



He Awa Whiria: Braiding Social and Emotional Learning with Bicultural and Intentional Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the powerful intersection of social-emotional learning, bicultural practice, and intentional teaching in early learning. Recognising the crucial role of the first five years in a child's social and emotional learning and development, it explores how kaiako (teachers) can enhance children's learning experiences by integrating these three key constructs into future practices. While the importance of social-emotional learning within Māori contexts is acknowledged in the literature, there's a notable gap in understanding how kaiako incorporate bicultural practices to support this area of development. The refreshed early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki 2017, emphasises intentional teaching and enhanced bicultural framing, providing a strong foundation for this integration. Drawing from a larger research study, this article presents an overview of existing key research and suggests a potential way forward for kaiako to intentionally support social-emotional learning by drawing on the richness of the Māori language, culture, and traditions. This approach aims to realise the bicultural aspirations of Te Whāriki and empower kaiako to create more holistic, culturally responsive learning experiences while addressing the need for teachers to articulate their evidence-based practices in supporting children's social and emotional learning.

Keywords: Bicultural, early childhood, early learning, intentional teaching, Māori education, social and emotional learning

INTRODUCTION

This article reviews the literature on three distinct yet intersecting constructs of teaching and learning in early learning¹ (see Figure 1). It explores the potential benefits of integrating these three constructs that can deepen understanding and inform future teaching and learning discourse and practice. Evidence suggests that social and emotional learning is among the most critical factors for shaping

¹ The term "early learning" is used to represent early childhood centres and preschools. It is increasingly utilised in the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*.

positive outcomes for children across multiple domains in their early years, and its significance in influencing positive outcomes has been well documented (Blewitt et al., 2021; Denham, 2023; Goodman et al., 2015; Tamati et al., 2021). The first five years of a child's life are crucial for gaining experience and knowledge about their social world, and “developing increasing social and emotional competence is a key task of early childhood” (McLaughlin et al., 2017, p. 25). In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a commitment to honouring the foundational Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) partnership agreement between the indigenous Māori people and representatives of the British Crown. *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum, is positioned as a bicultural curriculum, and understanding how pedagogy and practices that draw on the richness of kaupapa Māori approaches to facilitating social and emotional learning could benefit all tamariki (children) and contribute to the promise of *Te Whāriki* as a bicultural curriculum. Finally, there has been an increasing interest in intentional teaching in recent years, which has been made more explicit in the refreshed *Te Whāriki 2017* (McLaughlin et al., 2016; McLaughlin & Cherrington, 2018). The role and responsibility of the kaiako (teacher²) as a ‘key resource’ has emerged with greater visibility and states that their “primary responsibility is to facilitate children’s learning and development through thoughtful and intentional pedagogy” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 59). Examining these three distinct learning areas collectively could contribute to reimagining practice and pedagogy that intentionally supports kaiako to infuse bicultural practices to facilitate children's social and emotional learning in early learning.

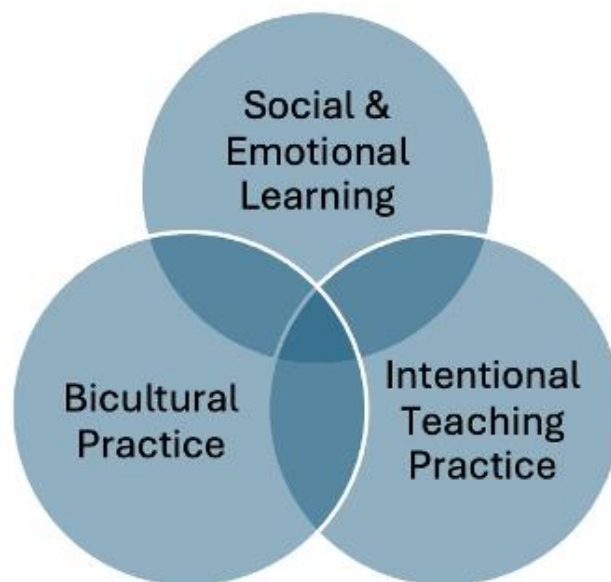


Figure 1. Intersecting constructs of pedagogy and practice

² In Aotearoa New Zealand, kaiako is used interchangeably with teachers, educators and other adults who have responsibility for the care and education of children in early learning settings, as it is in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017).

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Children who participate in quality early learning experiences have better long-term learning and life outcomes (Bakken et al., 2017; Ministry of Education, 2019b; Poulton et al., 2015). The early years of a child's life are fundamental for growth, learning, and development and is a crucial time for shaping self-concept, emotional control, empathy, and consideration for others (Poulton et al., 2015; Shulman, 2016; Tamati et al., 2021). Bakken et al. (2017) suggest that “birth to age 5 are viewed as a critical period for developing the foundations for thinking, behaving, and emotional well-being” (p. 255), setting the foundation for a lifetime of learning and emotional resilience. Critical evidence and longitudinal research have established that social and emotional learning plays a crucial role in shaping positive outcomes for children across multiple domains during their early years (Denham, 2018; Education Review Office, 2011; Goodman et al., 2015; Ministry of Education, 2019a; Ministry of Health, 2018; Tamati et al., 2021). The well-known Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study (DMHDS)³ findings highlight social and emotional learning in the early years as central to developing relationships, learning and well-being (Poulton et al., 2015). Having established the significance of social and emotional learning in the early years, the next section will delve deeper into what social and emotional learning is.

What is social and emotional learning?

Social-emotional learning is complex and hard to define as it encompasses a multitude of interconnected concepts that influence one another (Campbell et al., 2016). Likewise, social-emotional learning is situated within a wider ideological context, which prioritises different orientations of the nature of childhood and the child in society. Thus, many definitions exist, some with shared characteristics and others with significant (and contested) variations in scope and focus. For example, the Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) characterises social and emotional development as:

the developing capacity of the child from birth through 5 years of age to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learn—all in the context of family, community, and culture. (Yates et al., 2008, p. 2)

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) offers another SEL framework that is featured on the Ministry of Education TKI website⁴. It outlines five core competencies: self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; relationship skills; and, responsible decision-making

³ The Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study (DMHDS) is a comprehensive and ongoing longitudinal research study conducted in New Zealand. The study follows the health and development of 1037 babies born in Dunedin between 1/4/1972 and 31/3/1973.

⁴ Te Kete Ipurangi – the online knowledge basket – is New Zealand’s bilingual education portal. An initiative of the Ministry of Education, it provides New Zealand schools with diverse resources and curriculum materials to enrich teaching, elevate student achievement, and support professional development for educators and school leaders.

(Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, n.d.; Mahoney et al., 2021). CASEL (n.d.) suggests that:

SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

These two definitions share commonalities in recognising the significance of social and emotional learning and development, the importance of forming secure relationships, regulating and expressing emotions, and the deeply intertwined mutual influence of social and emotional learning throughout development (Neaum, 2019; Palaiologou, 2021; Rivers et al., 2013; Tominey et al., 2017). However, the CSEFEL definition offers some differences from CASEL in two distinct ways. Firstly, it explicitly acknowledges children from birth through five years of age, highlighting the critical role of early childhood development. Secondly, it places social and emotional learning within the critical context of family, community, and culture. Culture plays a crucial role in social and emotional learning, although it is often overlooked in definitions. In the specific context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Macfarlane et al. (2017) provide an overview of social and emotional learning in Aotearoa New Zealand education, emphasising the integration of Western and Indigenous Māori viewpoints. The authors advocate for the addition of a complementary aspect of *manaakitanga*, which embodies the idea of 'caring' and is a fundamental Māori principle. They emphasise how incorporating Māori concepts such as *manaakitanga* with the social and emotional core competencies and indigenous phenomenology supports cultural identity learning environments for *tamariki Māori*. Additionally, the spiritual dimension of 'wairua' is a critical aspect that is absent from the CASEL framework. Wairua is essential for the holistic development of Māori, connecting the other dimensions across time and space (Ministry of Education, 2017). If the dimension of wairua is neglected, children may not achieve the aspirations of *Te Whāriki* and those inherent in their whakapapa. Therefore, it is crucial to consider children's social and emotional learning and development through a framework grounded in Māori principles.

Social and emotional learning as individual and coexisting constructs

Exploring 'social learning' and 'emotional learning' as independent yet interconnected constructs invites brief reflection on the unique meanings associated with each. *He Māpuna te Tamaiti* states, “[e]motional competence is a foundation for children’s success in learning and relationships and vital for their wellbeing” (Ministry of Education, 2019a, p. 35). While there is no universally agreed-upon definition of the term 'emotion' among psychological scientists and behavioural neuroscientists (Izard, 2010), the term 'emotion' is used by many to describe a range of feelings, emotions, moods and dispositions (Keltner et al., 2019). From birth, children display a variety of basic emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear, which are observed across different cultures (Keltner et al., 2019; Tominey et al., 2019). As children develop, their ability to experience and express emotions in a manner conducive to their own well-being and that of

others expands. This encompasses skills like regulating emotions and effectively managing moments of distress or anger (Keltner et al., 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Tominey et al., 2019). When considering emotional learning in early childhood, Epstein describes it as “the knowledge and skills related to children's recognition and self-regulation of their feelings” (Epstein, 2007, p. 71) and must occur within the context of secure relationships.

Considering social learning and development, “infants are social beings from birth” (Ministry of Education, 2019a, p. 51), ready to engage and learn through relationships and interactions. They develop feelings of safety and security through caring relationships and express themselves socially through communication forms such as smiling, imitating sounds, and physical gestures (Ministry of Education, 2019a; Palaiologou, 2021). Social learning encompasses a child's social knowledge, skills, and ability to relate to others in appropriate ways relevant to the situation's social and cultural context (Epstein, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2019a).

Having briefly explored the distinctive nature of ‘social learning’ and ‘emotional learning,’ it is evident that they are interconnected concepts that mutually influence each other. Research emphasises their synchronous development within a holistic framework (Epstein, 2014; Neaum, 2019; Palaiologou, 2021). Te Whāriki symbolises holistic development as the woven whāriki (or mat), weaving together the principles and strands of the curriculum collaboratively. For Māori, this is beautifully represented as a metaphor for weaving together the dimensions of a developing child, encompassing tinana (physical), hinengaro (cognitive), whatumanawa (emotional), wairua (spiritual), and the social and cultural aspects that collectively shape a child's growth and identity (Ministry of Education, 2017; Royal-Tangaere, 1997). Similarly, Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994, 1997), a holistic Māori health model now extended to education, inherently considers the whole child through the four walls of the whare (house). These interconnected dimensions encompass physical, mental, spiritual, and whānau, emphasising that child development and learning are deeply intertwined with cultural and social contexts and the importance of children's active involvement in daily activities. This aligns with the sociocultural perspective of Rogoff (1993), which emphasises the influence of culture in shaping development. These complex interactions within child development provide a powerful rationale for considering social and emotional learning constructs together in the context of culture.

The role of kaiako in fostering social and emotional learning

Social and emotional learning and development have been a significant thread in the tapestry of early learning and are increasingly acknowledged as essential areas of focus (Campbell et al., 2016; Denham, 2023; Mahoney et al., 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2017). Internationally, early childhood curriculum documents emphasise the importance of identifying and responding to children's skills, knowledge, interests and needs in leading curriculum design, advocating for a wide range of experiences to facilitate play and learning. Educators' attuned observation and thoughtful response to these areas, as well as recognising moments to support social and emotional learning, is a critical component of effective intentional teaching (Hedges & Cooper, 2018).

Teachers play an essential role in nurturing and shaping children's social and emotional learning, overall well-being, development of healthy relationships, self-regulation, and understanding of appropriate behaviour (Blewitt et al., 2021; Education Review Office, 2011, 2016, 2020; Epstein, 2014; Goodman et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Ministry of Education, 2019a). Across the strands of Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum, the roles and expectations of educators in facilitating social and emotional learning are explicitly expressed, such as "kaiako nurture empathy through interactions, modelling and respectful practice" and "kaiako use proactive strategies that encourage children's social participation" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 40). Research demonstrates that effective strategies to support children's social and emotional well-being include educators promoting collaboration, building strong relationships with children and their whānau, and knowing them well (Education Review Office, 2011). Stable teaching teams and consistent expectations have also been identified as contributing factors. A recent study by Blewitt et al. (2021) exploring Australian early childhood teachers' views revealed findings similar to those of the Education Review Office (2011) evaluation. Educators reported the critical importance of the educator-child relationship and partnering with caregivers. They also highlighted the influence of the physical environment and targeted strategies embedded in everyday experiences and interactions.

Interestingly, the Blewitt et al. (2021) study also found that while educators prioritised children's social and emotional skills, their specific strategies for supporting them varied based on factors such as structural quality and educator expertise. Educators drew upon both explicit knowledge (documented guidelines and structured programmes) and tacit knowledge (personal insights gained over time) to inform their practice. However, they struggled to articulate their specific strategies, emphasising the importance of making this knowledge more explicit and implementing evidence-based practices. This aligns with other research suggesting that "teachers need greater knowledge of effective strategies to teach social-emotional skills in intentional and appropriate ways" (McLaughlin et al., 2017, p. 21). Mahoney et al. (2021) also propose that teachers must wholeheartedly embrace and implement practices that promote social-emotional learning.

In contrast, less effective early childhood services were found to use a limited range of strategies and engage in poor-quality interactions (Education Review Office, 2011). Both studies identified growth opportunities, such as addressing challenges like high staff turnover, large group sizes, and inconsistent training. Fantuzzo et al. (2012) noted that teachers with higher efficacy tend to spend more time teaching cognitive and social-emotional skills. While teacher well-being is an important related topic, a deeper exploration is beyond the scope of this publication. However, it is important to note that by supporting educators in managing the demands of their roles and fostering their own social-emotional learning, we can reduce stress and create a more stable, effective learning environment (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

BICULTURALISM AND BILINGUALISM

Key definitions of biculturalism typically included terms such as 'dual', 'equal' and 'partnership' (Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014). Contextualised to education in

Aotearoa New Zealand, Chaffey et al. (2017) suggest that "[b]iculturalism is often accepted as a term referring to two cultures in partnership" (p. 49). The essence of biculturalism in Aotearoa positions tangata whenua (Indigenous Māori) and tauwi (non-Māori) walking together, acknowledging and understanding each other's cultural heritages as partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This position is captured in a quote by an early childhood teacher from Jenkin's research on biculturalism in early childhood education: "[t]wo cultures not one, cultural language, values, beliefs, practices, taonga, customs as a whole/holistic, not part. Everything my people hoped for with Te Tiriti o Waitangi" (Jenkin, 2009, p. 99). The quote also establishes the duality of cultures and introduces the intrinsic relationship and mutual influence of culture and language.

In English medium settings in Aotearoa New Zealand, research literature has examined bilingualism and the revitalisation of the Māori language within a broader context of biculturalism, including language, culture, and identity (Skerrett & Ritchie, 2021). More than 30 years ago, Rose Pere expressed, "[l]anguage is the lifeline and sustenance of a culture" (Pere, 1991, p. 9), recognising the significance of culturally grounding language. Like Pere (1991), the literature suggests that the constructs of language and culture are intricately interwoven, forming a symbiotic relationship where language acts as a means to facilitate culture. This interconnectedness highlights the fundamental importance of language in conveying meaning, reflecting cultural environments and worldviews, and supporting the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and identity (Rameka & Peterson, 2021, p. 307). Similarly, Corson (1990) suggests that "to a large extent 'bilingualism' always implies some degree of 'biculturalism' for the individual, since learning a language involves acquiring many aspects of the knowledge, beliefs, skills and experiences that identify the culture that has produced the language" (p. 160). Skerrett (2007) draws attention to the importance of language and cultural entanglement, "language is central to cultural transmission" p.6, and emphasises concerns that language loss could diminish Māori perspectives, cultural values and ways of doing things. Each of these authors shares a common understanding of the inseparability of language and culture, which resonates with the holistic nature of learning and development in Te Whāriki.

Bicultural Practice and Social and Emotional Learning

Currently, there is limited research into how teachers effectively incorporate bicultural practices to support social and emotional learning. However, existing studies provide valuable insights into how teachers implement bicultural practices in their pedagogy. Williams et al. (2012) draw attention to the critical role of bicultural competency among teachers in delivering high-quality early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. They argue that bicultural competency among teachers is crucial for providing high-quality early childhood education nationally. Early learning in Aotearoa New Zealand emphasises the integration of kaupapa Māori approaches into daily pedagogical practices (Ministry of Education, 2017, 2020; Williams et al., 2012). *Te Whāriki* explicitly requires the incorporation of te reo Māori (Māori language) and tikanga Māori (Māori cultural practices) to ensure a bicultural curriculum for all children (Ministry of Education, 2017). Furthermore, it emphasises that "all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to te Tiriti o Waitangi" (Ministry of Education,

2017, p. 69), recognising the importance of bicultural education in fostering cultural competence and treaty partnership awareness from an early age.

Several studies, including those by Chaffey et al. (2017) the Education Review Office (2010) and Williams et al. (2012) examined bicultural competencies among early childhood teachers and trainee teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand, identifying three critical issues in bicultural practice. These issues include: 1) teacher emphasis on *Te Whāriki* as a foundation for shaping bicultural pedagogical approaches; 2) limited te reo Māori proficiency and cultural competencies among educators persist as a barrier to effective bicultural practice; and, 3) there is an urgent need for sustained professional development to enhance teachers' bicultural capabilities and confidence. These interconnected factors highlight the complexity of implementing bicultural education in Aotearoa New Zealand's early learning settings.

Te Whāriki as a foundation for bicultural practices

Te Whāriki is widely recognised as foundational for guiding bicultural practices (Williams et al., 2023). Multiple ERO reviews emphasise that a comprehensive understanding of *Te Whāriki* is essential for its effective use as a bicultural curriculum (Education Review Office, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020), a point supported by Rameka (2018) and Skerrett (2018). An evaluation, by the Education Review Office (2018) found that 42% of early learning services felt confident in using *Te Whāriki* to support tamariki Māori, which is a positive development. However, confidence was lower in working with tamariki Māori to achieve educational success as Māori. Researchers argue that while the bicultural curriculum is crucial for supporting Māori learners' culture and identity, it is equally significant for all children in Aotearoa New Zealand (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2020; Skerrett, 2018). Skerrett (2018) emphasises the importance of including te reo Māori for every learner, not just Māori, with te reo woven into daily contexts in early childhood centres. This highlights the need for more effective professional development and resources to support teacher capability in realising *Te Whāriki*'s full potential as a bicultural curriculum (Rameka, 2018; Skerrett, 2018).

Teacher bicultural capabilities and competencies

The second of the issues identified above concerns teachers' limited capabilities and confidence to use te reo Māori and demonstrate cultural competencies, which are barriers to providing a bicultural curriculum in early learning. Ongoing research suggests there is still room for progress in this area to address the monocultural and monolingual practices that still dominate early learning settings (Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014; Skerrett & Ritchie, 2021; Williams et al., 2023). So, what can be done? To address these challenges, a transformative approach is necessary. This approach involves weaving a truly bicultural early childhood curriculum by intentionally embedding te reo Māori me ōna tikanga Māori throughout all aspects of the programme. By integrating kaupapa Māori approaches, educators can create a rich tapestry of learning experiences that honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the dual heritage of Aotearoa New Zealand. This approach has the potential to nurture holistic growth in our youngest learners and helps bridge cultural gaps, fostering a more inclusive and culturally

responsive educational environment. Chaffey et al. (2017) remind us that teachers in early learning use a "cross-curricular approach to planning learning experiences for infants, toddlers and young children by taking the kaupapa Māori principles into different curriculum areas" (pp 50-51). When considering the cultural influence on social-emotional development, cultural theorists suggest that "the emotions of a culture are also essential to defining that culture" (Keltner et al., 2019, p. 80) and that emotional patterns within a culture typically exhibit similarities. They also explore the distinct role emotions play in shaping values and facilitating role negotiation within social structures, norms, and interactions among group members. This cross-curricular approach affirms the potential to promote social and emotional learning focused on kaupapa Māori principles, te reo and tikanga practices.

Reflecting on this article's focus on social and emotional learning in early childhood education, a cross-curricular approach rooted in bicultural practices emerges as a powerful pathway for positive change. By integrating kaupapa Māori principles, tikanga, and te reo throughout the curriculum, educators can create culturally responsive experiences that nurture children's holistic development, particularly their emotional well-being and social skills.

Kaiako support for bicultural practice

In order to effectively build teachers' bicultural pedagogy and practice, professional learning and support are critical. The literature is saturated with recommendations for more resources, Māori mentorship and professional learning and development for teachers to progress in providing bicultural early childhood education (Broadley et al., 2015; Education Review Office, 2019; Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014; Skerrett & Ritchie, 2021; Williams et al., 2012). While such recommendations are essential in progressing bicultural aspirations, authors have argued that resources and professional learning and development for students and teachers are insufficient. Reframing attitudes and behaviours and bringing a wholehearted desire to implement te reo Māori me ōna tikanga practices meaningfully are also required to enhance the bicultural competencies of teachers (Broadley et al., 2015; Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014; Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2020; Rau & Ritchie, 2005; Williams et al., 2012). This reframing is supported by Bates (2015), who argues that "[c]ultural competence begins with oneself...[and requires] a personal commitment to step out from our own perspective and step into another" (p. 14). Attitudes towards cultural competence are particularly important as most kaiako in early learning are non-Māori (Education Counts, 2022; Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2020). According to Broadley et al. (2015) non-Māori teachers who embraced a bicultural understanding of themselves were more receptive to bicultural practices and took greater responsibility in the setting to align their belief in partnership and responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. A growing body of literature recognises that teachers bring their own deeply embedded cultural values, attitudes and beliefs to their teaching, which can play a crucial role in influencing those they teach (Bishop, 2003; Chaffey et al., 2017; Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014; Milne, 2009). This idea of innate cultural transmission is captured by Rana and Culbreath (2019) when they report "that culture and experiences of teachers and learners affect the enactment of pedagogies" (p. 87). In addition to this, knowing one's own cultural values and identity and understanding how this

influences practices and behaviours have been recognised in the literature as an essential step in valuing and reflecting the culture of others (Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014; Milne, 2009; Williams et al., 2012). This exploration of one's own cultural values and how they impact practices that facilitate social and emotional learning is not well-known and has been recommended for further investigation (Blewitt et al., 2021).

FRAMEWORKS AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT PRACTICE

The previous sections have identified the need for resources and professional development for teachers to improve social and emotional learning (Blewitt et al., 2021; Education Review Office, 2011) and bicultural practices (Education Review Office, 2019; Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014; Skerrett & Ritchie, 2021) in early learning. This subsequent section will explore some of the frameworks and resources available to support kaiako in early learning in Aotearoa New Zealand. Programmes such as the *Incredible Years Teacher* (IYT) (Webster-Stratton, 2012) and the *Alert Program for Self-regulation* (Williams & Shellenberger, 1996) provide teachers and parents with strategies to create a positive learning environment while promoting children's pro-social behaviour. Adopted from the USA, these programmes are now a significant part of the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L). While these programmes have some alignment with the Aotearoa New Zealand context, indigenous authors have voiced concerns that such programmes are evidence-based from a Western perspective (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2013). Consequently, making adaptations to align these programmes with the principles of Māori pedagogy is required to ensure cultural relevance within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Adopting learning programmes and theories divorced from Māori pedagogy could compromise indigenous epistemology.

Frameworks from Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand authors and researchers have offered early learning kaiako valuable frameworks for promoting social and emotional learning and bicultural practices independent of one another. For example, (McLaughlin et al., 2017) offer a comprehensive list of strategies teachers can use to intentionally teach children's social and emotional competence. Equally, New Zealand Indigenous researchers have developed valuable frameworks that promote teachers' bicultural practices, such as *The Hikairo Schema: Culturally responsive teaching and learning in early childhood education settings* (Macfarlane et al., 2019), which offers valuable guidance for all teachers, encouraging them to rethink engagement strategies and practices that create culturally rich learning environments from a Māori world view.

Te Huia (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2020) and He Piki Raukura (Tamati et al., 2021) are frameworks developed by Māori for Māori. Te Huia is a holistic planning and assessment tool built on Te Pikinga ki Runga (Macfarlane, 2009). It aligns with the Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles and meaningful bicultural pedagogy curriculum design. He Piki Raukura is an assessment framework for Māori child behaviour built on four Māori constructs. While these researchers have positioned these frameworks with an emphasis on assessment, they play a

critical role in responding to the dominant Western European approaches that have marginalised Māori for decades (Hynds et al., 2016; Savage et al., 2014). Many of the current frameworks and resources approach social and emotional learning and bicultural learning and practice as separate areas of learning. Resources and guiding frameworks infusing these two areas could be valuable in fostering children's social and emotional development through the richness of bicultural pedagogy.

He Māpuna te Tamaiti

He Māpuna te Tamaiti (Ministry of Education, 2019a) is a promising foundation for developing bicultural practice, offering the potential for kaiako to infuse kaupapa Māori approaches into social and emotional learning. This framework has been developed to support social and emotional competence in Aotearoa New Zealand early learning settings with a bicultural focus for use in mainstream settings. Although it is considered valuable for providing comprehensive and practical guidance to kaiako, anecdotal evidence suggests that insufficient implementation support has compromised its use to its full potential. Like *Te Whāriki*, *He Māpuna te Tamaiti* has the capacity to enhance and promote a more robust intentional approach to the implementation of social and emotional learning by drawing on both Western pedagogies and rich Māori traditions and could be further strengthened. Dual approaches to pedagogy can potentially reinforce the ability of kaiako to thoughtfully and intentionally support social and emotional learning using bicultural approaches that promote Māori language, culture and identity. The following section will focus on the significant role of intentional teaching and its potential to support these two constructs.

PLAY AND INTENTIONAL TEACHING IN EARLY LEARNING

Play is central to early childhood education, and teachers focus on providing rich play and learning environments and experiences to foster children's interests, knowledge, skills, and learning dispositions (Ministry of Education, 2017; Smith, 2013; White et al., 2009). Teaching and learning in early childhood encompasses complex interactions between teachers, children, places and things. A plethora of literature identifies high-quality teaching as one of the most influential contributors to quality outcomes for learners (Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Fraser, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2019b).

Internationally, there is a movement towards intentional teaching within play-based approaches, which engages educators and children in shared thinking and problem-solving to build meaningful learning experiences and outcomes (Aspden et al., 2023; Australian Government Department of Education, 2022; McLachlan, 2017; McLaughlin et al., 2016; Ministry of Education, 2017; Ranson & Cameron, 2023). Intentional teaching is thoughtful and planful and doesn't happen by chance. Intentional teaching is described by Epstein (2007) "to always be thinking about what we are doing and how it will foster children's development and produce real and lasting learning" (p.10). This requires teachers to understand curriculum and practices that contribute to valued learning. In early childhood education, pedagogy and curriculum are woven together to bring together the understanding of how to teach and why you teach in a particular way.

This notion of teacher intentionality throughout the refreshed *Te Whāriki* 2017 has been highlighted as a significant ‘shift’ from the 1996 publication and positions kaiako as “the key resource” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 59) in facilitating children's learning and development through a purposeful and intentional pedagogy (McLachlan, 2017). Teachers being planful and deliberate in their practice during play is not a new concept for kaiako in early learning (McLaughlin et al., 2016); rather, it is a renewed focus that reflects a growing emphasis on making explicit the intentional work teachers do to facilitate learning through play-based contexts and interactions.

Like *Te Whāriki*, *He Māpuna te Tamaiti* has a robust collective theme of kaiako intentionally supporting social and emotional learning; “this resource provides support for intentional teaching so that you can confidently plan to support children’s developing social and emotional competence as well as identify and make use of teachable moments” (Ministry of Education, 2019a, p. 20). While it is widely understood that children in early childhood learn best through play and interaction with people, places, and things (Ministry of Education, 2017), teachers also play a critical role as “social skills can be supported and taught” (Ministry of Education, 2019a, p. 52). In the same way, educators are essential in supporting and guiding bicultural learning through enacting culturally responsive practices (Education Review Office, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2017; Weinstein et al., 2004). They must also prioritise the actions of *Ka Hikitia–Ka Hāpaitia* (the Māori Education Strategy) for tamariki Māori and weave a bicultural curriculum that recognises the “deeply connected relationship between language, culture, and identity and the importance of weaving te reo Māori and te ao Māori (Māori world views)” (Skerrett, 2018, p. 4). As mentioned previously, the full potential of this resource remains to be seen, and neither its implementation nor effectiveness has been assessed. Similarly, extensive research highlights effective ways for educators to support young children's social-emotional development, emphasising intentional teaching approaches that offer engaging learning opportunities through children's interests and meaningful educational experiences (Blewitt et al., 2021; Epstein, 2007; Epstein, 2014; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Ministry of Education, 2019a).

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER WITH *HE AWA WHIRIA*

The connection between social and emotional learning and bicultural practice is evident. By drawing on a comprehensive Indigenous framework, we can effectively integrate these concepts, nurturing a synergistic relationship that strengthens both aspects during the early years. The Māori metaphor *He Awa Whiria* (braided river) (see Figure 2) symbolises biculturalism, representing an Indigenous framework that intertwines Māori streams of knowledge, approaches, and understanding with Western knowledge streams (Macfarlane et al., 2015). *He Awa Whiria* has been successfully utilised as a theoretical framework in various research and policy initiatives (Cram et al., 2018; Derby & Macfarlane, 2024; Martel et al., 2022). This holistic approach, grounded in te ao Māori (Māori worldview), offers kaiako the opportunity to integrate Western and Māori perspectives on social and emotional learning, thereby empowering them to

facilitate intentional and meaningful learning experiences for tamariki in Aotearoa New Zealand.

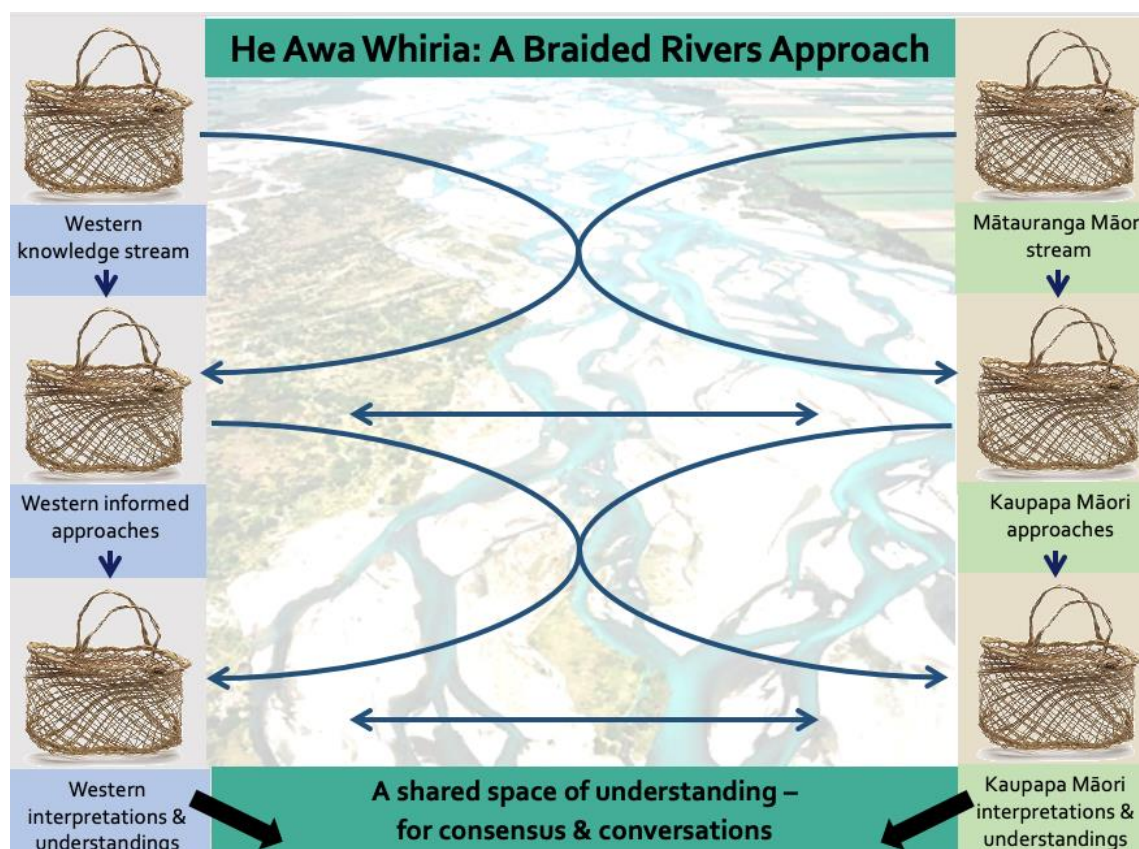


Figure 2. He Awa Whiria approach (Macfarlane et al., 2015)

CONCLUSION

This review highlights the essential nature of integrating social and emotional learning, bicultural learning, and intentional teaching in early learning. The research literature strongly supports that the first five years are critical for a child's development of social and emotional knowledge, skills, and relational patterns, with kaiako playing a crucial role in facilitating this learning process (Ministry of Education, 2019b). However, while educators understand the importance of social and emotional learning, research suggests they need support to explicitly articulate their evidence-based knowledge and practices to support this learning (Blewitt et al., 2021). Macfarlane et al. (2017) maintain that social and emotional learning is fundamental to Māori, yet limited research explores how kaiako in early learning use bicultural practices to support this learning. The current research emphasises the significance of bicultural teaching and learning, reflecting both Te Tiriri of Waitangi partners throughout the education system in Aotearoa New Zealand. Although *Te Whāriki* has positively influenced the visibility of tikanga and te reo Māori in early learning programmes, Western pedagogy and practice remain dominant, indicating that there is still a long way to go (Jenkin, 2017; Skerrett, 2018; Skerrett & Ritchie, 2021; Williams et al., 2023). This review also reveals that purposeful professional development and curriculum resources are needed to build teacher capability in designing

intentional, play-based opportunities that scaffold children's social and emotional learning and bicultural practice (Education Review Office, 2010, 2011, 2019; Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014). The intentional teaching discourse could be the critical thread that supports kaiako in weaving together social, emotional and bicultural learning in their practice.

The *He Awa Whiria* framework offers an opportunity to integrate the richness of kaupapa Māori traditions and pedagogy with Western knowledge to understand what kaiako know and do to support children's social and emotional learning in a bicultural context. Future publications will report on understanding New Zealand's early childhood kaiako regarding children's social and emotional learning and the use of bicultural practices to facilitate such learning. This research has the potential to foster the vision of *Ka Hikitia*, for tamariki Māori to enjoy educational success as Māori and fulfil the promise of *Te Whāriki* as a bicultural curriculum for all children in Aotearoa New Zealand. In conclusion, I offer some final reflective questions that may be of interest to early childhood education kaiako:

- What strengths do I have in supporting social-emotional learning for infants, toddlers, and young children, and how can I build on these to enhance my practice?
- How can I integrate Māori and Western knowledge streams to affirm language, identity, and culture while supporting social-emotional learning for all learners?
- What tools, resources, or connections could further empower me to strengthen my practice in integrating these knowledge streams?

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