

## Language matters: Developing inclusive, strength-based practice in an RTLB cluster

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Tēnā koutou katoa  
Ko Mānāia te maunga  
Ko Kālikanui te awa  
Nō Pēwhairangi ahau  
E mihi ana ki ngā tohu o nehe, o Whangārei e noho nei au  
Ko Fiona Harkness tōku ingoa  
Nō reira, tēnā koutou katoa

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### Language

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



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### Language

- 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 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).

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

— PLATO

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### Research questions

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



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## Methodology

- **RTLB Participants**
  - Twelve RTLB from one cluster
  - Experience working as an RTLB ranged from newly employed to 16 years
  - Audio-recorded Initial Meetings on two occasions: **prior to and following** professional development sessions
  - Reflected on initial meetings
  - Participated in two targeted PLD sessions
- **Practice Leader/Researcher:**
  - transcribed RTLB recordings & analysed language used by RTLB at Initial Meeting prior to targeted PLD.
  - Developed and facilitated two three-hour PLD sessions for RTLB
  - Transcribed and coded audio-recordings of Initial meetings

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## Professional Development

- RTLB participated in two three-hour PLD sessions focussed on:
  - cognitive bias
  - problem attribution
  - language use
  - judgements
  - assumptions
  - emotive language
- RTLB used transcripts of the two initial meetings as opportunities to reflect on their own language through guided analysis.
- Practice Leader/Researcher analysis of RTLB language within the transcripts was a key focus of this research.

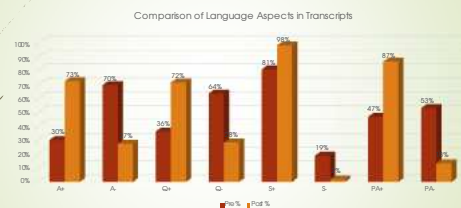
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## The Practice Leader/Researcher

- Guided RTLB analysis of their language during Initial Meetings using transcripts
- Transcribed Initial Meeting recordings and coded them for:
  - assumptions avoided/made
  - questioning open/closed
  - strengths-based/deficit
  - problem attribution external/internal

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## Findings



**Figure 1**  
Comparison of Language Aspects in Initial Meeting Transcripts Collated for All Transcripts

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## Transcript

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.

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## Transcript

Interviewee: But not incredibly empathetic (laughs)  
 RTLB9: Mmmm  
 Interviewee: That sort of falls him a wee bit.  
 RTLB9: You feel that he doesn't really show any empathy or kindness.  
 Interviewee: Not very often. Not very often.  
 RTLB9: No we don't see the empathy very often.  
 Audio of Initial Meeting, RTLB & Teacher, 2019

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## Reflection

*"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"*

RTLB Participant, 2019

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## Reflection

*"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."*

RTLB Participant, 2019

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## Conclusion

- 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 the collaborative problem solving framework.
- The demonstrated effectiveness of the PLD in creating a notable shift in the language used by RTLB has implications for further professional development.

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Manaakitia a tātou tamariki  
Manaakitia ngā mea ka rongu  
Manaakitia ngā mea ka kitea  
Ko te tupurua o ngā tamariki  
Arā ko te kanohi 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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