented in a similar vein when answering Question 12. RTLB1 observed on IMRQ-1 that “conducting the analysis has also had the effect of me reflecting on how the Initial Meeting is conducted.” Further, RTLB11 commented that it was “very helpful. If you don’t analyse you do not see/understand your patterns of communication” and RTLB8 similarly thought “it was interesting to have the opportunity to see exactly what words I have used.” RTLB9 found the opportunity “valuable to shine a light onto the words and sounds of our interaction.” A reflection by RTLB2 asks:

*How do we improve our practice if we are not provided with the opportunity to review? Of course, we are always anecdotally personally reviewing and reflecting on parts of our practice for our own self-improvement needs. But in reality, our practice is time deprived for opportunities to do anything really worthwhile. So, to have the opportunity to officially build this specific review into our practice will, I believe, reap dividends for our service delivery..... effective outcomes, promoting change from reflection and review will only eventuate if we have the same understanding of the strengths-based initial interview model we are to aspire to.*

In their IMRQ-1, in response to Question 12, RTL5 wrote:

*It was a worthwhile exercise and makes me consider the importance of the Initial Meeting... It did make me realise that a lot of information could be gathered even from a fairly brief meeting. Taking time to consider exactly what was said and how it was expressed was interesting.*

In IMRQ-2: Q12, RTL12 felt that “the Initial Meeting framework was a good support” and RTL6 noted that “it’s a really significant piece of work for our RTL professional practice. I am noticing positive changes in my own practice [from] drilling deeper.” RTL9 in IMRQ-2: Q14 noted “The questions are brilliant. I enjoyed it, learning lots.” In addition, RTL10, reflected that they were “always open to having feedback/feedforward and the opportunity to reflect on [their] practice” and that they were “always pleased to learn and reflect.” Further, in response to Question 12 RTL7 made the following observation:

*I value this opportunity and hope I can improve my practice further. If we always do what we have always done, we’ll always get what we’ve always got. You are better able to notice things when you can reflectively read a transcript, for example.*

In conclusion, and illustrating the general response to this opportunity for PLD, RTL2 responded:

*Just as I alluded to in my first Initial Meeting reflection... this has proved hugely valuable for me in contributing to improving my professional practice. We are all time deprived but this opportunity for guided reflection was offered by my Practice Leader. I say 'guided', because had I not received her professional development series.... I would never have had the knowledge to review and reflect in a professionally worthwhile manner. There is no doubt thanks to my Practice Leader's foresight, this has instigated on-going learning for me.*

This research indicates that it is not enough to simply present a workshop and expect change or improvement. The research also appears to indicate that RTLB had not been trained sufficiently in the skills of enacting inclusive, strengths-based language at the first phase of the CPS to be sufficiently aware of them in action. I suggest there are wider implications of this, which professional development providers may wish to consider. What are the requisite skills for RTLB in practice? How knowledgeable and skilled are RTLB currently? Can the learnings from this study inform further PLD planning? It may be worth considering whether these learnings could now be "scaled up" to inform PLD provision for a wider group within education. Further, individual practitioners may find it beneficial to implement their own PLD opportunity through either audio/video recording themselves in practice and implementing a learning cycle as illustrated by this thesis.



## Final Comments

Undertaking this research has had a significant impact on me on a professional level. As noted in my introduction, this journey started as a result of two key issues. Firstly, I had become acutely aware of, and concerned by, the way students and student difficulties were being described by RTLB and educators. Secondly, for some time I had been endeavouring to affect a conceptual shift with RTLB in this regard through discussion, case review and PLD. I believe the limited effectiveness of this was as a result of not providing RTLB sufficient opportunity, over time, to fully engage and reflect.

Future PLD I provide will incorporate explicit opportunities for RTLB to continue to develop the knowledge and practise the skills required to work effectively within a CPS framework. There is no longer the assumption that RTLB new to the role either arrive with commensurate skill and knowledge or somehow gain these through talk and osmosis. I intend to re-develop the RTLB induction framework to more explicitly teach the requisite skills of CPS. In addition, current practice guidelines and templates will be evaluated to ensure they fully evidence inclusive, strengths-based language and approaches. This research has highlighted that CPS, as an effective framework for RTLB practice, requires the development of commensurate skills through ongoing opportunities for learning, reflection and improvement.

Ko te ahurei o te  
tamaiti arahia ō  
tātou māhi

Let the uniqueness of the child  
guide our work

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# Appendices

# Appendix A: PLD Session #1 PowerPoint

11/08/2019

1

## Developing Inclusive, Strength-Based Practice

PLD Session 1

Fiona Halness

2

### Agenda

1. Welcome and introduction
2. Purpose - Initial meeting - Principles of practice
3. Work matter
4. Practice
5. Transcript analysis task
6. Close

3

### Purpose

To increase our awareness of language, thoughts and actions and their impact on the conceptualisation of a problem situation.




"Be the change you wish to see in the world"

4

### Language

The language we use not only describes our thinking, it also informs our thinking.



5




"THE BEGINNING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE WORK."

— PL 3.1.11

6

### Initial Meeting Phase

Clear identification of a problem situation before progressing to intervention is critical to successful outcomes.



7 **RTLB Principles of Practice**


- The RTLB principles of practice underpin all that we do. They are relevant and have significance of the initial meeting phase.
- Inclusive teaching
- Culturally responsive
- Ecological approach
- Collaborative and seamless
- Strengths based
- Reflective
- Evidence based
- Professional



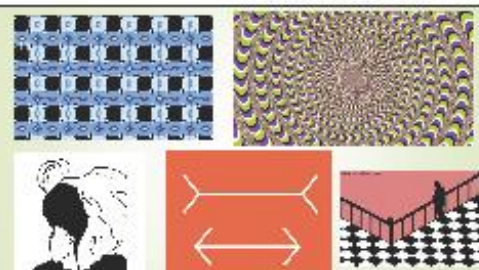

8 **What is your first impression?**

9 **Cognitive Bias**

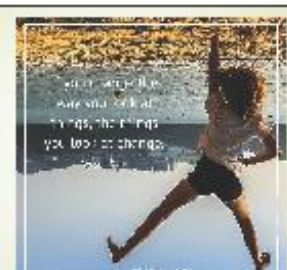
**Common Cognitive Biases when Making Decisions and Judgements**



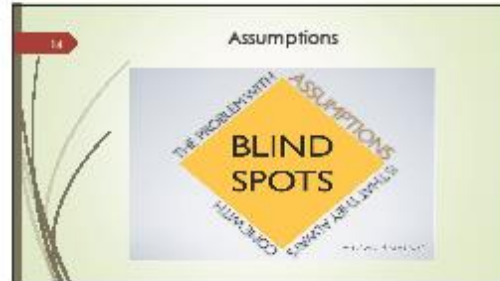
10 **Cognitive Bias**



12







15

### Assumptions

Examples

- The student:
  - knows how to behave properly
  - knows the rules here
  - could do it if he just tried harder
  - just doesn't like this subject
  - has all of his attention
- The teacher:
  - understands what's on my mind
  - agrees with me
  - wants to put the plan in
  - knows about this



"If you understand someone's perspective, you can't help but to love them."  
-Bev Vincent

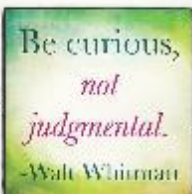
16

### Subjective, Emotive Language

Three eggs with faces. The left egg is smiling, the middle egg is frowning, and the right egg is neutral. A speech bubble above the smiling egg says: "Emotive: arousing or able to arouse intense feelings, expressing a person's feelings rather than being neutrally descriptive." A speech bubble above the frowning egg says: "Subjective: based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions."

17

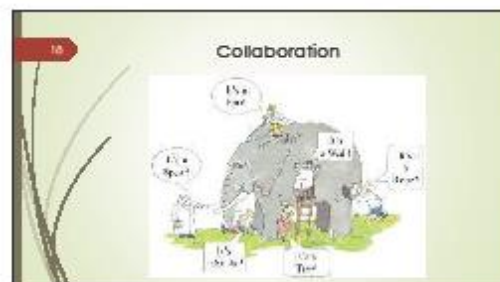
### Objective, Neutral Language



"Be curious, not judgmental."  
-Walt Whitman

Neutral, impartial or unbiased

Objective: not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing fact.





19 Paraphrasing: Check for understanding

A cartoon illustration of a teacher and a student. The teacher asks, "Hi? Is W?" and the student replies, "It's 1948".

20 Paraphrasing: Check for understanding

A cartoon illustration of a teacher and a student. The teacher asks, "Hi? Is W?" and the student replies, "It's 1948". The teacher then says, "So what I am hearing is that you are stating that the number is 1948. Is that right?"

21 Open vs Closed Questions

Closed Questions – can be answered with either a single word or a short phrase e.g. Is this student's behaviour a problem in class?

Using Closed Questions:

- They are easy to answer
- They are quick to answer
- They give little extra information
- They keep control of the conversation with the questioner

22 Open vs Closed Questions

Open Questions – deliberately seek a longer answer and are the opposite of closed questions e.g. What are your concerns about this student?

Using Open Questions:

- Ask the respondent to think and reflect
- Give you opinions, feelings and the respondents experiences
- Hand control of the conversation to the respondent

23 Deficit

Deficit thinking blames the student for school failure (Valencia, 1997).

Deficit viewpoints infer "There is little schooling can do to 'fix' these students and so interventions are created to help them fit into the dominant school culture (Simone, 2012).

24 strength-based

1. Describe the problem behaviour in neutral, observable terms.
2. Identify positive characteristics or contributions the individual makes.
3. Create a new, positive perspective on the individual—a frame that you can articulate in a short sentence.

A handwritten note on pink paper that reads: "TELL A NEW STORY - or there are just details and moments of a life. TELL THE STORY of hope."

**25 Problem Attribution: Externalising the conversation**

- The words we use to describe a problem situation can help shape a new reality and shift our conceptualisation of that problem (Freeman, Epton & Labovitz, 1997).
- Narrative Practice is:
  - a way of speaking that separates problems from people.
  - an attitude and orientation in conversation, not simply a technique.
  - based on the premise that problem is the problem, the child is not the problem. They own the problem they have a problem

**26**

**27 Practice**

- Scenarios
- Groups of 4
  - Think - Pair - Share
  - Identify all instances of and highlight using the code noted.

Assumptions Avoided/Made	A+ or A-
Questioning Open/Closed	Q+ or Q-
Strengths-Based/Deficit	S+ or S-
Problem Attribution External/Internal	PA+ or PA-

- Whole group sharing and discussion

**28 Your Reflection Exercise: Transcript Analysis**

1. Review your transcript and audio.
2. Note in the left hand column through the transcript what you were thinking or feeling at the time the words were being spoken and any reflections.

**29 Transcript Analysis**

1. Use the highlighters provided and the code noted below to identify the following:

1. Assumptions Avoided/Made Highlight: Green	A+ or A-
2. Questioning Open/Closed Highlight: Pink	Q+ or Q-
3. Strengths-Based/Deficit Highlight: Blue	S+ or S-
4. Problem Attribution External/Internal Highlight: Yellow	PA+ or PA-

**30 Transcript Analysis**

1. Reflection template (Walker, 2013)
  - Referring to your transcript complete the reflection template.
2. Return highlighted transcript and Reflection Template to Fiona Ha by Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

31

Ko te ahurei o te tamaiki arahia ō tātou māhi.

*Let the uniqueness of the child guide our work.*

32

References

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- Miller, J. (2019). *1826e reading: a synthesis of four 1826 early-onset reading to achievement*. London: New York: Routledge.
- *Special Education*, (28 August 2019). *Reading: a School Reformed from*. <https://www.spe-ed.com/2019/08/28/reading-a-school-reformed-from/>
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- *Reading: a School Reformed from*. (2019). *Reading: a School Reformed from*. London: New York: Routledge.
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- *Reading: a School Reformed from*. (2019). *Reading: a School Reformed from*. London: New York: Routledge.

# Appendix B: PLD Session #2 PowerPoint

11/08/2019

1

## Developing Inclusive, Strength-Based Practice in an RTLB Cluster.

PLD Session 2

Fiona Halkness

2

Ma te whakaatu, ka māhio  
Ma te māhio, ka marama  
Ma te marama, ka mātau  
Ma te mātau, ka ora

With discussion comes understanding  
With understanding comes light  
With light comes wisdom  
With wisdom comes well being

3


### Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Recap PLD 1 & Activity
3. Initial Meetings
4. Principles of Practice
5. Activity 2
6. Close

4

### Recap PLD and Activity

- To increase our awareness of language, thoughts and actions and their impact on the conceptualisation of a problem situation at the Initial Meeting stage.



5

### Purpose

To develop strength-based and inclusive language with a focus on the initial meeting phase of the RTLB practice sequence.



"Be the change you wish to see in the world"

6

### Initial Meeting

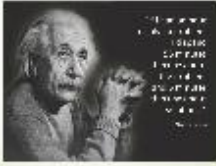
- We are focussing on the initial meeting phase
- When does an initial meeting occur?
  - Think Pair Share
- What do you aim to achieve at an initial meeting?
  - Brainstorm



1

7 Initial Meeting

- Clear identification of problem/situation before progressing to intervention is critical to successful outcomes.



8 RTLB Role in the Initial Meeting



9 Initial Meeting

- Initiation of the collaborative consultative relationship with the teacher
- Clarify RTLB role – important to dispel myth that we are expert in extra part of class.
- Discuss referral
- Nature of the problem – tentative hypothesis. Look to confirm/disconfirm.
- Identify the unknowns.
- Avoid solutions – the activity trap
- Involve consultees in joint data gathering and problem identification to help challenge existing assumptions.
- Start with the teacher's perspective then decide jointly what else needs to be gathered.
- Planned baseline data gathering phase – what else do we need to know, clarify roles and responsibilities
- Data collected to clarify the problem/situation rather than labeling the individual child.
- Next step will be to restructure the problem as a defined goal.

10 RTLB Principles of Practice

- All RTLB principles of practice are relevant and have significance of the initial meeting phase. These underpin all that we do.
  - Inclusive teaching
  - Culture responsive
  - Strength based
  - Collaborative and systemic
  - Strength based
  - Student
  - Interdisciplinary
  - Professional
- We write to bring specificity of inclusion and strength based practice.


11 Inclusive

- The RTLB role is to recognise and value the diversity and contribution of all children and young people.
- What would inclusive practice look like/sound like at the Initial Meeting stage?



12 Strength-Based

- What would strengths-based practice look like/sound like at the Initial Meeting stage?
  - Discussion - Not for them



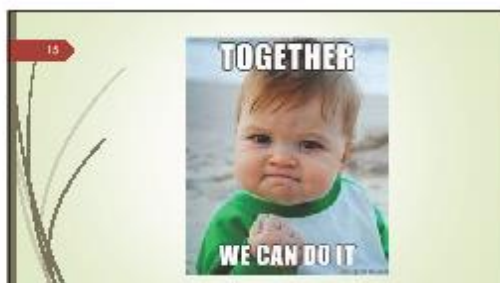




14 Initial Meeting: Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS)

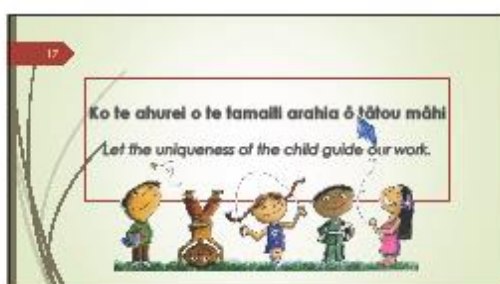
1. Clear identification of the underlying problem situation defined collaboratively with the teacher. (Ginsburg and Peirce, 1988)
2. RST asks to "establish a more complete conceptualization of the problem" (Walker, 2015, p. 22). (Walton and Rubenfeld, 2014)
3. Redefines the problem structure in a desired goal. What is the discrepancy between where the teacher and students are now and where they want to get to? (Walton and Rubenfeld, 1985)
4. Responsibility for next actions are negotiated and agreed to by the roles of partnership.
5. Collaborative construction is not about being prescriptive, or that the RST expects that the teacher merely accepts the RST's perspective on the discrepancy. (2015)
6. There is reciprocity between teacher and RST. (Walton et al., 1985; Walcott et al., 2015)

Schools use a combination of these perspectives, experiences, and strategies which must be acknowledged in order to build trust in equivalent outcomes and strategies. (Mihal, Austin, and Harty, 2017)



16 Initial Meeting 2

- Initial meeting of approx. 30 min recorded.
- Initial Meeting Template
- Teacher Consent completed
- Recording options:
  - Phone
  - iPad
  - Lap top
- Recording saved as sound file
- Tech support available - RHa
- Flash drive or email to Rana Ha with RAS name.
- Audio recordings transferred by RHa
- To R Ha by Friday 04 March of latest



18 References

- Algarra, M., C. Gonzalez, G. J. Garcia, A. J. Pineda, E. M. (2018). Implementing multiple intelligences (MI) in engineering students' research. *International Journal of Engineering Research in Education*, 16(1), 101-105. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15393099.2018.1481111>
- Algarra, M. M., 2018. Use of Multiple Intelligences (MI) with Multiple Intelligences as a Strategy to Enhance the Quality of Learning. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 1(1), 1-10. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24747183.2018.1511111>
- Algarra, M. M., 2018. Use of Multiple Intelligences (MI) with Multiple Intelligences as a Strategy to Enhance the Quality of Learning. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 1(1), 1-10. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24747183.2018.1511111>
- Algarra, M. M., 2018. Use of Multiple Intelligences (MI) with Multiple Intelligences as a Strategy to Enhance the Quality of Learning. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 1(1), 1-10. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24747183.2018.1511111>
- Algarra, M. M., 2018. Use of Multiple Intelligences (MI) with Multiple Intelligences as a Strategy to Enhance the Quality of Learning. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 1(1), 1-10. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24747183.2018.1511111>
- Algarra, M. M., 2018. Use of Multiple Intelligences (MI) with Multiple Intelligences as a Strategy to Enhance the Quality of Learning. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 1(1), 1-10. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24747183.2018.1511111>
- Algarra, M. M., 2018. Use of Multiple Intelligences (MI) with Multiple Intelligences as a Strategy to Enhance the Quality of Learning. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 1(1), 1-10. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24747183.2018.1511111>
- Algarra, M. M., 2018. Use of Multiple Intelligences (MI) with Multiple Intelligences as a Strategy to Enhance the Quality of Learning. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 1(1), 1-10. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24747183.2018.1511111>
- Algarra, M. M., 2018. Use of Multiple Intelligences (MI) with Multiple Intelligences as a Strategy to Enhance the Quality of Learning. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 1(1), 1-10. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24747183.2018.1511111>

## Appendix C: Code Book: Analysis of Initial Meeting

### Code Summary:

Assumptions Avoided/Made - Green Highlight	A+ or A-
Questioning Open/Closed - Pink Highlight	Q+ or Q-
Strengths-Based/Deficit - Blue Highlight	S+ or S-
Problem Attribution External /Internal - Yellow Highlight	PA + or PA -

Inclusive, strengths-based language			Exclusive, deficit language		
Behaviour	Description	Examples	Behaviour		Examples
<b>Assumptions avoided</b>  <b>Code: A+</b>	<b>1.1</b> Describes the nature of the problem in terms which describe the observable behaviours. Statements are qualified or tested.	<i>I think/feel that there is an issue with x...</i> <i>There might be a problem with how...</i> <i>I believe that...</i> <i>It appears that...</i> <i>X may.....</i> <i>X does not complete the work set.</i> <i>X does not sit on the mat when asked.</i>	<b>Assumptions made</b>  <b>Code: A-</b>	Describes the nature of the problem in terms of assumptions made about the intent or purpose of the person's actions. Beliefs are taken for granted as true without testing.	<i>X has a problem with.....</i> <i>X is looking for attention when she....</i> <i>X is lazy and won't complete the work</i> <i>X is stubborn/manipulative/vindictive</i>

	<b>1.2</b> Gives/describes information without drawing conclusions as to how the student, or others may be thinking or feeling.	<i>What I observed was...</i> <i>X has moved schools 3 times in the last year.</i>		Presents opinions and conclusions as truths. States opinions, perspective and hunches as facts.	<i>Her home life is awful so she is not taught how to behave properly.</i> <i>X has moved a lot so now he doesn't care about anything.</i>
	<b>1.3</b> Labels (ADHD etc.) are not used to define or describe the problem situation or student difficulties.	<i>X has a diagnosis of ADHD/Dyslexia/ASD etc.</i> <i>X has a diagnosis of ADHD/Dyslexia/ASD etc. and at times he has difficulty.....</i>		Labels (ADHD etc.) are used to define or describe the problem situation or student difficulties.	<i>He is ADHD so he is.....</i> <i>Because she is ASD she....</i> <i>I am referring X because he has FASD.</i>
	<b>1.4</b> Uses neutral, objective language to describe behaviours and events.	<i>X walked over to the desk and picked up the pen after I had asked him not to.</i> <i>X did not complete his work this morning.</i>		Uses emotive, subjective language to describe behaviours and events.	<i>X deliberately barged across to the desk in defiance of me.</i> <i>X said disgusting things to Y all morning instead of doing his work.</i>
<b>Open Questioning</b> <b>Code: Q+</b>	<b>2.1</b> Asks clarifying questions which elicit a full response and make no assumption regarding the outcome.	<i>Tell me more about .....</i> <i>What was X doing in the playground prior to the incident?</i> <i>What makes you say that....?</i>	<b>Closed Questioning</b> <b>Code: Q-</b>	Asks questions which elicit little information beyond a yes or no response. Asks loaded questions which make assumptions regarding the response.	<i>Did you....?</i> <i>Were you....?</i> <i>Was X....?</i>
	<b>2.2</b> Checks for understanding.  Asks for clarification of the other person's thinking probes into any point of	<i>So you are saying x.... is that correct?</i> <i>The key points you mentioned are x and y, am I right?</i>		Does not check for understanding.  Allows complex, value-laden statements without clarification of the other	<i>This is what is happening.</i> <i>You/We are going to....</i> <i>The student is ....</i>



	difference, paraphrases and checks for accuracy.	<p><i>When you say x, what do you mean by that?</i></p> <p><i>What has led you to that conclusion?</i></p>		<p>person's thinking, paraphrasing or checking for accuracy.</p> <p>Absolutist statements made about problem situation that steer the conversation in a specific direction, loaded questions, does not leave time for other to answer or answers the question him/herself.</p>	<p><i>Your student needs to..</i></p> <p><i>You need to.....</i></p>
<p><b>Strengths-based</b></p> <p><b>Code: S+</b></p>	<p><b>3.1</b> Makes statements about the ability and strengths of a student.</p>	<p><i>X appears to enjoy....</i></p> <p><i>X is good at....</i></p> <p><i>X helps when.....</i></p>	<p><b>Deficit</b></p> <p><b>Code: S-</b></p>	<p>No acknowledgement of strengths of student. Explicit statements re students' lack of strengths.</p>	<p><i>He is no good at anything</i></p> <p><i>He never tries in class</i></p>
	<p><b>3.2</b> Language allows for times when positive or desired behaviour occurs.</p>	<p><i>X sometimes</i></p> <p><i>X occasionally</i></p> <p><i>X frequently</i></p>		<p>Statements are absolute and allow no room for occurrence of positive opposite behaviours.</p>	<p><i>X always.....</i></p> <p><i>X never.....</i></p>
<p><b>Problem Attribution External</b></p> <p><b>Code: PA+</b></p>	<p><b>4.1</b> Describes the person as in a relationship with the problem. Situates the problem away from the person.</p>	<p><i>The problem has affected her energy levels.</i></p> <p><i>She has anxiety and the anxiety makes it hard for her to join in games.</i></p> <p><i>He has aggressive behaviours and the aggression causes difficulties.</i></p> <p><i>There was the crying most mornings</i></p>	<p><b>Problem Attribution Internal</b></p> <p><b>Code: PA+</b></p>	<p>Describes the problem as part of the student. The problem is described in ways that assume it is somehow a part of the student, or within them. That the student is blamed for the school failure.</p>	<p><i>He is ADHD</i></p> <p><i>She is unmotivated</i></p> <p><i>He is a worrier</i></p> <p><i>She was a cry baby every morning</i></p>

	<p><b>4.2</b> Frames student behaviours in terms of experiencing difficulty. Describes student as lacking the skills to meet expectations.</p> <p>Can't not won't .</p>	<p><i>X has difficulty completing his work on time.</i></p> <p><i>X has difficulty communicating with other students.</i></p>		<p>Frames student behaviours as student's choice. Describes students as choosing their behaviour.</p> <p>Won't not can't.</p>	<p><i>X won't do what I ask him to do.</i></p> <p><i>X won't complete her work on time</i></p> <p><i>X wants to tell the other students what to do all the time.</i></p>
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## Appendix D: Initial Meeting Template

Initial Meeting: *RTLB Name / Cell / Email*

<b>Name:</b> <b>DOB:</b> <b>Year:</b> <b>School:</b>	<b>Date of Meeting:</b> <b>Place:</b> <b>Review Meeting:</b>	<b>Meeting with:</b>  <b>Who else has supported you with this?</b>
1. <b>Introduction:</b> Roles and aims clarified		
2. <b>Concerns:</b> What are your concerns? What is the challenging situation? What impact is this having for the student/for you?		
3. <b>Student Strengths and Interests:</b> What works? What is going well?		
4. <b>Possible influences:</b> What factors outside of this context may have an impact on this difficulty?		5. <b>Context(s) in which the difficulties do not occur:</b>
6. <b>What are possible triggers?</b> What factors within this context may lead to the difficulties occurring?		7. <b>Interim Hypotheses:</b> Why is this difficulty(s) occurring? What is our 'educated guess'?

8. <u>Is there anything else I should know?</u>
9. <u>What would be the best outcome of my involvement? What would you most like to see happen?</u>

**Next Steps:** What other information or data do we need?

What we will do now	Who?	When?	Done?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
Next meeting & review:	Copies to:		

## Appendix E: Initial Meeting Questionnaire

### Initial Meeting: Reflection Questionnaire

*Please provide a summarised response for each question*

RTLB Name:

Date of Meeting:

1.	What were your impressions/feelings about the meeting?
2.	<p>How would you rate the balance of participation in the meeting? (please highlight one number):</p> <p>Participation</p> <p>1 -----2-----3-----4-----5</p> <p>All Teacher <span style="float: right;">No Teacher</span></p> <p>No RTLB <span style="float: right;">All RTLB</span></p>
3.	<p>a. How did you establish rapport?</p> <p>b. Were there any barriers to this?</p>
4.	<p>a. Do you feel that the teacher's concerns were clearly established? Yes/No</p> <p>b. Did you tentatively identify the problem? Yes/No</p> <p>c. If so what was it?</p>
5.	<p>a. Did you note any signs of resistance or vulnerability? Yes/No</p> <p>b. If yes, what?</p> <p>c. How did you deal with it?</p>
6.	What did you do to make the teacher feel supported?
7.	What information do you still need to gather?

8.	Did you end up with a clear agreement of what will happen next? Yes / No
9.	Is it clear from the plan who will do what by when? Yes / No
10.	Did you offer any solutions to the problem? Yes / No
11.	What would you do differently next time?
12.	What are your thoughts regarding this opportunity to review your transcript and reflect on your initial meeting?
13.	What are your thoughts about this initial meeting compared your first recorded meeting?
14.	Any other comments:

# Appendix F: Participant Information and Consent Forms



**EDUCATION AND  
SOCIAL WORK**

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New Zealand

## PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET – RTLB

**Project Title:** Developing Inclusive, Strength-Based Practice in an RTLB Cluster.

**Name of Researcher:** Fiona Harkness

**Supervisors:** Dr Joanne Walker, Dr Frauke Meyer

I am currently a Master's student in Education at the University of Auckland and the Practice Leader at the [REDACTED] RTLB Cluster. I invite you, to take part in my thesis research project. For this research, I will examine if the professional development provided has resulted in any shifts in language to a more inclusive and strength-based approach.

As part of our ongoing professional learning and development all RTLB in the cluster will audio-record two initial meetings of new requests for support. One before the first PLD session and one before the second PLD session. The audio-recordings will then be transcribed by me or a transcriber, who has signed a confidentiality form, and used in PLD sessions. The transcripts will be annotated by you with your thoughts and feelings you had during the conversation and used by you to reflect on your language and behaviour in the meeting. The PLD will cover best practice expectations for initial meetings, recognition of inclusive, strength-based language, open questioning and key elements of consultative, collaborative approach to problem-solving.

In your role as an RTLB, I seek your consent to utilise the audio-recordings and transcripts from your initial meetings as well as the request for support, for the cases you have recorded the initial meetings for, for my research. For the recording, you will need to provide the other person involved in the initial meeting with a Participant Information Sheet and they will need to sign a Consent Form. These will be provided by me. The research will not focus on the behaviour of the other person involved or the case discussed in the initial meeting.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation until the stage of data analysis one month after you submitted the second audio-recording for transcription. Participants can withdraw their data and have it deleted until the stage of data analysis which will commence one month after the initial meeting. The cluster manager, has given their assurance that your participation or non-participation will have no effect on your relationship with the [REDACTED] Cluster or your employment by [REDACTED]. I, in my role as a Practice Leader for the [REDACTED] RTLB Cluster and the researcher, give my assurance that your participation or non-participation will have no effect my professional relationship with you.

All data collected during the research will be stored securely and will be kept separate from consent forms. The audio files and transcripts will be stored securely on the researcher's password protected computer or a university server and will be destroyed securely after six years. All consent forms will be stored securely for a minimum of six years in a separate location to the research data and then destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded and digital files will be permanently deleted.

As the potential participant group is small, confidentiality of RTLB cannot be guaranteed, however every measure will be taken to ensure confidentiality of all participants, including schools, by replacing all names with pseudonyms and by deleting or masking any identifying information, for example place names, before data analysis takes place. At the end of the project, I will make a summary of the findings available to participants.

Please feel free to ask me any questions about the research before you sign your consent form.

Contacts:

You can contact me at

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Researcher's supervisors:

Dr Frauke Meyer and Dr Joanne Walker

+64 9 373 7999 ext 48471

[f.meyer@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:f.meyer@auckland.ac.nz) or [jo.walker@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:jo.walker@auckland.ac.nz)

Or the Head of School (Learning, Development and Professional Practice):

Dr Richard Hamilton

+64 9 923 5619

[rj.hamilton@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:rj.hamilton@auckland.ac.nz)

For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, the University  
of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, at the University of Auckland,  
Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142.

Telephone 09 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: [ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz).

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2018 for three years.  
Reference Number 021751



## CONSENT FORM – RTL B

(THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS)

**Project title:** Developing Inclusive, Strength-Based Practice in an RTL B Cluster.

**Name of Researcher:** Fiona Harkness

**Supervisors:** Dr Joanne Walker, Dr Frauke Meyer

**Contact email address for researcher:** [REDACTED]

I have read and understood the Participation Information Sheet and understand the nature of the research and why I have been invited to participate. I have had the opportunity to clarify information and ask any questions I had.

- I agree to participate in this research.
- I understand that participation in this research means to consent for the researcher to utilise the audio files and transcripts from my initial meetings, the annotations I have made in the PLD sessions, as well as the referral report for the cases I have recorded in the initial meetings, for her research.
- I understand that I need to provide the other person involved in the initial meeting with a Participant Information Sheet and they will need to sign a Consent Form. These will be provided by the researcher. I understand that the research will focus on shift in RTL B behaviour after the PLD session and not focus on the behaviour of the other person involved or the case discussed in the initial meeting.
- I understand that participation in this research is entirely voluntary and that I can choose to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation until the stage of data analysis one months after I submitted the second transcript for transcription.
- I understand that the cluster manager has given their assurance that my participation or non-participation will have no effect on my relationship with the [REDACTED] RTL B Cluster or my employment at [REDACTED]
- I understand that the researcher, in her role as a practice leader, gives her assurance that my participation or non-participation will have no effect on my relationship with her.
- I understand that data gathered in the research will be stored securely. Identifying material (including keywords, pseudonyms, and consent forms) will be stored separately from coded data. All data and consent

forms will be destroyed after six years. Hard copies will be shredded and digital files will be permanently deleted.

- I understand that every measure will be taken to ensure confidentiality, but that anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Pseudonyms will be used for any names in any reporting and other identifying material will be masked or deleted. I understand that the data collected will be used in the completion of a Master of Education and maybe used in publications and conference presentations.
- I wish to receive a summary of the findings. Yes / No

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **EMAIL:** \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2018 for three years.  
Reference Number 021751

## PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET – Teachers

**Project Title:** Developing Inclusive, Strength-Based Practice in an RTLB Cluster.

**Name of Researcher:** Fiona Harkness

**Supervisors:** Dr Joanne Walker, Dr Frauke Meyer

I am currently a Master's student in Education at the University of Auckland and the Practice Leader at the [REDACTED] RTLB Cluster. I invite you, to take part in my thesis research project. For this research, I will examine if the professional development provided has resulted in any shifts in language to a more inclusive and strength-based approach.

For this research I would like to ask for your consent for the RTLB, you are in an initial referral meeting with, to audio-record the meeting. The audio-recordings will then be transcribed by me or a transcriber, who has signed a confidentiality form, and used in our PLD session by the RTLB to reflect on his/her practice. I seek your consent to utilise the audio-recordings and transcripts from your initial meeting for my research. The research does not focus on your behaviour or the case discussed in the initial meeting. For this research, I will examine if the professional development provided has resulted in any shifts in language by RTLB participating to a more inclusive and strength-based approach.

The PLD will cover best practice expectations for initial meetings, recognition of inclusive, strength-based language, open questioning and key elements of consultative, collaborative approach to problem solving. The researcher will also access the request for support report written by the RTLB for this case to analyse the language used.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation. The cluster manager and I, in my role as a practice leader for the [REDACTED] RTLB Cluster, give our assurance that your participation or non-participation will have no effect on your relationship with the RTLB services.

You can withdraw your data and have it deleted until the stage of data analysis which will commence one month after RTLBs have submitted the second recording of an initial meeting. This will be by the Friday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019.

The recordings will be transcribed by either myself or a transcriber. The transcriber will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

All data collected during the research will be stored securely and will be kept separate from consent forms. The audio files and transcripts will be stored securely on the researcher's password protected computer or a university server and will be destroyed securely after six years. All consent forms will be stored securely for a minimum of six years in a separate location to the research data and then destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded and digital files will be permanently deleted.

Every measure will be taken to ensure confidentiality of all participants, including schools, by replacing all names with pseudonyms and by deleting or masking any identifying information, for example place names before data analysis takes place. At the end of the project, I will make a summary of the findings available to participants.

If you have any questions or queries, please contact the researcher.

Contacts:

Researcher:

Fiona Harkness

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Researcher's supervisors:

Dr Frauke Meyer and Dr Joanne Walker

+64 9 373 7999 ext 48471

[f.meyer@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:f.meyer@auckland.ac.nz) or [jo.walker@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:jo.walker@auckland.ac.nz)

Or the Head of School (Learning, Development and Professional Practice):

Dr Richard Hamilton

+64 9 923 5619

[rj.hamilton@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:rj.hamilton@auckland.ac.nz)

For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, the University  
of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, at the University of Auckland,

Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142.

Telephone 09 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: [ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz).

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2018 for three years.  
Reference Number 021751



Consent Form (Teachers)

Project title: Developing Inclusive, Strength-Based Practice in an RTLB Cluster.

Name of Researcher: Fiona Harkness

Supervisors: Dr Joanne Walker, Dr Frauke Meyer

Contact email address for researcher: [Redacted]

Analysis of Initial Meeting
(This consent form will be kept for a period of six years)

I have read and understood the Participation Information Sheet and understand the nature of the research and why I have been invited to participate. I have had the opportunity to clarify information and ask any questions I had.

- I agree to participate in this research.
I understand that participation in this research means to consent for the researcher to have this initial meeting for referral with an RTLB audio-recorded. I understand that the audio-recording will be transcribed and used by the RTLB in a PLD session focussing on their language and behaviour in the meeting, not my behaviour or the case discussed. I understand that the researcher will also collect the referral report for this case to analyse the language used.
I understand that participation in this research is entirely voluntary and that I can choose to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation until the stage of data analysis one month after the RTLB submitted the second transcript for transcription.
I understand that the Cluster Manager and the Practice Leader has given their assurance that my participation or non-participation will have no effect on my relationship with the RTLB service.
I understand that data gathered in the research will be stored securely. Identifying material (including keywords, pseudonyms, and consent forms) will be stored separately from coded data. All data and consent forms will be destroyed after six years. Hard copies will be shredded and digital files will be permanently deleted.
I understand that every measure will be taken to ensure confidentiality, but that anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Pseudonyms will be used for any names in any reporting and other identifying material will be masked or deleted. I understand that the data collected will be used in the completion of a Master of Education and maybe used in publications and conference presentations.
I wish to receive a summary of the findings. Yes / No

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_
(please print clearly)

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET – Cluster Manager

**Project Title:** Developing Inclusive, Strength-Based Practice in an RTLB Cluster.

**Name of Researcher:** Fiona Harkness

**Supervisors:** Dr Joanne Walker, Dr Frauke Meyer

I am currently a Master's student in Education at the University of Auckland and the Practice Leader at the [REDACTED] RTLB Cluster. I invite you, to take part in my thesis research project. For this research, I will examine if the professional development provided has resulted in any shifts in language to a more inclusive and strength-based approach.

As part of our ongoing professional learning and development all RTLB in the cluster will audio- record two initial meetings of new requests for support. One before the first PLD session and one before the second PLD session. For the recording, participants will need to provide the other person involved in the initial meeting with a Participant Information Sheet and they will need to sign a Consent Form. These will be provided by me. The audio-recordings will then be transcribed by me or a transcriber, who has signed a confidentiality form, and used in PLD sessions. The transcripts will be annotated by RTLB with the thoughts and feelings the had during the conversation and used by them to reflect on their language and behaviour in the meeting. The PLD will cover best practice expectations for initial meetings, recognition of inclusive, strength-based language, open questioning and key elements of consultative, collaborative approach to problem solving

In your role as the Cluster Manager, I seek your consent to utilise the audio files and transcripts from RTLB's initial meetings as well as the request for support reports, for the cases RTLB have recorded the initial meetings for, for my research. The research will not focus on the behaviour of the other person involved or the case discussed in the initial meeting, but on potential shifts in language and behaviour of the RTLB.

I ask that you, in your role as Cluster Manager, give your assurance that the RTLB's participation or non-participation will have no effect on their relationship with the [REDACTED] RTLB Cluster or their employment by [REDACTED]. I, in my role as a Practice Leader for the [REDACTED] RTLB Cluster and the researcher, give my assurance that the RTLB's participation or non-participation will have no effect on my professional relationship with them.

Participation is entirely voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation until the stage of data analysis one months after they submitted the second audio-recording for transcription.

The recordings will be transcribed by either myself or a transcriber. The transcriber will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

All data collected during the research will be stored securely and will be kept separate from consent forms. The audio files and transcripts will be stored securely on the researcher's password protected computer or a university server and will be destroyed securely after six years. All consent forms will be stored securely for a minimum of six years in a separate location to the research data and then destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded and digital files will be permanently deleted.

As the potential participant group is small, confidentiality of RTLB cannot be guaranteed, however every measure will be taken to ensure confidentiality of all participants, including schools, by replacing all names with pseudonyms and by deleting or masking any identifying information, for example place names before data analysis takes place. At the end of the project, I will make a summary of the findings available to participants.

Please feel free to ask me any questions about the research before you sign your consent form.

Contacts:

You can contact me at



Or my supervisors:

Dr Frauke Meyer and Dr Joanne Walker

+64 9 373 7999 ext 48471

[f.meyer@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:f.meyer@auckland.ac.nz) or [jo.walker@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:jo.walker@auckland.ac.nz)

Or the Head of School (Learning, Development and Professional Practice):

Dr Richard Hamilton

+64 9 923 5619

[rj.hamilton@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:rj.hamilton@auckland.ac.nz)

For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, the University  
of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, at the University of Auckland,  
Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142.

Telephone 09 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: [ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz).

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2018 for three years.  
Reference Number 021751

## CONSENT FORM – Cluster Manager

(THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS)

**Project title: Developing Inclusive, Strength-Based Practice in an RTLB Cluster.**

**Name of Researcher:** Fiona Harkness

**Supervisors:** Dr Joanne Walker, Dr Frauke Meyer

**Contact email address for researcher:** [REDACTED]

I have read and understood the Participation Information Sheet and understand the nature of the research and why the RTLB have been invited to participate. I have had the opportunity to clarify information and ask any questions I had.

- I give my consent for the RTLB working in this cluster to participate in this research.
- I understand that participation in this research is entirely voluntary and that participants can choose to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation. Participants can also withdraw their data and have it deleted until the stage of data analysis until the stage of data analysis one months after they submitted the second transcript for transcription.
- I give my assurance that an RTLB's participation or non-participation will have no effect on their relationship with the [REDACTED] RTLB Cluster or their employment at [REDACTED].
- I understand that the researcher, in her role as a Practice Leader, gives her assurance that an RTLB's participation or non-participation will have no effect on their relationship with her.
- I understand that an RTLB's participation in the research involves giving consent to have the researcher use the audio recordings of two one-on-one initial meetings of approximately 30 minutes with a teacher for her research. Participants will annotate these transcripts during PLD sessions. Furthermore, I understand that the researcher will collect the referral report for the cases the RTLB recorded their conversations for, for her research.
- I understand that data gathered in the research will be stored securely. Identifying material (including keywords, pseudonyms, and consent forms) will be stored separately from coded data. All data and consent forms will be destroyed after six years. Hard copies will be shredded and digital files will be permanently deleted.
- I understand that every measure will be taken to ensure confidentiality, but that anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Pseudonyms will be used for any names in any reporting and other identifying material will be masked or deleted. I understand that the data collected will be used in the completion of a Master of Education and maybe used in publications and conference presentations.
- I wish to receive a summary of the findings. Yes / No



**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **EMAIL:** \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2018 for three years.  
Reference Number 021751