

Home-School Partnerships and Outcome Measures

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ABSTRACT

The concept of home-school partnerships is widely accepted as being important for student success. How this concept can be quantified in a more equitable and valid way, specifically through the lens of the Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), is the focus of this inquiry. RTLB and parent surveys, plus an interview with a Ministry of Education (MOE) respondent, found the current measuring practices lacking in validity and equity. It is suggested that rather than a single outcome measure being the focus for the Ministry of Education to gauge the impact of an RTLB intervention on the home-school partnership, an intervention to strengthen the relationship would be more equitable and robust. It also concludes that national consistency of practice and a shared understanding of what indicators could be present in a powerful partnership, would benefit the validity of the outcome data.

Research Paper

Key words:

home-school partnership; Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

At the core of RTLB practice is the Ministry of Education's RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit (Ministry of Education, 2018). This document outlines the RTLB role, scope, practice, principles and compulsory outcome reporting. It guides RTLB practice on a national level, including a requirement to submit outcome measures to the Ministry of Education.

In the initial and final stages of the RTLB practice sequence (Ministry of Education, 2018), RTLB are required to complete several outcome measures set by the Ministry of Education. One of these outcomes asks the planning team to measure and quantify the school-home partnership, using a single numeric score on a scale of one through ten. This is a positivist approach in that it uses a quantitative measure in order

to identify general patterns of causality. The planning team typically consists of the class teacher, family/whānau and an RTLB.

This outcome measure poses some challenges. Firstly, there is very little in the way of a supporting rubric to dictate what a 'partnership' looks like to be able to measure the outcome in a consistent and valid way. Secondly, it represents the perception of several voices, the family/whānau, RTLB and the teachers, who may not often see the concept of partnership through the same lens, and therefore, have incongruous judgements. Also, a positivist approach using a solitary quantitative outcome may not be the best way to gather the data needed for such a complex relationship due to the generalisation inherent in this method.

The aim of this inquiry is to investigate the notion of home-school partnership in relation to the RTLB practice outcome, and find a way this could be determined and quantified in a more valid and equitable way. The question that guided this inquiry was: *How can the RTLB home-school partnership outcome be determined and quantified in a more valid and equitable way?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Education Review Office (ERO) (Education Review Office, 2016) states there is an increasing body of New Zealand research showing many benefits of home-school partnerships that are "enhancing outcomes for all students" (p. 26). This literature review will investigate the meaning of home-school partnership within a New Zealand school context. It will examine, through a te ao Māori lens, possible equity issues when individuals enter into a partnership, and finally, it will discuss current attempts at evaluating home-school partnerships.

Terminology

Throughout the review the te reo Māori word 'whānau' is used alongside 'family'. This term is culturally-responsive and allows families to identify

their own membership of whānau. For some it can represent the nuclear family, but for others it can extend to wider relations and friends. This term is therefore inclusive and flexible by nature. The New Zealand literature is set within this context of whānau/family.

Home-School Partnership in the New Zealand Context

The Ministry of Education (2016) has released a four-year plan, *Ambitious for New Zealand (2016-2020)*. Within this plan, the Ministry of Education's objective is to have parents as part of the collaborative decision-making process in education. Many previous Ministry of Education publications include this sentiment, including the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013–2017* (Ministry of Education, 2013a), *The Pasifika Education Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2013b), *Collaboration for Success* (Ministry of Education, 2011) and *Success for All - Every School, Every Child* (Ministry of Education, 2010). Despite these publications and independent research reinforcing the importance of home-school partnerships (Glueck & Reschly, 2014), the literature reports that not all schools are fully implementing this in practice (Garbacz & Sheridan, 2011). In a wide survey of 600 schools in New Zealand, only half had created policies on home-school partnerships (Auditor-General, 2015). This would indicate there is a need for more schools to adopt an inclusive culture toward home-school partnerships.

Definitions

A large body of international literature focuses on the behavioural indicators of parental participation, which fit within Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 1995). In contrast to this, literature on partnerships focus on learning and behaviour goals created in powerful collaborations. This body of literature speaks of parent views being respected (Hornby & Witte, 2010), parent's confidence growing (Education Review Office, 2008), joint ownership of goals (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2015), and a greater trust relationship and efficacy of family/whānau (Connor & Cavendish, 2018).

Participation versus Partnership Rationales

When comparing the effect size on learner achievement for Epstein's (1995) participation behaviours and collaborative partnership behaviours, it becomes evident that family/whānau beliefs, attitudes and expectations in collaborative partnerships are a powerful predictive factor of student achievement (Boonk, Gijsselaers, Ritzen & Brand-Gruwel, 2018; Hattie, 2009).

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) developed a continuum of parental engagement with school. At the heart of this research was not the outcome for the child, but rather the agency of the family/whānau. Timperley and Robinson (2002) highlighted two political rationales for home-school partnerships. The first focused on child achievement outcomes, the second on the empowerment of the parent. They defined the child outcome-focused behaviour as participation and the parent outcome-focused behaviour as partnership. They stated, "the literatures on participation and partnership both pursue the themes of social democracy and student outcomes separately, with neither addressing the questions of their interrelationship or what it might take to achieve both objectives" (Timperley & Robinson, 2002, p. 13). For the majority of the literature this has also been the case, however, when considering the literature with a te ao Māori perspective, the elusive co-existence mentioned by Timperley and Robinson (2002) is present.

Te Ao Māori Perspective.

Hall, Hornby and Macfarlane (2015) discussed the importance of schools building trusting and caring relationships with family/whānau in a New Zealand context, where whānau voice, expertise, culture and partnership is sought and respected. Berryman and Woller (2013) reported similar findings with Māori valuing power sharing, collaboration, relationships, care for learners, and respect of Māori identity.

Family/whānau see these elements of partnership as naturally leading to the achievement outcomes the participation rationale, as outlined by Timperley and Robinson (2002), has as a focus. In the social rationale of partnerships, Berryman and Woller (2013) state that "whakawhānaungatanga was not just about building relationships with families so that interventions could take place; the process of whakawhānaungatanga was in itself, often, the intervention" (p. 834). The Education Review Office (2015) acknowledges the importance of both rationales. They recommend that both learner achievement and whānau participation be evaluated by schools and whānau together.

Equity in Partnerships

To be culturally-responsive, New Zealand schools need to consider a truly inclusive mind-set when building relationships with family/whānau (Berryman & Woller, 2013; Woods, Morrison & Palincsar, 2018). The Māori Advisory Board to the Office of the Auditor General (Office of the Auditor General, 2015) states that while there does not exist a formula for whānau and schools to engage with each other, the

onus to make sure it happens rests with the school. Berryman (2014) agrees and warns that “when it comes to the relationships that are formed, and who gets to define and legitimate them, the school retains all the power” (p. 5). This power sharing dynamic is one addressed widely in the literature. Lines, Miller and Arthur-Stanley (2012) state that understanding the cultural lens both partners have, is a first step to power sharing. School leadership that emphasises the essential role that family/whānau have in the education of learners is also important (Barnes, Hutchings, Bright & Taupo 2012; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2019).

Biddulph, Biddulph and Biddulph (2003) report in their best evidence synthesis that “ethnic and socio-economic differences in parental involvement show a pattern of the least involvement for the families of the children for whom it may be most important” (p. 147). This under-representation is often due to a lack of parent understanding and knowledge about how to work collaboratively with teachers (Woods et al., 2018). Other factors include a lack of parent efficacy (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) and a void of communication (Barnes et al., 2012). Mereoiu, Abercrombie and Murray (2016) noted that parents often took a listening role as they felt that teachers were the experts.

The research also points to the systemic issues of the school, being the majority culture, not necessarily wanting to relinquish or share the power it holds. This breeds a culture of seeing the minority in deficit terms (Berryman, 2014; Timperley & Robinson 2002). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) see power sharing as a process on a continuum. As schools and family/whānau share information and decision-making, efficacy increases for both partners in a more fluid state. Most researchers agree that communication and a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities pave the way to a more equitable partnership (e.g. Bull, Brooking & Campbell 2008; Connor & Cavendish, 2018). Capability building of both partners on how to work together and collaborate has also been widely found to be an effective way to increase equity in partnerships (Connor & Cavendish, 2018; Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017).

Congruence in Partnerships

Congruence of teacher and parents’ perception of their relationship quality has not been the focus of many studies (Kim et al., 2012). Therefore, it is not fully understood what effect incongruence has on student outcomes. Glueck and Reschly (2014) state that congruence is important for student success, however, research by Minke, Sheridan, Kim, Ryoo and

Koziol (2014), found that congruence had no effect on academic outcomes for students. It is generally accepted that incongruence exists in home-school partnerships (Mitchell, Morton & Hornby, 2010; Richards, Frank, Sableski & Arnold, 2016). Epstein et al. (2019) did not necessarily see this as a negative, stating that, “Good partnerships encourage questions and debates and withstand disagreements” (p. 15).

Measurement of Partnerships

While the effect of home-school partnerships on learner outcomes has been widely measured, the complex and contextualised nature of the partnership itself has made it difficult to define, let alone measure (Lines et al., 2012). Relationships between home and school can include such unobservable concepts as “trust, respect and personal regard, accountability, consideration, sensitivity and understanding, equality and reciprocity” (Minke, 2006, cited in Minke et al., 2014, p. 529).

The New Zealand Context

In a te ao Māori context of relationship, there has been an emergence of tools that attempt to measure home-school partner relationships. The Auditor General’s audit of home-school partnerships used a school self-review tool developed by the Ministry of Education (2019) on the Ruia School-Whānau Partnerships website (Office of the Auditor General, 2015). The Education Review Office use a self-review inquiry model called the “Evaluation Framework for determining the quality of relationship” (Education Review Office, 2015, p.15). Other New Zealand researchers have used culturally-responsive approaches, such as Hall et al. (2015) and Te Kete Ipurangi (2019). Others have used general reflective questions and interviews (e.g. Berryman & Woller, 2013) as well as triangulating these insights with school data and policies (e.g. Mutch & Collins, 2012). In the literature reviewed, the RTL Professional Practice Toolkit (Ministry of Education, 2018) is the only tool to use a quantitative measure.

Scaling of Partnerships

There have been two noteworthy models utilised to order the complexities of the home-school partnership. The first, utilised internationally, uses a Response to Intervention (RTI) framework to create ways partnerships can be intensified to meet needs and contexts (Lines et al., 2012; Richards, Frank, Sableski & Arnold, 2016). The second is a continuum based on a hierarchical idea of the different forms of partnership (Department of Education, 1989; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Robinson et al., 2015).

Summary

This review has discussed the complexities of home-school partnership with a focus on the New Zealand context, particularly from a te ao Māori perspective. It has examined current practices and issues of equity, congruence and measurement methods.

RTLB use a highly collaborative, problem-solving approach in schools, which encourages family/whānau to collaborate with teachers to create goals for the learner (Ministry of Education, 2018). From the perspective of an RTLB tasked with assessing this home-school partnership as an outcome, the review highlights many considerations and identifies many shapes and functions a partnership may have. To measure all these and maintain equity and cultural integrity within one quantitative outcome measure, is problematic. Even if this is a valid measure, in the absence of detailed indicators it is unlikely practice can be consistent within or across RTLB clusters. Furthermore, this outcome measure implies that congruence is important and assumes that the partnership has been equitable with all participants understanding what is being measured.

This inquiry proposes to investigate current practices of how RTLB fulfil the requirements of the home-school partnership outcome and ascertain if this practice is valid and equitable in light of the literature. In completing this inquiry, it is hoped a more consistent, valid and equitable measurement process can be formed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach was used for this inquiry to ensure a breadth and depth of data was obtained from actual practice. Quantitative and qualitative questionnaires were utilised as well as a semi-structured interview. The inquiry focused on a system that has an effect on RTLB practice. Many assumptions needed to be challenged and investigated, so it was necessary for the author to adopt a realist philosophy. This allowed for real practice to emerge in the midst of a complex system (Bhasker, 1989). It also mitigated researcher bias, as a member with a potentially shared paradigm with the speciality group of teacher participants. As mixed methods research, family/whānau and RTLB voices were gathered (Dobson & Gifford-Bryan, 2014). The research was conducted from a strengths-based perspective and with the premise that the learner is not separated from the concept or definition of the family/whānau.

Participants

Two different questionnaires were tailored for RTLB and parent respondents. This tailoring for audience was to mitigate the disadvantage of questionnaires when respondents are unable to understand the questions, as reported by Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin and Lowden (2013).

RTLB Participants

Every RTLB, who has been employed for longer than six months, was invited to complete the questionnaire. This was to provide the opportunity for a consensus of practice and to allow for opinions on a wide national scale. RTLB Cluster Managers were invited to provide consent for their cluster RTLB to participate in this questionnaire by forwarding the Survey Monkey Link to their teams. The authors own cluster was not included in the sample, as holding a position in management may be seen as coercive to expect participation. A total of 92 RTLB completed the survey.

Parent Participants

Parents of recently closed RTLB cases from two cluster areas were invited to participate to mitigate the effect memory can have on data collected that is too far removed from the event reported on (Bell & Waters, 2014). Two cluster managers were invited to forward the survey link to qualifying parent participants, a sample size of approximately forty participants. A total of five participants completed this survey. The participants also had to have an email address to be able to complete the survey online. Participants were chosen in this manner as a way to narrow the participant number and to make distribution and participation easy and anonymous. To maintain an ethical approach, it was ascertained the author had never worked with any of these families before.

Ministry of Education Participant

The interview was conducted with a Ministry of Education respondent who was nominated by the Ministry of Education after being sent an invitation and introductory letter. The participant had the necessary knowledge to be able to discuss the home-school partnership outcome measure.

Questionnaires

A questionnaire tool was chosen because of the ability to collect a large number of respondents and elicit potentially more honest responses as it was a confidential and anonymous process. The use of a questionnaire provided the flexibility required to elicit opinions and attitudes as well as current

actual practices. It allowed for both open and closed questions (Menter et al., 2013). The online, dedicated Survey Monkey tool (surveymonkey.com) was utilised for both to allow for a wide distribution, affordability, ease of completion, and to protect the privacy of the participants. Both questionnaires were open for a total of ten weeks for responses.

Questionnaire A: Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour Survey

This questionnaire gathered data on current practice which required some open narrative responses. It also gathered quantitative data that included questions such as lists and scales as discussed in Bell and Waters (2014) and Likert (1932).

Questionnaire B: Parent Survey

This questionnaire gathered mostly quantitative data, including lists, categories, quantities, ranking and scales (Bell & Waters, 2014).

Interview: Ministry of Education

An interview lasting 45 minutes, using a semi-structured qualitative format, was conducted at the Ministry of Education offices in Wellington. This format was used to allow the flexibility of follow-up or clarifying questions. The interview had the advantage that the participant was able to provide views using their own terminology, which in turn made it easier to understand the attitudes and rationale that underpin the home-school outcome (Menter et al., 2013). A strengths-based approach was used in the choice and tone of questions with the intention of identifying what is working well within the Ministry of Education system of outcome data collection. This is in keeping with the RTLB strengths-based principle of practice (RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit, 2018), but also to mitigate any harm to the Ministry of Education as part of ethical considerations. It was important to provide the Ministry of Education an opportunity to imagine opportunities rather than focusing on deficiencies using an Appreciative Inquiry strengths-based approach (Fifolt & Lander, 2013). The interview was recorded and transcribed by an RTLB administrator. The transcription of the interview was sent to the interviewee for reflection and accuracy checking. This ensured no research bias by using this method of data gathering (Burne, 2017).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was completed from a positivist and pragmatic theory basis. Basic quantitative methodologies were used to find percentages while qualitative data was analysed with the inquiry

question guiding the analysis, then coded with main themes noted. In this way both qualitative and quantitative data can add meaning and confirm each other by deduction from quantitative data and induction from qualitative data (Brierley, 2017). It also meant that data could be generalizable and context specific. This helps in being able to answer the research question without the omission of potentially important constructs of the participants (Brierley, 2017). In short, this approach and philosophy allowed for a more complete picture of actual practice.

Ethical Considerations

A thorough review of all ethical considerations formed a large component of the planning stages for the inquiry. Ethical considerations were made under the principles of autonomy, avoidance of harm, benefits, justice, special relations, and the Treaty of Waitangi. This review included peer and supervisory reflection and, in accordance with a university code of ethical conduct, the project was deemed to be low risk.

RESULTS

The two surveys and interview will be discussed separately to highlight the unique perspective each brings. Percentages have been utilised for the RTLB survey results; however, due to the low number of parent respondents, this was not a valid way to represent that data so raw data only is reported.

Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour Survey

Of the RTLB surveyed, 60% of respondents had no idea how the Ministry of Education uses the home-school partnership data they are asked to report on. The following results are grouped under the overarching themes of the survey questions.

Equity of Representation

A majority of RTLB respondents (98%) included the voice of the class teacher when completing the home/school partnership outcome at the beginning of an intervention, with 74% including the voice of the family/whānau. A very similar percentage (97%) included teacher voice at the end of the case, with 76% of surveyed RTLB choosing to include the voice of the family/whānau.

When considering the voice of both home and school, 43% of respondents reported mostly congruence of opinion, with complete congruence reported by 3%. Most RTLB respondents indicated using some kind of strategy to represent the voices of the partnering team, with 19% reporting they would

sometimes not use any strategy but simply a default score. None of the RTLB respondents reported that they use the recommended method in the RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit (Ministry of Education, 2018), of reaching an Overall Team Judgement (OTm) all of the time: in fact 37% reported as never being able to use an OTm).

The majority of RTLB respondents (70%) reported that they had to rely on gathering the voice of home and school separately and then making

an outcome judgement based on this, with 58% reporting they have also previously relied on their own understanding of the relationship and made an autonomous decision.

The following data shows which 'voice' is more frequently included by RTLB respondents when making an outcome measurement decision. The data indicates a bias toward including the voice of the school when collecting data for the home-school outcome.

Q12 How often do you reach an outcome score based mostly on the voice from representatives of the home?

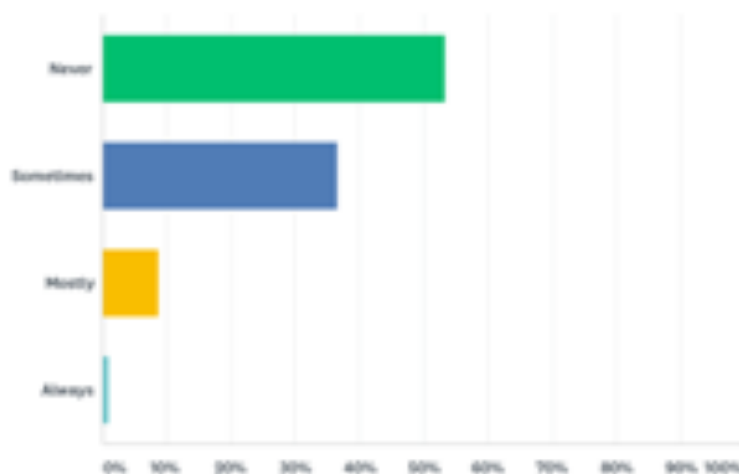


Figure 1. Which 'voice' is more frequently included in outcome measurement decisions [Home].

Q13 How often do you reach an outcome score based mostly on the voice from representatives of the school?

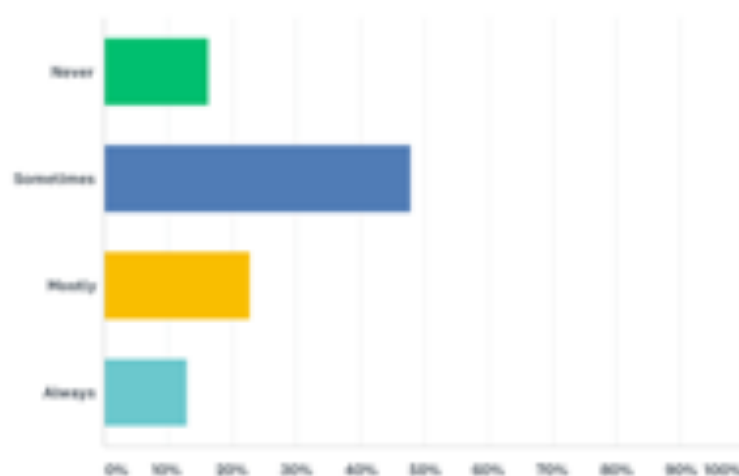


Figure 2. Which 'voice' is more frequently included in outcome measurement decisions [School].

From the comments of participating RTLB, some of the reasons for this bias emerges.

Often the families don't have a good understanding of their children's progression at school. Therefore data is usually collected in collaboration with school staff." (R23)

I only use the teacher's response because there is no information attached to the measure as to how to work out the different voices and be equitable. Therefore I chose the teacher's perspective since we are really an in-school service. (R82)

I certainly talk about support and partnership with school and family but scoring or rating this partnership is not necessary or appropriate, therefore I make a guess at the score. (R65)

Consistency of RTLB Practice.

The results also show that 41% of RTLB surveyed were not aware of any cluster-wide methodology for collecting the home-school partnership outcome data. A further 22% reported some general cluster-wide guidelines, with 20% using the rubric provided in the RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit (Ministry of Education, 2018). Of those surveyed, 49% of RTLB felt mostly confident that their interventions improved home-school partnerships, with 35% feeling somewhat confident.

The following three graphs (see Figure 3, 4 & 5) are in response to the question of confidence that the home-school partnership outcome is equitable, valid and culturally-responsive.

Q20 How confident are you that your current practice of measuring the home-school partnership outcome is equitable for all partners?

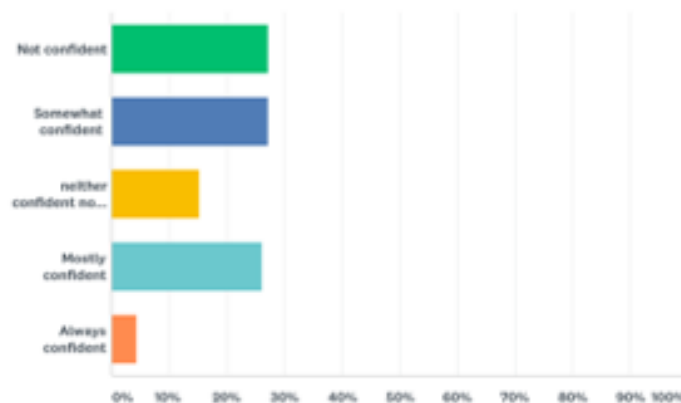


Figure 3. RTLB confidence in equity of practice measuring home-school partnership.

Q21 How confident are you that the home-school partnership outcome measure is culturally responsive?

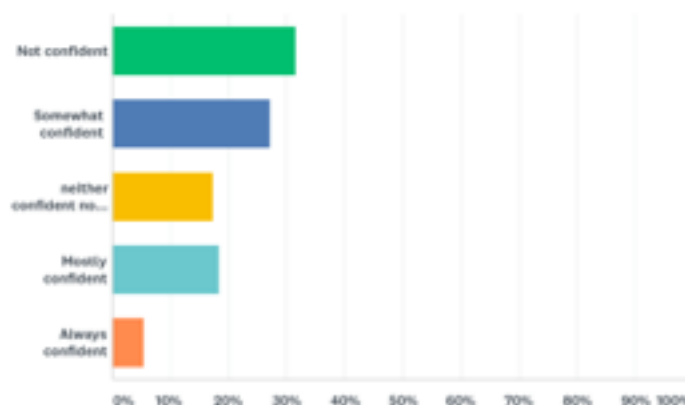


Figure 4. RTLB confidence in cultural-responsiveness of practice measuring home-school partnership.

Q18 How confident are you that your current practice of measuring the home-school partnership outcome is valid?

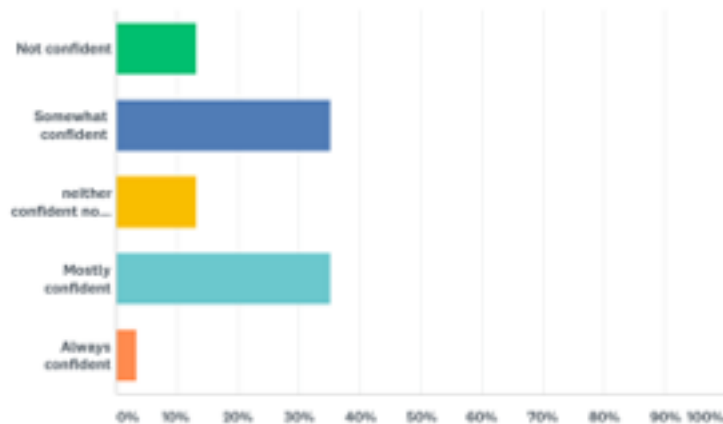


Figure 5. RTLB confidence in validity of practice measuring home-school partnership.

From this data there emerges a picture of participating RTLB not being confident that the outcome measure is culturally-responsive, or particularly equitable. The question of validity has polarised the respondents, however, 13% report not being confident the measure is valid compared to only 3% reporting they feel it is. This lack of confidence is mirrored in the following participant's comments:

I have a lack of belief that they are in anyway a valuable measure.” (R6)

“Personally, I’m not placing an emphasis on the integrity of this data given my understanding that it does not directly impact on my casework but is more for use by Ministry of Education. (R10)

It is very subjective according to the context of particular ‘Requests For Support’ and individual interpretations from whanau and teachers as to what they think is a good relationship. (R78)

To me it does not represent a true picture. I believe there definitely needs to be a measure for the different voices. (R43)

I compliantly do it, but place little value on it and put very little effort into it. In my view, this compulsory, vague, subjective and ambiguous outcomes reporting process is the biggest barrier for me. (R22)

I think there needs to be clearer national guidelines and a rubric. (R18)

Home/school partnership is definitely an area where we need to improve our practice considerably. I worry too that it is not culturally-responsive. (R18)

Validity Barriers and Enablers in RTLB Practice

The following tables contain the barriers and enablers identified by the participating RTLB that have an effect on the validity of the home/school outcome measure. RTLB participants were asked to identify any of the factors they felt were a barrier or an enabler. The results are listed in ascending order of frequency.

Interestingly, while the top-ranked barrier to being able to complete a valid outcome measure was based on relationships and functions within a relationship, for instance, communication difficulties, the top listed enabler for the surveyed RTLB was knowledge of how the Ministry of Education uses the outcome data. The rest of the top-ranked enablers illustrate a desire for clear data gathering and analysing guidelines and tools.

Parent Survey

The results from the parent survey revealed conflicting experiences of partnering and planning with schools. While some parents found their voice was listened to and valued, others felt ignored and in conflict with the school:

The school was set in their ways, and because I would not medicate my son, he was pretty much expelled. (R1)

Table 1
RTL B Identified Barriers to Validity of Outcome Measure.

Responses	% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
A strained relationship between home and school	48.91%	45
Communication difficulties with parents	41.30%	38
A lack of time to have a robust discussion with teachers or whānau	40.22%	37
A lack of understanding of teachers and/or parents of what a home-school partnership is	39.13%	36
Cultural differences between the home and school	38.87%	33
A lack of definition of the outcome in the Professional Practice Toolkit	27.17%	25
A lack of consistency within your cluster practice	27.17%	25
Communication difficulties with teachers	25.00%	23
Parents or teachers are new to the school	25.00%	23
Difficulty reaching agreement between home and school	23.91%	22
A lack of rubric for the outcome in the Professional Practice Toolkit	21.74%	20
I have never experienced any barriers	13.04%	12
You forget to complete either the pre or post outcome measure	8.70%	8
Your lack of understanding of what a home-school partnership is	4.35%	4

Table 2
RTL B Identified Enablers to Validity of Outcome Measure.

Responses	% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Knowledge of how the MOE uses the outcome data	50.00%	45
A rubric to support judgements	42.22%	38
A data gathering tool to include the voices of home and school	38.89%	35
Two separate outcome measures representing teacher voice and whānau voice	37.78	34
A clear policy about outcome methodology	33.33%	30
More time to discuss home-school partnerships with whānau and teachers	30.00%	27
A home-school partnership goal within the collaborative action plan	30.00%	27
Across-cluster and within-cluster moderation	21.11%	19
A better understanding of home-school partnerships	17.78%	16
Guidance on how to combine in-congruent outcome scores within a partnership	17.78%	16
I think I already have valid practice and do not need further help	14.44%	13
A reminder system to complete the outcome	10.00%	9

I found it to be a great experience and feel that it has been of great benefit. There has been a huge improvement in his learning and I felt like I was part of the team. (R2)

All the surveyed parents reported being invited to meet with the RTLB at the beginning of their child's intervention, and all respondents had at least a vague recollection of being asked about the relationship between themselves and the school. Three out of the five respondents reported that any discussion they had about home-school partnerships were only with the RTLB. Consequently, three out of five of the respondents had no idea how the school views the partnering relationship with them. Two respondents knew the school either agreed or mostly agreed with their assessment of the partnering relationship. This data does not indicate either a positive or negative relationship, only the level of congruence. Three of the five respondents reported the RTLB intervention made no difference to the partnering relationship they had with the school, however two respondents reported it caused a moderate to large improvement.

Four out of the five respondents had no recollection of the RTLB outcome measure being explicitly discussed, with the other respondent having only a vague recollection.

Three out of five respondents attended one or two meetings and contributed to the goal setting for their child. Four out of five respondents felt their ideas and opinions were taken into account during the RTLB intervention, however it is unclear if this was by the school, or RTLB, as highlighted by one respondent, "with the RTLB, not the school." (R4)

Ministry of Education Interview

The interview revealed that the Ministry of Education identified the home-school partnership outcome as an important outcome to measure. This was due to how the relationship the family/whānau has with the school impacts on learner outcomes. The intention of the outcome measure is to demonstrate the positive impact RTLB can have.

However, the Ministry of Education respondent reported that the data gathered from the RTLB outcomes, "has so many errors, it is of limited use." The only reliable data collected is the number of students who have received support from the RTLB service. No outcome reporting data is used for reporting purposes to the Performance Management Board due to it not being accurate enough to use.

The Ministry of Education respondent reported an awareness that some RTLB clusters have undertaken

a moderation process to come to an agreement on where a pre- and post-outcome measurement may be placed on the scale. The respondent went on to say that there is a range of practice within and across clusters regarding the outcome measure, with no collective understanding of the points on the continuum. The Ministry of Education respondent spoke about the need to quantify the difference RTLB can have on learners. It was also acknowledged that the post-outcome measure for the home-school partnership may be worse than the pre-outcome measure because of:

... a better understanding of what a strong partnership looks like. They may have initially thought they had a really strong partnership, but as they continued to work more closely together, they actually realised they didn't have a strong relationship. The data can be very misleading.

The respondent reported that if the outcome measure remained the same, or had a worse post-score to pre-score, it was, "our assumption that the data is incorrect, so we wouldn't report it." The respondent stated that:

From a MOE perspective we are not confident at all that the measurement is equitable because it is up to the practices within the clusters ... There needs to be some rigor to ensure that it's equitable, that it's not the RTLB determining the pre- and post-, that it is part of the team and everybody has a voice. From a Ministry perspective, we can't say that is happening in all forty clusters.

When asked about how different perspectives can be represented in one outcome measure the Ministry of Education respondent admitted that it is a problem, adding that it depended largely on the skill of the RTLB to moderate that discussion so teachers and family/whānau come to agreed points. The respondent stated that there needs to be a

... collective understanding of the points on the continuum" and "more descriptors added to the continuum, having a closer look at what criteria are being used to measure the strength of the relationship, and what we think are important factors in these relationships.

DISCUSSION

The literature reviewed consistently found that having family/whānau in a powerful partnership with the school provides benefits to the learner in a multitude of ways (e.g. Education Review Office,

2016; Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003; Hornby & Witte, 2010). However, when considering the quantification of this partnership, many factors affect the validity and equity of this outcome measure.

Validity

The extent of the validity of the data collected by the Ministry of Education refers to how accurately it represents the concept of the home/school partnership in actual practice. Valid data is strong enough to measure what it claims to measure.

Methodology

The Ministry of Education outcome measure is based on a positivist approach to research. In the literature reviewed, the RTLB outcome measurement strategy was the only one that attempted to quantify the home-school partnership. Ryan (2006) stated that a positivist approach, “is rightly thought to be inadequate when it comes to learning about how people live, how they view the world, how they cope with it, how they change it, and so on” (p. 13).

While the present quantitative methodology should enable patterns to emerge across national RTLB cases, it is also highly structured and does not allow for any clarity over ambiguous results (Ryan, 2006). From the interview with the Ministry of Education respondent, it is apparent that these ambiguities are rendering the data collected useless and invalid. A positivist approach may not be the best fit due to the reductionism that cannot reflect the fluid and complex relationships between home and school (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Lines et al., 2012; Ryan, 2006).

Consistency

The RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit (Ministry of Education, 2018) states that the decision on the outcome measure for home-school partnerships, “could be made as a team, or could be made by the RTLB if the situation is sensitive” (p. 33). The term ‘sensitive’ is not elaborated on, however one would assume it refers to a major breakdown of the relationship between the home and school. This undefined term opens the door to interpretation and inconsistent practice.

The Ministry of Education respondent was confident that an Overall Team Judgement (OTmJ) ultimately depended on the RTLB’s skill level in moderating a discussion to reach agreement. However, in practice, none of the RTLB respondents were able to report being able to consistently reach an OTmJ all of the time; in fact, 37% reported as never being able to reach an OTmJ. The majority reported having to gather the voice of the team members separately and

then complete the moderation themselves or observe the relationship dynamics and make an autonomous decision. These results explain the parent respondents all having *some* recollection of discussing the home-school relationship in general terms with the RTLB, but only one respondent having any recollection of the outcome measure being discussed.

With the methodology so open to translation resulting in an array of practice, validity can be compromised. The Ministry of Education respondent acknowledged there is no shared understanding and that practices range widely both within and between clusters. This is confirmed by 41% of the RTLB respondents having no knowledge of any cluster-wide methodology or guidelines for collecting the home-school outcome data, with a further 22% being aware of some *general* guidelines. In order to enable validity, 33% of RTLB respondents identified having a clear policy on methodology, 42% identified more specific indicators, and 40% stated a data gathering tool would help.

Equity

Voice and power

It is an expectation that the voices of both school and home are included in the home-school outcome measure. The Ministry of Education respondent echoed this belief, but then went on to state they do not have a lot of confidence that this is happening. This lack of confidence was mirrored in the RTLB survey results, with 54% of respondents reporting feeling little-to-no confidence that the outcome was an equitable measure.

The results show there is some bias toward the school voice. Of RTLB surveyed, 98% reported including the voice of the teacher when collecting data for the home-school partnership outcome, whereas 75% included the voice of the parent. Furthermore, when the RTLB is considering an OTmJ, results show a bias towards giving more emphasis to the voice of the teacher (see Figure 1).

Congruence

It could be hypothesised by the existence of only one outcome quantity measure that the Ministry of Education prefers and expects congruence. Within the parent participant group, three of the five reported that they had not had a conversation as a team about the strength of the home-school partnership and therefore had no idea if their perspective was congruent with the schools. While the literature states that incongruence is not necessarily detrimental (Epstein et al., 2019), it can potentially be a difficulty when a unified measurement is required.

There is a wide range of inconsistent data gathering practice when RTLB are met with incongruence. Given that only 3% of responding RTLB reported consistently experiencing congruence in their practice, it would seem that some level of incongruence is the norm. The commonality of incongruence is also affirmed by research completed by Mitchell et. al. (2010) and Richards et al. (2016). In the absence of a shared understanding of practice, many different strategies are used by RTLB to collate the incongruent data into a single outcome quantity. This inconsistency allows for inequality and renders the outcomes less valid.

Relationship

Communication

The Ministry of Education respondent stated that it is imperative that RTLB initiate robust conversations so that perspectives can be shared and the strength of the relationship identified. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) talked about communication breeding communication, which leads to more efficacy and equitable partnerships (Bull et al., 2008; Connor & Cavendish, 2018). The Ministry of Education respondent also identified that the closer a team partners and communicates, the more enlightened they may be about the outcome measure. However, this in itself could lead to misleading pre- and post-data with a lower post-score actually indicating a better understanding.

The top three barriers identified by the participating RTLB to being able to provide a valid outcome measure all refer to relationship themes, including time pressures, communication obstacles and strained relationships between home and school. It could be that the 'sensitive' nature of measuring the home-school partnership has become a barrier to all partners communicating openly, causing a counterproductive factor in RTLB being able to impact the relationship positively. It would seem the outcome measure is driving practice rather than being an outcome of practice.

Sustainability

A question that this inquiry has raised, but not necessarily answered, is the level of partnership that remains after the RTLB has closed the case. One parent respondent commented that it was the RTLB who listened and took into account their opinions and ideas, not the school. It is possible the outcome data may be more respondent of the RTLB-home partnership, and if this is the case, how sustainable is the partnership when the RTLB are no longer involved? In the absence of an inclusive school

culture, the RTLB may be the only link between home and school. This aligns with the assertion that very few New Zealand schools have a policy on home-school partnership (Office of the Auditor General, 2015).

Cultural-Responsiveness

RTLB practice includes the principle of 'Cultural Responsiveness' (Ministry of Education, 2018). This principle places importance on RTLB valuing cultural diversity and supporting whānau/families by promoting, protecting and including cultural-responsive practices within their casework.

Partnership v Participation

The literature speaks of two related, but distinctly different political rationales when considering home-school relationships; participation and partnership (e.g. Timperley & Robinson, 2002). From a te ao Māori perspective, a social rationale of partnership prevails where power sharing and collaboration are valued and seen to lead naturally to student achievement (Berryman & Woller, 2013). Participation, however, is focused more so on the raising of learner achievement.

While the RTLB home-school outcome measure takes into account and supports the partnership between home and school, the Ministry of Education respondent stated that, "if there is a strong relationship, then it is more likely to lead to positive outcomes for students ... unless we can quantify that it's made a positive difference, then it could actually be doing harm", which speaks to a participation rationale. While the emphasis difference is subtle, it does mean the current outcome measure is biased toward the participation rationale.

The Education Review Office (2015) states that both rationales should be evaluated by schools, and it could be argued that the collective of RTLB outcomes fulfil this directive. For the complex home-school partnership, however, it is necessary to be very clear about the underpinning beliefs, values, and rationales one is subscribing to for valid and equitable data to be enabled. By having a slight bias to participation, the data will also have a bias, and unfortunately this bias is not aligned with te ao Māori worldviews.

Power Balance

The RTLB respondents demonstrated a lack of confidence that the outcome measure is culturally-responsive, with only 18% mostly confident that the methodology is as such. It is also interesting to note that 36% of RTLB respondents have found a cultural difference between home and school a barrier to

gaining valid outcome data. It could be that this is an indication of the power imbalance between home and schools, with the latter not wanting to relinquish control (Berryman, 2014). This imbalance was illustrated by a parent respondent who stated

The school was set in their ways, and because I would not medicate my son he was pretty much expelled (R1)

The parent portrays feelings of not been listened to and valued. The Māori Advisory Board to the Office of the Auditor General (2015), state the onus rests with schools to make sure relationships are built and sustained as they inherently hold the balance of power in home-school relations.

CONCLUSIONS

Within this inquiry there was very little evidence found of the measurement of the home-school partnership outcome being valid or equitable. In response to the inquiry question this does mean that there are many actions that can be taken to improve validity and equity. These actions can be undertaken by the Ministry of Education as well as RTLB individual practices.

Ministry of Education Actions

The Ministry of Education needs to consider what their epistemology base is for the research and what their core values are in regards to the difference between participation and partnering.

In light of the literature, it would be hoped a focus on partnership would be the way forward. With this considered, a decision needs to be made whether the reporting of the status of the relationship is enough, or whether, to be more equitable and valid, the outcome should be linked to practice that explicitly goes about improving the collaborative partnership between home and school. In the researcher's opinion, the latter would allow for not only a more equitable and valid outcome, but also actively improve a relationship that research tells us is pivotal for student learning (Education Review Office, 2016).

If the outcome is treated, not as an outcome but rather as an intervention in itself, described by Berryman and Woller (2013) as *whakawhānaungatanga*, it would hold far more value and cultural integrity. This would allow for shared goals to be informed by potential nationally developed evaluation tools and RTLB collaboration with schools and parents to raise capability in partnering, which is a well-researched method to increase equity in partnerships (Connor

& Cavendish, 2018; Epstein, 2013). This capability building for schools would also ensure sustainability, inclusiveness, communication and power balance in relationships (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Incongruence should be expected and a consistent and shared practice developed. Of the RTLB respondents, 38% commented that two separate outcome measures for the school and home would enable a more valid outcome. This could also be a future consideration for the Ministry of Education to allow for a more equitable result.

A shared definition, more indicators on the partnership continuum, and a greater understanding of these indicators would increase the validity of data. Most of the literature agreed that a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved will enable a more equitable partnership (e.g. Bull et al., 2008; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

RTLB Actions

To build a more equitable outcome measure RTLB need to be diligent in including all stakeholder voices and having open and shared discussions. It may be that RTLB need to increase the time spent on having the difficult conversations in a team context, even when relationships are 'sensitive', to stay true to the ultimate sustainability of learner outcomes.

More detailed continuum indicators, moderation and a shared understanding of home-school partnerships could be explored at cluster level, if not wider.

Further Research

This inquiry is highly contextualised to RTLB practice. While the findings relate explicitly to the researcher's practice, there are also implications for schools and parents that this research does not address, for example, further research is needed to fully investigate all the different perspectives involved.

Future research into the importance of congruence between home and school would also be beneficial. Congruence and incongruence both reportedly contain benefits (Epstein et. al., 2019). It would be useful to understand how the strength of both can be utilised to build strong and enduring relationships. At present there is very little research completed in this area.

Presently there is no research available that tracks the home-school partnership beyond the RTLB intervention sequence. If sustainability of partnership can be fostered, the outcome for student learning will be improved with less need for on-going interventions

(Boonk et al., 2018). This is an important area for future research.

Finally, by developing a shared understanding, providing strategies to support consistent practice, with a focus on building capability to build powerful and sustained partnerships, the home-school partnering outcome can be measured in a more valid and equitable way.

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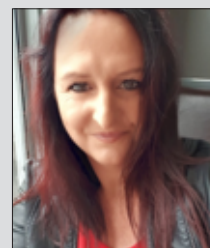
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