

PLD Facilitated Support to Engage Teachers in Linking Family & Whānau to Classroom Literacy Pedagogy

A Research Paper in response to MOE Reporting Requirements

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February 2016

Abstract

In response to the Ministry of Education (MOE) focus on enhancing the provision of Professional Learning and Development (PLD), the Literacy Team Facilitators of the Literacy Language Learning Te Waipounamu team have been engaged in a multi-year process of self-study and inquiry around improving their individual and collective PLD practices. Through this ongoing inquiry, research, and evaluation process the team has identified appreciative inquiry and ‘smart tools’ as “high leverage moves” within their PLD. In this paper, we provide a documentary account of one particular area of the team’s embedded inquiry, namely the use and impact of using the ‘Student Inquiry Protocol’ as a framework for engaging and supporting teachers to make explicit links to family/whānau as part of their literacy pedagogy practices. This protocol is used within the Teacher Inquiry process that underpins the PLD. Through this account we highlight the positive outcomes of this approach for both teachers and students.

Introduction

The Literacy Language Learning Te Waipounamu PLD Team is a group of PLD facilitators who work interdependently as a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998). As such, they have been engaged together over several years in iterative cycles of inquiry, which is the basis of their PLD programme evaluation and research framework. The team also works with an external evaluator who engages as a ‘peripheral participant’ in the community of practice in order to enable their increased evaluation capacity to guide their continual improvement of PLD practices and programmes.

The central focus of the Team’s multi-year inquiry has been to systematically examine what it means to place the issues of ‘identity, language, and culture’ at the centre of their PLD facilitator practices in literacy. In this way, they seek to contribute to both the praxis and international dialogue in the field that is seeking to crack open the ‘black box’ that currently exists between acts of PLD facilitation, resulting teacher learning and pedagogical change, and student learning outcomes (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). We present here the results of the Team’s most recent inquiry which centers on seeking to better understand the outcomes for both teachers and their students from the facilitated use of one of the Team’s ‘smart tools’ that focuses explicitly on linking family/whānau knowledge to classroom literacy practices.

Building Stronger Family/Whānau and School Relationships in Support of Student Learning

In the New Zealand education sector, researchers and teachers generally agree about the power of relationships between the school and family/whānau, and children learning at school. The NZ Best Evidence Synthesis series (beginning in 2003), with the community and family influences on children’s achievement in New Zealand (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003) supports this notion strongly. The resulting identification of the levers likely to best bring about change in educational outcomes for learners includes the activation of educationally powerful connections, highlighting the importance of the family/whānau and school relationship in addressing quality social and academic outcomes for diverse learners.

The strength of the family/whānau and school relationship is in working together to support the student's learning at school in a mutually appreciative relationship that will lead to positive changes in learning outcomes for all students. Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that effective parent involvement in schools' occurred when diverse cultural and class differences in families were recognized, respected, and addressed. Similarly, the recently released Education Review Office report in New Zealand, *Educationally Powerful Connections with Parents and Whānau* (ERO, 2015) highlights the importance of the two-way sharing of expertise and understanding and the celebration of similarities and differences between schools and families.

Through this process of sharing knowledge, both the learning partnership between the home and school and the first and highly influential learning environment of the child being in the home (Dumont, Istance & Benavides, 2010) is acknowledged and valued, and the process of this communication supports and strengthens reciprocal, learning centred relationships. Further to this, Henderson and Mapp (2002) conclude that family involvement provides a 'protective effect' for children as they navigate their way through our education system and the more family/whānau support for children means the greater opportunity to do well at school and a stronger inclination to further their learning.

Drawing from the Literacy Team's prior inquiry, the study presented here draws from the team's continuing focus on the importance of a child's identity, language, and culture. Through the 2015 inquiry cycle the team sought to encourage the teachers' within their in-depth PLD schools to further think about the relationship between each child's family/whānau and their literacy learning in the classroom. Using a set of the team's 'smart tools' (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009) teachers were encouraged to interview and engage with parents in an effort to enable them to gain insight into and recognition of the wealth of knowledge family/whānau has about their child's early learning in literacy and the importance of sharing this knowledge with their child's teacher. The responses of many teachers in this study highlighted the individual movement of teachers positioning, away from telling parents what they could do, to where they learnt to truly listen. The inquiry suggests that the learning and development by teachers has enhanced their literacy practices in ways that have supported accelerated literacy gains for priority learners.

The team's guiding inquiry question for this year has been: How does the PLD facilitated use of the 'smart tool' support teachers in linking family/whānau knowledge to classroom literacy practices? And what are the literacy learning outcomes for the focus students in these teachers' classrooms? In the subsequent sections of this paper, we first present a brief summary of the PLD framework and methodology for this inquiry to provide a context for understanding the team's PLD facilitation work with schools. Then we turn to the evidence generated from this shared inquiry, which focuses on both changes in knowledge and practices among the teachers, as well as the literacy gains for a sub-group of their priority learners. We conclude with a discussion of the outcomes from the inquiry related to the impact of the team's work as PLD facilitators.

A ‘Strengths-Based Approach’: The Literacy Language Learning Te Waipounamu Model of PLD

In commencing their PLD work with schools, the Literacy Team took the collaborative approach of seeking to work alongside schools to enable them to accelerate the literacy achievement for priority learner groups. In this way the team has sought to be the ‘bridge’ between the teachers and the most current research on best practices in literacy pedagogy. As such, they engage teachers in ongoing conceptual and practical considerations of this research, helping them see the relevance for their own practice and their students’ learning.

Through the Team’s ongoing inquiry, research, and evaluation processes they have developed a practice-based, research-informed, “Strengths-based PLD Framework” that has demonstrated its effectiveness in engaging schools and teachers in promoting collective and individual inquiry into practice that leads to pedagogical change and enhanced student outcomes. The framework is underpinned by two key practices: 1) appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) and, 2) ‘smart tools’ (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). These were identified as “high leverage moves” within the PLD in that they appeared to be particularly salient and powerful in the development of leadership and pedagogical capacity-building to support changes in literacy practices (for a full description of this framework, see Fickel, Henderson, & Price, 2013).

The Focusing Inquiry for Literacy PLD: Appreciating and Building on Students’ Identity, Language, and Culture

In a previous inquiry cycle undertaken by the Team, the “Focus Students Protocol” emerged as a key facilitative smart tool for centering students’ identity, language, and culture at the core of the literacy PLD (Fickel, et.al, 2013) Facilitators noted in their 2014 inquiry cycle that many of the teachers demonstrated enhanced knowledge of student identity, language, and culture, and showed an increase in perceiving these as a valuable strength in their students’ learning. Other data from the facilitators indicated that through the use of the protocol, many teachers were having ongoing conversations with family/whānau, and often were taking more time to share student’s work with them. The facilitation team noted, however, that not all of them had been systematic in supporting teachers to undertake such active engagement with their students’ whānau, and even when they had encouraged them, not all teachers took up this practice (Fickel et al., 2015).

Yet, the data from that inquiry cycle indicated that when teachers did take up more active engagement, there appeared to be a clear shift in teacher pedagogy and a related increase in student literacy learning. It is for this reason that in their 2015 collaborative inquiry, the PLD facilitators agreed to focus on enabling teachers in their in-depth PLD schools to engage family/whānau as sources of knowledge and insight regarding their students’ identity, language, and culture as strengths in literacy learning.

The team developed a specific smart tool to support teachers in gathering this student related information: Parents/Whānau Questionnaire (Figure 1). The intent of the tool was for teachers to conduct a personal interview with a parent(s), caregiver,

or whānau member who could provide insights into the student's early literacy experiences.

This is about your child's early literacy experiences in home languages and/or English

Tell us about your child learning to speak and their speaking now.

Tell us about your child learning to read and to write.

What does your child think about speaking, reading and writing now?

How do you help your child with reading and writing at home?

What does your child need help with to support their child's reading and writing?

Figure 1. Parent/Whānau Questionnaire

Methodology

The on-going PLD inquiry, research, and evaluation has been co-constructed and implemented by interweaving utilization-focused (Patton, 2008), and empowerment (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005) approaches to PLD evaluation with practitioner action-research (Noffke & Somekh, 2005). By interweaving these approaches, we have sought to build long-term capacity for integrating improvement-oriented evaluation into the fabric of PLD provision and the team's practice-work. This supports the Ministry of Education's contractual concerns for quality assurance, and continuous improvement.

Inquiry Process

In conducting this inquiry, the facilitators drew from the prior year's methodology and agreed to undertake a systematic approach to their work. Thus, the implementation of this inquiry was situated within their regular implementation of the strengths-based PLD framework (as described above), with all of their in-depth focus schools. This framework was anchored by the use of the Focus Student Protocol and Family/Whānau Questionnaire with all teachers in the schools. The Facilitators then issued an invitation to the teachers to participate in the formal research associated with this inquiry. From this invitation, each facilitator was able to identify two focus teachers to serve as their 'focus teachers' for their facilitator inquiry.

In keeping with the initial needs assessment process for developing a PLD programme within the strength-based PLD framework, each facilitator conducted initial observations of their two focus teachers using the Literacy Team's "Effective Classroom Practice in Literacy" document and an exploratory interview process. From this the facilitators identified the focus teachers as high, medium, or low in implementation in relation to general literacy practices, as well as teachers current

level of engagement with students' identity, language, and culture. Facilitators then initiated the use of the Focus Student Protocol as the scaffold for the teachers' own inquiry process. They also actively supported the teachers in using the Family/Whānau Questionnaire to assist them in considering the student identity, language, and culture as strengths for literacy learning, and to identify links to family/whānau knowledge to support student learning.

Throughout the year, the facilitators regularly and systematically used the Focus Student Protocol to engage the focus teachers in carefully examining the impact and implications of the use of this protocol to support priority learners, and ensured that the discussions focused explicitly on links of student identity, language, and culture to literacy learning. The facilitators specifically documented their engagement with the focus teachers, as well as continued documenting their PLD practices with all schools and teachers using the established team processes and protocols. This provided a wider context for the examination of the data from the "focus teachers" with regard to changes and shifts in practice. Discussion of the focus teachers learning and development was a regular point of discussion and debriefing at the PLD team meetings with respect to how teachers were making links between students identity, language, and culture, and family/whānau knowledge as strengths to support student literacy learning.

Focus Teacher Participants and School Contexts

During the 2015 contract period, 10 facilitators worked with a total of 20 focus teachers across 11 different schools. The majority of facilitators (9 of 10) worked with two teachers at a single school; one facilitator had two teachers at two different schools. Only four of the 20 participating teachers were male, and all but three of the teachers held permanent teaching roles. There were no beginning teachers, with the least experienced being five teachers with 4 to 5 years teaching and the most being three teachers with 18, 20 and 25 years' experience.

Each teacher selected between three to six priority learners to serve as focus students for their inquiry, resulting in a total of 86 students. However, during the course of the year three students moved from their school leaving a final total of 83 focus students in the data set for analysis.

The schools within which these teachers worked included both high and low decile schools, including four that were decile 2 or 3, three that were decile 4 to 6, and four that were decile 7 or 8. Four of the 11 schools were continuing from previous years, and seven were schools new to the PLD literacy programme.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this focused inquiry occurred in two distinct phases. First, each of the facilitator's collated data related to their focus teachers and the teachers' respective focus students and summarised their PLD practices with the focus teachers. This was captured in a template designed by the external evaluator to ensure consistency of documentation across the 10 team members. From this data, each facilitator was then asked to develop a case study of their PLD practice with each of the focus teachers, and then to theorise about the use of the smart tools in

relation to focusing the teacher on identity, language, and culture of the focus students and the links to family/ whānau knowledge. In specific, they were asked to consider: What were the affordances I provided to support this happening and what did I do to allow this change? They were asked to document this as a two-page 'case study' of their PLD practice with their two focus teachers. As part of the data set, they also provided learning outcome data for the priority learners each teacher identified as their respective focus students.

As part of this round of data analysis, the facilitators provided an overall judgment for each focus teacher regarding their year-end level of implementation of effective literacy practices and engagement with focus student identity, language, and culture. The rating scale was the same as initial scale of three levels: high, medium, or low implementation. In completing their case studies, the Literacy Team facilitators drew from a variety of data sources including: 1) their journals and PLD practice logs, 2) focus teacher documentation form and feedback on the use of the Focus Student Protocol and the Family/Whānau Questionnaire and 3) evidence from the implementation of other classroom-based smart tools and facilitative activities.

The second phase of data analysis was undertaken by the external evaluator with each of the 10 facilitators providing their summative template data and synthesising case study of their PLD practice with their focus teachers. The external evaluator then compiled the summarised data related to focus teacher changes in practice and related focus student learning outcomes, and then analysed the synthesising cases as a single data set. This allowed for the identification of key themes to emerge from the data for a summative cross-case summative analysis of teacher learning and practice with respect to engaging student identity, language, and culture and making links to family/whānau knowledge to support literacy learning outcomes.

Enhancing Teacher Capacity to Use Students' Identity, Language, and Culture as Strengths for Literacy Learning

As indicated previously, the intent of this inquiry has been to more closely examine how the PLD facilitated use of the Family/Whānau Questionnaire supported teachers in linking family/whānau knowledge to classroom literacy practices as part of the teacher inquiry cycle supported through the Focus Student Protocol. The PLD facilitator inquiry was also interested in examining the literacy learning outcomes for the focus students when the teachers undertook to use this knowledge to support their literacy pedagogy in the classroom. While we seek to examine these relationships of teacher learning to pedagogical change, and then to student learning outcomes, we acknowledge that we are not seeking to make causal links but rather explore the possibilities in ways that can enable us to see a little further into the 'black box' of PLD with regard to supporting teachers to engage student identity, language, and culture as recourses for teaching literacy.

In the subsequent sections, we examine explicitly the teachers' engagement with and use of the family/whānau knowledge gleaned from their use of the questionnaire to change their literacy practices. This includes consideration of the facilitator ratings of the teachers' initial and post PLD practices in terms of both effective literacy pedagogy, and engagement with students' identity, language, and culture. We then

turn our inquiry lens to the outcomes for students as teachers changed their literacy practices, looking both at their achievement toward national standards, and engagement in their learning.

Teachers' Learning: More nuanced understandings of student 'prior knowledge' and importance of 'family/whānau knowledge'

Facilitators' case studies showed that overall teachers in both the continuing and new schools found the use of the questionnaire to be valuable to their understanding of their students' strengths as literacy learners. For teachers new to the team's PLD approach, the Focus Student Protocol, including the explicit use of the questionnaire, was an entirely new way of considering both their own learning, and the consideration of their students' identity, language, and culture as strengths. A few of these teachers found engaging with family a more difficult or less well developed part of their teaching repertoire. As one teacher noted at the start, "connecting with parents is very difficult for me...one of the most challenging aspects of my job." The facilitators' cases also indicated that in many of the schools, the approach to family/whānau engagement was 'superficial' and mostly consisted of formal parent conferences, or invitations to prize-giving and other organized events. Even so, the schools and the focus teachers indicated the recognition of the need to make stronger links, while also acknowledging that they did not already have the knowledge and skills to do this in ways that were learning focused.

In these schools and with these teachers, the facilitators noted that they needed to support teachers to consider the links to family and whānau, but also in gathering student voice to access a wider range of prior knowledge. This included regularly challenging the staff and teachers to know their focus students "more than academically", so as to spend time learning more about their life, interests, what was happening in their world. They assisted teachers in considering how the information from the questionnaire could deepen their understanding of their focus students, and how this linked specifically with literacy practices. They noted that not all the schools provided consistent support and attention to focus visits by the PLD facilitator. Thus, the facilitators found the need to continually focus teachers' attention to their students' prior knowledge and expressed interests and identified strengths.

As for the teachers in the continuing schools, most facilitators noted that they had a stronger awareness of their students' prior knowledge and related this to their understanding of the students' identity, language, and culture. They all had prior experience making connections with students' family/whānau, whether through use of the prior year's questionnaire or other school-based processes. In fact, in one school engaging family/whānau 'was a priority and was initiated early in the year across all classes' based on their identified needs the previous year. In the continuing schools, facilitators reported a more consistent and supportive ethos of engagement with family/whānau being led by the school leadership team, so that their focus was on harnessing this knowledge to support pedagogical change for the teachers.

As summarized in Table 1, the facilitators ratings' of the level of the teachers implementation of effective literacy practices at the beginning of the year placed the majority of teachers (65%) at Medium and five teachers being Low; all of the teachers rated as Low were in schools new to the PLD. At the end of the PLD, effective literacy practices showed progression with 50% being rated as High or Medium/High. One teacher however, remained at Low.

Table 1. Facilitator Ratings of Focus Teacher Literacy Practice

Level of Implementation of Effective Literacy Practices	Beginning of PLD	End of PLD
	N=20	N=20
Low	5	1
Medium	13	9
Medium/High	1	1
High	1	9

When the data was investigated by the change in individual teachers' ratings for effective literacy practices, this revealed that although 35% did not change, 65% of the teachers were seen to move in a positive direction. Those teachers who did not change remained at the Medium level of implementation of effective literacy practices, with the exception of one who remained at Low.

Table 2: Change in Level of Effective Literacy Practices

Change in Level of Effective Literacy Practices	N=20
Low to Medium	4
Medium to High, Medium/High to High, Medium to Medium/High	9
No Change	7

The distribution of facilitator ratings for the implementation of identity, language and culture were similar to those for effective literacy practices, with five teachers being rated as low and the majority being medium (75%); although none were rated as High. Again, all teachers rated Low initially were new to the PLD. The move in ratings from the start to end of the PLD was again similar, with 45% moving to a rating of High, however two teachers were rated as Low.

Table 2. Facilitator Ratings of Focus Teacher’s Practice related to Identity, Language and Culture

Level of Implementation of Identity, Language and Culture	Beginning of PLD	End of PLD
	N=20	N=20
Low	5	2
Medium	15	9
High	0	9

Again similar, the change in identity, language and culture ratings showed 35% as no change and 75% moving in a positive direction. Four of the teachers new to the PLD moved from Medium to High, with the five other end of year shifts to High being among those teachers who were in continuing schools. Five of the six teachers that showed no change remained at Medium, while one remained at Low and one moved backwards from Medium to Low.

Table 4. Change in Level of Implementation of Identity, Language and Culture

Change in Level of Identity, Language, Culture	N=20
Low to Medium	4
Medium to High	9
No Change	7

The facilitator case studies provided insight into the specific learning and pedagogical changes of the 20 focus teachers. The analysis of these cases shows that each teacher’s learning journey was, as expected, unique to their particular existing knowledge and skills. As one facilitator explained, “both teachers involved in the study began at different starting points and made varying rates of progress depending on their ability to grasp, transfer, and embed what they were learning into their classroom practice.” Even so, there were some shared insights and changes noted across these focus teachers and the facilitators’ case studies. The most evident change was the self-reinforcing nature of engagement with family/whānau. Facilitators noted that once a teacher had initiated the relationship using the questionnaire, and received positive response from the family/whānau member(s), the teachers sought to build these relationships. Teachers seemed to become motivated by the interest shown by the whānau to make more effort to increase the communication. By focusing attention on building the relationships, teachers were able to develop their skills at engaging with family/whānau, and as one facilitator noted, “became better at communicating with them and listening to them.”

Another key shift in practice by the teachers was increased attention to student prior knowledge, including a wider-angled lens in considering what was ‘important’ to note, as well as what counted as prior knowledge. Through the engagement with family/whānau the teachers seemed to more deeply consider identity, language, and

culture as informing both the content and process of literacy learning. For those students who had English as another language, this included supporting and encouraging both the family/whānau and the students to use this as a strength for learning English, which was a shift from potentially seeing it as a 'barrier' to be overcome.

A third and related shift in teachers' practice was the increased use of strategies, time, and attention to seeking students' own voice in terms of their self-knowledge of own learning, current learning challenges, and interests that allowed the teachers to make more explicit connections to the selection of literacy content and activities. Even in the case of the teacher who remained at a Low level of implementation around identity, language and culture, her attention to student voice and expressed interests increased. Teacher's understanding of the complexity of student 'prior knowledge' seemed to be strengthened through the engagement with family/whānau. However, as it was a key feature of all the focus teachers enhanced literacy practices, it may well be that the overarching focus on a sub-group of priority learners was the necessary foundation for developing this depth of understanding.

Student Learning: Supporting accelerating literacy progress by engaging students' identity, language, and culture

In seeking to understand the connection of teacher learning and student learning, each of the teachers in this PLD inquiry selected 4-6 priority learners as focus student for their own teacher inquiry. These students became the 'touchstones' for the teachers and facilitators to more closely examine the relationship of the teacher's changing literacy practices with respect to engaging and harnessing students' identity, language, and culture in support of their students' literacy learning progress. To gauge this change in student learning, each focus student was evaluated at the initiation of the PLD in relation to the national standards, based on an 'overall teacher judgment' (OTJ) which drew on multiple indicators and a range of assessments.

Table 5 below shows the students attained level of literacy at the beginning of the PLD. These data show that 73% of the students were rated as Below and 26% Well Below National Standards for their school level; with only one student rated as performing At standard. By the end of the PLD, 51% of the students had progressed and were subsequently evaluated to be At the National Standard, with a further 43% sitting at Below the National Standard. Although five students were rated as Well Below, three of these students had made significant gains in literacy (at least two years progress), though not enough to bring them out of this evaluative category. The other two students moved downwards from Below to Well Below, both having worked with the same teacher who was new to the PLD.

Table 5: Student Literacy Level against the NS

Students Literacy Level	Initial N=86	Final N=83
Well Below	22	5
Below	63	36
At	1	42

When the change in individual students literacy ratings provided in Table 6 were explored, it was noted that 65% of the students showed positive gains, including six students moving from Well Below to At. The majority of these changes in student ratings showed accelerated literacy learning gains, often showing more than 2 years of growth when indicated by grade-level. Although 33% had no change in rating and 49% remained at Below or Well Below, as discussed above, that did not indicate there were no improvements in the literacy of these students; many improvements were made, but sometimes it wasn't enough to take the student up to the next literacy level. This was particularly the case for intermediate students (Years 7 and 8) who were initially rated as demonstrating literacy levels several years below their current school level. For example, one Year 7 student who began at At the end of year 4 improved to at the end of Year 6, and so although still counted as Well Below, had clearly made progress. In fact, the majority of the students who appear not to have made changes were in this category of intermediate students working Well Below National Standards and had made these types of gains.

Table 6. Changes in Student Literacy Level

Students Change in Literacy Level	N=83
Well Below to Below	13
Below to At	35
Well Below to At	6
No Change	27
Below to Well Below	2

While the changes in literacy learning outcomes relative to the national standards are important markers in considering the outcomes, these were not the only changes in student learning detailed in the facilitator case studies. Across the cases of these teachers pedagogical change, the facilitators noted that the relationship between the teachers and their focus students' became deeper and more trusting, allowing the teachers to make more explicit connections of student background and prior knowledge to their decision-making. Some students noted that because of the effort to build relationships with their family/whānau, their parents now asked them how they were doing and read the school newsletter, website, and reports. From the

facilitator's feedback, it also appeared that the students saw that their teachers believed in them and had positive views of their families and in their interests. This in turn strengthened these relationships and the value of them, and appeared to enhance the students' engagement in and motivation toward their literacy learning.

Illuminating the importance of theories of action, expertise and scaffolds in effective PLD

By analysing the 10 facilitators' case studies of their work with 20 teachers, we have been able delve more deeply into the team's collective practice to illuminate the resulting outcomes for both teachers and their students. From this close examination of the Team's PLD practice, this inquiry has both reaffirmed and provided more depth in understanding around three key features of quality PLD. The first is the importance of acknowledging and working with teachers existing knowledge and practice, both as individuals and as communities within a school, so as to enable the particular learning journey toward enhanced pedagogy. For our team, this serves to strengthen and support our theory of action and foundational principles of the strengths based PLD framework we have co-constructed over the last several years.

The second affirmation of extant PLD research is related to the importance of external facilitation and 'expertise' to support teachers and schools in undertaking pedagogical change (Timperley, et al., 2007). What is new from this cross-case analysis of the case studies is two-fold, both the importance of long-term engagement of a facilitator, as well as informing the ways in which such facilitation enables engagement with family/whānau. With respect to the importance of the length of engagement, this study demonstrated that even for those schools in the second year of PLD, having the facilitator 'walk along side' them was critical to their engagement in the iterative cycles of teacher inquiry that supported them in strengthening their engagement with family/whānau. It was necessary to have that support in order for the teachers to shift the interaction from 'transactional' surface activities, toward sustained relationships that focused more explicitly on student learning and progress in ways that were transformational. In the cases of the new schools, these further highlighted the importance of having that external lens and support over the course of the year to ensure there was continued attention to and engagement with these new practices and ways of 'thinking' in relation to engaging family and whānau.

What this study newly illuminates about the facilitator's role in teacher learning is how their explicit querying around 1) students' identity, language, and culture, and 2) how the teachers were engaging with family/whānau, served as a scaffold for teachers as they acquired the new patterns of pedagogical thinking and reflection. The facilitators were a support and guide for teachers in developing the communication skills necessary to engage more meaningfully with family/whānau to focus on student literacy learning. Moreover, through their expertise and reflective guidance, they enabled the teachers to expand their understanding of what constitutes student prior knowledge, and the link of knowledge to aspect of student's identity, language, and culture.

Finally, this study has affirmed the affordances that particular PLD protocols, in this case the Team's use of smart tools, provide to PLD. The close examination of the

use of the family/whānau questionnaire suggests it is a valuable 'cognitive tool' that supports the facilitators in scaffolding the teachers' reflection and consideration of the role of identity, language, and culture to students' literacy learning. As part of the data gathering process for the teacher inquiry supported through the Focus Student Protocol, this questionnaire supported teachers to shift their focus of attention toward understanding their students in relationship to their family/whānau backgrounds and funds of knowledge in a positive and supportive way. The facilitator cases showed that it supported the teachers in seeing more deeply the strengths their students' languages, interests, and home-community knowledge provided, and to consider how these could be engaged more fully for their literacy learning.

By providing an 'entry point' for engaging with family/whānau, the tool in combination with the support of the facilitator opened access to new resources teachers could draw on for their literacy pedagogy. And, while we remain cautious of making causal links between the teachers' learning and enhanced student literacy outcomes, both the quantitative data from the overall teacher judgments (OTJ) and the reported qualitative data from teachers and students suggest that by knowing their students and families better, the teachers were able to create more meaningful literacy learning opportunities that enhanced their literacy achievement.

Conclusion

Over the course of several years the Literacy Language Learning Te Waipounamu PLD Team has been engaged in a systematic inquiry into their own facilitation practices with a focus on examining what it means to place the issues of 'identity, language, and culture' at the centre of their work. Our engagement in close examination of our practice has been intended to enable the field to continue to crack open the 'black box' that currently exists between acts of PLD facilitation, resulting teacher learning and pedagogical change, and student learning outcomes (Timperley, et al., 2007). In the PLD inquiry presented in this documentary account, the focus was on examining the facilitated use of one of the Team's smart tools, the Family/Whānau Questionnaire, that focuses explicitly on linking family/whānau knowledge to classroom literacy practices. Our cross-case analysis of facilitator practice has both reaffirmed key understandings from the PLD literature, as well as shed light on the particular teacher learning that resulted from a focus on engagement with family/whānau. In this way, we have contributed to the praxis and dialogue in the field, and in particular illuminated PLD practices that can support stronger engagement of teachers and schools with their students' family and whānau.

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