ABSTRACT
The child well-being movement seeks to enhance the well-being of all children and protect our most vulnerable. The plethora of definitions and approaches to child well-being may create ambiguity and uncertainty about what child well-being means and what research-based frameworks are available to support it. In this initial study, the well-being views of primary school-aged children were explored and aligned with the Developmental Assets approach which conceptualises child well-being in terms of the relationships, opportunities, competencies, values and self-perceptions that all youth need to be resilient and thrive (Search Institute, 2012). The results highlight the importance of interests to subjective child well-being and the limited opportunities reported by the majority of participants to constructively engage with their interests. This study suggests advocacy for children to have increased access to interest-based learning opportunities. The Developmental Assets approach, which includes a model for community development, provides school communities with a potential framework to understand, measure and respond to the well-being needs of students, as is required of schools by the Well-being for Success policy (Education Review Office, 2013).

Research Paper

Keywords: child well-being, developmental assets, primary

BACKGROUND
Child well-being is a multi-faceted construct that varies in its meaning across cultures and disciplines (Aldgate, 2010). It is most easily understood through the term health, with the terms well-being and health often used synonymously (Durie, 1994). Health is defined in New Zealand by Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994) which constructs health around taha tinana (physical well-being), taha hinengaro (mental and emotional well-being), taha whānau (social well-being) and taha wairua (spiritual well-being), all of which are located, for Māori, on the whenua (land), their place of belonging. Health and well-being are understood to exist on a positive continuum, linked to the idea of a ‘good life’ (Buchanan, 2000), in which individuals and collectives thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

While child well-being has two measurement paradigms, both support the child’s rights to have their voice heard and included on matters that affect them (Aldgate, 2010; United Nations, 1989). The child well-being indicators provide quantitative measures of child well-being that are used, for example, to guide the development of social policy (Ben-Arieh, 2010). Subjective child well-being research describes the other measurement paradigm. These studies have employed a variety of methodologies and have generated a large number of child well-being taxonomies (Dex & Hollingworth, 2012). According to Dex and Hollingworth (2012), the overarching themes include feeling loved within significant relationships, having a quality home, school and community environment, and being physically and emotionally healthy (see Table 1). Culture will determine what these themes look like. The well-being views of primary school-aged children are also included in the subjective child well-being studies published by Morgan (2010) and Fattore, Mason and Watson (2009), both of which are included in Table 1.

The Developmental Assets approach is an ecological, strengths-based and child-focused framework that conceptualises child well-being in terms of forty different Developmental Assets (Search Institute, 2012). Research has repeatedly shown that higher asset levels are associated with: a) greater achievement in school (Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartain, Sesma & Van Dulmen, 2006); b) increased valuing of cultural diversity and satisfaction with life (Scales, 2014), and c) reduced risk of certain behaviours including alcohol abuse and violence (Benson & Scales, 2009). Used in over sixty countries by over three million youth, and recently aligned with the international study of Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children, the validity and efficacy of the assets approach is well-established (Scales, 2014).
The recent development of a spiritual axis, defined as awareness of self and the world, connection and belonging to others, and having a life of meaning and contribution (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen & Roehlkepartain, 2012) further aligns the Developmental Assets approach with Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994), which underpins the Health and Physical Education section of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). This study was an initial exploration of the assets approach within the New Zealand context.

**METHOD**

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC). Support was gained from the principal and the board of trustees of a local primary school to include all Year 5 and Year 6 students attending this school in the study. An information sheet was then sent to parents including an opt-out form. Only one parent elected to return the opt-out form.

The study employed a mixed method design which involved semi-structured well-being discussions and administration of the Developmental Assets Profile-Preteen questionnaire (DAP-P). The semi-structured well-being discussions, held in either small groups or one-to-one, used an adapted version of Fattore, Mason and Watson's (2007) interview guide (see Table 2). The well-being views of 81 participants (41 female and 40 male) were recorded. The DAP-P, which contained 58 questions relating to the 40 Developmental Assets, was read out loud by the researcher to whole classes. It was completed by 132 participants (65 female and 67 male). The average age of participants was 10 years old.

A data-driven thematic analysis was completed on the child well-being discussions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved coding the responses into themes and sub-themes. The main themes were quality of relationships and self and freedoms. The central themes were positive sense of self, agency and security. The general themes were physical environment, material & economic resources, physical health, activities, social responsibilities and adversity. The quality of relationships included with parents, friends, family, teachers & pets. The self and freedoms included health; food & exercise, education; achievement & aspirations, choices; use of time, possessions, IT, freedom & responsibility, sports & outdoor activities. The quality of Environment included home, school, neighbourhood. The importance of having fun and play at home and in the neighbourhood, particularly for primary school-aged children.

### Table 1

**Key Components of Subjective Child Wellbeing**

| MORGAN (2010) | FATTORE, MASON & WATSON (2009) | DEX & HOLLINGWORTH (2012) |
|---------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Being healthy (44%) | - Main themes:                  | - Quality of relationships:  |
| Feeling loved (24%)  |  - Significant relationships   |  - With parents, friends, family, teachers & pets |
| Having a home (23%) |  - Emotional life               |  - Including qualities of love, acceptance, care, support, togetherness, respect, praise, fairness, listening |
| Feeling happy (19%) | - Central themes:               | - Self and freedoms:         |
| Being cared for (17%) | - Positive sense of self        |  - Health; food & exercise   |
| Being safe (17%) | - Agency                        |  - Education; achievement & aspirations |
| Having a family (14%) | - Security                      |  - Choices; use of time, possessions, IT, freedom & responsibility, sports & outdoor activities |
| Having friends (14%) | - General themes:               | - Quality of Environment:    |
| Being supported (11%) | - Physical environment         |  - Home, school, neighbourhood |
|                        | - Material & economic resources |  - The importance of having fun and play at home and in the neighbourhood, particularly for primary school-aged children |

### Table 2

**The Interview Guide**

| INTERVIEW QUESTIONS | INTERVIEW QUESTIONS |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Summary questions   | 1. What does well-being or ‘being well’, mean or feel like to you? |
|                     | 2. Tell me about a time in your life when things were going really well |
| Components of well-being questions | 3. Tell me about people that make you feel well. |
|                     | 4. Tell me about places that make you feel well. |
|                     | 5. Tell me about things that make you feel well. |
Previous research was used to guide initial interpretation of the data, leading to the identification of 21 themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thematic maps were used along with thematic frequency data and co-occurrence rates to identify three main themes and five subordinate themes. The main theme of interests included discussion of music, art, literacy, dance, technology, nature, sports and toys. Inter-rater reliability between the researcher and a fellow graduate student was 86.5% (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The DAP-P data was entered into a pre-formatted Excel worksheet provided by the Search Institute. This produced a total assets score and eight individual asset category scores. The constructible use of time asset category was the lowest scoring asset category, with the positive values and positive identity asset categories also scoring in the low and vulnerable range. All other asset categories including social competencies, commitment to learning, boundaries and expectations, empowerment and support scored in the moderately high level.

The two data sets were integrated through a ranking process. The thematic data was ranked according to frequency and the assets data relative to strength of response.

FINDINGS

The thematic analysis gave rise to eight interconnected well-being themes (see Figure 1). The three main themes were relationships, emotional health and interests. Their interconnection is illustrated in the diagram by the three overlapping circles. The subordinate themes of safety, values, special events and accomplishment provided independent and inter-related contributions to well-being. All themes co-occurred with the environmental theme, visually represented in the diagram by the outer environmental circle.

Figure 1: Child well-being themes.

The main themes of relationships and emotional life have been well-established in the literature (Fattore et al., 2009; McAuley & Rose, 2014). The identification of interests as a main well-being theme may reflect age-specific importance to local primary school-aged children, an assertion supported by Chen (2011). The extract below illustrates the inter-relationship between the key themes:

Researcher: Tell me about people that make you feel well?
Participant: My family and my best cousin.
Researcher: What makes her your best cousin?
Participant: We are the same age and like the same stuff and we’re nice to each other and happy.

Table 3 integrates the thematic data and developmental assets data. There is a semantic overlap between the two most-frequently discussed well-being themes of relationships and emotional health, and the two strongest asset categories of support, and boundaries and expectations, with the latter providing for the former (Scales, 2014). This implies that the Developmental Assets approach could be applied to develop the asset categories of support, and boundaries and expectations, which for vulnerable youth may facilitate enhancement of relationships and emotional health. The most significant disparity between the two data sets was in the main well-being theme of interests and the weakest asset category of constructible use of time, in which the majority of children reported limited opportunities to engage with their interests outside of school. This finding argues for parents, teachers, practitioners and school leaders to facilitate increased access to interest-based learning opportunities for all students, especially in light of the commitment to learning asset category being the third strongest asset category.
Weaving educational threads. Weaving educational practice.

IMPLICATIONS

The Education Review Office (ERO, 2013) asks all schools to measure and respond to the well-being needs of students. This request is based on the belief that, by developing a system to strengthen the well-being of all children, we will be better-able to protect our most vulnerable children, promoting their well-being and positive educational outcomes (Kahn, 2010). The recently published Well-being for Success Pilot Study Update (ERO, 2015) highlighted the continued need to develop a greater understanding of children’s well-being views and the variability amongst schools in their response to child well-being needs. The availability of the research-based Developmental Assets approach, with its questionnaire designed to collate the child’s voice, model of community development and measurement framework which provides for ongoing measures of treatment efficacy, may be used by school communities to develop a clearer understanding of child well-being needs from the child’s perspective, and provide a measured response.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on either subjective child well-being or the Developmental Assets approach may look to analyse the data according to the dimensions of Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994) or Te Wheke (Pere, 1997). Once the Developmental Assets framework has incorporated the newly-developed spiritual axis, future research would include a cultural analysis completed by Māori, and a pilot study to assess the efficacy of the assets framework.

CONCLUSION

A significant opportunity has recently emerged for school communities to develop local child well-being initiatives (ERO, 2013). The current study identifies one research-based framework that may facilitate an effective and efficient response. This study suggests the importance of increasing children’s opportunities to constructively use their time and engage in interest-based learning opportunities as a pathway to enhancing the well-being of primary school-aged children. This has relevance to parents, teachers and practitioners, all of whom make decisions on a daily basis that influence child well-being. To affect positive change for the larger school community depends on our ability to collaborate, release traditional role boundaries (Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb & Nevin, 1995) and work together to access and utilise the available resources.

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AUTHOR PROFILE

Anastasia Miliffe has a Masters in Educational Psychology from Massey University. Her previous research topics have included specific reading difficulties and the efficacy of intervention programmes for struggling readers. She is currently completing her Educational Psychology internship through Massey University and is employed by the Ministry of Education in Dunedin.

Email: ana.miliffe@education.govt.nz