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 of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), is the focus of this inquiry. RTLB and parent surveys, plus a questionnaire answered by the Ministry of Education (MOE), 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 this relationship between home and school would be more equitable and robust. It also concludes that national consistency of practice, a shared understanding of what indicators could be present in a powerful partnership, and the intended use of the data, would benefit the validity of the outcome data.

Research paper

Keywords:
partnership, Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

At the core of RTLB practice is the Ministry of Education's RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit (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 (MOE). The purpose of the outcome data is to provide evidence of a positive impact. "A nationally consistent outcomes framework enables RTLB to use credible and useful data when reporting to parents/whānau, families, teachers, schools/kura and Kāhui Ako, the Ministry of Education and other relevant stakeholders" (Ministry of Education, 2018. p.28).

In the initial and final stages of the RTLB practice sequence (Ministry of Education, 2018), RTLB are required to complete several outcome measures set in an outcomes framework by the MOE. 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 (see Appendix A). 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.

In a recent review of the outcomes framework, the Education Review Office (2018) highlighted several concerns. They found that the outcomes framework did not align well to assessment and curriculum frameworks in schools, and that they did not address the sustainability of any outcomes over time. They recommended that, "the Ministry of Education work with RTLB clusters to review the Outcomes Framework, and address issues raised in this report about its purpose and usefulness" (p.31). 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 evaluated and quantified in a more valid and equitable way.

Inquiry question

How can the RTLB home-school partnership outcome be evaluated and quantified in a more valid and equitable way?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Education Review Office (ERO) (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). The benefits to learner academic achievement, social adjustment, attendance and behaviour, is well documented (Averill, Metson & Bailey 2016; Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003; Brooking, 2007; Dobson & Gifford-Bryan, 2014; Epstein, 2013; Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Hornby & Witte, 2010; Lines, Miller & Arthur-Stanley, 2012; Mereoiu, Abercrombie & Murray, 2016; Mutch & Collins, 2012). 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 MOE's objective is to have parents as part of the collaborative decision-making process in education. Many previous MOE publications include this sentiment, including the NZ 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 & Reschley, 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 (1995). Epstein's (1995) Framework of Six Types of Involvement, has formed the constructs and language for a lot of the subsequent research on home-school partnerships (Averill et al., 2016; Epstein, 2013; Hornby & Witte, 2010; McDowall & Schaughency, 2017; Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). This could have possibly limited the scope and parameters of research completed to date as this research focuses on the behavioural indicators of parental involvement. In contrast to this literature on participation indicators, literature on partnerships, where learning and behaviour goals are created in powerful collaborations, predominantly focuses on individual education plans (IEP). This body of literature speaks of parent views being respected (Hornby & Witte, 2010), parents confidence growing (ERO, 2008a), joint ownership of goals (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2015), and a greater trust relationship and efficacy of family/whānau (Connor & Cavendish, 2018; Mereoiu et al., 2016).

Participation Versus Partnership Rationales

When comparing the effect size on learner achievement for each of the involvement behaviours of Epstein's participation behaviours, (Epstein, 1995) 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, Gijselaers, Ritzen & Brand-Gruwel, 2018). These factors score an effect size of 0.8 in Hattie's meta-analysis of home variables that impact achievement (Hattie, 2009). Hattie (2009) attributes 'effect size'quantities to factors that influence achievement. An effect size of d=0.2 may be judged to have a small effect, d=0.4 a medium effect and d=0.6 a large effect on outcomes. In contrast, Epstein's participation indicators of communication has an effect size of 0.39-0.47, homework 0.28, collaboration with community 0.47, volunteering 0.35-0.47, with decision-making having no effect at all (Robinson et al., 2015). Therefore, the behaviour with the greatest effect in home-school partnerships has

had the least amount of research to date, with the far larger body of research being based on factors that have a medium effect at best.

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 rationales for home-school partnerships. The first focused on child achievement outcomes, the second on the social democratic stance of empowering the parent, such as Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) continuum. They defined the child outcome-focused behaviour as participation, and the parent outcome-focused behaviour as partnership. According to Timperley and Robinson (2002), the social democratic approach to partnership is focused on the process of power sharing and equity within the relationship; in contrast to this, a student outcome focus is often seen as the dominant partner co-opting the other to participate. 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 my observation, 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 and whānau see these elements of partnership as naturally leading to the achievement outcomes the participation rationale 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 ERO (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 (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) states that understanding the cultural lens both partners have is a first step to power sharing. School leadership that has a strong belief that family/whānau have an essential role in the education of learners are also important (Barnes, Hutchings, Bright & Taupo, 2012; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2019).

Biddulph et al. (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 literature 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 Reschley (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 the te ao Māori context of relationships, there has been an emergence of tools that attempt to measure home-school partner relationships. The Auditor General's (2015) 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. The ERO use a self-review inquiry model, called the 'Evaluation framework for determining the quality of relationship' (ERO, 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 RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit (Ministry of Education, 2018) is the only tool to use a quantitative measure.

Attempts to Measure Home-School Partnerships

There have been three 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 on a continuum to meet needs and contexts (Lines et al., 2012; Richards et al., 2016). The RTI framework is heavily reliant on pre-set parameters and data to determine where on the continuum a partnership would sit, and therefore what interventions would be necessary for improvement.

The second is a continuum based on a hierarchical idea of the different forms of partnership (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Robinson et al., 2015).The third is the outcome scaling in the RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit (MOE, 2018). ERO (2018) found that the RTLB outcomes were problematic in that they were subjective, lacked moderation and when the scaling process was averaged it, "resulted in meaningless data unsuitable for reporting and decision-making purposes" (ERO 2018, p. 29).

Summary of Literature

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. The literature identifies a continuum of involvement behaviours through to powerful and robust partnerships in terms of what home-school partnerships may look like. To measure all these and maintain equity and cultural integrity within one quantitative outcome measure is problematic. 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 MOE.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods 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. 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 in New Zealand 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 author's 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 responded to this questionnaire.

Parent Participants

Parents of recently closed RTLB cases 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). These parents were from two cluster areas, as these clusters neighbour the researcher's cluster, and therefore, have a similar profile. Two cluster managers were invited to forward the survey link to qualifying parent participants, a sample size of approximately 40 participants. A total of five participants responded to 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 Participation

The questionnaire was completed by the MOE after being sent an invitation and introductory letter. The participants 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. Questionnaires also elicit potentially more honest responses as it is 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 10 weeks for responses.

Questionnaire A: Resource Teacher of 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).

New Zealand Ministry of Education

A qualitative questionnaire was forwarded to the Ministry of Education offices in Wellington, along with an introductory letter. The MOE formed a group with the appropriate knowledge to answer the questionnaire. The questionnaire had the advantage that the participants were 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 MOE 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 MOE as part of ethical considerations. It was important to provide the MOE an opportunity to imagine opportunities rather than focusing on deficiencies using an Appreciative Inquiry strengths-based approach (Fifolt & Lander, 2013).

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 generalisable, 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 the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct (2015), the project was deemed by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee to be low risk.

RESULTS

The main result findings that relate to the inquiry question of the two surveys and the questionnaire will be discussed separately as each comes from a different perspective. 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.

Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour Survey

Of all the RTLB surveyed, 60% of respondents had no idea how the MOE 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.

A majority of surveyed RTLB (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 (2018) of reaching an overall team judgement (OTmJ) all of the time; in fact 37% reported as never being able to use an OTmJ. The majority of RTLB respondents (70%) report on having 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.

Figure 1 shows which 'voice' is more frequently included by the surveyed RTLB 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.

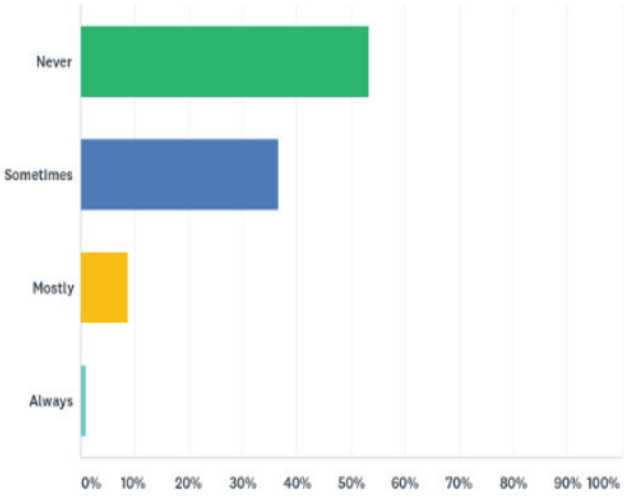
From the comments of participating RTLB, some of the reasons for this bias emerges:

> *"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)*

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



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

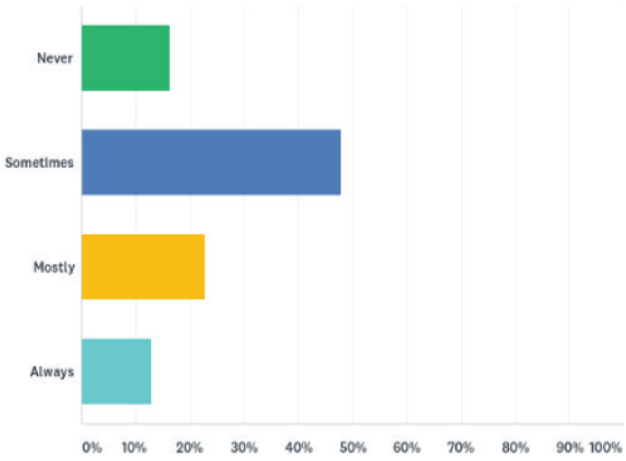
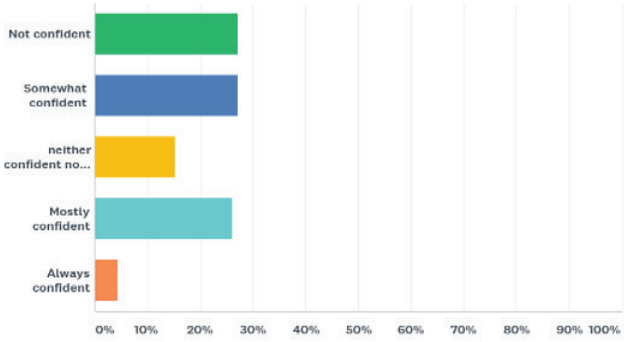


Figure 1 Which 'voice' is more frequently included in outcome measurement decisions.

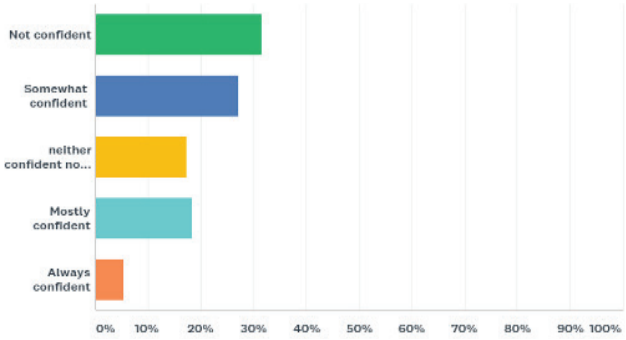
Consistency of RTLB Practice

The results also show that 41% of RTLB surveyed are not aware of any cluster-wide methodology for collecting the home-school partnership outcome data. A further 22% of RTLB surveyed reported some general cluster-wide guidelines, with 20% using the rubric provided in the RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit (2018). Of those surveyed, 49% of RTLB felt mostly confident that their interventions improved home-school partnerships, with 35% feeling somewhat confident. Figure 2 is 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?



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



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

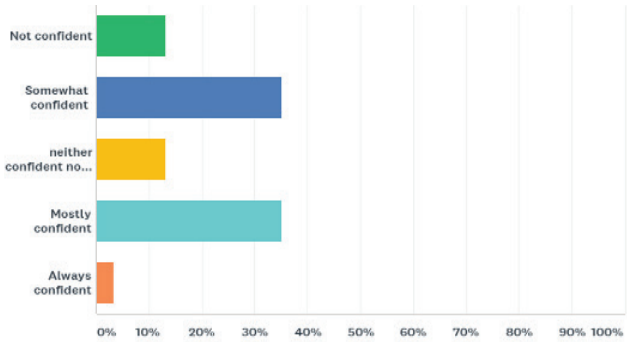


Figure 2 RTLB confidence in equity, validity and cultural-responsiveness.

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 any way 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 (page 40) 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 barriers to being able to complete a valid outcome measure were 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 MOE 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 parent survey did not have a large number of respondents, with only five returning data. This in itself could be indicative of the relationship barriers that exist between either home and schools, or RTLB and homes. While the imbalance of participation numbers between the RTLB and parent respondents is large, the surveys sent were gathering data from the different lenses and were treated separately so as to not minimise the parents who did respond.

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)

"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 were 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 know the school either agrees or mostly agrees 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 Questionnaire

The questionnaire revealed that the MOE identified the home-school partnership outcome as an important outcome to measure due to the impact on learner outcomes this relationship has. The intention of the outcome measure is to demonstrate the positive

Table 1

RTLB Identified Barriers to Validity of Outcome Measure

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Your lack of understanding of what a home-school partnership is	4.35%	4
You forget to complete either the pre or post outcome measure	8.70%	8
I have never experienced any barriers	13.04%	12
A lack of a rubric for the outcome in the Professional Practice Toolkit	21.74%	20
Difficulty reaching agreement between home and school	23.91%	22
Communication difficulties with teachers	25.00%	23
Parents or teachers are new to the school	25.00%	23
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
Cultural differences between the home and school	35.87%	33
A lack of understanding of teachers and/or parents of what a home-school partnership is	39.13%	36
A lack of time to have a robust discussion with teachers or whanau	40.22%	37
Communication difficulties with parents	41.30%	38
A strained relationship between home and school	48.91%	45
Total Respondents: 92		

Table 2

RTLB Identified Enablers to Validity of Outcome Measure.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A reminder system to complete the outcome	10.00%	9
I think I already have valid practice and do not need further help	14.44%	13
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
Across cluster and within cluster moderation	21.11%	19
More time to discuss home-school partnerships with whanau and teachers	30.00%	27
A home-school partnership goal within the collaborative action plan	30.00%	27
A clear policy about outcome methodology	33.33%	30
Two separate outcome measures representing teacher voice and whanau voice	37.78%	34
A data-gathering tool to include the voices of home and school	38.89%	35
A rubric to support judgments	42.22%	38
Knowledge of how the Ministry of Education uses the outcome data	50.00%	45
Total Respondents: 90		

impact RTLB can have. It is currently mandatory for RTLB to report this outcome to the Ministry of Education. In 2015, the Ministry initiated the need for RTLB to work towards reporting on the strength of the home-school partnership.

The MOE states that, *"as this was a new aspect of outcome measurement, reporting on it required clusters to develop a moderation process to ensure consistency of data reporting."*

The questionnaire invited the MOE to comment on how useful the outcome data was for their purposes. The response indicated they view the outcome data as being useful at cluster level:

> *Having a big-picture view of the outcomes of RTLB work helps clusters make wise choices about how best to support teachers and learners and helps inform future practice."*
>
> *The Ministry expects RTLB practitioners to be responsive to feedback they gather and report on and act on it.*

In their review of the RTLB service, ERO identified most clusters were using the RTLB outcomes framework and were data-rich for individual case data, however were not collating and analysing their data. ERO suggested next steps were for clusters to identify patterns and trends including what works for learners. It is expected the home-school partnership feedback reports are used primarily by RTLB practitioners and cluster leadership to show progress and for cluster's continuous improvement. Trends will usually be primarily at the level of case-types.

The MOE identified several barriers when using the outcome measures to gather and analyse home-school partnership data:

> *The Ministry is aware outcome measures can reflect circumstances beyond the effect of RTLB involvement, for example multiple school interventions occurring concurrently."*
>
> *"Feedback is limited to what parents, whānau and teachers feel comfortable sharing with each other. Those inherent limitations must be considered when using the data."*

The ERO report, published in 2018, concluded that the unreliability of outcome measurement judgements made was due to a lack of moderation processes within and across clusters. Further, averaging outcomes data resulted in data being unsuitable for reporting and decision-making purposes.

The 2018 ERO report notes the outcome framework is broad and subjective, and further, when averaging student outcomes, data became meaningless due to the quantitative nature of the data. The lack of any expectation of what would be deemed appropriate progress on the scale also renders the data useless to use as evidence of intervention impact.

The MOE reported there is work underway to improve the consistency and reliability of data reporting in response to ERO's recommendations. They also reported that a strength of the outcome is that:

> *The data is collected by experienced professionals in a standard format and reflects the views of parents/whānau and teachers.*

When asked about how equitable the MOE thought the home-school partnership outcome measure was, they responded:

> *We are unsure of the intended meaning of equitable in the context of home-school partnership data.*

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. Biddulph et al. 2003, ERO, 2016, 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 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 MOE 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 2018 ERO report 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 & Schneider 2002; Lines et al., 2012; Ryan, 2006).

Consistency.

The RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit (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.

Not one 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 is compromised. 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 would be beneficial, 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. A lack of confidence that this is the case was clear 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 MOE 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 in to a single outcome quantity. This inconsistency allows for inequality and renders the outcomes less valid.

Relationship

Communication

The MOE acknowledges that the data gathered may be limited due to the reliance on "what parents, whānau and teachers feel comfortable sharing with each other."

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) talk about communication breeding communication, which leads to more efficacy and equitable partnerships (Bull et al. 2008; Connor & Cavendish, 2018).

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 representative of the RTLB-home partnership, and if this is the case, how sustainable is the partnership when the RTLB are no longer involved? The MOE confirms this when they acknowledged that the outcome measure can reflect circumstances beyond the effect of RTLB involvement. The ERO (2018) report also raised the concern of the sustainability over time of RTLB interventions.

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 (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 case work.

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 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 strength of partnership between home and school, the MOE states that all the outcomes are to measure the, "positive impact of RTLB work" (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 28); 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 ERO (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 that may not align 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 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.

Intent

One unexpected finding is the lack of understanding around the original intent of the home-school partnership outcome for the RTLB. The RTLB seem to have the understanding that the outcome data was primarily intended for the MOE to use from comments such as:

> *"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)*

This aligns with data that showed half of the RTLB respondents stated that knowing how the MOE uses the outcome data collected would be the number one enabler for them to collect more valid data. It could be argued that this perception is further enforced by the outcomes being mandatory to report against and dictated in the RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit (Ministry of Education, 2018).

The MOE indicates that it is at the cluster level "*a moderation process to ensure consistency of data*

reporting" is formulated, and further, that it is their expectation that RTLB practitioners are responsive and act on the outcomes data they collect. They state, *"It is expected the home-school partnership feedback reports are used primarily by RTLB practitioners, and cluster leadership to show progress and for cluster's continuous improvement."* Further to this, they state that any trends identified will primarily only be case-type. This lack of clarity could have impacted on the validity and potential usefulness of the data collected, as well as the amount of agency at cluster level.

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 MOE as well as RTLB cluster and individual practices.

Ministry of Education Actions

The MOE needs to consider what their epistemology base is for the research, and what their paradigm is 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 author'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 (ERO, 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. The focus of the RTLB intervention would therefore be working with schools and whānau to build powerful partnering relationships. The intervention could include aspects that are important to whānau such as power sharing, collaboration, relationship, care for learners, respect of Māori identity (Berryman & Woller, 2013), as well as a holistic and values-based approach to the curriculum (Barnes et al., 2012). 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 and 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 MOE 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 would enable a more equitable partnership (e.g. Bull et al., 2008; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

A clarification about the purpose of the outcomes data for clusters would also improve validity. If clusters were given a clear mandate that the primary purpose of the data was to inform and improve their own practice they could take more ownership and tailor systems to meet this need for their own contexts. Capability building for cluster management teams on data collection and use would be of great benefit.

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, building school and parent capability for powerful partnerships. 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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APPENDIX A: HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP OUTCOME MEASURE

RTLB Professional Practice Toolkit, 2018, p. 31.

Home/School partnership outcome measure

At the start of RTLB involvement (at the initial meeting) and at case closure (at the review meeting) feedback is gained from teachers and parents/whānau to gauge the strength of the connection between home and school, and the extent to which the partnership supports student learning.

1	Limited connections and partnership building
2	
3	
4	Developing connections and partnership building
5	
6	
7	
8	Established, strong and effective connections and partnership building
9	
10	