

*Culturally responsive PLD for capacity-building and innovation in literacy practices that support diverse learners*

Letitia Fickel, Ed.D  
School of Teacher Education  
University of Canterbury

Adie Bonisch M.TchLn  
Christine Henderson M.TchLn  
Gaylene Price M.TchLn  
Literacy Language Learning Te Waipounamu Team  
EducationPlus  
University of Canterbury

*In collaboration with the Literacy Language Learning Te Waipounamu PLD Team*

Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the  
American Education Research Association,  
April 16-20, 2015  
Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Introduction

International studies indicate that Aotearoa New Zealand<sup>1</sup> primary school students, on average, perform significantly above the international mean in reading and mathematics (PISA 2009, 2012; PIRLS 2006, 2011). However, further examination of this data also indicates a significant gap between the highest and lowest achieving students. In fact, the inequality in educational outcomes reflected in this gap between students is one of the largest among OECD nations (May, Cowles, & Lamy, 2013). Thus, it remains the case that educators and communities in Aotearoa New Zealand continue to face a persistent problem of practice in ensuring equitable outcomes for a significant number of students. This is of particular concern for Māori, the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as for other Pasifika youth and students learning English as another language.

Having identified teacher effectiveness as a key factor in student learning, the New Zealand government has concentrated on enhancing the professional knowledge and practice base of teachers as a key lever for securing more equitable outcomes for students. Thus, the Ministry of Education has placed considerable emphasis on enhancing the systematic performance of professional learning and development (PLD) offered to teachers and schools by various PLD providers. This has included a monitoring and reporting approach situated within an inquiry framework, that establishes clear, shared standards for quality provision of culturally responsive PLD. In this context, the Ministry of Education (2012) has indicated that culturally responsive PLD “refers to a system focus that affirms identity(ties), language(s) and culture(s) of every learner with a view to generating equitable outcomes across the system” (p.17).

Individual and collective experiences in schools have generally resulted in the accepted wisdom that teachers and teaching matter greatly in student learning. Recently this shared wisdom has been united with growing empirical evidence that affirms teacher effectiveness as a critical factor in student engagement in learning and achievement outcomes (see Alton-Lee, 2003). Such research has also demonstrated the positive impact that high concentrations of effective teachers within schools have on accelerating student learning in ways that serve to shrink the achievement gap (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Haycock, Jerald & Huang, 2002; Alton-Lee, 2003). Because of this central role teachers play in student outcomes, there has been growing interest and concern among educationists, researchers and policy makers in better understanding how professional learning and development (PLD) for teachers can support enhanced pedagogical practice. From this research has emerged a growing consensus about high quality PLD practices (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Lieberman 1995; Little 1993; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). Moreover, this research has highlighted the importance of school leadership in developing the learning cultures within schools that enable teachers implement changes in practice (Timperley, et.al, 2007).

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper we have used both the te reo Māori and English names for the country in recognition of the indigenous rights of Māori people, as reflected in the bilingual and bicultural commitments of the Treaty of Waitangi.

In this paper, we present a documentary account drawn from our on-going research and evaluation of a culturally responsive PLD programme that places student language, culture and identity as the focus of attention in literacy learning. Taking a school-wide approach to PLD, the model we have developed is grounded in an Appreciative Inquiry framework (Cooperrider & Srivesta, 1987) that seeks to identify and increase the use of existing practices within the schools as leverages for enhancing and further developing culturally responsive practices in literacy. For the documentary account presented here, we have turned our inquiry lens explicitly on examining the use of “smart tools” to support leadership capacity-building in support of innovation in literacy practices within schools.

### Critical Leavers in Ensuring Quality Teacher Learning that Support Equitable Student Outcomes: Culturally Responsive Practices & Leadership Capacity

The growing empirical evidence regarding the importance of teachers’ knowledge and skill to ensuring equitable student outcomes has resulted in more attention being paid to teacher learning and development. This focused inquiry has resulted in a growing consensus about what constitutes effective practices (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Lieberman 1995; Little 1993; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). The literature suggests that effective PLD promotes deep, principled conceptual understanding. This is accomplished by engaging teachers in in-depth inquiry focused on specific content-area knowledge coupled with systematic, critical examination of their prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. Effective PLD supports teacher to connect the new information with their existing practical theories so as to support them in the necessary deconstruction and reconstruction of prior knowledge (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Darling-Hammond 1997; Lieberman 1995; Little 1993). Thus, the prevailing theoretical framework and related models of professional development promote an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001) and purposeful engagement in practice with critical reflection and ongoing dialogue to enhance learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Halley & Valli, 1999; Wells, 1999).

The literature is less informative, however, in documenting the sorts of professional learning contexts, content, and processes that support teachers in developing culturally responsive practices. Culturally responsive practice is grounded in the assumption that there is a special knowledge base, skills, processes, and experiences necessary for teachers that enable them to work successfully with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Smith, 1998). And over the last few decades a well-established body of knowledge has emerged that highlights the dispositions and key practices of culturally responsive teachers who produce more successful outcomes for their students (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop, 2010; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Sleeter 2008). From this research, we know that teachers who respect, care about, and are open to their students’ diverse backgrounds develop better relationships with them and typically see more successful academic outcomes (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Macfarlane, 2006). Yet, in spite of this established knowledge base on CRT, we still face many of the same educational issues that gave impetus to this research (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Most evident of these issues is the continuing achievement gap. Continuing inquiry into the modes and processes that best support the development of culturally responsive practices among teachers and within schools thus remains of paramount concern.

In examining effective PLD, research has pointed to the importance of context in

teacher learning and development. Such research has highlighted the importance of school leadership in creating the conditions that enable the supportive environments necessary for both rigorous professional learning and implementation of resulting changes in practice (see Timperley, et al, 2007). In fact, in conducting a meta-analysis of research studies in order to examine the impact of leadership on student outcomes, Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, (2009) found that promoting and participating in teacher learning and development had the highest impact across five leadership dimensions (p. 38). They noted that in high-performing schools leadership promotes the development of learning communities that focus on student success, and in these contexts leaders often challenge or change cultures that are not engaged in the collegial discourses and relationships that support this focus. Such research has also highlighted the importance of distributed leadership, specifically the cultivation of teacher expertise and leadership in a range of curriculum areas or pedagogical practices, for enabling principals to deal with the complexity of the day-to-day pressures of leadership (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Timperley, et al., 2007). Given the importance of leadership, and in particular distributed leadership, in creating the conditions to support teacher learning and change, focused examination of PLD models that explicitly attend to leadership capacity-building offer the possibility of extending both the empirical and theoretical knowledge base in the field.

#### Undertaking Collaborative Research and Programme Evaluation: Methodological and Theoretical Framework

The research and evaluation of this PLD programme is an ongoing, co-constructed and co-implemented process. It has been informed through the interweaving of several theoretical frameworks from both evaluation and research fields. These include utilization-focused (Patton, 2008) and participatory, collaborative and empowerment models (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005; Cousins & Whitmore, 2007) approaches of programme evaluation, and action-research (Whyte, 1991; Noffke & Somekh, 2005). Our purpose in this interweaving has been to build capacity for integrating practice-focused research and improvement-oriented evaluation into the routine practices and expectations for PLD provision.

Socio-cultural and constructivist theories of learning and knowledge underpin the conceptual framework of both the PLD programme and the embedded research and evaluation. Drawing from the socio-cultural theoretical perspective, we agree with Schwandt's (2000) observation that "human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). This underlying assumption guides how the PLD team understand themselves as learners and knowers, and how they frame engagements with the teachers and school leaders with whom they work. It also guides how the research and evaluation of the programme is an ongoing process of co-construction and collaborative engagement with the external evaluator.

Our theoretical stance is also based on our shared understanding that knowledge is distributed among individuals, and that we collectively co-construct meaning and understanding together as we interact (Vygotsky, 1978). This interaction results not only in a personalized form of sense making, but also leads to the cultivation of a shared, public understanding as well. Thus, our work is also grounded in the theoretical construct of "communities of practice" as it is within such communities

that common stores of knowledge are built by interacting around problems, solutions, and insights drawn from shared practice (Wenger, 1998, 2000).

With respect to our PLD programme, our theoretical framework is also informed by an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach. AI argues that organizational improvement is best engaged by paying more attention to what is required to enact change than to focus on existing problems (Bushe, 1998; Billings & Kowalski, 2008; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Through a process of question-posing AI serves to strengthen the system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003, p. 3)

Our research and evaluation seeks to document the experiences, learning, and shifts in practice of a team of twelve PLD facilitators working collaboratively with an external evaluator to enhance their work. The co-authors of this paper are the external evaluator, a university faculty member, and three of the PLD facilitators who work for UC Education Plus who hold the contracts for professional development. The current PLD literacy contract includes a focus on literacy with respect to both reading and writing, and has integrated the focus on English Language Learners (ELL) into a more comprehensive model.

For the documentary account presented in this paper, we have turned our inquiry lens explicitly on examining a key focus of the PLD programme which is to support distributed leadership capacity-building within schools in support of innovation in literacy practices within schools. Data sources for examining this facet of our PLD work include: 1) the socially constructed artifacts, including project tools and protocols, 2) facilitator journals and PLD practice logs, and 3) annual summative programme evaluation reports. In presenting this documentary account, we pair a summative analysis of the PLD programme evaluation data with three selected case studies from each of the three facilitators, to illuminate various context sensitive ways that co-leadership and smart-tool use developed to result in positive student learning outcomes in literacy. In the case studies, have used pseudonyms throughout when naming schools and teacher leaders.

### An Appreciative Inquiry Focused Professional Learning & Development Model

As noted previously, the PLD framework has been informed by an appreciative inquiry approach that focuses on attending to enacting the desired change through increasing capacity to harness positive potential. In this way, the Literacy Team has sought to identify and increase the use of existing practices within the schools as leverages for enhancing and further developing culturally responsive practices in literacy. The PLD model developed by the Literacy Team has centred on working alongside schools to change the picture of achievement for Māori, Pasifika and other 'priority' learner groups identified by the Ministry of Education. To support focused work, the PLD model has been developed by the team to interweave three key components: 1) in-depth engagement with schools, 2) explicit leadership capacity-building for principals and literacy leaders, and 3) focus on student voice and student agency and learning evidence as the focus for on-going inquiry into practice (Fickel, Henderson & Price, 2013).

Within the model, the literacy and ELL facilitators serve as the ‘interface’ between current research and practice, serving as a supporting bridge connecting current teacher/leader understandings of literacy with relevant practices and constructs gleaned from the latest research findings. Facilitators’ thus work the ‘in-between the spaces’ of practice and research (Ikas & Wagner, 2008; Ortega, 2009).

Another key aspect of the Team’s PLD practice-work has been the collaborative development and use of ‘smart tools’ by the Literacy Team members. As described by Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) '**smart tools**' are tools and routines that are well designed and based on sound evidence-based theories. Over the course of the last three years, the Literacy Team has co-constructed and collaboratively refined through use and feedback with schools a set of ‘smart tools’ in response to the varied context, strengths and needs of the schools’ with regard to their leadership, literacy and culturally responsive practices. These ‘smart tools’ are embedded into and woven through all aspects of the facilitator practice (Fickel, et. al, 2013).

In undertaking the in-depth engagement with schools, the Literacy Team has established an implementation framework for the PLD appreciative model (Fickel, et.al., 2013; Fickel, Henderson & Price, 2015). Within the model, it is expected that the facilitator work alongside the school leaders and teachers to bring about improved literacy teaching practice, and do so in a way that enables the school to become self-sustaining in the new practices. Thus, at the outset of the PLD, facilitators support the school principal, literacy leader, and other teacher leaders to undertake an extensive scoping exercise, or needs assessment, to ascertain the current state of literacy practice. The scoping includes the use of a variety of the team’s ‘smart tools’ to capture both a wide and deep examination of data in order to craft a picture of the literacy focused practices at a school-wide organizational and leadership level, a school-wide literacy level, and at classroom level. With this knowledge the school leadership team and the Literacy Team facilitator then co-construct the collaborative school plan for literacy PLD for the year.

Throughout the implementation of the PLD activities, the facilitators model both high-quality PLD practices as well as each of the specific literacy pedagogies identified for teacher learning and implementation. Moreover, the facilitators overtly demonstrate and explain the theoretical and research-base for these practices in order to support the school to replicate the practice on their own and to ‘normalize’ the practice. Throughout the year, the facilitator supports the school with the collection, collation, analysis, and interpretation of in-depth data on the patterns of student achievement, teacher pedagogical content knowledge shift, and improved capability of leadership of literacy across schools. Much of this work of modeling and ‘normalizing’ literacy practices and engaging with data is again grounded in the use of a range of ‘smart tools.’ Of particular focus in this phase of the in-depth work is the use of ‘student voice’ and other forms of evidence of student learning to inform practice. In this way the schools are supported to engage in ongoing self-reflection and assessment, and revise their PLD plans and activities to better support student literacy learning needs.

#### PLD as a Context for Leadership Capacity-development

Close examination of the collected documentation of the facilitation team’s work and student learning outcomes suggest there are a number of key PLD activities and facilitator actions within our model that have been critical in the development of

leadership capacity-building for innovation and change in literacy practices within schools. However, as noted previously, within the overarching PLD implementation model, each facilitator works with the school leadership team (however constituted at the school) to craft a specific PLD plan responsive to the particular literacy learning needs of the students, as well as the professional learning needs of the teachers. Thus, while the literacy team members use the PLD framework with fidelity to the principles of the model, no two in-depth school 'implementation models' look exactly the same. Therefore, along with examining the evidence of leadership learning across the wider group of twelve facilitators, it is important to look closely at specific 'cases' of implementation in order to discern both the patterned regularities and context-sensitive adaptations within the PLD model with respect to leadership capacity-building. To that end, before turning to the summative findings from the team's data, we present here three 'cases' of PLD implementation that highlight the different ways the facilitators enable and support leadership development among a whole school leadership team, a designated school literacy leader, and a teacher leader with expertise in ELL.

### *Taking a school leadership development approach*

Uptown Primary is an urban school serving a fairly large cohort of 424 students, including 53 Māori students. The school's government designation is 'decile 7' indicating that the students' families are proportionally from middle or lower socio-economic communities. There are 19 teachers working in the school, guided by a school literacy leadership team made up of the principal and three literacy leaders working at different year levels. Both large-scale assessments and school-based data indicated low levels of writing achievement among the students.

In initiating the focused PLD work with this school, the facilitator engaged the leadership team in a range of initial appreciative inquiry scoping activities. The scoping focused on collecting a range of data and evidence with which to underpin their needs assessment for literacy focused teacher learning. In undertaking the scoping, she engaged the school literacy team in gathering data using three 'smart tools.'

The scoping began with the "School Literacy Practices" protocol that supports gaining a general sense of literacy practice within the school by focusing on students achieving below curriculum expectations. The literacy team was asked to engage as a team with the central question of this protocol: *How is identity, Language and Culture reflected in literacy teaching and learning?* Once they had collectively considered their initial reflective responses to the series of questions around their perception of school-wide literacy practices, the team shifted to gathering real-time observations of practice using two other smart tools. The 'Let's take a Walk' smart tool is also framed around 'identity, language and culture' and supports understanding how the school is seen from a variety of perspectives. It asks the participant-observers to view the school with new eyes "as if you are entering the school for the first time." This included the facilitator, teachers, students and parents to gain a diverse range of perspectives of how the school is viewed. Finally, the facilitator had the school literacy team complete the 'Literacy Walkthrough', an observational tool which required each of the team members and the facilitator to walk through the school

stopping in classes for less than 10 minutes and looking for evidence of literacy activities and instruction and getting student voice around literacy

From this scoping activity, the school literacy team was able to identify quite varied literacy practices within and across the teachers and classrooms in the school. The facilitator noted a lack of self-confidence among the leaders to lead and facilitate staff professional learning, or lead discussions analyzing student achievement or learning data. She also identified the range of strengths and areas for growth in literacy teaching and learning among the literacy leaders and the principal. Together, the school leaders and the facilitator became a singularly focused 'literacy leadership team.'

The scoping activities provided the team with the necessary needs assessment to develop an appreciative inquiry approach for creating a PLD plan to address the needs of the school. To address the variation of effective writing practices within the school, the content of teacher learning activities was focused on the writing process and building teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of teaching writing through that process. The learning areas outlined in the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) served as the specific learning contexts for writing allowing authentic and child friendly content. Other key aspects of the PLD plan included:

- Developing school wide non-negotiables for practice
- Use of 'focus student' protocol widely among teachers
- In class observations of teaching
- Triangulated observations of practice
- In class modelling by literacy leaders and facilitator
- In class coaching by literacy leaders and facilitator
- Focused staff meetings on teacher learning of writing process/pedagogy

The summative PLD data from this school indicate that the way the literacy is taught has changed in most classes. Teachers in the school report higher engagement among students, offer more choice in writing, and are making more explicit connections between reading and writing for students, and within their planning. The teachers now model and scaffold student learning with more regularity, and use strong scaffolds to support students through the writing process. Of particular note in the junior area, the teachers focused on vocabulary and oral language development through incorporating a variety of ways to let the students have more opportunities to talk, discuss and verbalise their thoughts.

In support of the literacy leaders and principal, the facilitator was explicit and intentional about implementing her role in ways that supported leadership capacity-development. This included:

- Working with the leadership team to understand their data;
- Holding regular meetings with the leadership team to build their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and confidence;
- Coaching members of the team to lead staff meetings, building confidence to undertake the lead through scaffolded assistance and gradual release of responsibility;

- Coaching members to conduct observations, particularly triangulated observation where they would make several observations and lead the subsequent discussions and goal setting with teachers;
- Lead and modeled for leaders how to engage in courageous conversations around identity, language, culture, and equity arising from the data;
- Worked closely with the literacy leaders on gathering and analyzing focus student data to model how they could work with their staff in a similar manner; and
- Continually asked questions of the principal to be an advocate for the literacy leaders in the school.

The evidence from this case indicates that the explicit and ongoing attention to leadership capacity development within the PLD plan enabled the literacy leaders to build confidence and take the initiative for continuing focus on literacy in the school. They reported significant change and growth in their practice as teachers and as leaders. Their leadership role has helped them see the “big picture” and they report loving being at “the forefront of the journey of learning.”

#### *Developing a school’s literacy leader*

Janet is a Literacy Leader in a ‘decile 1A’ school. This government designation indicates that the school is in a low socio-economic urban area and is afforded additional operational funding from the Ministry of Education because of its locality and the high needs of students within the school. There are 5 teachers working in the school plus a Principal. The leadership team consisted of the Principal, the Literacy Leader and the facilitator as the outside ‘expert’ (Timperley, et. al., 2007, pg xxix). The data for the 90 students at the school indicated a rather low level of 15% of students meeting curriculum expectations for their year level.

This school is not representative of other schools in this urban area in that Māori and Pasifika students represent 67% of the student enrolment. This representation of MOE designated ‘priority learners’, coupled with the low numbers of students meeting curriculum expectations and the team’s scoping tools that focused on identity, language and culture worked together to address teacher pedagogy that would build knowledge of what would work for Māori and Pasifika students.

Although the literacy leadership team included the Principal of the school it was clear that leadership of this work was being placed as the responsibility of the Literacy Leader. This did not mean the Principal was not supporting the work and would not make strategic decisions about funding it, she did. Rather, her distribution of this leadership to the Literacy Leader was a reflection of the heavy workload resulting from social agencies involved in the school due to other context issues within the wider community.

In keeping with the PLD model the scoping initially sought to gather a school wide picture of literacy practices, and then focused in on individual classroom practice. The PLD facilitator conducted initial interviews with the Principal and Literacy Leader using the “School Wide Literacy Practices” protocol. In this way the PLD facilitator was able to glean the leaders’ collective views of identity, language and culture in literacy learning, as well as their perspectives and perceptions of the students

achieving below curriculum expectation, existing strengths and needs of teaching staff, and involvement of family and whānau and students own agency about learning.

Through this scoping activity, the PLD facilitator also was able to identify that Janet had expert literacy knowledge, and was an influential staff member within the school. During the fifteen plus years she had worked in the school she had not previously held a leadership position. However, the regard her colleagues had for her expertise was an invaluable aspect of her emerging leadership, and ultimately served as an enabling mechanism for her to lead the changes required in literacy teaching practice. Nevertheless, at the outset of the PLD Janet's lack of prior leadership experience lead to the facilitator's decision to model the use of some of the scoping focused 'smart tools' with the teaching staff, to demonstrate ways of working more explicitly around learning focused conversations. This enabled Janet and the facilitator to then discuss and reflect together on the use of the tools, and the resulting data collected about literacy teaching practices and teacher perceptions.

The collection and analysis of this scoping data was undertaken collaboratively with Janet to ensure she understood the needs of teachers and was aware of what needed to be addressed to change the picture of achievement across the school. The data indicated that that there was wide variation of literacy practices among the teachers. It was apparent that teachers did not share their literacy practices amongst themselves, and no one knew what teaching expectations each other held for literacy learning in each classroom level. Moreover, the data indicated that staff did not talk much on a professional level about teaching and learning, rather they talked a lot about student behaviour.

The facilitator and Janet then jointly undertook the use of other 'smart tools' to further 'see' into classrooms, and gather student perceptions through interviews. These data were used to triangulate what Janet and the facilitator had already identified and to gain some understanding of student's knowledge and learning about writing, their motivation and engagement. The student interviews supported the notion that writing needed addressing but also highlighted the students desire for more focus on identity, language and culture as the basis for writing in the classroom. From this more in-depth data they developed a PLD plan to address the needs of the teachers with respect to developing literacy practices in writing that were responsive to the identified learning needs of their students. The PLD plan included identifying teachers who had aspects of effective practice and showcase these to other staff to build the staff discussion about effective practice and help to develop a shared view of how teaching impacts on students. The use of the 'Focus Student Protocol' became the foundation 'smart tool' for capturing teachers' practices and the changes they were making as they focused on the learning needs and literacy development of these focus students. This tool provided multiple opportunities for professional discussion and was the basis of sharing that evolved within the school during the year. It in essence captured the changes and decisions teachers were making as their knowledge grew. This was helpful to Janet as she observed their on-going cycles of inquiry around their focus student group.

Throughout the PLD initiative in this school, the facilitator worked in an explicit manner to deprivatise her own practice around leading the learning of other teachers. She modeled the processes for collecting, analyzing and interpreting teacher and

student data, and demonstrated how to use that data to make evidence-based decisions for PLD activities to support teacher learning and changes in literacy practice. Through this collegial model of mentoring and coaching by the facilitator, Janet was able to develop her leadership vision and skills.

A key area of growth for Janet was in her ability to assume a more ‘appreciative’ lens when working with her colleagues. Initially she had a reasonably negative attitude to others teachers capabilities based on her experiences teaching the year 7 & 8 students, who she felt arrived in her class with low levels of literacy after their many years with her colleagues. Through the year she learnt to reserve judgment about teacher practice in the school and to approach staff in such a way as a wondering rather than judging. This tended to increase the opportunity for more open, learning focused discussions among the staff. The more open conversations, and Janet’s increased focus on celebrating and sharing the ‘good’ things happening with writing, resulted in increased levels of trust and teachers seeking out support for areas they found challenging or difficult to teach. For the students, the results were equally positive. At the end of the year there was an increase in the number of students meeting curriculum expectations in writing and Janet, agreed to take up the role of Deputy Principal for the following year.

#### *Supporting the development of ELL teacher leadership and expertise*

Westside is a small urban school with a culturally diverse student group of 200, including Māori 23%, Pasifika 26%, New Zealand European 23% and other ethnic backgrounds 23%. Approximately 44% of the students speak a language other than English at home. These students are a mix of second-generation Aotearoa New Zealand families, as well as new migrants. A few students originally from refugee backgrounds also attend the school. In total there are 19 different languages spoken in the school. The school’s government designation is ‘decile 3’ indicating that the students’ families are proportionally from lower socio-economic communities. There are 8 teachers working in the school including Grace, the Literacy/ELL Leader. The school staff generally works as one collaborative team and Grace has considerable expertise at both junior and senior year levels (5 year olds and 10-12 year olds).

Historic achievement data showed over 50% of students Below or Well-below National Standards. This difference was particularly noticeable in Years 1-4. The PLD facilitator noted that, “here the teachers of the junior students routinely suggested that ‘children arrive at school with no language’”. At the outset, it was clear to her that teachers’ perceptions reflected an English-only language framework and a lack of knowledge about the cultural and linguistic capital of students arriving in their school.

As a Literacy/ELL leader in the school, Grace was particularly strong in her exemplar of excellent classroom practice when teaching diverse students. This was evidenced by her previously being selected to work with the university facilitator on the development of a Ministry of Education produced DVD ‘Making Language and Learning Work’. At that time Grace reported, *‘I thought this work would just be about my ESOL students, but it’s helped me to teach literacy skills more effectively to my whole class.’* Subsequent to that experience, she went on to complete training in TESOL. Grace was acutely aware of the gains that could be made in her whole school if all of the teachers had knowledge of the relevant literacy teaching strategies,

vocabulary focus, differentiated reading and writing material and scaffolded oral language frames that she had been supported to develop through individual coaching. Because of her prior experiences, she was able to influence the Principal to apply for the Literacy/ELL in-depth PLD model so the whole school could engage with this focused learning.

Once the school came on board with the PLD provision, the university facilitator who had previously worked with Grace was assigned to be the school's PLD facilitator. In collaboration with Grace, the PLD facilitator began the scoping activities within the school by focusing on collecting a range of data and evidence with which to underpin the school's needs assessment and for the creation of the PLD plan. The Literacy/ELL Leader and facilitator explored: *How is identity, Language and Culture reflected in literacy teaching and learning?* through the use of three of the team's 'smart tools.' These included the 'Let's take a walk' tool which frames the leaders and teachers as participant observers in their own school to identify the signs and symbols that reflect the identities, languages and cultures of their students. They also undertook classroom observations and student voice interviews through a snapshot of literacy practice by using the 'Literacy Walkthrough' tool. Further to this, a self-review tool was used to closely examine layers of practice in relation to its cultural and linguistic diversity. This self-review tool uses a series of prompts and questions to probe a range of layers of practice including; enrolment systems, assessment/monitoring and tracking of student progress, specific ELL support programmes and engagement with families. This review was completed by Grace and the facilitator and shared with the Principal and management team. These three 'smart tools' provided information and direction for the co-construction of the PLD plan for the school, and guided their ongoing collaborative work with all teachers and refining of the systems within the school.

Using the PLD team's appreciative inquiry framework was important in this context, given the facilitator's and Grace's prior experiences with the previously referenced 'deficit focused' teacher talk related to students' language knowledge and skills. Thus, the collaborative, co-facilitated PLD they undertook together focused on both enhancing the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and modeling high impact literacy practices. This two-pronged approach meant that as a school staff they engaged in professional reading that focused on research related to additional languages knowledge in order to 'disrupt' their operative teacher beliefs. They also used carefully selected resources that exemplified research-informed literacy practices in settings 'just like mine' so that teachers could observe Grace or the facilitator modeling effective teaching with diverse students. In this way the teachers were able to 'see' both the existing literacy knowledge and strengths the students had, as well as how the focused strategies supported their accelerated English language learning. From these demonstrations Grace and the facilitator then deepened the work to include coaching and shared teaching.

The two also collaborated on a number of reviews of existing school practices, systems, and curriculum materials. This included:

- reviewing the range of teaching contexts and ensuring texts and themes that reflected Pasifika students were routinely embedded into the school curriculum;

- reviewing of the instructional reading programme so teachers use a wider range of triggers in their text selection and activation of prior knowledge;
- reviewing the withdrawal language support programme offered to students; and
- changing the focus of teachers in parent conferences to more closely resemble a ‘listening’ stance rather than a ‘telling’ one.

A final PLD strategy they initiated was the use of the Focus Student Protocol. The use of this ‘smart tool’ enabled Grace as Literacy/ELL Leader to maintain the continued focus on, and monitoring of, literacy strategies teachers were implementing across the school, so that there was continuity between visits by the facilitator. Through the implementation of the targeted PLD plan, the school literacy practices shifted to more strongly reflect high impact scaffolding for all their students, with a particularly positive outcome for the many English Language Learners.

### Supporting leadership capacity-building with ‘high leverage facilitation moves’

The evidence from the summative programme evaluation and the facilitator case studies presented here suggest that the use of an appreciative inquiry approach has been a critical theoretical and practice-based framework for the PLD. Furthermore, the findings from this more focused inquiry into leadership capacity-development has highlighted a set of what appear to be “high leverage facilitation moves” that support the development of leadership capacity-building for innovation and change in literacy practices within schools.

The appreciative inquiry framework used in this PLD model supports schools in identifying strengths—no matter how few or hard to identify--already in use within their context with their particular student cohort. Identifying existing practices that are ‘working’ appears to enable them to use and build on these strengths for their professional learning in order to change practice in context-sensitive and responsive ways. Moreover, as we see in the case of Janet, the Literacy Leader, by focusing on existing strengths and taking a stance of inquiry and ‘wondering’ rather than judgment, the PLD facilitation model has enabled the development of trust among the staff that allows for the deprivatising of practice that generates more learning focused dialogue and sharing of success and challenges. The ability to develop and maintain trust among colleagues is a key leadership disposition and skill, and the appreciative inquiry approach serves as a valuable capacity-development framework in this practice space. Through the focus on positive potential, and offering a mechanism for suspending judgment in order to stay focused on problem posing, the appreciative inquiry approach to PLD has supported the leadership capacity to “apprehend, anticipate, and heighten” the ability of the ‘system’ to change (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003p. 3)

The evidence from Literacy/ELL Leader case reflects aspects of both the power of the appreciative approach to PLD, as well as the ways that individual knowledge becomes shared group knowledge that serves in the development of a ‘community of practice’ within the schools. By identifying the existing strengths and expertise of the Literacy/ELL Leader, the facilitator was able to support and enable that expertise to become shared, harnessed, and expanded within the wider school teaching repertoire.

A key concept of ‘communities of practice’ is that individual knowledge becomes collective knowledge through the collaborative interaction around problems, solutions, and insights drawn from their local practice context (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). We see in this case how through the PLD activities and skilled facilitation the schools were able to create a common store of pedagogical content knowledge for working with English language learners by creating space and opportunity to learn from and with a single individual.

Perhaps the most critical high-leverage facilitation move in the PLD model has been the explicit and on-going attention given to student identity, language, and culture as central features of student development and learning generally, and learning literacy more specifically. The PLD team has ensured this pedagogical focus on identity, language and culture by firmly placing it at the center of all of the ‘smart tools’ so that all facets of data collection, data analysis frameworks, and evaluation planning with school leaders and leadership teams includes close attention to students’ diverse strengths and learning needs. In this way, the facilitators can help ‘shift’ the discourse in the school from common patterns of either ignoring these aspects completely, or approaching them from deficit perspectives. Developing positive relationships with students that are respectful and affirming of their diverse cultural backgrounds is a cornerstone of culturally responsive practice that results in more successful academic outcomes (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Macfarlane, 2006). Shifting the ‘deficit discourse’ toward a focus on student strengths and potential through an explicit and reiterative way has been one of the most significantly effective facilitation moves identified within this PLD model.

As evidenced in all the cases, but particularly highlighted in the whole school leadership case, the use of the range of ‘smart tools’ required both the leadership team and the teaching staff to continually gather and consider data that illuminated the inextricable link between student identity, language and culture and their engagement in the learning opportunities, as well as the resulting learning outcomes. The facilitators talked about this as leading ‘courageous conversations’ and were explicit in their coaching, modeling and debriefing with school leaders and Literacy Leaders about how to plan for and engage in these discussions in productive ways. Having the facilitators model the effective strategies and skills for explicitly addressing and grappling with the arising issues of equity was a distinctive aspect of their PLD focus on developing the leadership-capacity to lead change in the schools that resulted in closing the achievement gap for students.

Throughout the summative data, as well as clearly evidenced in the cases presented here, the deprivatisation of facilitator practice was a pervasive and integral aspect of the PLD model. They were consistently attentive to the need to model and coach the leaders through all facets of the literacy PLD model as an ‘intervention’ to support continuous teaching and learning improvement in literacy. The purpose of this explicit deprivatisation and coaching was to enable the leaders to create a safe space for their own leadership learning, with respect to developing the necessary dispositions and skills to continue to lead not only the ongoing focus on literacy, but to also lead other change initiatives within their schools. Thus, the facilitators’ modeling of the entire change/improvement cycle processes--undertaking scoping activities for needs assessment, disaggregating and analysing the data with staff, modeling the strategies for both building trust and challenging deficit thinking, and co-constructing PLD plans

to support practice level change--was a key lever for leadership capacity-building. In this way the PLD model has enabled the leaders to continue to drive the ongoing school improvement to change teaching practices and subsequently raise the achievement of all learners. Moreover, the focus in the PLD model of having an 'outside expert' (Timperley, et. al., 2007) support the engagement and enabling collaboration climate among school leaders allowed them to take up diverse participation roles that demonstrate a pragmatic approach to leveraging the positive impact of leadership within PLD initiatives highlighted in the research (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009).

#### Extending our understanding of teaching and learning

There is a growing body of research examining the characteristics of effective PLD. Yet, there remains a need for continuing systematic study and in particular fine grained examinations of that illuminate the complex interplay of context, content, and process in the service of teacher professional learning. Moreover, few studies have specifically examined the conceptualisation and delivery of "culturally responsive PLD" as a leadership-capacity development model such as presented in the case studies examined here. Such investigations into the development of culturally responsive practice among educators in the professional learning and development sector of the system can provide important understandings and implications for action with respect to closing the persistent achievement gap for diverse students and youth.

## References

- Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best-evidence synthesis*. Wellington, NZ: New Zealand Ministry of Education.  
Retrieved from :  
<http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/5959>
- Ainscow, M., & Sandill, A. (2010). Developing inclusive education systems: the role of organisational cultures and leadership. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 14*(4), 401-416.
- Ball, D. L., & Cohen, D. K. (1999). Developing practice, developing practitioners: Toward a practice-based theory of professional education. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook on policy and practice* (pp.1-32). San Francisco, CA, USA: Jossey-Bass.
- Billings, D. M., & Kowalski, K. (2008). Appreciative inquiry. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, 39*(3), 104.
- Bishop, R. (2010). Effective teaching for indigenous and minoritized students. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 7*, 57-62.
- Bishop, R., O'Sullivan, D., & Berryman, M. (2010). *Scaling up education reforms: Addressing the politics of disparity*. Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER.
- Bishop, R. & Berryman, M. (2010). Te Kotahitanga: Culturally responsive professional development for teachers. *Teacher Development, 14*(2), 173-187.
- Bryk, A., Sebring, P.B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J.Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press.
- Bushe, G. R. (1998). Appreciative inquiry in teams. *The Organization Development Journal, 16*(3), 41-50.
- Castagno, A. E., & Brayboy, B. M. J. (2008). Culturally responsive schooling for indigenous youth: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational*
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2001). Beyond certainty: Taking an inquiry stance on practice. In A. Lieberman & L. Miller (Eds.), *Teachers caught in action: Professional development that matters* (pp. 45-58). New York, NY, USA: Teachers College Press.
- Cooperrider D. L., & Srivesta, S. (1987). Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. *Research in Organizational Change and Development, 1*, 129-169.
- Cooperrider, D. & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. San Francisco, CA, USA: Berrett-Koehler Publisher.
- Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J. (2003). *Appreciative inquiry handbook: The first in a series of AI workbooks for leaders of change*. Bedford Heights, OH, USA: Lakeshore Communications.

- Cousins, J. B., & Whitmore, E. (1998). Framing participatory evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 80, 5–23.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco, CA, UK: Jossey-Bass Publishing.
- Fetterman, D. & Wandersman, A. (Eds.) (2005). *Empowerment evaluation principles in practice*. New York, NY, USA: Guilford Press.
- Fickel, L.H., Henderson, C. & Price, G. (2015). *Inquiring into PLD facilitator Practice to Support Culturally Responsive Literacy Pedagogy*. Research paper in response to MOE Milestone Reporting, Internal Document.
- Fickel, L.H., Henderson, C. & Price, G. (2013) *Centering Language, Culture and Identity at the Nexus of Professional Learning and Practice*. San Francisco, CA, USA: American Education Research Association Annual Meeting (AERA), 27 Apr-1 May 2013.
- Haycock, K., Jerald, C., & Huang, S. (2001). Closing the gap: Done in a decade. *Thinking K-16*, 5, 3-22.
- Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development (3rd ed.)*. Alexandria, VA, USA: Association for Supervision
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-64.
- May, S., Cowles, S., & Lamy, L. (2013). *PISA 2012: New Zealand summary report*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.
- Macfarlane, A. (2006) Becoming Educultural: Te whakawhitinga o ngā mātauranga - Interfacing the knowledge traditions. *Kairaranga Journal of Educational Practice* 7(2): 41-44.
- Ministry of Education (2012). *English-medium culturally responsive PLD: Contract monitoring an reporting-Providers' users guide*. NZ: Author (internal document).
- Ministry of Education. (2008). *State of education in New Zealand: 2008*. Wellington, NZ: Author.
- Noffke, S. & Somekh, B. (2005). Action research. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds.). *Research methods in the social sciences* (pp. 89-96). London, UK: Sage Publishing.
- Patton, M. (2008) *Utilization-focused evaluation: The new century text* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage Publishing.
- Putnam, R. & Borko, H. (2000). What do new views of knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher*, 29(1), 4–15.

- Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why: Best evidence synthesis iteration*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermenutics, and social construction. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 189- 213). Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage Publishing.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2008). Preparing white teachers for diverse students. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, & J. McIntyre (Eds.), *Handbook of research in teacher education: Enduring issues in changing contexts* (3rd ed.) (pp. 559-582). New York, NY, USA: Routledge.
- Sleeter, C. E. (Ed.) (2011). *Professional development for culturally responsive and relationship-based pedagogy*. New York, NY, USA: Peter Lang.
- Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007). *Teacher professional learning and development: Best evidence synthesis iteration*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/15341>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.
- Wayne, A. J., Yoon, K.S., Zhu, P., Cronen, S., & Garet, M.S. (2008). Experimenting with teacher professional development: Motives and methods. *Educational Researcher*, 37(8), 469-479.
- Wells, G. (1999). *Dialogic inquiry: Toward a sociological practice and theory of education*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning as a social system. *Systems Thinker*, 9(5), 1-8. Retrieved from <http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml>
- Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organization, SAGE Social Science Collection*, 7(2), 225-246.
- Whyte, W. F. (Ed.) (1991). *Participatory action research*. Newbury Park, CA, USA: Sage Publishing.