



Getting to the ‘Heart’ of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL): Challenging Epistemology and Ontology in Emotion Theory

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Abstract

Educational psychology remains constricted by Westernised science’s universalising views. The teaching about emotions and their expression is a critical element at the core of educational psychology, but the underpinning ontology and theories appear to be largely unexamined. The importance of educational psychology was highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and with wellbeing initiatives accumulating, now, more than ever before, educational psychology research and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand must be called to account. Most existing programmes derive from anthropological, psychological and observation-based approaches, unquestioningly proposing that we all feel emotions because of, or in response to, certain occurrences in our lives. Dare we question this ‘given’ through a decolonising or cross-cultural lens? Māori values, holistic concepts and the diverse ways of knowing and being with emotion need to be considered as Aotearoa New Zealand looks beyond the dominant discourse of current SEL. In classrooms every day, practitioners discern how to discuss and respond to emotions, their own and those of the students in their care. This article invites educators to critique their own understandings of emotions and considers ways to challenge educational psychology and the practice of teaching about emotions to acknowledge the culturally diverse classroom contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Keywords Social and emotional learning · Holistic wellbeing · Indigenous psychology · Bicultural spaces

Introduction

Hedgehog is sad because he has no friends.

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Simplistic and brief, this line from a children's book mirrors the singular cause-and-effect way emotions are approached by many educators, and even prominent researchers in the field of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL). Current teaching of SEL recognises that Hedgehog is sad, and tries to compensate, but in doing so imposes a culturally limited conceptualisation of emotional understanding. The purpose of this article is to question the foundational theories and ontologies underpinning educational psychology and SEL approaches in schools, specifically in relation to emotions, while acknowledging the challenges of discussing the complex, subjective topic of emotions with our students.

Educational psychology has difficulties in moving toward an inclusive way of educating about emotions because psychology itself is a Westernised concept separating an aspect of the holistic experience of wellbeing. Not only is it non-holistic, but educational psychology also generalises and categorises certain aspects, creating concepts as 'facts' removed from the diversity of experience and context. Research calls for moves toward a more culturally inclusive approach than SEL currently provides, one that includes diverse knowledge and ways of being (Denston et al., 2022). The importance of culture in considering any psychological initiative, practice, or pedagogy was emphasised by Sir Mason Durie (1998, 2013) whose extensive body of work on pathways to Māori health, beyond a colonising history detrimental to Māori wellbeing, continues to inspire many educators and researchers. Durie highlighted the contradiction of promoting health and wellbeing while denying aspects of culture and identity, a contradiction evident in many SEL and educational psychology initiatives.

The term Cultural-Social-Emotional Learning (CSEL) emphasises the necessity of indigenising wellbeing curricula, since emotions are not universally conceived or experienced but have a cultural dimension. CSEL is more useful than SEL, which was developed in about 1987 by a group of North American researchers and advocates (Brackett et al., 2019) and is predominantly skills-based (O'Toole & Britt, 2019). Regardless of any claimed cultural and/or linguistic responsiveness, SEL is incongruent with Māori and Indigenous research, yet remains the dominant model.

An important disclaimer is that, as a Pākehā researcher, although I am drawing on Māori and Indigenous concepts, I cannot completely know or understand them in their original form. I am benefiting from the work of Māori and Indigenous researchers and taking care to preserve their understandings. I include words in te reo Māori (the Māori language) to carry the Māori concepts, challenge the dominance of the English language, and reinforce the diverse understandings discussed in this article. Māori words are translated in brackets on first use, and those used multiple times are included in a glossary at the end. From a Pākehā perspective, I have learnt a great deal from studying Māori and Pasifika points of view, and find that these learnings highlight the failings of current theory. As a cultural outsider, I present this work as a challenge to move toward CSEL and decolonising educational psychology.

Historically, Aotearoa New Zealand has had programmes focused on emotional regulation and management that respond to perceived problematic behaviours, for example Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) and Angus Macfarlane's

Hikairo Rationale (1997). Currently, there is a growing focus on teaching about emotions in response to the challenges of Covid-19, and in an attempt to improve poor mental health statistics (Boyd, Bonne & Berg, 2017; O'Toole et al., 2019; Ritchie, 2023). SEL research and programmes increasingly strive for cultural responsiveness, yet with little consideration of the epistemologies, ontologies, and taxonomies dominating SEL research and approaches. One recent critique of psychology in Aotearoa New Zealand claims that in order “to genuinely realise Te Tiriti aspirations” (Waitoki et al., 2023, p. 94), psychology must address the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems that marginalise Mātauranga Māori (Māori epistemologies) and hinder tino rangatiratanga (self-determination). The same applies to Educational Psychology. Symbolic gestures like taking Te Whare Tapa Whā in isolation from Durie's Whaiora (1998) are inadequate and do not compensate for the lack of wider understanding.

In recent research towards a linguistically and culturally responsive framework for social-emotional wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand, teacher-participants identified “developing understandings around emotions [as a] prickly zone of learning” (Denston et al., 2022, p. 399). The researchers found a perception that emotions are difficult to teach and proposed that teachers need to be taught “the language of emotions” so that it “can be developed in students” (Denston et al., 2022, p. 399). It seems that many educational psychologists are trying to find singular answers to pluralistic and complex issues. But clearly there is not *one* language of emotions. There are infinitely complex and nuanced epistemologies, ontologies, taxonomies, and languaging underlying emotions.

A 2016 survey of primary and secondary schools identified that most teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand felt they were ill-equipped to provide mental and emotional wellbeing support and that this was their dominant need for training to support wellbeing (Boyd et al., 2017). So, there is an identified need for schoolteachers in Aotearoa New Zealand to teach about emotions and their expression, but no appropriate pathways to support them in achieving this.

Theories of Emotion Underpinning SEL

Richard S. Lazarus (1991), with his cognitive-motivational-relational theory, makes a useful starting point for a synopsis of mainstream theory of emotion. Lazarus determined that each specific emotion had a “core relational theme” for example “sadness” is said to be caused by “having experienced an irrevocable loss” (Lazarus, 1993, p. 13). This statement recalls Hedgehog with no friends and the epistemicide of deciding on one homogenising observable reason for an emotion represented as a singular ‘truth.’ In the 1970s Lazarus and Nico Frijda (1993) established Appraisal theory based on the idea of ‘appraisal’ as the process involving emotion between cognitive awareness and action.

Emotional Appraisal (EA) remains the dominant emotional theory referenced in SEL research and utilised in programmes, including those in Aotearoa New Zealand. This version of SEL is well supported by CASEL, the Centre of Academic, Social and Emotional Learning in Chicago, who report that the benefits of SEL

include improved self-confidence, academic engagement and achievement, and behavioural management (Durlak et al., 2022; Greenburg et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). Further, SEL programmes assist with college and career success and CASEL claim that “SEL improves academic performance by 11 percentile points” (CASEL, 2024). CASEL promotes a “Universal, School-Based SEL approach” (Durlak, et al., 2022), and although moves have been made towards cultural diversity, these remain at the level of equitable access to SEL and have not made significant inroads into the conceptual basis of SEL.

ERO’s (2016) *Wellbeing for Success: A Resource for Schools* references the work of CASEL who are also cited as an international authority on SEL by New Zealand researchers (Denston et al., 2022; Macfarlane et al., 2017; O’Toole et al., 2019). CASEL promotes the RULER Approach to SEL, a programme sold to schools proposing that we all feel the same emotions in response to universal triggers from life events (Brackett et al., 2019). This approach, underlying the CASEL framework and its supporting research, teaches a ‘universal’ emotion vocabulary and literacy-focused skills and is even working on “develop[ing] a full suite of emotion skill assessments” (Brackett et al., 2019, p.156). This concept is further legitimised by Mayer et al. (2016) Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence (EI). Are understandings of emotions, their significance, and their expression so similar that such ‘standardised’ assessments could be justified?

Core values have recently been demonstrated to influence (or be reliable predictors of) emotion (Conte et al., 2023). Some authors argue that emotional psychology research since the mid-1980s has not substantiated previous theories but rather disproved them (Clore & Ortony, 2013). The Swiss Center for Affective Sciences at Geneva University has found demonstrable variations in appraisals across cultures (Cong et al., 2022). Klaus Scherer (1997) conducted extensive research into the relationships between emotion and culture, involving 37 countries, confirming variation and highlighting the limited demonstrability and consistency of emotional phenomena when applying positivist methodologies. Cultural differences in elicitation, display rules, naming, and grouping of emotions are now acknowledged (Keltner, Oatley & Jenkins, 2018). Despite decades of research on defining emotions and categorising appraisals, this pursuit is now considered somewhat futile due to inherent variability and subjectivity (Giner-Sorolla, 2019).

Including ‘Other’ Ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing into the Teaching of Emotions

Schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand accepts the bicultural foundation of our society, based on the 1840 Te Tiriti o Waitangi acknowledging Māori as tangata whenua (Indigenous people of Aotearoa). This understanding is required of all classroom teachers and educators as set out in *Standards for the Teaching Profession* (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2017). The dominance of Western psychology in SEL approaches, and the significant philosophical differences between these and Māori models, continues to highlight inequity and injustice for Māori school students. They join a school system still shadowed by a history wherein the Crown took control of

education in 1847 and began to use schooling as a process for ‘civilising’ Māori children. Reviewing this history from a Māori perspective, Maia Hetaraka (2024) notes that education became “a site of cultural surrender” and placed tangata whenua in “positions of powerlessness” (2024, p.17). Any endeavour to educate from a singular, Western Psychology ‘truth’ about the ‘facts’ about emotions perpetuates this history’s violence and could be seen as re-colonisation, re- ‘civilising’ of the final sacred frontiers of hearts and core ways of interacting with the world. This explains why tino rangatiratanga is vitally important in all educational initiatives, but even more so for those who teach the next generation about their emotions.

A major problem with psychology as a whole, including educational psychology and SEL in particular, is its disregard for context in the assumption of universality “based on White male regimes of truth” (Ciofalo, Dudgeon & Nikora, 2022, p. 3). Culture is “the biggest context” (Giner-Sorolla, 2019, p. 51). Acknowledging cultural and other contexts influencing emotion allows complex rather than singular concepts and leads towards CSEL. Subjects like history, languages, and social sciences contribute to students’ critical awareness of context—an immense topic with promise for future CSEL research.

If Te Tiriti o Waitangi is accepted as the basis of schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand, then Māori (and Indigenous) psychologies must be included in teaching emotions in our schools. Durie (2013) emphasised that preserving local traditions and beliefs is critical for Māori wellbeing; therefore, it is essential for successful wellbeing practices in Aotearoa New Zealand education. ‘Indigenous psychologies’ as a term may seem contradictory but nevertheless, it has become widely used in research that challenges Western psychology and offers new directions on the journey imbued with happiness and wellness, expressed in te reo as waiora (McMeeking et al., 2019). Indigenous psychologies are constructed from specific worldviews, linked to ecological, historical and cultural contexts, invoked to counter the systemic influences of dominant institutionalised cultures. (Ciofalo et al., 2022). Here, the terms Māori and Indigenous psychologies are used in the plural to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Māori and Indigenous cultures and the many different ways of seeing our psyche. This article embraces te reo, tikanga, and te ao Māori understandings, not in a singular way, but toward dynamic plural co-construction of knowledge that encourages an open, discursive space where heterogeneous cultural-social-emotional understandings are valued.

Concepts for Teaching Emotions in Aotearoa New Zealand

This section draws on insights relating to emotion and waiora from a range of Māori scholars and research, in particular, the He Ara Waiora framework (Te Tai Ohanga—The Treasury, 2021) to examine emotions and further challenge SEL. Numerous concepts could be explored from Mātauranga Māori to develop CSEL approaches and tangata whenua researchers have much scope in this area. From my positioning, work by Māori and Pasifika authors highlights shortcomings of current SEL theory and practice. The three Māori concepts of hinengaro, ngākau and wairua, are discussed here with that illumination in mind.

The concept of *hinengaro* combines thought and emotion (Durie, 1998). It is a concept that highlights that we all feel emotions on differing levels of consciousness drawing on complex epistemologies. "The word *hinengaro* that is standard today for mind or intellect in traditional language also represents the spleen or stomach" (Stewart, 2021, p. 80). Māori and Indigenous authors emphasise this inter-connected, whole-body way of knowing, thought and emotion (Durie, 1998; MacFarlane et al., 2017). Future CSEL research could explore the incorporation of these holistic whole-body conceptualisations.

The *ngākau* is a concept often called the metaphorical heart which is "the seat of emotion in the body, the place of affection and pain, and the feeling mind" (Jones, 2017, p.108). *Ngākau* is therefore of profound significance—connecting to the *ngākau* could be said to be the essence of CSEL in Aotearoa. Rose Pere gifted us her Te Wheke model of wellbeing, in which one of eight key dimensions of *whānau waiora* (collective wellbeing) is *whatumanawa* (the open and healthy expression of emotion): "Ranga Whatumanawa / Relating to the Emotions and Senses" (Pere, 2014, p. 3). *Whatumanawa* also conveys the concept of the "seat of emotions, heart, and mind" (www.maoridictionary.co.nz). Indigenous perspectives emphasise the need to infuse classrooms with more 'heart' or warmth while acknowledging and embracing cultural values and indigenous ways of knowing and being (Macfarlane, 2010; Macfarlane et al., 2017; Taleni & Surtees, 2024). In te ao Māori, the mind, body and spiritual dimensions of emotion converge within the *ngākau*.

The third Māori concept drawn on to challenge current SEL theory is *wairua*, which is related to both spiritual and religious manifestations by Māori informants (Dempster-Rivett et al., 2022) and their role in influencing emotions. *Taha wairua* is the most important element of wellbeing (Durie, 1998). "[T]he values, beliefs and practices related to *wairua* are essential to Māori conceptions of health and wellbeing" (Te Tai Ohanga—The Treasury, 2021, p.1). *Wairua* is often translated as 'spirit' but this terminology fails to capture its complex layers of meaning—the capacity to have faith, the manifestation of the spiritual world into the physical and human realms, a connection to *mauri*, which means life force, spiritual sustenance for the body, etc. (Durie, 1998; Ngawati, et al., 2018; Pere, 2014).

He Ara Waiora

He Ara Waiora is a "framework built on te ao Māori knowledge and perspectives of wellbeing" (Te Tai Ohanga -The Treasury, 2021, p.1). It has "potential to pioneer an internationally significant model for measuring and analysing wellbeing" (McMeeking et al., 2019, p. 7). He Ara Waiora was initially conceived to examine the New Zealand tax system and guide government policy, but has grown to be widely applicable and offers the ability to "monitor the state of wellbeing over time" (McMeeking et al., 2019, p. 7). Most relevant here is Version 2.0, which conceptualises wellbeing into a macro framework that attempts to clarify relationships "between the different elements of wellbeing" (McMeeking et al., 2019, p. 5). Through leadership from Hinerangi Raumati, the extensive Māori engagement has included 15 initial hui across the North Island, two *tikanga*

framework consultation hui, further development with a think-tank of pūkenga Māori (Māori academics and practitioners), followed by testing with Māori through five more nationwide hui focused on engagement. This process encompassed a fullness of wellbeing that requires sound cultural understandings. The Mātauranga Māori concept of Waiora was defined as follows:

A multi-dimensional and layered way of understanding wellness and happiness, that importantly is not a journey to wellbeing, but a journey imbued with wellness. Understood this way, Waiora was considered to appropriately anchor the moral imperative underpinning He Ara Waiora. (McMeeking et al., 2019, p. 61).

The Diversity of Emotions and a Pedagogy of the Heart

A recent article conceptualising a “pedagogy of the heart” presents an approach to education to improve opportunities for Pasifika students to thrive (Talení & Surtees, 2024; Talení et al., 2018). This pedagogy centres on the key Samoan values of alofa (love), tautua (service) and osiosiga (reciprocity). The authors make a case for prioritising these concepts across the otherwise historically, linguistically, and culturally diverse communities represented within the umbrella term ‘Pasifika.’ Rather than expecting assimilation to the Westernised culture dominant in English-medium schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, these authors challenge policy and educators toward “change that is responsive to Pasifika ways of knowing, being and doing” (Talení & Surtees, 2024, p. 4).

Similarly, CSEL and educational psychology need to be responsive to diverse ways of knowing, being and doing. Despite Educational Psychology generally not making room for diversity, indigenous psychologies point toward diverse ways of knowing, being and doing underpinning emotions. Rather than the external circumstance or happening causing the emotion, this proposal recognises that it is the needs, beliefs, morals, values, goals, ways of knowing, being or doing or anything significant to the individual within their cultural context that are either met or unmet in any moment, and are prioritised to the point at which emotions are triggered.

The ‘Pūtaka’ Concept

I will adopt the concept of ‘pūtaka’ in this article to represent the collective of these important culturally embedded underlying factors. Pūtaka is a Māori word with various meanings, including ancestor, progenitor, origin, cause, or a literal root (taproot of a plant) or base (of a hill). I am selecting ‘pūtaka’ as an appropriate idea to convey how needs, beliefs, morals, values, goals, ways of knowing, being or doing, or anything significant to the individual, get down to the *root* of the emotion, the *root* of holistic wellbeing. Other researchers may be better qualified than me to explore the languaging and conceptualisation of pūtaka, but here, in this article, I draw on it to help me to challenge the dominant narrative.

Western views often present scientific knowledge as absolute ‘truth’ whilst labelling all other forms of knowledge as mere “beliefs, opinions, intuitions and subjective understandings” (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p.120). Because pūtaka acknowledge diverse ontologies and epistemologies, it helps me take a step across the abyss, to broaden beyond the current Westernised educational psychology view of emotions. In my conceptualisation, the pūtaka are uniquely experienced, prioritised and appraised. Likewise, the resultant emotions are uniquely experienced and contextual. The exploration, acknowledgment, and expression of pūtaka, has the potential to connect us to the heart, as well as the head, focusing on fostering cross-cultural understanding and empathy rather than judgement and analysis. In this way, the expression of pūtaka can facilitate the ability to better see through another’s eyes as communication develops students’ increased self-awareness and mutual recognition.

Eight adult Māori survivors of childhood maltreatment reflected on what would have potentially helped prevent their involvement in crime, family violence, and mental illness. Key factors involved engaging in te ao Māori to establish tūrangawaewae (a place to stand with belonging and identity), nurturing wairua, and embracing pou (becoming a pillar of strength for themselves and others) (Dempster-Rivett et al., 2022). These factors could be seen as pūtaka, the root way of being, underneath the emotions the participants either expressed or suppressed during childhood. When pūtaka go unmet, when life’s events and stimuli do not align with our pūtaka, emotions are elicited. Other researchers have explored a range of Māori values with potential to make a difference in classrooms in Aotearoa, which could be collectively considered as pūtaka, for example: Aroha, Manaakitanga, Kotahitanga, Tiakitanga, Whanaungatanga, Mana tuku iho, Mana tauutuutu, Wairua (Durie, 1998; McMeeking et al., 2019; Pere, 2014; Stewart, 2021).

By shifting our discussion and communication of emotions to include the pūtaka that trigger emotion, we make room for the ontological and holistic aspects of te ao Māori (and many diverse ways of being that form part of the local context for students). This necessitates tika (a special care and respect) to open a multi-lingual, dialogical space for cross-cultural connections. Te ao Māori integrates cosmogenic narratives, metaphorical understandings, and holistic spirituality within te reo (Stewart, 2021).

As previously discussed, cognitive-motivational-relational theory links specific life occurrences, or stimuli, to certain universal appraisals and emotions. This foundational emotional epistemology has persisted in Western science for over six decades. This emphasis on stimuli (external, observable aspects of experiences) and resultant emotions must be challenged within educational psychology (SEL) in order to align better with Indigenous Psychologies’ deeper, holistic roots underneath emotion.

Approaches for Diverse Teaching of Emotions in Classrooms

In classrooms, practitioners regularly discern how to discuss and respond to emotions, including their own and those of their students. CSEL needs to be flexible

enough to accommodate multiple epistemologies and ontologies while remaining practically applicable. Practice is directly influenced by how educators view and think about the diversity of emotions. Many educators recognise the need for CSEL but are daunted or inadequately prepared for the task (Boyd et al., 2017; Denston et al., 2022). The separation of Western educational psychology from Indigenous psychologies offers no assistance to those educators wanting to better support Māori and students from minority groups in English-medium classrooms. While labelling & expressing emotions was established in the first section of this article as essential, the diverse ontologies, epistemologies and taxonomies underlying emotions must not be excluded from both theory and practice.

Developing Pictorial Resources as Invitations for Collaboration

One interconnected practice is using pictorial resources as invitations to discussions regarding Wairua, pūtake, hinengaro, the ngākau, and many holistic concepts surrounding emotion and waiora. Figure 1 helps to simply illustrate the idea of each child having unique pūtake underlying their emotions. In this image, the train has tanks with varying levels representing pūtake. Emotions are like indicators on the train's dashboard, metaphorical lights that require investigation to determine if it relates to one pūtake tank or another that needs refilling. Meanwhile, the switch stand lever signifies that there is a decision to be made based on the tank levels (not the emotions) to help the train go the best path for its waiora. The image fails to capture the interconnectedness and nuanced elements reinforcing a separateness not

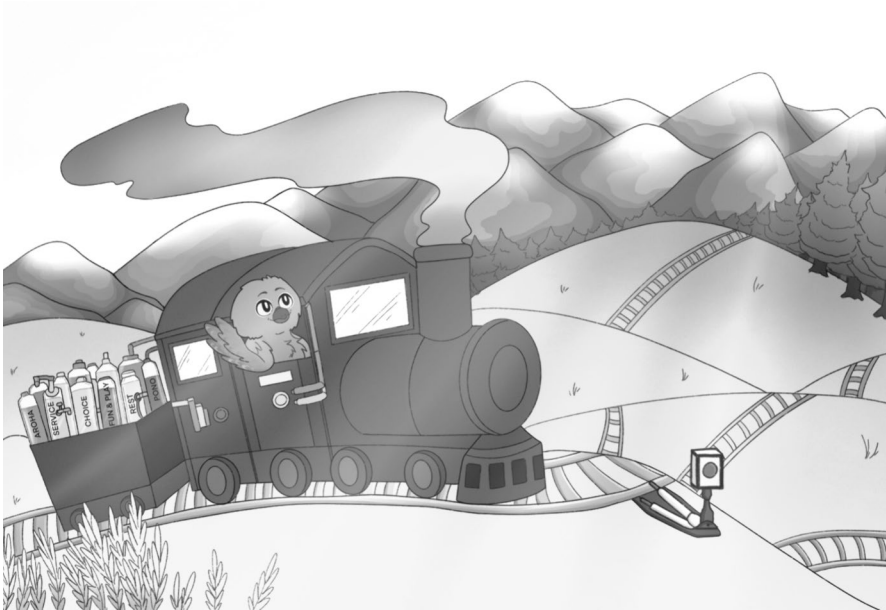


Fig. 1 Train image to help explain the HBEA concept

relevant to Mātauranga Māori. Yet, it is clearly on a journey, reflecting McMeeking, Kahi and Kururangi's (2019) emphasis that the journey is imbued with wellness, not toward a particular destination. The tracks branch off many ways and there is no end to them. The bird has the potential of becoming a familiar character for young children, while also avoiding over or under association with specific human images and concepts. Further research is needed to develop culturally responsive resources that invite a wide range of open discussion regarding diverse pūtake and emotions. This image has many limitations but is a way of using a metaphor to illustrate aspects of complex, diverse processes.

Primarily pictorial community co-construction resources make room for the creation of local languaging and cultural understandings around the images while reducing researcher influence or languaging. Artwork and pictures need to incorporate new research as they emerge, but they are merely one way of inviting discussion into the diversity of emotion. Research regularly recognises the need to develop policy writers, academics, school leaders and practitioners' cultural competencies. Self-reflection and the development of these competencies are all the more crucial when dealing with a subject as sensitive as emotions, whether using artwork creation or other means of inviting discussion.

Collaborative, Whole-Community Approach

Though commonalities will be found within groups, research consistently emphasises variability of the emotional experience (Clore & Ortony, 2013; Cong et al., 2022; Conte et al., 2023; Scherer, 1997). Remaining open to this diversity creates a space that "listens to culture" (Habib et al., 2013, p. 172).

Durie emphasises the differences of Māori & non-Māori contexts, narratives, values and aspirations, yet also draws on Pere's identification of mana ake (uniqueness) as key to wellbeing:

It can also be misleading to draw conclusions about an individual because of ethnicity or cultural affiliation. No two Māori journeys are the same. Although there are common histories, commonly held cultural views, and similar socio-economic living conditions, Māori as a people are diverse. (Durie, 2013, p. 60).

Taking into account both the inclusion of cultural traditions and generalisations that assist in affirming (often lost) cultural identities, while also acknowledging individual uniqueness, it is clear that localised co-construction of CSEL knowledges is vital for ethical inclusion of diverse worldviews. Without it, theory and practice easily becomes a one-size-fits-all approach that masks power imbalances. In Aotearoa, especially, careful consideration of power differentials and the principles of participation, protection and partnership is imperative. To minimise the "cultural genocide" of current SEL approaches, Katzman and Stanton (2020, p. 1563) call for input into SEL from community and cultural stakeholders. Even Kaupapa Māori approaches can fail to inspire and challenge toward supporting localised community and stakeholder derived understandings if their focus is on finding singular answers.

Collaborative whole community involvement is vastly different from the current SEL narratives. For instance, Mitey (a wellbeing approach developed by the Auckland University and the Sir John Kirwan Foundation and begun in schools in 2020) utilises specific unit plans and resources. These unit plans and resources teach a researcher-derived emotional literacy based on Western Psychology, including references to ‘Emotional Intelligence’ (discussed earlier in relation to CASEL) (Gibson, 2023). Mitey’s example of a whole-school restricts the concept of the entire school to students and staff (Gibson, 2023), overlooking the importance of family and community.

Contrastingly, CSEL approaches need to involve the wider community, hapū and iwi, whānau and cultural stakeholders through a series of hui. Deriving inspiration from Kaupapa Māori, each step needs to involve an element of co-construction to move toward more inclusive, effective ways to teach about emotions and wellbeing in Aotearoa. However, caution is necessary to consider power dynamics fully. Together, all stakeholders determine, conceptualise, prioritise order of learning and explore culturally appropriate ways of teaching the communication of emotions with as little leading from facilitators or educators. The use of a series of contrasting photos and artworks rather than words or models would assist true collaboration that is not led by the conceptions of the facilitators.

Ongoing Whānau Collaboration

Additional to the hui suggested to establish a unique whole-community approach, CSEL needs to constantly extend to include collaboration with the significant stakeholders within student’s homes. Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1998) and Te Wheke (Pere, 2014) emphasise the significance of iwi and hapū contributions and the essential role of family, extended family, and ancestors to individual and collective wellbeing. Therefore, approaches need to extend beyond the classroom and teacher-student relationship.

Metge and Kinloch (1993) warn that emotions and their resultant behaviours could be misinterpreted without cultural understanding and effective cross-cultural discourse. They use the example of whakamā, an emotion that appears to be shame or shyness but can have complex cultural, psychosocial, and behavioural purposes for Māori (Metge & Kinloch, 1993). Whakamā is just one example among many that emphasise how vital a CSEL approach based on understanding diverse ontologies and epistemologies is to student wellbeing.

Using images without words allows whānau, caregivers and students to use their own languaging or forms of expression when communicating about emotional understandings and pūtake. This communication needs to build openness toward the expression of emotions and the diverse ways of knowing, being and doing under emotions. The ongoing involvement of whānau is integral in developing a collective dialogical practice regarding emotions that maximises inclusivity. In this way, educators become learners alongside students throughout the relational pedagogical process of CSEL.

Creating the Space – Weaving the Mat Together

Having discussed art & pictorial resources, community and whānau co-construction and joint meaning-making, the actual dialogical space for both listening and expressing emotions is the last area of research explored in this article. I draw attention to three key aspects that stand out to me in the research as applicable to CSEL.

Firstly, the space is always proposed as a co-constructed, multi-lingual, dialogical practice rooted in diverse epistemologies, ontologies and cosmologies. Devine, Pau'uvale Teisina and Pau'uvale (2012) propose the metaphor of the *fala* (woven mats) representing a philosophical approach that supports a relational space where multiple cultures exist together. This metaphor allows for much extension. It allows us to consider how each piece of flax is seen and remains whole rather than merged. If one piece of flax is much wider than the rest, the mat does not weave together in the space as effectively. In the space there needs to be room for conflict, uncertainty, misunderstanding, but a constant striving for justice and equity (Freire & Macedo, 1995; Todd, 2009). The conflict and uncertainty is a sign that no one piece of flax has dominated the rest. Acknowledging power dynamics within the space is all the more important when discussing emotions. Just as braiding together epistemologies from different cultures on a theoretical level in order to merge them into one can either offend, water-down, or power dynamics can result in dominance of particular worldviews, so too can this occur in the space between self and other.

Another aspect relating to space is the ethical seeing of the other and the intentionality held within it. Drawing on the work of Emmanuel Levinas (1961, 2008). I suggest that any attempt to merge one to another, assimilate, or reduce another to a copy of ourselves and our worldviews is a form of symbolic violence.

We shall never know [the other person] apart from acting with him. But unless we desire this, and go on trying, we shall never escape from the subjectivism of our systems and the objects they bring before us to categorise and manipulate. (Levinas, 1961, 2008, p.18).

Levinas' philosophical theory lends itself to extensive research in relation to CSEL, but here in relation to the dialogical space required to learn about emotions, it is the intentionality that is key to the ethical argument. Our intention, however unattainable is about learning to know the other, not learning technique, nor analysing and judging the discussion. Techniques, literacies, and prescriptive resources have the power to alter the balance within the space, or to silence certain voices. While we must accept we can never fully know the 'other' or see the world through their eyes, the attempt to move toward this greater understanding sets the scene for connection to diverse emotional ways of knowing being and doing and also the simpler ethics of care or *aroha* research points toward (Noddings, 2010; Macfarlane, 2010; Taleni & Surtees, 2024)

Lastly, in SEL, the focus on a purely intra-relational space needs to be challenged. The widely applicable intra-active hyphen-space between self and 'other' (introduced originally by Sharon Todd, 2009, and subsequently explored by many) has much to offer this discourse; yet, further complexities are involved when

conceiving the space within which emotions are communicated and pedagogically approached. Durie's presentation of the space of Māori holistic wellbeing challenges seeing the exchange as purely person-to-person. Hauora (wellbeing) "is viewed as an interrelated phenomenon rather than an intra-personal one" (Durie, 1998, p.71). Not only to include the ngākau, the whole body, and wairua, but it must be acknowledged that the dialogical space within which we engage in expressing emotions includes space, time, relationship to the land, whakapapa (heritage), and diverse ways of knowing, being and doing (Durie, 1998). Also, worth note here is the Samoan concept of vā (space), that while it does relate to 'betweenness', it both separates and holds things together, including the inter-relatedness between the spiritual, the social, physical objects, land and the environment (Talení & Surtees, 2024).

This dialogical space represented by the woven flax mat does not just have flax strands that represent self and other, but all these different aspects, seen as crucial to wellbeing and underlying emotions. These must not merely be seen as context, but an integral part of the conception and communication of emotions. A mat incorporating the ngākau, the whole body, wairua, space, time, relationship to the land, whakapapa (heritage), and diverse ways of knowing, being and doing sounds like an appropriate place to begin discussion about emotions.

Conclusion

Learning from Māori and Pasifika authors highlights the shortcomings of current SEL theory. The current languaging of emotions clearly fails to centre on diverse pūtake, bodily-linked, ecological, historical or spiritual elements underlying emotions.

This article has significant limitations including the focus solely on teaching about emotions when research shows that a holistic approach to wellbeing is essential. Delving solely into emotions, this research has examined the deepest, most diverse and most holistically influencing parts of ourselves – our needs, beliefs, morals, values, goals, ways of knowing, being or doing or anything significant to the individual, which in this article were termed pūtake. These considerations have signalled some specific potential directions for future research.

Challenging the dominant colonial and hegemonic paradigms in Aotearoa's discourse on emotions, this paper argues for an indigenisation of SEL research and approaches, advocating for CSEL approaches aligned with Tiriti responsibilities and the waiora-related needs of students. To support this learning, the article has discussed the use of open visual artworks in lieu of words, whole community collaboration and ethical consultation, whānau partnership, and creating a discursive space (represented by the woven mat) for the exploring of emotions in their most diverse and holistic sense.

I have underscored the imperative of integrating diverse, multi-layered, knowledges, ontologies and values into educational psychology emotion theory and practice. Taking pūtake into account is a key part of developing a discourse with transformative social and emotional learning at its centre; a discourse that aims to

move the SEL conversation from the head to the ngākau, to listen and empathise at a core level, a root level, the level of the pūtake.

Glossary of Māori words

As used in this article

Aotearoa	A Māori word for New Zealand (North Island in some accounts), locates te ao Māori
Ara	Pathway or road; metaphor of 'a journey'
Hapū	Smaller kinship group, effective social structure
Hauora	Health, wellbeing
Hinengaro	Mind, traditionally also meaning spleen
Hui	Meeting, tribal gathering
Iwi	Large kinship group, tribe, people
Kaupapa Māori	Māori philosophy (of education)
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
Mauri	Life essence
Ngākau	Heart, traditionally also meaning mind
Pūtake	Taproot of plant, base of hill, underlying cause
Tangata Whenua	Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand
Te Ao Māori	The Māori world/worldview
Te Reo	The Māori language
Tikanga	Customary practices and protocols
Tino Rangatiratanga	Self-determination or autonomy
Waiora	'Waters of life,' wellbeing (of emotions)
Wairua	Spirit, ghost
Whānau	Family, extended family
Whatumanawa	Seat of the emotions, heart, spleen, kidney, bowels

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