

How wellbeing literacy reflects and supports wellbeing practices in early education: A directed qualitative content analysis of teacher practices

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Abstract: At the same time as positive psychology and wellbeing science has grown and expanded through cross disciplinary research and dialogue, the field of early education globally has increased its focus on wellbeing outcomes for children. How new concepts and theories from wellbeing science, such as wellbeing literacy, can be applied to early childhood education to underpin wellbeing pedagogy and practices, and support children’s wellbeing, is relevant and timely. Through an online survey and directed content data analysis, this qualitative study sought the perspectives of early childhood teachers about how they promote children’s wellbeing communication. Furthermore to understand how teachers’ practices compare to the wellbeing literacy capability model. Findings from 76 teachers from Victoria, Australia yielded rich data about ways wellbeing words, topic areas and concepts are taught, practice examples of expressive and receptive wellbeing language, how these align to wellbeing literacy and why this is important to teachers. An intentionality for child wellbeing and children’s capability for effective wellbeing communication, along with other pedagogies in addition to the wellbeing literacy model emerged. These findings indicate wellbeing literacy and the 5-component model align with existing wellbeing pedagogy. Additionally, how wellbeing literacy can expand early education’s singular and traditional view of literacy towards a contemporary, socio-cultural conception. Findings from this study begin to address the paucity of research and literature about wellbeing literacy in the context of childhood and early education. Understanding how a literacy of wellbeing may be applied to pedagogy and practice in ECEC and authentically facilitated by teachers, is novel in both education and wellbeing fields and can enhance both educational and wellbeing outcomes for young children and pedagogical avenues for educators.

Keywords: wellbeing literacy, wellbeing, early childhood education, teacher perspectives, literacy

1. Introduction

Human wellbeing, and related concepts such as happiness, quality of life, thriving and flourishing, have been under discussion and debate for centuries. Under the broad term of ‘wellbeing science’, research into what defines and supports how humans can *be well* and *do well* has expanded, moving through cross-cultural deepening waves, offering new theories, models and a “more globally inclusive picture of wellbeing” (Lomas, 2022, p. 254; Wong, 2011). With this broader focus (beyond illbeing) and cross disciplinary dialogue, new and expanded constructs and theories have emerged. These include those related to positive emotions (Frederickson,

2013); flow (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000); hope (Snyder, 2000; Colla et al., 2022); self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000); strengths (Peterson, 2004); wellbeing literacy (Oades et al., 2021) and psychological wellbeing (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

These and other concepts from wellbeing science and positive psychology have been influenced by and applied to many disciplines—from education, psychology, philosophy and science to politics, economics, public policy and marketing (Jarden & Roache, 2023; Lee & Sirgy, 2004). In particular, the application of positive psychology to education settings has produced the field of ‘positive education’. Positive education (or wellbeing education) seeks to combine knowledge from positive psychology with best-practice teaching and learning to achieve both wellbeing and academic goals (Norrish et al., 2013; White, 2023). However positive education is under-examined in early childhood (Baker, et al., 2017; Waters et al., 2022). This article addresses positive education in the specific discipline early childhood education, and the application of one of wellbeing science’s newest concepts, wellbeing literacy.

1.1 Wellbeing literacy

Introduced by Oades and colleagues in 2017, wellbeing literacy was proffered first as an ingredient missing in positive education and an interesting possible future to elaborate on wellbeing, recovery and mental health (Oades & Johnston, 2017; Oades et al., 2017). Originating in wellbeing science and influenced by the intellectual and disciplinary spaces of contemporary literacy, constructivism and contextualism, wellbeing literacy is defined as “a capability to comprehend and compose wellbeing language, across contexts, with the intention of using such language to maintain or improve the wellbeing of oneself, others or the world” (Oades et al., 2021, pg. 1). In line with multiple literacies and socio-cultural views of literacy as constructing and making meaning within and between people, wellbeing literacy draws attention to the language people have and use around their wellbeing (Oades et al., 2021). Wellbeing literacy, simply construed as the mindful use of language for and about wellbeing, is the ability to communicate intentionally about and for wellbeing and involves language skills that are used in context and for the direct purpose of wellbeing creation (Hou et al., 2021). These skills, or necessary components, form the capability of wellbeing literacy whose five components distinguish and extend it beyond other literacies such as health or emotional literacy (Berkman, 2010; Steiner, 2003). (see Table 1 below).

Of note in the capability model is potential confusion with emotional literacy or social-emotional learning (SEL), particularly under the *Vocabulary and knowledge* component. Emotional literacy is the ability to recognise, understand, manage and appropriately express emotions (Sharp, 2014). SEL is generally defined as the process of understanding and managing emotions, empathy, relationships, identities, goals and decisions (Denham, 2003). These concepts could be perceived as similar to wellbeing literacy regarding the use of vocabulary and knowledge related to emotions. Concepts of emotional literacy and SEL provide broad frameworks for conceptualising emotional and social competencies, however wellbeing literacy focuses on the capability to intentionally comprehend and compose wellbeing language across contexts. While emotions are a domain of wellbeing (Sun et al., 2020), this does not equate to the broader scope of wellbeing literacy. Rather, emotional literacy and SEL could be considered domains or elements of wellbeing literacy (Francis et al., 2020).

As a recent addition to wellbeing science and positive education, research into wellbeing literacy and its application to real world situations is nascent. Hou and colleagues (2021) have developed and empirically tested a simple provisional measure of wellbeing literacy (the Well-Lit 6), a 6-item scale to assess the concept of wellbeing literacy in the education context. Wellbeing

literacy has been studied in primary school children (aged 5 – 10 years) through visual narrative analysis of children’s drawings (Waters et al., 2021; Waters et al., 2022) and via a brief online positive psychological intervention (Francis et al., 2020). In adults, wellbeing literacy has been explored in lay populations (Chng et al., 2022); in the workplace in the form of digital wellbeing literacy (An et al., 2023), and in higher education settings for the wellbeing of academics (Lemon et al., 2024a; Lemon et al., 2024b) and students (Johnson et al., 2017; Serini et al., 2024). Wellbeing literacy has also begun to be explored cross nationally, with the psychometric properties of the Well-Lit 6 examined in Chinese military cadets (Jia et al., 2024); perspectives of wellbeing gathered from Chinese international students (Huang et al., 2020) and Burns et al.’s., (2024) study of 1044 adults residing in Australia, the United Kingdom, Singapore, South Africa and Malaysia investigating their mental health and wellbeing literacy discrimination skills. Disciplines other than wellbeing education, such as coaching, are also interested in the application of wellbeing literacy (e.g. Passmore et al., 2024).

Table 1. *The Wellbeing Literacy Capability Model* (adapted from Baker et al., 2021)

	Component	Description
<i>The WHAT? of wellbeing literacy - about wellbeing</i>	1. Vocabulary and knowledge about wellbeing	Words, information about wellbeing
<i>The HOW?</i>	2. Wellbeing Comprehension of multimodal texts	Listening, reading, viewing about and for wellbeing
	3. Wellbeing composition of multimodal texts	Speaking, writing, creating about and for wellbeing
<i>The WHO? WHEN? WHERE?</i>	4. Context awareness and adaptability	Awareness of adapting language to context
<i>The WHY? of wellbeing literacy - for wellbeing</i>	5. Intentionality for wellbeing	Habit of intentionally communicating for the purposes of wellbeing – a belief, desire, awareness and intention to use language to maintain or improve wellbeing for the self and others

These studies aside, many opportunities exist to further explore, understand and apply wellbeing literacy across contexts and cultures, and at different ages and stages of the lifespan. For example, a yet unexplored area is early childhood education (Waters et al., 2022). There are synergies between positive psychology and early childhood education regarding prioritising wellbeing outcomes, but a paucity of research applying positive psychology interventions to this education sector (Baker et al., 2017; Shoshani & Sloane, 2017). Baker et al., (2021) have specifically highlighted the potential application of wellbeing literacy to early education, arguing it is a necessary and relevant concept to facilitate and conceptualise child wellbeing in this context however further research has yet to be published. This current study aims to begin exploring this novel opportunity and further expand knowledge of wellbeing literacy.

1.2 The early childhood education context

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services provide age-differentiated education and care for children under compulsory school age, with an intentional education component aiming to develop cognitive, physical, social and emotional skills necessary for school and societal participation (OECD, 2024). Education for children prior to school attendance is embedded in international government policy and discourse, highlighted by the United Nations (2015) Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4; Quality Education, Target 4.2) to ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education. Moreover, OECD indicators show that enrolment in at least one year of formal ECEC before the start of compulsory schooling is universal or near universal in OECD countries (OECD, 2024). For example, 92% of 4-year-olds are enrolled in ECEC in Australia, 81% in New Zealand, 98% in Japan and Italy, 100% in the UK and Indonesia, with a 2022 OECD average of 96% (OECD Chart).

Congruent with positive education's goal of providing education for both wellbeing and scholarly achievement (Norrish et al., 2013), ECEC curricula and frameworks internationally focus on both child wellbeing and academic outcomes. For example, explicit inclusions around wellbeing exist in ECEC curriculum documents in the United Kingdom, USA, Australia, New Zealand, China, Columbia, Denmark, Portugal (Author et al, 2017; Brogaard-Clauson et al., 2022, Shuey & Kankaraš, 2018). The acquisition of traditional academic skills, such as literacy, is also a widespread focus of ECEC programs, with efforts to increase early literacy experiences (as emergent literacy) evident in curricula and practice (Chambers et al., 2016; Piasta, 2016). Given this, wellbeing literacy's nascent and under-researched position in the critical early education sector, and early childhood as a time of rapid language acquisition and literacy skill development (Al-Harbi, 2020; (Raban, 2012), there is a relevant and important opportunity to investigate of how wellbeing literacy can be applied to ECEC settings.

1.3 The context of Australia

In the Australian ECEC context, an examination of how children's wellbeing literacy may be supported is timely. Whole of government initiatives have been recently launched, including *The Early Years Strategy 2024–2034* (Department of Social Services, 2024) and the *Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy* (National Mental Health Commission, 2021) both of which include a child wellbeing focus. Furthermore, in early education, early literacy and wellbeing are key learning outcomes and foci of state, territory and national educational frameworks, quality standards and regulations (ACECQA; 2023; Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Australia's national *Early Year's Learning Framework* (EYLF), mandates 5 key Learning Outcomes for children including "Children have a strong sense of wellbeing" and "Children are effective communicators" (AGDE, 2022, p. 29). Effective communication with the intention for wellbeing is therefore a synergy between wellbeing literacy and ECEC worthy of investigation. Additionally, the EYLF states literacy "incorporates a range of modes of communication including music, movement, dance, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, composing, reading and writing" (AGDE, 2022, p. 57), echoing the multimodal elements of communication in the wellbeing literacy capability model (see Table 1). With government ECEC strategies focused on wellbeing and connections visible between curriculum documents and the wellbeing literacy capability model, we find a rationale for examining how ECEC teachers are promoting children's wellbeing communication in multimodal ways.

1.4 The current study

To begin addressing the wellbeing literacy research gap and possible connection in ECEC, this investigation sought to hear from teachers in early education about their child wellbeing pedagogy and practices. As an initial look into this education context through the perspectives of those responsible for wellbeing and educational outcomes (ECEC teachers), it was guided by the research questions: *In what ways are early childhood teachers promoting children's wellbeing communication through pedagogy and practice?* and *How do the answers provided by teachers compare to the wellbeing literacy capability model?*

2. Method

2.1 Qualitative study design

Qualitative research aims to explore the meaning that individuals or groups assign to a phenomena or problem and understand human experiences from the perspective of the participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). A qualitative stance on this study therefore sought to compare data from early childhood teachers about their wellbeing practices with the wellbeing literacy capability model to see how the model “mirrors real life and how events may operate in the real world” (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, p. 224). Reflecting an interpretivist approach (Saunders et al., 2019) this study endeavoured to generate new and deeper interpretations and understanding of wellbeing literacy in the context of early education, placing an emphasis on the pedagogical experiences and practices of ECEC teachers.

2.2 Participants

Data reported in this paper came from a subset of questions from a larger online survey purposively sampling early childhood teachers working with 3- to 5-year-old children, in kindergarten programs in the state of Victoria, Australia. Consistent with phenomenology, participants should have meaningful and significant experiences with the phenomenon under investigation and be relatively homogeneous (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Moustakas, 1994). Thus, the perspectives of those in teaching roles (holding a Diploma or Bachelor of Early Childhood Education or relevant qualification) were sought given the responsibility they hold for the pedagogical approach and practices to meet the wellbeing and communication Learning Outcomes of Australia's national and state ECEC frameworks.

Volunteer participants for the survey were recruited via social media (invitations via email, Facebook and LinkedIn), known networks and resultant snowball sampling. Participants submitted anonymous online answers via Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com.au) between July and November 2023. A total of 76 surveys were included in the study. In qualitative research, justifications of sample size are complex—there are few ‘rules’ and saturation is not recommended, however this sample size was deemed ‘mid-range’ and rich enough to answer the research questions and pragmatically able to be deeply analysed (Boddy, 2021; Braun et al., 2021; Marshall et al., 2013).

Of the 76 participants, gender identity was 74 female, one male and one non-binary, and countries of origin included Australian (including Indigenous Australian), Asian and Anglo European. 65 participants spoke English only and 12 an additional language. Participants taught in rural, regional and metropolitan ECEC services with teaching experience ranging from less than one year to over 25 years. All were teachers but many held additional leadership and/or pedagogical roles (see also Table 2 below). The sample represents a convenience sample who

provided an informed and important perspectives on ECTs wellbeing pedagogy and practices but may not generalise across all early childhood teachers.

Table 2. *Demographics of survey participants*

Sample Characteristics	n
Role	
Teacher	36
Teacher + Director/Service leader	12
Teacher + Educational/Pedagogical leader	11
Teacher + Director/Service leader + Educational/Pedagogical leader	10
Teacher + other (e.g. coach)	7
Qualification	
Diploma or Graduate Diploma	16
Bachelor's degree	46
Master's degree	14
ECEC Experience	
Less than 1 year	2
1-10 years	43
11-20 years	13
20+ years	18
Cultural Background	
Australian (excluding Indigenous Australian)	52
Indigenous Australian	1
Other backgrounds	23

2.3 Data collection

Participants answered closed and open-ended online survey questions regarding their wellbeing definitions and perspectives (such as how they describe child wellbeing, how they would know if a child had a weak or strong sense of wellbeing) and pedagogical practices (such as how they reported they promote or support child wellbeing in their work and what they think are the most important things they teach children about wellbeing). Consistent with the chosen data analysis method for this study (qualitative directed content analysis, see below), other questions targeted the components of the wellbeing literacy capability model (Table 1) – for example, seeking to know how expressive and receptive language experiences (composition and comprehension skills) were provided to support wellbeing, if teaching these communication skills was important to teachers and why. Examples of practices and barriers were also sought specifically around the wellbeing literacy model components of words and information, expressive and receptive language, and context.

2.4 Researcher reflexivity

The authors have backgrounds in ECEC, psychology and wellbeing science. Our respective familiarity with ECEC pedagogy and wellbeing literacy were an asset in the study design and interpretation of the results. However, we acknowledge the potential initial positive bias towards the capability model. While an understanding of nuances of ECEC practices reported in open-

text responses was an advantage, we were conscious of this familiarity leading to assumptions. To counteract this, reflexivity was maintained during data analysis with peer debriefings, frequent revisiting and questioning of the data and the first author keeping a reflective log and audit trail (Shaw, 2010). The directed content analysis approach reported below also supported reflexivity and mitigation of bias via the allowance for emergent categories and those outside of the wellbeing literacy capability model.

2.5 Ethical considerations

All procedures were approved by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics committee (ID #25979)

2.6 Data analysis

Data was organised and analysed using directed qualitative content analysis primarily through the NVivo platform (<https://lumivero.com/>). Content analysis has three distinct approaches (conventional, summative and directed) and is a method for drawing realistic conclusions, from all types of texts, in a way that is dependable, credible, confirmable and transferable (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Specifically, directed content analysis (DCA) starts with theory and codes are defined both before (from relevant research findings or theory) and during analysis (from the data) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The main strength of a DCA approach is that existing theory can be refined, extended or supported, particularly as a research area grows (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Findings can include both supporting and non-supporting evidence for a theory, particularly in a new context. DCA was therefore chosen to understand more about wellbeing literacy in ECEC practices using codes predetermined from the wellbeing literacy capability model while remaining open to new insights to emerge from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Oades et al., 2021). Guided by a more structured process than a conventional content analysis, DCA has three main phases, Preparation, Organisation and Reporting (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

For the current study, the *Preparation* phase included data familiarisation to develop a comprehensive sense of the whole. Open text responses from relevant questions in the survey were chosen as units of analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and both manifest and latent content analysis was decided upon to ensure a deep understanding of the data (Assaroudi et al., 2018). The *Organisation* phase then began via developing the structured categorisation matrix of predetermined codes (see Table 3, column 1). Theoretical definitions of the predetermined codes were made using existing theory and definitions from the wellbeing literacy capability model (Oades et al., 2021). These included the five necessary components of wellbeing literacy (see Table 1) and an additional 'other than the model' category (to capture data that may not fit the capability model). This approach allowed for critical reflection on preconceptions and mitigated potential bias by explicitly allowing for the inclusion of data that did not align with the capability model.

Next, analysis was undertaken, including reviewing the data for correspondence with or exemplification of the predetermined categories. During analysis, data that could not be coded into the predetermined categories of the structured categorisation matrix were identified and analysed to decide if they represented a new category or a subcategory, based on the principles of inductive content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This process resulted in the emergence of six subcategories, further evidencing receptiveness to emergent themes that extended beyond the initial framework of the wellbeing literacy model (Table 3, column 2).

Table 3. Structured categorisation matrix (of predetermined categories and emergent subcategories) used for and during coding

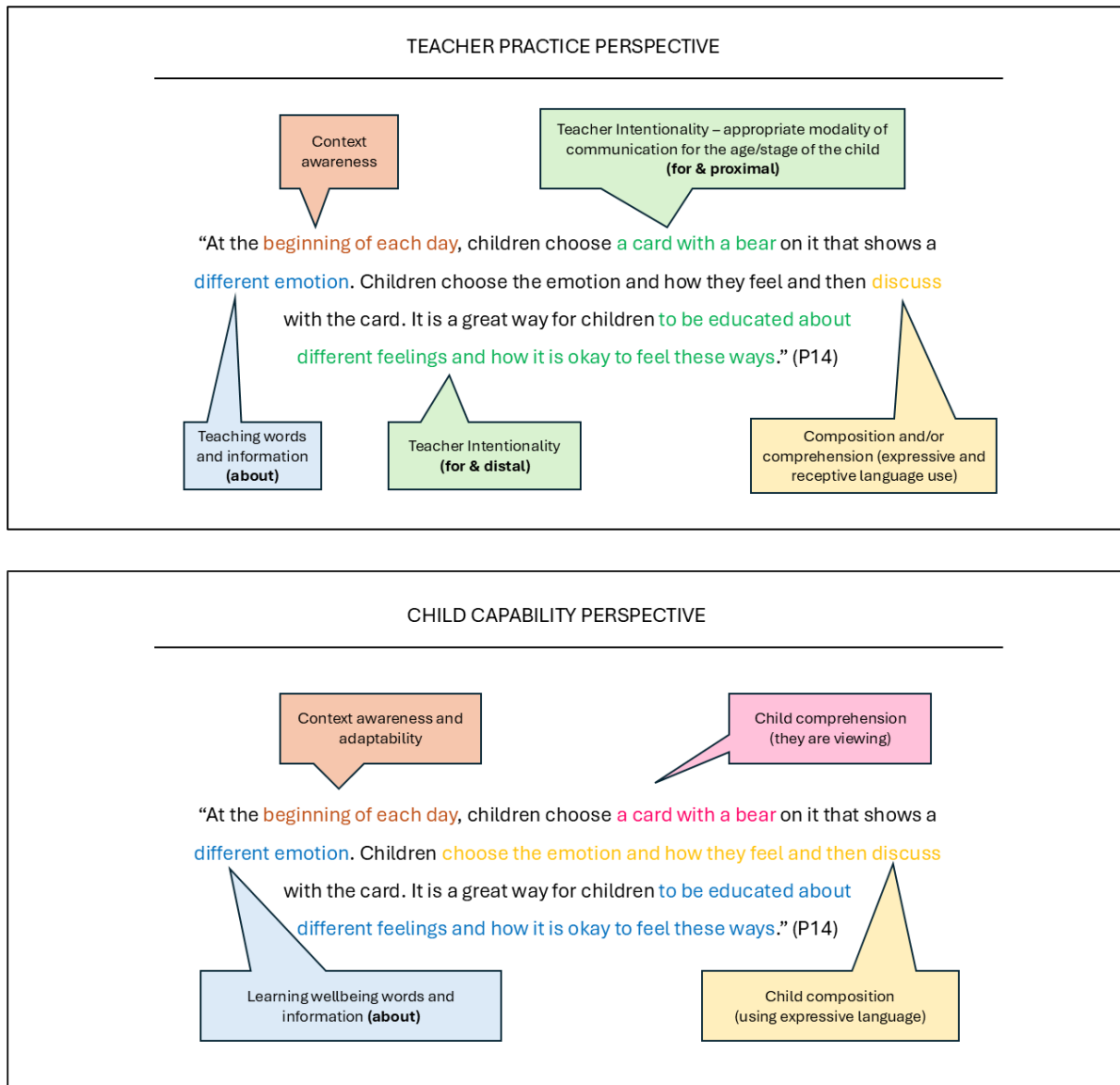
Predetermined categories	Emergent Subcategories
Vocabulary and knowledge about wellbeing	Practice and pedagogy importance Wellbeing words, topic areas and concepts taught
Comprehension of multimodal text related to wellbeing	Comprehension: Practice and pedagogy importance
Composition of multimodal text related to wellbeing	Composition: Practice and pedagogy importance Composition: Wellbeing expression, communication and signs Composition: Non-verbal communication avenues are important
Context awareness and adaptability	-
Intentionality for wellbeing	-
Other than the model	-

Data analysis was conducted by the first author followed by regular discussions and validation of content among co-authors to reach consensus (Elo & Kynga's, 2008). In addition, findings were discussed with three external peer de-briefers (from wellbeing science and early education fields) to provide critique and fresh analysis perspectives (Byrne, 2001).

Beyond the adopted DCA process as elaborated by Elo & Kyngäs (2008) and Hsieh & Shannon (2005), we devised and applied an additional and more nuanced stage of analysis. Smaller sections of qualitative data—specific examples of child wellbeing practices and language-use interactions reported by survey participants—were chosen for deeper analysis using only the 5 components of the wellbeing literacy model. Likening these small data units to a vignette (realistic stimuli or scenarios used in research to provoke responses and gain participants' insight into a phenomenon; Skilling & Stylianides, 2019) these data extracts were used to support our understanding of the alignment of wellbeing literacy components with teacher reported practice.

In this way we used the extracts/vignettes to further our understanding and analysis of data in our role as researchers, rather than the traditional use of vignettes for data collection with research participants. This analysis was undertaken on the same data extract/vignette from both a teacher practice perspective (teacher pedagogy and how it may be underpinned through a wellbeing literacy lens) and the child capability perspective (what elements of the capability of wellbeing literacy may be being developed in the child during the specific language interaction). This analysis process was undertaken during peer debriefings and captured in audit trails to interrogate specific segments of the data against the wellbeing literacy capability model. It was as a reflexive and re-questioning technique that informed the emergent subcategories and conclusions drawn for the overall findings. See Figure 1 for a specific example of the process.

Figure 1. Example of participant response coded for components of the Wellbeing Literacy Model from the dual perspectives of the teacher and the child



The final phase, *Reporting*, consisted of detailing the DCA process and enumeration of findings, including systematically presenting the association between the data and the Structured Categorisation Matrix (Table 3), and reporting trustworthiness criteria adopted (Assarroudi et al., 2018).

2.7 Trustworthiness

Informed by Lincoln & Guba's evaluative criteria for qualitative studies of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (1986), several techniques for establishing trustworthiness (as a parallel term to rigour) were used. Familiarisation with the data, by reading and re-reading the survey results, was undertaken by the co-authors for credibility and peer debriefing supported clarity of data interpretations and content validation. An audit trail was kept to capture and report the DCA stages and processes along with evolving interpretations and decisions, and researcher reflexivity to establish dependability and confirmability of the analysis. The extent to which the findings are trustworthy and transferable are ultimately up to the reader

(Lincoln & Guba, 1986), however strategies such as purposive sampling of participants and reflective journaling were undertaken to support transferability (Enworo, 2023).

3. Findings

The survey responses yielded rich and explicit data related to how teachers in early education contexts promote children's wellbeing communication and how these practices compare to the wellbeing literacy capability model. These findings were informed by the dual analytic approach of broader DCA and the novel vignette analysis as described above. Findings, under each of the predetermined categories and five emerging subcategories (Table 3) are now discussed, along with supporting participant responses.

3.1 Predetermined category: 'Vocabulary and knowledge about wellbeing'

This category refers to an individual possessing vocabulary and knowledge about wellbeing that they value and can use in the service of their own wellbeing or that of others (see Table 1, Component 1). Participants provided many examples of teaching practices (interactions, experiences, curriculum content and strategies) they employ to promote children's wellbeing through this avenue. For example:

- "At every opportunity I use words to describe feelings. If I see a child is feeling upset/overwhelmed/angry/frustrated etc., I will say: 'I can see you're feeling upset because...', 'That's so hard for you right now...'. Describing what's happened, what's going on inside for that child helps to give them the words and validates their feelings, and actually, them as a person of value." (P20).
- "Through stories, songs, games, puppets, incidental conversations and modelling — sharing resources with families." (P58).

At a more nuanced level, participants shared specific language they used to support children's wellbeing communication in knowledge areas such as self-regulation, behaviours, interactions, levels of arousal, thoughts, emotions, health, social justice, lifestyles, safety and consent. For example "You know your body best; it's okay to say no" (P36); "How's your engine running?" (P53); "What colour do you think jealousy is?" (P44); "When you have a problem with others. What are your options?" (P9); "'sometimes' and 'everyday' foods" (P29). Participants also shared examples of wellbeing vocabulary and knowledge used by children, for example "I'm in the green zone. When we take turns, I feel happy" (P29); "I'm having a moment" (P48); "When I'm quiet the monsters come." (P70); "this is what angry looks like" (P36).

When participants answered questions about wellbeing words and information they teach children they not only expressed how important this area of their work is, but the many ways they do this. As a result, two emergent subcategories were identified during analysis.

3.1.1 Emergent subcategory: 'Practice and pedagogy importance'

Overwhelmingly, participants indicated (in multiple choice survey questions) that practices teaching children wellbeing words and information were 'important' or 'very important' (92%). Why these practices were important was further evidenced in open text responses, revealing an underlying pedagogical value of teachers that children are capable communicators and wellbeing communication skills are vital:

- "... words help children identify things that they perhaps can't otherwise understand. They are capable of such understanding so by embedding the language into our daily practice we are allowing them to learn in a way that reflects their

capabilities and sets them up for success.” (P3)

- “Having and understanding the language to use when speaking of their wellbeing, understanding how to regulate themselves and knowing how to ask for help. Having the language to describe how they’re feeling. (P23)

3.1.2 Emergent subcategory: ‘Wellbeing words, topic areas and concepts taught’

Participants also shared broad wellbeing topics and concepts they teach young children, including but not limited to vocabulary, knowledge and language skills about emotions, feelings and self-regulation; self-care and pursuing their own interests; safety and security; independence, agency and having their own voice; concepts of respect, fun and happiness, autonomy and rights; mindfulness and resilience; strengths of character (kindness, empathy, love of learning); physical health and lifestyle; nature and the outdoors; and ideas about belonging, relationships and connection.

Specific knowledge areas participants reported they teach children so they have access to wellbeing vocabulary included those around respect, yoga, exercise, healthy eating, mindfulness, meditation, mindset, gratitude, resilience and anxiety. Multimodal resources teachers used to support children’s acquisition of wellbeing words and knowledge included books, posters, flash cards, illustrations, puppets, social stories, toys and television programs. Participants also shared they utilised formal and external programs/practices as sources of wellbeing knowledge suitable to share with young children. For example emotional literacy curriculums, the concept of ‘bucket filling’, Zones of Regulation, emotional coaching, Circle of Security and Smiling Mind.

3.2 Predetermined category: ‘Comprehension of multimodal text related to wellbeing’

This category concerns people being able to comprehend multimodal texts related to wellbeing. Participants reported they support children’s wellbeing communication, outcomes and learning through comprehension (receptive language) in ways aligning to the wellbeing literacy model through reading, listening or viewing (Table 1). Practice examples provided by teachers included story telling (picture story books, audio books, oral stories, social stories); displays, posters, charts and visual aids (for routines, achievements, topics of discussion, activity choices); positive verbal expressions, encouragement and affirmations; watching films or video/YouTube clips; puppets; photographs (of family, emotions, events); introducing new language/words; having comfort items accessible; listening to music, singing and meditation/mindfulness tracks; role modelling and sharing personal experiences. Illustrative responses from participants included:

- “I do a lot of “told” stories or puppet play.... In this way I can tailor stories towards a particular need. Also using books and games.” (P20)
- “Sharing a personal experience and how it felt for me. Providing story/video as provocation for discussion about wellbeing.” (P29)
- “Listening to lovely music, providing opportunities to dance to different types of music and noting how the music makes us feel.” (P74)

98% of participants shared that providing receptive language experiences for children’s understanding of wellbeing was as ‘important’ or ‘very important’ and thus a ‘practice and pedagogy importance’ subcategory (Table 2, Column 2) developed.

3.2.1 Emergent subcategory: 'Comprehension: Practice and pedagogy importance'

It was evident that children having the opportunity to receive/comprehend wellbeing texts, such as books, music or groups discussion, was an important pedagogical avenue for teachers to promote child wellbeing communication. Not only to provide children with immediate wellbeing boosts and experiences, but for them to develop increased comprehension of their own wellbeing and strategies to improve it that they could use beyond the immediate ECEC setting. Pedagogical intentions of fostering children's learning, development and wellbeing were evident, for example:

- "Wellbeing underpins all learning and development. Learning about wellbeing in early childhood will give children a framework they can take with them through life." (P 54)
- "Stories have always been used to teach, right back in time. We all relate to teaching that comes through stories. They open up new worlds to us." (P26)
- "Receptive language is important for educators to teach children to assist children in being effective communicators." (P66)

3.3 Predetermined category: 'Composition of multimodal text related to wellbeing'

This category refers to composition of wellbeing texts as it occurs through writing, speaking, and creating (Table 1). Wellbeing literacy is not just about knowing and receiving wellbeing related information, but also includes a 'productive' element of creating *about* and/or *for* wellbeing of self and/or others (Oades et al., 2021). Survey participants reported many ways they promote children's wellbeing communication through expressive language activities and opportunities, including art/craft experiences (drawing, painting, cutting, pasting); singing, dancing and actions songs; puppets, books and comfort items; emotion/feeling/face stones/cards; dramatic and 'small world' play; group discussions and 1:1 conversation; sensory experiences (playdough, sand, water, mud); puzzles; and loose parts. For example:

- "Puppets, (making emotions puppets as well as acting with different puppets) emotions cards for memory or sorting or similar games, emotions dominos, playdough with blank face templates, potato heads, books, songs." (P13)
- "We send home Kozy Koala each week with a different child and they are encouraged to then share with the group what adventures they had together. Our prompts encourage the children to draw and speak about different mindful experiences, ways their family practice gratitude or empathy etc." (P34)
- "Daily quiet time where we use meditation pebbles that children have decorated." (P42)

Following from and underneath the pre-determined category of 'Composition of multimodal text related to wellbeing', three subcategories emerged.

3.3.1 Emergent subcategory: 'Composition: Practice and pedagogy importance'

The data highlighted how important promoting child wellbeing communication through expressive language practices was to participants (including writing, speaking and/or creating). Participants expressed pedagogical aspects related to educational philosophies, child development and differentiated teaching, for example:

- "Visual arts are a strong form of communication for children and I have deep respect for the Reggio Emilia project and the hundred languages of children." (P45)

- “If a child is able to effectively communicate that they need help or assistance, or explain how they are feeling, this demonstrates strong wellbeing.” (P60)
- “Children learn differently and express themselves differently. It's important to provide a wide range of ways for them to express themselves successfully.” (P71)

3.3.2 Emergent subcategory: ‘Composition: Wellbeing expression, communication and signs’

Responses indicated participants felt children can be, and are, effective wellbeing communicators with capacity to express how they feel and what they need to support their wellbeing. Furthermore, that signs children have a strong sense of wellbeing can be observed by teachers via children’s expressive language, particularly during opportunities such as art experiences, singing, dancing or wellbeing related conversations:

- “Children at the early years stage are developing the communication skills about wellbeing. Learning the words to describe emotions and feelings. Once trusting relationships are built with their peers and the Educators the children are able to practice effective communication.” (P9)
- “They are able to be aware of their own feelings or able to express how they’re feeling.” (P23)
- “Children express their feelings and needs through words, facial expressions, body language and voice. Can effectively express happiness, sadness, anxiety, etc.” (P6)

3.3.3 Emergent subcategory: ‘Composition: Non-verbal communication avenues are important’

Answers to questions about expressive language practices for child wellbeing included those around through writing, speaking, and creating, with a strong focus on teachers acknowledging children’s non-verbal pathways of communication. Congruent with the wellbeing literacy model that wellbeing communication is multimodal and literacy is a social exchange between people (Oades et al., 2021) many responses referred to the pedagogical importance of non-verbal strategies as valid forms of wellbeing communication. This included body language; children’s actions, interactions and behaviours; as well as children with English as a second language or non-verbal languages, for example:

- “Verbal communication is just one type of communication, I believe that children have 100 languages and providing opportunities to use these languages strengthen the children communication, identity and wellbeing.” (P74)
- “Children communicate through action and body language, if a child has a poor sense of wellbeing or safety they may act out and misbehaviour is always communicating, children with a strong sense of wellbeing may be confident and engaged in the program and this is also communication.” (P27)
- “Children may verbalise or be non-verbal in sharing their wellbeing—how they self-regulate, manage challenges, adapt to change etc. this can also come out in their play.” (P31)

3.4 Predetermined category: ‘Context awareness and adaptability’

This category refers to being aware of and adapting to contexts as the meaning of language varies with different situations and wellbeing information may be useful in one context and not in another (Oades et al., 2020; see also Table 1). Participants expressed they have observed and believe young children possess this ability. Firstly, in the way they transfer knowledge from one

setting to another (home to their ECEC setting and vice versa), and secondly, more closely aligned with the intent of 'Context awareness and adaptability', by adapting words and language use according to the different spheres of their lives:

- "I have heard about children taking concepts they have learned at Kinder and sharing them with their family. E.g.: twiddling thumbs, taking a deep breath, telling family members to use a green voice (quiet) instead of an orange (loud)." (P53)
- "Yes, often the children will use words with their family that they know it is not appropriate at Kinder." (P4)
- "Children's willingness to express is affected by those around them and how they expect to be received. Also the environment may affect their capacity to express by limiting opportunity, providing negative feedback or few resources with which children may express e.g., art, music." (P25)

3.5 Predetermined category: 'Intentionality for wellbeing'

The final component in the capability model concerns intention—the habit of intentionally using language to maintain or improve the wellbeing of self or others. This implies that comprehension (reading, listening, viewing) or composition (writing, speaking, creating) is 'skillful' or 'mindful' (Oades et al., 2021). This can be argued as a complex and nuanced skill, in that expressive and/or receptive communication is *intentionally* used for the purpose of a wellbeing outcome, not just a generic or singular activity related to wellbeing areas or topics but without the express intention *for* wellbeing. The degree to which 3- to 5-year-old children may possess this skill of intentionality and to which teachers can or try to promote this in children, was not explicitly explored in this survey due to complexity and not wishing to place a time burden on volunteer participants. However, across the data set notions of intentionality were evident. One of the research aims of this study was to explore ways teachers promote children's wellbeing communication, and the data suggested they do this with intention:

- "Children express themselves in many ways and we can support this by providing intentional opportunities to communicate." (P 52)
- "Spending more intentional time with the child, supporting them to understand the language around wellbeing, creating an environment that guides and facilitates an improvement in their wellbeing." (P24)
- "Explicitly and incidentally, with intention. I do this through discussion, visual art experiences, children's literature, drama, visual tools, opportunities for physical play and risky play where children can be supported to assess the risks involved." (P45)

3.6 Predetermined category: 'Other than the model'

Across the data set, many ways ECEC teachers promote children's wellbeing were offered that did not map directly to the wellbeing literacy model. These were captured and considered under the category of 'other than the model'. None of these contradicted the previous categories or subcategories but reinforced the broad, complex, multimodal and multi-faceted ways teachers promote children's wellbeing and wellbeing communication. Play, as an overall pedagogical approach was a noteworthy response, as were time in nature and sensory experiences. Each of these pedagogies arguably facilitate language use environments/opportunities, promote avenues for wellbeing words and information to be introduced, and expressive and receptive wellbeing

language exchange. Responses and practices that indicate teachers resonate with multimodal and differentiated approaches to wellbeing communication included:

- “Allowing children to take risks supports their development in so many ways. I’ve seen children’s wellbeing soar after mastering the climbing tree. They become more confident and more determined in positive ways. Shy children start to speak out and develop stronger relationships and resilience.” (P41)
- “Dialogic book reading, playworlds, dramatic play, adult led drama, visual arts, gosh everything! It depends on the children’s loves—we would use their curiosities as a vehicle for curriculum.” (P63)
- “All children will express themselves in different ways depending on their developmental stage and abilities. Children needs to have a variety of avenues.” (P7)

4. Discussion

In the current study, ECEC teachers provided rich and broad ways they promote children’s wellbeing communication through everyday pedagogical approaches and practices. This was done multimodally, providing children opportunities for listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating, verbally and non-verbally, about and for their wellbeing. Additionally, teachers indicated these teaching practices and pedagogical decisions were made intentionally, embedded in practice, with the belief they were important and that children could adapt to their wellbeing communication to context. This evidences multiple ways in which ECEC teacher’s everyday wellbeing practices compare to the wellbeing literacy capability model (Oades, 2021). As wellbeing literacy is a new construct in positive education and wellbeing science, this study adds to our understanding of wellbeing literacy and its application to the context of early childhood education.

While interest in positive and wellbeing education has grown internationally and significantly, challenges exist regarding which of its new theories, approaches and applications are relevant and to what context (White, 2023). In many early childhood education contexts wellbeing outcomes are mandated (e.g. AGDE, 2022) but meeting these outcomes is complex and varied as child wellbeing is a dynamic, multifaceted and contested construct (Dirwan & Thévenon, 2023; Pollard & Lee, 2003). Choosing rigorous, contextually and pedagogically relevant constructs and approaches to apply in support of child wellbeing is therefore critical. As the findings of this study indicate, teachers’ child wellbeing practices can be compared to the capability model indicating alignment between the wellbeing literacy construct and ECEC context. Early childhood teachers indicated strongly that teaching children composition and comprehension skills about and for child wellbeing was important to them, thus a model that can reflect current practices and inform wellbeing pedagogical approaches is not only relevant but necessary and beneficial.

Early literacy is also of interest to the findings of this study. In the current contexts of expanding wellbeing science research and the Australian whole of government focus on educational and wellbeing outcomes in early childhood, wellbeing literacy offers a model to expand ECEC literacies discourse. In ECEC, particularly in the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) literacy is already framed as multimodal (incorporating a range of communication modes such as music, movement and visual arts; AGDE, 2022) and is therefore synergistic with wellbeing literacy. However, the concept of literacy and learning of literacy skills in the EYLF remains closely aligned with the traditional, linear and developmental outcome of

an individual being able to extract information through reading and to communicate through writing (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003). As evidence of how a child may become an effective communicator (Learning Outcome 5), the EYLF suggests children “begin to understand key literacy and numeracy concepts and processes, such as the sounds of language, letter-sound relationships, concepts of print and the ways that texts are structured” and they “display literacy behaviours by incorporating reading and writing approximations and viewing in their play (including digital technologies) (AGDE, 2022, pp. 60-61). However literacy scholars have expanded views of literacy from an individual, cognitive process (where reading and writing is an internal, mental practice), to a socio-cultural one, occurring between people and within a context (Gee, 2015). Literacy is now perceived as plural rather than singular paradigm and the concept of multiple literacies has emerged (Gee, 2015). Wellbeing literacy is one such expansion that could add to ECEC conceptions of literacy.

Baker et al., (2021) have argued the contextual relevance of wellbeing literacy to ECEC and as an opportunity for clarification of best practice. Findings from this current study, examining the perspectives and practices of ECEC teachers add weight to this position, evidencing how existing wellbeing communication practices align with the wellbeing literacy capability model. With child wellbeing a topic of global concern and discourse and the facilitation of wellbeing viewed as a contemporary educational outcome as important as academic proficiency (De Ruyter et al., 2020; OECD, 2017) we argue it is timely for ECEC discussions, expectations and curricula inclusions to expand from ‘reading and writing’ and include a literacy of wellbeing.

4.1 Implications

Positive education broadly, and wellbeing literacy specifically, is understudied in early education (Baker et al., 2017; Shoshani & Sloane, 2017; Waters et al., 2021). While remaining cautious about the findings from one study, implications exist in the examination of an additional context for wellbeing literacy and increasing the expansion of positive education into early childhood. ECEC experiences, settings and teachers are some of the most essential and impactful factors in a child’s development and fundamental for children’s successful learning, development, and wellbeing in their early years and across their life trajectory (Hattie, 2008; Huppert, 2009; OECD, 2017; Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). Understanding how a literacy of wellbeing may be applied to pedagogy and practice in ECEC and authentically facilitated by teachers, may enhance both educational and wellbeing outcomes for young children and pedagogical avenues for teachers.

4.2 Limitations and future directions

The current study has begun to address gaps in existing literature (i.e. wellbeing literacy and ECEC) by hearing from ECEC teachers and comparing their wellbeing practices to the capability model. Limitations and opportunities for future research exist.

A limitation was the lack of in-depth exploration of how teachers understand and support children’s intentionality for wellbeing, particularly given this skill may not align with 3- to-5-year-old children’s trajectories and capacities. While the data suggested teachers recognise the importance of pedagogy and practices for wellbeing, future research is needed to understand how they may promote intentionality in young children’s wellbeing communication.

Moreover, the sample offered limited gender and cultural diversity. While it is known that ECEC workforce is predominantly female (Rohrmann et al., 2020), cultural and linguistic diversity percentages of the sector are less clear (Gide et al., 2022). Future research could focus on recruitment strategies to reach a more diverse sample, particularly in indigenous perspectives

given the EYLF focus on the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives (AGDE, 2022).

Additionally, the data provided by teachers represented self-report on the wellbeing language opportunities they provide for children and was therefore one step removed from the actual teaching practice or phenomenon of the wellbeing language interaction. Future opportunities exist in video-based methods of data collection for analysis and a richer understanding of the application and existence of the wellbeing literacy model from both the perspective of the teacher (i.e. their pedagogy and how it may be underpinned by wellbeing literacy) and the child (i.e. what elements of the capability of wellbeing literacy may be developed)

The convenience sample of ECEC teachers surveyed is also a limitation in that it may not generalise across early childhood teachers. However, the purpose (and strength) of the current qualitative study was to provide an in-depth and contextualised understanding of teachers' perspectives in the specific area of child wellbeing communication practices, rather than to generalise findings. Future research directions could include replication of this study and/or testing the findings across broader contexts (such as other states and territories in Australia or international ECEC cohorts) for external validity and/or generalisability confidence.

5. Conclusion

Wellbeing science is an interdisciplinary endeavour with a long and rich lineage founded on fields as broad as psychology, philosophy, economics, sociology, education politics, ancient and indigenous wisdoms. It is deepening and iterating in waves, across time, contexts cultures and disciplines. Research and innovation have been undertaken and applied to let "all flowers bloom" from these spaces (Huppert & Cooper, 2014, p. 36). Wellbeing literacy, as the mindful use of language for and about wellbeing (Oades et al., 2021), is one such concept that is ripe for exploration, application and blooming. Using directed qualitative content analysis and the perspectives of teachers working towards wellbeing and communication outcomes for young children, this study has examined comparisons to the wellbeing literacy capability model. Synergies exist in this interdisciplinary exchange, not just for pedagogy and practices and the wellbeing of children during their earliest education, but for children's development and success across the lifespan. Borrowing again from Huppert and Cooper's (2014) analogy, we hope the seeds of this study encourage further research and the blooming of children's wellbeing literacy in their early years.

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Ethics approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics committee (ID # 25979). This study was conducted in accordance with the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council 2018).

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