Research paper

Teachers' perspectives of social-emotional learning: Informing the development of a linguistically and culturally responsive framework for social-emotional wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand

Amanda Denston [a,*], Rachel Martin [b], Letitia Fickel [a], Veronica O'Toole [a]

[a] Faculty of Education and Child Wellbeing Research Institute, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, 8140, New Zealand
[b] College of Education, University of Otago, PO Box 56, Dunedin 9054, Child Wellbeing Research Institute, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, 8140, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' understandings of social-emotional wellbeing contribute to developing ways that teachers can engage with students to develop social-emotional skills. This collaborative research project adopted a critical participatory action research methodology, informed by Kaupapa Māori research principles. The perceptions of teachers were explored through wānanga (ethical spaces for research) to inform the development of a co-constructed culturally and linguistically sustaining framework for social-emotional wellbeing. Findings suggested that creating a framework requires being informed by indigenous models of wellbeing. Results suggest that developing such a framework requires teachers to develop understandings of their own social-emotional competencies, as well as their students.

1. Introduction

Internationally there is a growing concern for the wellbeing of children. Emotional and behavioural difficulties are being experienced by an increasing number of children from increasingly younger ages (Brauner & Stephens, 2006). For many children, these difficulties contribute to maladjustment over time (Gardner & Shaw, 2008) and may compound during adolescence when a range of additional risk factors emerge (Patton et al., 2012; UNICEF, 2020). A recent UNICEF (2020) report on child and adolescent wellbeing outcomes rated Aotearoa New Zealand 35th out of 41 OECD nations. This data echoed earlier findings from the Education Review Office (ERO) (2015a, 2015b), indicating that many students within primary and secondary school contexts are not experiencing the advocated outcomes for student wellbeing, which include "satisfaction with their life at school, their engagement with learning and their social-emotional behaviour" (ERO, 2015a, p. 6). These troubling low rates of wellbeing among youth in Aotearoa New Zealand, have been associated with negative educational outcomes, including increased rates of disengagement, stand downs, suspensions, and school abandonment (Bishop et al., 2009). Such disparities in both wellbeing and educational outcomes among youth are worse for Māori (Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand) and other marginalised youth (Bishop et al., 2009; Education Counts, 2020b).

The global concern regarding youth wellbeing has led policy makers and educationalists to advocate for a more holistic approach to education that includes social-emotional learning (SEL) alongside cognitive development (OECD, 2015). The study presented in this article is drawn from a multi-year critical participatory action research project that aimed to co-construct with teachers a socially, culturally, and linguistically responsive framework for SEL reflective of the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. We present here findings from the first phase of the research, which focused on developing a context-sensitive, shared understandings of social-emotional wellbeing and learning with the teachers in the project.

* Corresponding author.
  E-mail address: amanda.denston@canterbury.ac.nz (A. Denston).

1.1. Current perspectives on social-emotional wellbeing and learning

The concept of *wellbeing* has continued to gain purchase in everyday social discourse, as well as across a range of professional, disciplinary, and policy domains (McLeod & Wright, 2015). Although some have argued that wellbeing remains an elusive and often ambiguously defined concept (McLeod & Wright, 2015), most constructions define wellbeing as having several domains, including physical, economic, and social and emotional wellbeing (Manning & Fleming, 2019). Social and emotional wellbeing relates to how an individual thinks and feels, not only about themselves but about others, which fosters the development of resilience and the ability to manage challenges (Manning & Fleming, 2019, p. 7). Conceptions of social and emotional wellbeing and development are subjective and influenced by culture and spirituality. According to Lu (2008, p. 290), "culture not only provides a specific set of conceptions of SWB [subjective wellbeing] but also constructs particular pathways for its achievement." From an Indigenous perspective, notions of social and emotional wellbeing are inextricably linked and are not viewed as distinct concepts. Moreover, perceptions of wellbeing are context-sensitive, including connections to 'place' and the social and political history of colonisation and marginalisation. The centrality of culture in how social and emotional wellbeing is conceptualised means that educational practices focused on developing the social-emotional wellbeing of young people need to be culturally and linguistically responsive (Macfarlane et al., 2017; Weisz et al., 2005).

SEL, as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2020), is a developmental process that relates to one's ability to regulate emotions, set goals, develop and maintain relationships, and make decisions. The process is underpinned by the development of five key competencies that include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2020). SEL programmes have been identified as an effective educational practice for developing social-emotional wellbeing in students (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2001; Pentz, 2003; Weare & Nind, 2011; Weisz et al., 2005). Such studies have demonstrated long-term effects on various areas of functioning, including relationships and school attendance, up to four years following participation (Taylor et al., 2017). The identified associations between social-emotional competence and academic outcomes have contributed to the prominence of wellbeing in education, making SEL a central tenet for schools and teachers.

For example, in the United States (US), the role of schools in delivering programmes related to the prevention and promotion of societal issues has been evident since the late 1990s. However, the delivery of such programmes was viewed as disparate to legislation, including the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act, which emphasised the role of test scores as measurement of academic outcomes (Kress & Elias, 2006). Such legislation, which associated funding with academic outcomes, threatened the implementation of programmes targeting societal issues in the face of growing need. While early reviews did not analyse programmes for specific effects within these associated outcomes, these have become increasingly important as conclusions around the effectiveness of programmes began to be drawn from identified outcomes (Corcoran et al., 2018). In their review of the effect of SEL programmes on academic outcomes, Corcoran et al. (2018) identified large effects for reading (ES = 0.25), mathematics (ES = 0.26), and science (ES = 0.19). These effects were consistent across elementary, secondary, and elementary/secondary educational contexts. They also found that fostering social-emotional competencies in children had widespread and long-term effects beyond academic outcomes, including

attitudes, behaviour, conflict, interpersonal skills, and mental health. While the identified effects of variables are undoubtedly influenced by research methodologies enacted (see Corcoran et al., 2018), schools are now viewed as an environment where social-emotional capacities of children can be fostered (Durlak et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2016), alongside the development of cognitive skills. Moreover, some researchers have noted that developing social-emotional capacities in learners has also been viewed as a mechanism for school improvement (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015).

Research has substantiated the effectiveness of evidence-based programmes in schools to develop social-emotional wellbeing, and improved academic outcomes for students (Durlak et al., 2011; Weare & Nind, 2011), and this has come to be considered as best practice (Greenberg et al., 2001; Pentz, 2003; Weisz et al., 2005). Nonetheless, implementation within school contexts remains a complex issue. In fact, the implementation of programmes at whole school level has not been supported consistently within research findings (Durlak et al., 2011). As Durlak (2016) noted, clear differences exist between the conceptions of a programme and their lived reality within schools.

One key factor in these differences relates to implementation fidelity. To achieve positive effects, programmes require rigid adherence to implementation procedures within tightly controlled conditions (Barry et al., 2017; Durlak, 2016). However, research has found that programmes are often implemented on an ad hoc and discrete basis rather than being streamlined as part of a comprehensive curriculum of SEL (Barry et al., 2017; Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015). Ad hoc implementation has been demonstrated to be a threat to the efficacy of programme outcomes (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015).

While important aspects have been identified regarding the implementation of programmes (see Durlak, 2016), findings regarding the effects of existing SEL programmes by ethnicity are notably inconclusive (Durlak et al., 2011; Weare & Nind, 2011). Scant attention has been given to research that examines the role of culture within pedagogical practices across contexts (Loinaz, 2019). Given the increasing cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of schools, it has also been argued that best practice in this field should also include meeting the specific needs of children and their communities by developing social-emotional wellbeing practices and programmes that are culturally and linguistically responsive (Barnes, 2019; Macfarlane et al., 2017; Weisz et al., 2005). Being responsive to culture and language in SEL programmes could support the development and implementation of more sustainable and effective programmes, which Durlak (2016) has identified as a research priority for the field, alongside more qualitative research to understand within teacher processes (Corcoran et al., 2018).

1.2. The role of teachers in developing social-emotional wellbeing in students

The role of teachers as an influential factor on student emotions in the classroom (Frenzel et al., 2009; Uitto et al., 2015), as well as in the development of social-emotional wellbeing in students, has been clearly identified in research (Durlak et al., 2011; Zembylas, 2007). This influence is complex but appears to be related to the perceptions teachers hold about themselves and their students in relation to social-emotional wellbeing. These perceptions, which are underpinned by teachers' own cultural perspectives and understandings of emotions and social-emotional wellbeing, as well as their knowledge, skills, and competence in relation to SEL, strongly influence the implementation and success of programmes seeking to develop social-emotional wellbeing in students. Research has found that teachers who perceive wellbeing as an

inherited and non-malleable trait in students may be less likely to support the implementation of social-emotional wellbeing programmes (Kress & Elias, 2006). In contrast, teachers who view themselves as key agents of change have been noted to have greater motivation to implement such programmes (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). These teachers were suggested to hold higher levels of self-efficacy in terms of their ability to create change through SEL (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003).

Teachers' own social-emotional understandings and competencies are influential because they can affect the approach taken to develop social-emotional wellbeing in students and the interactions they have with students. Teachers who are aware of their own social-emotional competencies are more cognizant of how emotions influence interactions with others (Martinsone & Damberga, 2017). They can manage classroom relationships effectively and are proactive in their use of verbal and emotional cues with students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Martinsone & Damberga (2017) found that few teachers focused on their own social-emotional competencies when implementing SEL programmes. Teachers tended to focus on content material and student discipline, which affected their ability to focus on inter- and intra-personal skills (Martinsone & Damberga, 2017). They concluded that the effectiveness of SEL programmes was related to teachers' own social-emotional skills, as well as their ability to be self-reflective. Given the vital role of teachers in supporting student social-emotional wellbeing, Elbertson et al. (2010) have suggested that focusing on teachers' own social-emotional knowledge and competencies is crucial to the field. Recent research confirms this need, also acknowledging that more research is needed to inform and support teachers (Dolev & Leshem, 2017; Jennings et al., 2019), including teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand (Wylie & MacDonald, 2020).

1.3. Student wellbeing within the Aotearoa New Zealand context

Student wellbeing has become a central focus within both the wider social and educational contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is evidenced in the national Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy released in 2019, which outlines governmental aspirations across all aspects of wellbeing, including physical, emotional, social, economic, and cultural (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019). It is expected that as key social institutions, schools will be guided by this strategy toward aligned educational outcomes, including increasing equity of educational outcomes by providing an education that: "build [s] knowledge, skills and capabilities, and encouragement to achieve potential and navigate life's transitions"; and ensuring that children and young people experience "a sense of belonging, living free from racism and discrimination, care for others, having good relationships, and being connected to identity" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019, p. 18–19).

The development of this national strategy was partly in response to the longitudinal data related to the growing disparities in wellbeing and educational outcomes experienced by students, including Māori, Pacific, and English as additional language speakers, as well as those with special education needs (Ministry of Education, 2008). Disparities are notably worse for some Māori students. Within educational settings, Māori students are less likely to report that teachers will treat them fairly or that teachers will hold high expectations of them (Crengle et al., 2013). Male Māori students are twice as likely, and female Māori students are three times as likely, to experience stand-downs and suspensions as their European/Pākehā counterparts (Education Counts, 2020a). Māori and Pacific students are experiencing the greatest declines in school attendance in comparison to European/Pākehā and Asian students (Education Counts, 2020b). By Years 9 and 10 (Grade 8 and 9), two in every 100 Māori students are frequent truants, while 34 of every 100 Māori students leave school without a qualification (ERO, 2015a).

Disparities in wellbeing and educational outcomes experienced by students may be associated with how well-placed schools are to respond to student wellbeing. Research by Education Review Office (2015a), in a sample of 159 primary (kindergarten to Grade 5 or 7) schools, found that 11% of schools extensively focused on wellbeing. A further 18% of schools promoted and responded well to issues around wellbeing, while 48% of schools promoted and responded to wellbeing to a reasonable degree. Secondary schools (Grade 6 to Grade 12), overall, were clearly less well-placed to support student wellbeing. In a sample of 68 secondary schools, Education Review Office (2015b) found that 16% ($n = 11$) of schools were extensively focused on student wellbeing. A further 57% ($n = 39$) of schools held variable practices, while of the remaining 26% ($n = 18$) of schools, 14 faced substantial challenges in promoting and responding to wellbeing, and four schools experienced challenges to the degree that they were unable to promote wellbeing. Overall, while some schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, appear to be well-placed to support the development of wellbeing in students, there was high variability. The research also highlighted the role of community factors, including poverty and social deprivation, in developing wellbeing. The link between community and school was clear; community factors influenced student behaviour, which in turn influenced the capacity of the school to support and respond to wellbeing.

Two other policy documents frame the education context regarding enabling student wellbeing. The first is the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2015), which guides learning progressions for students. Only one of eight learning areas in the curriculum explicitly addresses wellbeing, Health and Physical Education. Here, wellbeing is conceptualised in terms of how learners can promote their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. Moreover, across the achievement objectives that represent levels of knowledge, understanding, and skills, wellbeing only features within physical activity and community resources. The second policy document is called *Our Code Our Standards* from Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (2017), which outlines the underpinning values of the profession, and guides the professional expectations and standards that are expected of all teachers in terms of effective teaching practice. It places a clear emphasis on the wellbeing of learners throughout all facets of the code of professional responsibilities and its accompanying standards for teachers.

2. Developing wellbeing in Indigenous students in Aotearoa New Zealand

According to Macfarlane et al. (2017), the social-emotional learning and motivation of Māori students are more likely to be supported by teachers when they have developed their knowledge of and empathy regarding the identity, languages, and worldviews of Māori students. As such, the wellbeing of students is likely to be enhanced for Māori learners when schools acknowledge and work with Māori ways of knowing. Māori values are a foundation for Māori knowledge and are understood as entwined and not discrete constructs. They are holistic and underpinned by socio-cultural considerations that are heavily embedded within whānau (extended family group), hapū (sub-tribe), and iwi (tribe) (Savage et al., 2014). Examples of values include whanaungatanga (intergenerational support process for building strong relationships), kotahitanga (encouraging identity through an ethic of bonding, inclusiveness, and unity) and manaakitanga (an intergenerational

reciprocal ethic of care, kindness, and respect). Within an educational context, these values do not focus on the control or punishment of learners but empowers and supports both learners and teachers when facing challenges, providing them with the ability to resolve conflict (see Savage et al., 2014).

For Māori, their history has been deeply embedded within oral traditions related to SEL (Macfarlane et al., 2017). However, since colonisation, the existence of Western streams of knowledge and indigenous epistemologies has resulted in dominant Western notions underpinning any efforts to address Māori knowledge and aspirations and how these are taught and evaluated within education (Harris, 2008). This has occurred at the expense of Māori. Recent ideological change has resulted in the repositioning of how Māori ideologies and values are viewed within education, including the introduction of *Our Code Our Standards* (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017) for teacher practitioners. This change not only explicitly honours the founding document of New Zealand, te Tiriti o Waitangi, the te reo Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi, which is the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand but clearly demonstrates implications for teaching practice. Such changes have been instrumental in enabling Māori ideologies and values related to social-emotional wellbeing to re-enter education (Macfarlane et al., 2017). However, one of the challenges in supporting and sustaining social-emotional wellbeing outcomes for Māori students remains at the practitioner level and relates to ensuring that practitioners have access to culturally and linguistically responsive evidence-based practice.

The need to develop and implement new practices within schools that focus on the wellbeing needs of Māori students and to ensure educators and schools achieve the vision held within the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and New Zealand Curriculum has become increasingly important (ERO, 2015a). Two such initiatives are Te Kotahitanga and its successor Te Hurihanganui. Te Kotahitanga sought to develop teachers' abilities to foster success for Māori within the secondary context through culturally responsive practices. Fundamental to this initiative was the focus on changing school structures to support teachers in making a difference in the educational achievement of Māori (Berryman & Bishop, 2009; 2012). Its successor, Te Hurihanganui, was an initiative for all schooling sectors that included a cross-agency approach to addressing deficit views against Māori, with the aim of accelerating achievement and wellbeing in learners (Ministry of Education, 2020). Such initiatives, while hopeful, are made vastly more complicated because of intergenerational trauma and disparate practices against Māori (Berryman & Eley, 2017).

2.1. Identifying the research need

The social nature of learning is inextricably linked to emotion and cognition (OECD, 2010); thus, supporting and sustaining social-emotional wellbeing in students requires that teachers hold pedagogical practices that are culturally and linguistically responsive. The extant literature on SEL has demonstrated the effectiveness of aligned programmes, as well as shown that knowledge and skills related to social-emotional wellbeing have the capacity to offer positive support to students (Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Moreover, research examining the implementation of SEL programmes in terms of teacher practices and pedagogies that support student wellbeing is apparent across educational contexts (e.g., Allen, 2017; Gerholm et al., 2019; Gottfried et al., 2019). However, there is less research on programmes that are underpinned by culturally and linguistically responsive frameworks.

Given this identified need, the aim of our research was to reposition how SEW and SEL were being viewed and taught in schools. Working with a small group of teachers from Years 4–10 (Grade 3 to Grade 9), the current research aim was explored within two phases: 1) to develop a context-sensitive, shared understanding of social-emotional wellbeing and learning with teachers that was culturally and linguistically responsive; and 2) to support teachers in developing and implementing SEL-focused pedagogies that enhance support for students' identities, languages, and cultures that are inclusive of the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. In doing so, we were mindful of Reicher's (2010) argument for the importance of capitalising on implicit or informal learning, as many abilities are developed through personal experience and practice, modelling and observation. The current article focuses on the first phase of the research aim that sought to develop shared understandings of SEW and SEL in teachers, which was guided by the following questions:

1. How do teachers perceive social-emotional wellbeing and social-emotional learning?
2. What are the identified teacher perceptions that can inform the development of an expanded construct of SEL that is culturally and linguistically sustaining?

3. Methodological approach

The research project was guided by Kaupapa Māori research principles, which supports the use of critical participatory action research (PAR) methodology. Kaupapa Māori research methodology has arisen in response to ongoing concerns that Eurocentric research practices are too often culturally inappropriate and harmful for Māori (Smith, 2005). Kaupapa Māori approaches utilise Māori principles and practices and is underpinned by te ao Māori worldviews (Māori ways of living and being) in co-constructing methodology and within the interpretation and dissemination of research (Macfarlane et al., 2014). Kaupapa Māori principles acknowledge the centrality and legitimacy of te reo Māori (Māori language), tīkanga (culture and customs) and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledges) (Smith, 2012). The current study was relevant to Māori aspirations while including non-Māori. As such, Māori were involved in guiding the research process from the commencement of the project, including whānau, hapū, and iwi.

Connecting our study with Kaupapa Māori principles and treating the teachers as co-researchers and the student participants as co-constructors of the findings enabled the development of shared understandings that empowered all involved (Te Aika & Greenwood, 2009). These principles guided our collaborative approach, in alignment with te Tiriti o Waitangi, thus, acknowledging tāngata whenua as the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand and the shared responsibilities of tāngata tiriti (those people living in Aotearoa New Zealand). The project received endorsement and support from the local Māori rūnanga (tribal assembly of authority) as a partner in the project, as well as approval from the participating schools, the university's research ethics committee, and the Māori consultation engagement group.

3.1. The research design

In line with the collaborative approach, a critical participatory action research design was utilised. This design is based on the democratic and collaborative model of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). The aim of this design is to understand the current effects of existing perspectives, structures, and practices to create new knowledges and ways of being. Such an approach is targeted at improving one's own individual practice and understandings of practices and the social dimensions in which these practices occur (Kemmis, 2007; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Fundamental to this

approach is the undertaking of research on a collective basis; thus, notions of the self are not individualistic but emphasise self-reflection in teachers at a collective level and at a depth. This approach further recognises that current ways of being are situated within wider historical and political contexts (Kemmis, 2007) that are interrelated and include socio-cultural, institutional, economic, and ecological forces (Martin, 2017). This means that self-reflection occurs in a plurality. Such an approach to action research has been viewed as a means by which evidence-based practice can be facilitated in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013) and has been previously used with indigenous peoples.

The research involved collaboration with two urban schools in a large city in New Zealand that included one primary and one secondary school. Both the schools and whānau held a shared concern for students' social-emotional and mental wellbeing. This concern may be related to the multiple traumatic events that have occurred in the past decade in the city where these students reside, which have resulted in notable on-going effects for individuals (see Dorahy et al., 2015; Lambert, 2014). One school was a contributing primary school, which in New Zealand contains students from Year 0/1 to Year 6 (5–12 years or Kindergarten to Grade 5). The other school was a secondary school that included students from Year 7–13 (12–18 years old or Grade 6 to 12). Leaders within each school identified two teachers ($n = 4$) who demonstrated an interest in working collaboratively with the university research team to develop their understandings around SEW. In addition, the deputy principals from each school, who held dual leadership and teaching roles, were also selected to join the research team in their leadership capacity only, although, for the first year of the study, one deputy principal was on leave ($n = 5$). One primary school teacher taught in a Level 2 immersion te reo Māori context with children from Years 4–6 (Grade 3 to 5). In New Zealand, bilingual education in te reo Māori and English is state funded and is characterised by the degree to which students experience te reo Māori in the classroom. In this classroom, children experienced te reo Māori 51–80% of their classroom time. The other teacher taught Year 6 students (Grade 5) within an English medium context. Both teachers from the secondary school taught students in Years 7 and 8 (Grade 6 and 7) within an English-medium context. In total, the four teachers worked with approximately 130 students.

3.2. Wānanga: the data gathering process

As noted, the current article reports the findings from the initial phase of the project, which focused on exploring the perceptions and understandings of social-emotional wellbeing held by the participating teachers during the first year of the project. To gather teachers' perceptions and understandings, data was collected via two wānanga that were held with the five teachers and four university researchers. Wānanga are part of Kaupapa Māori approaches to research. Wānanga are ethical spaces for research where individuals gather to share, discuss, deliberate, and consider ideas (Ermine, 2007). They are known as safe spaces because they uphold the mana (status) of all involved. In the current study, wānanga reflected Kaupapa Māori values that included the use of karakia (incantation), waiata (song), and the sharing of kai (food and drink) to reflect te ao Māori. Wānanga enabled all participants to be situated as learners while acknowledging the expertise of everyone; this enabled joint meaning making to occur between individuals. Wānanga were held during three separate research days. Each research day lasted for 6 hours, which aligned with a typical school day. The process for each wānanga was founded on whakawhanaungatanga, which fosters the development of relationships between individuals by connecting them to their

environment, their whakapapa (lineage), and whānau. During the first wānanga, all participants firstly engaged in pepeha, a tribal saying, which is a verbal map of oneself. Pepeha are a story of place, including where you are born and are from and the rivers and mountains that connect one to place, and the people one is connected to, including whānau. Through pepeha, connections and relationships were recognised for all participants, which supports the establishment of a safe space for learning from each other, and for the continued development of relationships, which was integral to minimise conflict moving forward.

Qualitative field notes were gathered during the first wānanga. During the second wānanga, the data was analysed, and the third wānanga provided an opportunity to further engage with the data following the period of noticing. Inherent in wānanga is the notion that all ideas are valid; therefore, no eligibility or ineligibility existed in terms of what could be recorded in the field notes or identified during analyses of data (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Because wānanga are safe spaces, the collection of data occurs only during the time of sharing so that the discussion of shared ideas is situated within that moment of time. As such, the field notes detailed the shared meaning-making through discussion and agreement that arose within each wānanga. Notes were written by a member of the research team, typically verbatim, and clarification was sought from participants regarding their shared ideas as part of the wānanga process to ensure that the worldviews of all participants were respected (Kennedy & Cram, 2010).

In the first wānanga, the elicitation of understandings and perspectives around SEW and SEL was carried out via discussing a range of topics related to SEL and SEW in relation to oneself and their current teaching practices. The elicitation was underpinned using two models of SEW that were linked to a third culturally and linguistically responsive model. The first model included te whare tapa whā, which conceptualises Māori health and wellbeing (see Durie, 1998). Importantly, te whare tapa whā reflects hauroa (health) and te ao Māori, which is the heart of Māori culture and from which stems Māori value systems (see Jackson et al., 2018). Te whare tapa whā is a holistic model that contains four interconnected elements, which is symbolized by a wharenui (meeting house). The elements include taha tinana (physical health), taha wairua (spiritual health), taha whānau (family health), taha hinengaro (mental health). These elements are grounded through he tātai whenua, the connection to the environment that acknowledges socio-political and historical contexts which underpin how Māori live. All elements within the wharenui are equally important to the health and wellness of individuals and/or their collective, which is dependent upon the balance that exists between the elements (Jackson et al., 2018). The second model included the model of SEL developed by CASEL (2020), as described previously. These two models merged to become interconnected, thus, reflecting he awa whiria (a braided river), a model developed by Macfarlane et al. (2015). This model merges indigenous Māori knowledge and practices with practices from Western science (Macfarlane et al., 2017); the streams of knowledge converge to form a new space where epistemologies are shared to create new knowledges. According to Macfarlane et al. (2015), these interconnected streams act more powerfully together than when acting independently, thus, reflecting New Zealand's partnership approach to te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi).

Over the course of the first wānanga, teachers shared their perceptions and understandings related to SEL and wellbeing, which were guided by a range of topics, as seen in Table 1, framed as open-ended that guided the conversation. This meant that each wānanga had its own discursive flow through the novel concepts and ideas elicited via the topics. The recorded qualitative field notes informed the data analysis, which occurred during the subsequent

Table 1

Eliciting teachers' understandings of social-emotional learning and wellbeing.

Defining SEL
Indigenous and Westernised models of wellbeing — Te whare tapa whā, CASEL
Synergism - Western SEW and Māori models of wellbeing
Define emotions. What is their purpose?
Situating views of emotion - a Westernised perspective
Situating views of Māori emotions within colonisation
Indigenous Māori ways of learning and healing
What are culturally responsive educational practices?
Situating SEW within cultural narratives

wānanga, thus, supporting the critical participatory action research approach. This approach emphasises the development of a story-line that recognises the historical, social, and situational constraints of participants and how these contribute to the research process and the shaping and analysis of data (Liamputtong, 2010), as well as acknowledging subjectivity and the positions of individuals involved in the research. Analysis is open to variation and differences in worldviews.

To identify pedagogical practices that would support the development of social-emotional wellbeing, teachers were asked to engage in a period of noticing between the first and second wānanga. We exclusively used Mason's (2001) concept of noticing, which is characterised as a collection of practices where the experiences of individuals enable them to live, to learn, and to inform future practices. It is an intentional stance that supports individuals, as active agents, to try out ideas rather than being passive recipients of ideas argued by others. In the current study, teachers were asked to engage in noticing on two distinct levels. The first level related to their own practice. Teachers were asked, "What do you notice about your own practice?" while engaging with their own previously gathered data (qualitative field notes from the wānanga) to detect their own themes and similarities. The second level included teachers being asked, "What do you notice about your students?" during daily practice. This approach enabled the teachers to focus on noticing aspects of their own social-emotional competencies and those of their students.

3.3. Analysing the data

Initial analysis of the data was carried out during a subsequent wānanga via open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), during which initial concepts were generated. To achieve this, teachers independently interpreted the field notes from the wānanga by engaging in "close line by line reading" (Given, 2008, p. 86). Teachers focused on commonalities, or variations and points of difference around aspects such as practice, which were annotated on sticky notes and aligned to the data. These initial codes were subsequently examined and discussed through axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) by the research team in relation to commonalities or differences. This enabled relationships to be identified between the commonalities or points of difference, resulting in the construction of tentative categories that were collectively derived. These categories were further refined during engagement with the data according to how they addressed each "axis of interest" (Given, 2008, p. 52) that eventually determined the themes that underpinned teachers' perceptions of social-emotional wellbeing. The following section outlines and discusses these findings.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Identifying key aspects of social-emotional wellbeing

The current research sought to identify the perception and understandings that teachers, as a collective, held around social-emotional wellbeing and how these could inform the development of a framework for social-emotional wellbeing that was culturally and linguistically responsive. Open coding identified numerous key aspects of social-emotional wellbeing, which were related to oneself within their social world. These key aspects were further refined via axial coding to identify connections between the aspects. The identified key aspects are presented in Table 2. Further engagement with the data enabled the key aspects to be integrated and for themes to develop. This engagement resulted in the emergence of one key theme, relationships.

While the identification of relationships aligns with CASEL's competency of relationship skills, in the current study, the theme of relationships was found to be multi-dimensional. These dimensions related to three key aspects that included how one related: to oneself, to culture and languages, and to learning. Teachers clearly identified that one's ability to develop and maintain relationships was dependent upon several aspects, which included communication skills and having quality receptive and expressive skills. Teachers also identified that communication skills were fostered by understanding emotions that enabled students to recognise and normalise feelings and associated behaviours in themselves and the ability to reframe experiences to enable one to view experiences from different perspectives. Importantly, teachers noticed that communication skills included understanding emotions and identifying emotional states in others, thus suggesting that developing social-emotional capacities extended beyond only focusing on oneself. The teachers identified that having such knowledge and skills would contribute to fostering confidence in students, as one teacher noted "being brave stepping out of their comfort zone" and to learn from new experiences, where previously, students were noticed by another teacher in their interactions, to "avoid challenges and risk and view failure as a negative." This suggests that teachers, in the current study, viewed competence in communication skills as integral to developing social-emotional wellbeing in students. Such an approach supports the explicit teaching of skills; however, such approaches are noted to be broadly focused on students and, as such, often require little preparation by teachers (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). This could affect levels of teacher motivation and self-efficacy regarding the implementation of the programme, but also their ability to develop understandings of their own social-emotional competencies.

4.2. The mutually reinforcing and sustaining nature of social-emotional wellbeing

The teachers involved in our research perceived that identified aspects of social-emotional wellbeing were entwined and mutually reinforcing, and sustaining. They viewed that within the school context, the roles of teachers and children were crucial to developing social-emotional wellbeing. Thus, while teachers viewed competence in skills as important to developing social-emotional

Table 2

An overview of key aspects identified during axial coding.

Connections with others
Communication skills (receptive and expressive)
Risk taking, sharing of self
Prioritising and valuing individuals
Co-construction of SEL
Perceptions of self, including self-efficacy
Emotions and emotional states—in oneself and others
Cultural understandings and perspectives that affect understandings of emotions and wellbeing
Normalising and reframing social-emotional understandings

wellbeing, it was entwined within a relational approach. Within a relational approach (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017), context and the relationships held within this context are integral to the development of social-emotional wellbeing. In the school environment, typically, these relationships include the teacher and student (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017), although importance is given to the interpersonal skills of the teacher and their ability to notice and respond to students' cues (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). However, in the current study, we found that the roles of teachers and students were interchangeable within interactions and that an individual could hold the role of either teacher or a learner. One teacher noticed that when he decided to share his feelings around task anxiety and failure with students, the students were more likely to "check in with him on his progress" towards the identified goals. Another teacher noticed that her teaching interactions were influenced by the responses and engagement in learning activities of a cohort of bilingual students of another teacher, which vastly differed from the responses of her own students. In te ao Māori, this is known as ako (to both teach and learn). Within the current study, ako empowered both teachers and students because it altered the traditional balance of relationships within the classroom. The teacher further noticed that ako resulted in "changes [that] were immediate, so powerful [that everybody] was empowered to give it a go." Interestingly, this was also noted to positively influence emotions, including anxiety. Thus, within a relational approach, the development of genuine relationships that fosters social-emotional wellbeing can be manifested in a bi-directional relationship by both teachers and students, which did not preclude the explicit teaching of skills and strategies. As one teacher mentioned, this contributed to "normalising the learning pit," as well as the development of "strategies to move anxiety." Differences appeared to exist between the two different educational contexts (primary/secondary school), as one teacher commented that "metacognitive processes [were] verbalised to children" within interactions within the primary school context that did not tend to occur within the secondary school. Overall, this suggests that approaches to social-emotional wellbeing should not be viewed as distinct within the teaching and learning process but that the effectiveness of programmes may be influenced by the interaction between relational and skill-based approaches, which may differ between educational settings.

4.3. Identifying emotional unease in teachers

Teachers reported that emotions were an area they perceived as being less developed in students. Teachers identified that weaker or less developed understandings around emotions and emotional states could lead to a diminished sense of wellbeing for students due to interpersonal challenges, loss of a sense of self, and emotional unease. However, the development of understandings around emotions appeared to be an uncomfortable area of focus for teachers within our research. As one teacher commented, it was "the prickly zone of learning." The reluctance or difficulty that teachers experience in addressing emotions with students and the effects of emotions on classroom environments (see Taylor et al., 2020) has been identified in research. Triliva and Poulou (2006) found that teachers do not discuss emotions in depth with students. This appeared to be related to teacher perceptions that emotions were difficult to introduce (Triliva & Poulou, 2006) and, therefore, teach to students. This suggests that teachers' own perceptions and competencies around emotions and emotional states influence the experiences that are provided to students. As such, the understandings that students hold are partially influenced by the emotional competencies and understandings of the teacher. As one teacher commented, "I'm anxious as a teacher." Teacher capacities may influence the degree to which social-emotional

competencies, including the language of emotions, can be developed in students. Interestingly, teachers in the current study viewed their personal emotional competencies as different to the emotional competencies they held as teachers. This contrasts previous research (Nias, 1996) that found personal and professional identities often become inseparable, which means that educational contexts become influential in the development of constructs underpinning teacher identities, such as self-esteem. In the current study, we viewed that the differentiation that was found between teacher and personal identities may be related to the habituation of interactions within classroom experiences. According to Mason (2001), teachers can become comfortable with the sameness of classroom experiences and are only likely to notice aspects that sit outside the norm of daily practice. Even so, it is more likely that teachers will unconsciously react to established patterns rather than sensitively reacting to situations (Mason, 2001). Such reactions can serve to reinforce stereotypes (Mason, 2001), although they could also serve to reinforce established responses to the myriad of emotions and emotional states that occur within the classroom context. In the current study, teachers identified the desire to be responsive to their classroom context and school environment, noting "frustration by being excited and passionate and not receiving responses from the children" and to attend more closely to the cultural and linguistic understandings of their students and themselves "by listening to what they say" and recognising that "they have so much in their kete [basket of knowledge]." For the teachers, this included acknowledging socio-historical influences that underpin the development of social-emotional wellbeing.

Teachers viewed that the identification and selection of pedagogical practices and activities could support the development of social-emotional wellbeing within their classroom context via a focus on emotions. They also viewed that supporting the development of social-emotional wellbeing in students through continued communication and interaction with their students would further support engagement with the whānau of students. As one teacher noted, sharing about oneself often led to the "sharing of culture and cultural stories" that were underpinned by "parents or whānau perspectives" that resulted in the gifting of care (known as koha) between teachers, students, and whānau. Teachers noted the importance of whānau in the social-emotional wellbeing of themselves and students, thus acknowledging te whare tapa whā (Durie, 1998). Teachers recognised that whānau walked into the classroom with the child, just as the teacher walks into the classroom with their own whānau influences. Overall, the findings suggest that developing cultural and linguistically responsive social-emotional wellbeing in students requires approaches that recognise the interplay between teachers and students and their perceptions and understandings, which are influenced by context.

4.4. Contextualising the research

This study comprised of a group of teachers who were selected because of their interest in developing their understandings around social-emotional wellbeing. As research has previously noted (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Kress & Elias, 2006), teacher perceptions are influential to social-emotional wellbeing. As such, findings may not extend to other groups of teachers because teachers often hold differing views on social-emotional wellbeing and related competencies in students. Future research would benefit from larger samples of teachers from across educational contexts. The current study was also contextually specific and acknowledged the centrality of te reo Māori and the status of Māori as tāngata whenua in alignment with te Tiriti o Waitangi. Exploring socio-historical influences on identified aspects would further support

understandings around wellbeing and the ability to develop a framework of social-emotional wellbeing, which would underpin the development of programmes that are culturally and linguistically responsive to our students, especially our indigenous peoples. While the identification of aspects influencing the development of social-emotional wellbeing may differ between contexts and cultures, thus, leading to claims of limitations, the current research acknowledges the ways in which different epistemologies, including Eurocentric and Indigenous, can be brought together to form new knowledges and thus, new ways of thinking and being.

5. Conclusion

The current study sought to build on previous empirical and theoretical enquiry to examine the process of co-constructing a culturally and linguistically sustaining framework of social-emotional wellbeing within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Critical to addressing the research questions was developing an understanding of how teachers perceived their own social-emotional wellbeing and that of their students. Social-emotional wellbeing was identified as developing within an entwined and mutually reinforcing system with students and teachers within the heart of its development. The role of whānau was viewed as paramount and inextricably linked to students and teachers. The data indicated that, for teachers, relationships were integral to developing social-emotional wellbeing. It was also identified that the development of aspects underpinning relationships would not only contribute to developing social-emotional wellbeing in students but also to enriching relationships between teachers and whānau, although this was made more complex by the identified differences between teachers personal and professional identities. This study highlighted the importance of ensuring teachers understand and can engage with the cultural foundations of social-emotional wellbeing. Teachers were able to view wellbeing through a holistic approach from te ao Māori, where the child is placed at the centre of the whenua (land) alongside family, spiritual, physical, and emotional elements, which become clearer and more relevant to strongly inform the educational space. This study reinforces the importance of understanding culture, language, and connections between individuals in the development of SEL programmes. Though situated within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand and our bicultural context, this outcome affirms the need for further research of educational models of social-emotional wellbeing and SEL that explicitly engage local cultural perspectives and worldviews.

Acknowledgements

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