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# The politics of identity, belonging and exclusion

## Chinese immigrant parents' involvement in New Zealand early childhood education

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# Abstract

Parental involvement and parent-teacher partnership are key notions promoted in the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, and their value for children's learning and development is nationally and internationally recognised. This study employed a life story methodology and a range of relevant theoretical frames, including theoretical and conceptual approaches concerning identity, social spaces, transnationalism and critical multiculturalism to explore Chinese immigrant parents' participatory experiences in their children's early childhood education in New Zealand and the factors that influenced their involvement. A documentary analysis identified many of the dominant discourses and practices prevalent in New Zealand early childhood education. Ten Chinese immigrants from the People's Republic of China, recruited from three public kindergartens in Auckland, participated in two phases of individual face-to-face interviews, which focused on their involvement in the kindergartens and their perspectives of parenting, teaching and learning.

The participants took pride in their Chinese identity and were determined to maintain their Chinese heritage. They had high expectations for their children's education and were actively involved in their learning in private spaces. However, their participation in the kindergartens was passive and minimal. Utilising the technique of critical discourse analysis, an unequal positioning of discourses was revealed when narrative data was interpreted against textual findings. The participants' stories indicated that they felt the teachers were not prepared to embrace diverse familial funds of knowledge. Their parental

aspirations and concerns were often dismissed and silenced while the dominant discourses were institutionally reinforced, thus perpetuating the participants' essentialised beliefs regarding New Zealand and Chinese ways of teaching and learning, whilst placing cultural beliefs and practices in binary opposition. Without a sense of entitlement and belonging, the participants excluded themselves from the kindergartens. Although they reluctantly accepted the dominant discourses in public spaces, they actively employed strategies within private spaces to fulfil their parental aspirations. They fluidly utilised a range of transnational and transcultural spatial strategies to mix and match practices from both the home and host country in order to maximise the learning opportunities and achievements of their children. This thesis concludes with pedagogical recommendations informed by critical multiculturalism.

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# Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Abstract .....   | i   |
| Acknowledgements.....  | iii |
| 1. Introduction.....   | 1   |
| Story of the researcher.....   | 2   |
| Contextualising the study: ECE .....                                     | 3   |
| Contextualising the study: PRC immigrants in Auckland .....              | 6   |
| A life story methodological approach and an eclectic theorising .....    | 8   |
| Linguistic protocols.....  | 10  |
| Words of caution.....  | 12  |
| Structure of the thesis .....  | 12  |
| 2. Contexts Matter .....   | 21  |
| Introduction .....   | 21  |
| Contexts of New Zealand ECE.....   | 23  |
| Diverse ECE services .....   | 23  |
| Regulations, 'quality' and challenges .....                              | 25  |
| <i>Te Whāriki</i> .....  | 29  |
| Theoretical underpinnings of <i>Te Whāriki</i> .....                     | 32  |
| Erik Erikson.....  | 33  |
| Jean Piaget.....   | 34  |
| Lev Vygotsky.....  | 36  |
| Jerome Bruner .....  | 38  |
| The discourse of play in New Zealand ECE.....                            | 39  |
| The discourse of parental involvement & parent-teacher partnership ..... | 43  |
| Communication, engagement and empowerment.....                           | 47  |
| Immigrant parents: Values, beliefs and practices .....                   | 50  |
| Children's education: Upward social mobility .....                       | 50  |
| Perceptions of children's early learning and play .....                  | 52  |
| Perspectives and experiences of participation in children's ECE .....    | 55  |
| Social cohesion: Immigrants' participation in ECE settings .....         | 57  |
| Fluid, selective and adaptive practices.....                             | 59  |
| The Chinese contexts: Parenting and ECE .....                            | 60  |
| Overview of ECE in China and Hong Kong.....                              | 60  |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Confucianism and collectivism .....   | 63  |
| Beyond authoritarian and authoritative parenting .....  | 66  |
| Perspectives of education, learning and teaching .....  | 69  |
| Perspectives of play and ECE .....  | 72  |
| Conclusion .....  | 75  |
| 3. Theorising.....  | 78  |
| Introduction .....  | 78  |
| The politics of identity.....   | 80  |
| Social construction of collective and individual identity: Commonalities and differences .....  | 81  |
| Identities of Chinese immigrants: Complexities & problematisation.....                          | 85  |
| PRC immigrants in New Zealand .....   | 87  |
| Transnationalism.....   | 88  |
| Transnational identities .....  | 88  |
| Transnationalism and nationalism.....   | 91  |
| Transnational Chinese immigrants.....   | 93  |
| Social-cultural spaces .....  | 94  |
| Social spaces of transnational immigrants: Private and public spaces .....                      | 96  |
| New possibilities: Third spaces .....   | 98  |
| Crossing cultural-spatial strategies .....  | 101 |
| Critical multiculturalism.....  | 102 |
| Discourse and power: Moving beyond the binaries and the notion of ‘the West and the Rest’ ..... | 104 |
| The politics of cultural differences and the habitus effects .....                              | 107 |
| Concerted cultivation and segmented assimilation.....   | 111 |
| Identities, hierarchy of discourses, and exclusion .....  | 114 |
| Critical multicultural education and pedagogy .....   | 116 |
| Including the voices of families with diverse backgrounds.....                                  | 120 |
| Funds of knowledge: Recognising hybridity and fluidity .....                                    | 121 |
| Conclusion .....  | 124 |
| 4. Methodology .....  | 127 |
| Introduction .....  | 127 |
| Why a life story methodological approach? .....   | 128 |
| Qualitative inquiry.....  | 129 |
| Narrative research.....   | 130 |
| Life story .....  | 132 |



|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Meaning co-construction.....   | 134 |
| Truth, contextual knowledge and subjectivity.....                                  | 135 |
| Motives & intentions.....  | 137 |
| Voices.....  | 138 |
| Participants .....   | 139 |
| Selection criteria .....   | 139 |
| Recruitment .....  | 142 |
| Research process .....   | 144 |
| Data collection: Ongoing documentary analysis.....                                 | 145 |
| Data collection: Individual interviews.....  | 148 |
| Data interpretation: Narrative and critical discourse analysis .....               | 153 |
| Reflexivity and the role of the researcher .....                                   | 156 |
| Ethical considerations .....   | 159 |
| (De)limitations, ‘disclaimers’ and validity .....                                  | 161 |
| Conclusion .....   | 165 |
| Findings and Discussion .....  | 166 |
| 5. Documentary Review.....   | 166 |
| Introduction .....   | 166 |
| A brief context of New Zealand ECE and <i>Te Whāriki</i> .....                     | 168 |
| Parental involvement.....  | 169 |
| Issues of parental (dis)engagement.....  | 171 |
| Catering for cultural diversity .....  | 172 |
| Catering for linguistic diversity & supporting NESB children to learn English..... | 176 |
| Children’s learning at kindergartens .....   | 178 |
| Exploration and play .....   | 178 |
| Literacy.....  | 180 |
| Children’s portfolios: Documentation of children’s learning and development ....   | 182 |
| Transition to school.....  | 184 |
| Conclusion .....   | 186 |
| List of documents reviewed.....  | 187 |
| 6. The participants’ stories: (Non)involvement in children’s ECE .....             | 190 |
| Introduction .....   | 190 |
| Let the stories begin ... ..   | 192 |
| Demographic and familial background of participants.....                           | 213 |
| Chinese parenting models: Beyond authoritarian and authoritative .....             | 216 |
| An inappropriate metaphor: ‘Tiger mothers’ .....                                   | 219 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Mother of Mencius in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century .....   | 221 |
| Parental involvement: Private and public spaces.....  | 224 |
| Private spaces: Active involvement.....   | 225 |
| Engaging children in learning at home .....   | 226 |
| Engaging children in extra-curricular activities.....   | 228 |
| Public spaces: Limited involvement in kindergartens .....                                       | 232 |
| Reasons for choosing kindergartens .....  | 235 |
| Diverse ways of (non)involvement in the kindergartens, diverse reasons .....                    | 237 |
| <i>Responding to the needs of children</i> .....  | 237 |
| <i>Parent-help: Meeting the requirements and expectations</i> .....                             | 240 |
| <i>New space, new friends</i> .....   | 241 |
| <i>Passive and limited communication with teachers</i> .....                                    | 244 |
| <i>Limited contribution to children's portfolio</i> .....                                       | 247 |
| <i>Zero involvement in parent-teacher committee</i> .....                                       | 249 |
| Conclusion .....  | 252 |
| 7. The politics of identity: Being Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand.....                | 254 |
| Introduction .....  | 254 |
| Being immigrants .....  | 256 |
| Lack of childcare support .....   | 256 |
| Upward social mobility .....  | 258 |
| Being a proud Chinese.....  | 260 |
| Being Chinese immigrants in New Zealand.....  | 265 |
| Transnational Chinese immigrants.....   | 266 |
| Transnational identity: Lack of sense of belonging and involvement .....                        | 268 |
| Language and cultural barriers .....  | 272 |
| Will having Chinese-speaking teachers promote parental involvement? .....                       | 277 |
| Parental expectations: Maintaining the home language .....                                      | 278 |
| Many compromises, many strategies .....   | 280 |
| Parental expectations: Maintaining Chinese traditional virtues, values and cultures .....       | 286 |
| Parental expectations: Chinese cultures and language in public spaces.....                      | 291 |
| Parental expectations: Maintaining Chinese ways of learning.....                                | 295 |
| An essentialist belief: Chinese children should be good at mathematics .....                    | 297 |
| Parental expectations: 望子成龙/Wangzi chenglong (High aspirations for children's achievement)..... | 299 |
| *脸子/Lian zi (face) and competition .....  | 301 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Conclusion .....   | 306 |
| 8. A repertoire of transcultural spatial strategies .....  | 309 |
| Introduction .....   | 309 |
| Parental perceptions and basic expectations: Hope is the first step on the road to disappointment..... | 310 |
| Parental perceptions: Kindergarten teachers.....   | 316 |
| Lessons learnt from the past.....  | 319 |
| Disempowering experiences.....   | 322 |
| What do children get out of attending kindergartens?.....  | 327 |
| Play .....   | 327 |
| English: The importance of linguistic capital.....   | 334 |
| Preparation for primary school.....  | 340 |
| Independence and social competence.....  | 342 |
| Art and craft.....   | 344 |
| Diverse learning experiences.....  | 346 |
| Transnational perspectives of ECE .....  | 349 |
| Cultural adaptation: Active and strategic transcultural spatial strategies.....                        | 354 |
| Conclusion .....   | 360 |
| 9. Conclusion.....   | 363 |
| Summary.....   | 364 |
| Key findings.....  | 366 |
| Inconsistent and/or contradictory narratives .....   | 366 |
| High parental aspirations and contrasting involvement in public and private spaces .....               | 368 |
| The politics of in/exclusion: Identities, habitus and discourses .....                                 | 369 |
| Adaptation: A repertoire of fluid and strategic transcultural spatial practices ..                     | 372 |
| Contributions of the thesis.....   | 373 |
| Pedagogical recommendations: Critical multicultural education .....                                    | 374 |
| Engaging in critical reflections .....   | 375 |
| Reconceptualising discourses and avoiding essentialism .....   | 376 |
| Facilitating parent-teacher dialogue, supporting third spaces and transforming pedagogy.....           | 378 |
| Application beyond the current study .....   | 380 |
| Policy implications and future research .....  | 380 |
| Final thoughts .....   | 383 |
| Appendices.....  | 385 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Appendix 1 - Glossary .....                                      | 385 |
| Appendix 2 – Letter for the AKA .....                            | 387 |
| Appendix 3 – Information Sheet (Teacher) .....                   | 389 |
| Appendix 4 – Information Sheet (Parent).....                     | 392 |
| Appendix 5 – Consent Form (Teacher) .....                        | 395 |
| Appendix 6 – Consent Form (Parent) .....                         | 396 |
| Appendix 7 – Translated Information Sheet (Parent) .....         | 397 |
| Appendix 8 – Translated Consent Form (Parent) .....              | 400 |
| Appendix 9 – Interview Schedule (First Phase) .....              | 401 |
| Appendix 10 – Translated Interview Schedule (First Phase).....   | 404 |
| Appendix 11 – Interview Schedule (Second Phase) .....            | 406 |
| Appendix 12 – Translated Interview Schedule (Second Phase) ..... | 408 |
| References .....   | 410 |

# 1. Introduction

New Zealand has a large population of immigrants. According to the latest census statistics, one in four people were born overseas and there are more than 200 ethnic groups living in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Early childhood education (ECE) centres in New Zealand are also increasingly diverse with regard to the ethnicities of children attending (Education Counts, 2013). Considering that the demographic make-up of ECE settings in New Zealand has been transformed by increased numbers of immigrant families, and that parental participation in their children's ECE towards children's learning and development is widely recognised both nationally and internationally as an important pedagogical concern (Billman, Geddes & Hedges, 2005; Blanc, Clausier & Murcier, 2004; Grey & Horgan, 2003; Keesing Styles, 2000; Mitchell, Haggerty, Hampton & Pairman, 2006; Ward, 2009), it is timely to investigate how immigrant families are involved in New Zealand ECE landscape.

This study has selected one specific immigrant group, Chinese from the People's Republic of China (PRC), to explore their participatory experiences in their children's ECE in New Zealand and the factors that impacted on their involvement. Ten Chinese immigrant parents participated in two phases of individual life story interviews (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Miller, 2000; Plummer, 2001). Aspects and contexts of this study are explained in this chapter. The researcher's positionality, to be explained in the following section, was acknowledged as being an integral factor of the research process. Finally, in this introductory chapter, after highlighting and explaining several issues

regarding the linguistic protocols adopted in this thesis, an overview of each chapter is provided.

## **Story of the researcher**

I was born in Hong Kong, a former British colony. Unlike many 'Hong Kongers' of my age whose parents were immigrants from China in the early 1900s, both my parents were also Hong Kong-born. I was educated in the same English-speaking school, from kindergarten to pre-tertiary, followed by teachers' training college before becoming a primary and secondary school teacher in Hong Kong for over ten years. After our son was born in 1995, my husband and I decided to apply for immigration. We tried several other English-speaking countries but concluded that Auckland would be the best place to realise our 'immigrant dreams'. The three of us said goodbye to all our friends and extended family members and left Hong Kong on the evening of 16<sup>th</sup> August 1997 with only three suitcases, the other belongings arriving in Auckland in a shipping container a month later. We spent a few weeks in a motel before we found our first home and settled down.

My son soon turned three and needed to experience ECE, I thought. It took him over six months to 'settle' at a community-based early childhood education (ECE) centre. In the first six months, while he enjoyed the open space and abundant resources at the centre, he would cry whenever I attempted to leave, so I stayed at the centre to keep him company most of the time, and he was mostly happy. Due to my English linguistic ability and prior experience working with children, I was an active parent-helper. The head-teacher of the centre

began to offer me occasional relieving and part-time teaching, and so my journey in New Zealand ECE began.

My husband, a teacher in a Hong Kong secondary school, successfully achieved teacher registration and landed a temporary teaching position soon after we arrived in New Zealand. With one source of income and some savings, I could afford to be a full-time mother while resuming study extramurally. One qualification led to the next, my interest in ECE grew, and I became an ECE lecturer in 2002. In general, our experiences in New Zealand have been positive.

Nevertheless, the migration stories of my Chinese immigrant friends that I met through my son's ECE centre and primary school were far from positive. I had become aware of their struggles because they often asked me to utilise my English language ability to help them negotiate their way through New Zealand society. I also remembered the uneasiness I had felt when I lacked the cultural capital to make sense of certain teaching practices. If someone with a strong capacity in English, like myself, struggled to 'fit in' at times, I began to question how hard it must be for immigrant parents who have limited cultural and linguistic capital to feel included in New Zealand ECE settings.

## **Contextualising the study: ECE**

Being an ECE teacher-educator, I am aware that the notion of parent-teacher partnership is promoted in New Zealand (Grey & Horgan, 2003; Keesing Styles, 2000; Mitchell et al, 2006). The value of this partnership and parental involvement in their children's ECE as contributing to children's learning and development is also recognised internationally (Billman et al, 2005;

Blanc et al, 2004; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2002; MacNaughton, 2004; Prior & Gerard, 2007; Ward, 2009). The notions of parent-teacher partnership and parental involvement feature strongly in the New Zealand ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō nga mokopuna o Aotearoa* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1996). 'Family and Community' is one of the four principles of *Te Whāriki*, and it emphasises the importance of parental participation and the interdependence between teachers, families and local communities.

Upon reflection, although I was actively involved in my son's early learning and development, I do not remember forming any 'partnership' with my son's ECE teachers. I was never invited to share my parental aspirations or childrearing practices with them. Instead, I mainly followed their advice and met their expectations. I was comfortable being the parent-helper at the ECE centre; yet, I felt neither included nor excluded. However, spending long hours at the ECE centre meant I had many opportunities to meet and converse with the parents of my son's playmates, and a few friendships with both local and immigrant parents emerged through these conversations. As a new immigrant who did not have a job, the number of friendships that I had formed in these first few years could be counted on the fingers of two hands. These relationships extended my limited social network.

My experience described above, however, does not align with research findings. International cross-cultural investigations indicate that unlike the local parents, many immigrants prefer not to be involved in their children's ECE settings (De Gioia, 2013; Ebbeck & Glover, 1998; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Obeng, 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007; Tobin, Arzubiaga & Mantovani, 2007).



Previous New Zealand studies that look at Asian and/or Chinese (from various countries) immigrant parents' involvement in ECE yield similar results; these parents avoid participation in ECE centres (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2005, 2010; Wu, 2011; Zhang, 2012).

Being a teacher-educator, I have had many opportunities to visit ECE centres. It troubled me when I saw non-English speaking children struggling to be included, and when there were many parent-helpers in the centre yet none seemed to be an immigrant. My dual identity as an ECE teacher-educator and a sociology doctoral student has given me two different lenses through which to view these issues. From a New Zealand ECE perspective, I question how this lack of parental participation in ECE settings influences the learning and development of children with non-English-speaking immigrant parents. Through a sociological lens, I query how this non-participation constrains the settlement and integration of these immigrant parents in New Zealand. To many immigrants, their children's ECE centres are the first New Zealand community that they experience. A positive experience of this community helps immigrants to settle and thus contributes to the creation of social cohesion (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010; Spoonley, Peace, Butcher & O'Neill, 2005). Social cohesion is particularly important for New Zealand which has a large population of immigrants with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

Exploring the aspirations and education perspectives of immigrants prepares New Zealand educators to better understand the needs of diverse immigrant families and to embrace diverse ways of parenting, learning and teaching. Culturally appropriate pedagogy is crucial for supporting parental participation in

ECE settings and for assisting parents to realise their parental aspirations. A recent national survey finds that the ECE centres involved in the study were predominantly monolingual and monocultural, reflecting the dominant status of English in New Zealand and the dominant New Zealand cultural practices (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012). These findings are concerning because they imply that most ECE teachers might struggle to embrace the diverse linguistic and childrearing practices of immigrant families; instead, they may well contribute to privileging and reinforcing the dominant discourses while silencing the 'others' (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012).

The experiences immigrant parents gained from their children's ECE centres will inevitably inform their perceptions of New Zealand education practices, and influence their involvement in their children's future primary and secondary schooling as well as their expectations of school teachers. Since many Chinese immigrants come to New Zealand for their children's education (Ip, 2002; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012), a positive experience of ECE might give them a sense of security and assure them that they have found the 'right' place to bring up their children.

## **Contextualising the study: PRC immigrants in Auckland**

ECE centres in New Zealand, particularly in big cities like Auckland, are increasingly diverse in ethnicity. According to statistics provided by the Education Counts (2013), 'Asian' is one of the largest ethnic groups enrolled in licensed New Zealand ECE centres, and since 2004, the enrolment of this group has increased by 90%, the largest increase compared to the groups of European/Pākehā, Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand) and Pasifika

(peoples originally from the various Pacific Islands). Education Counts (2013) has also applied the same ethnicity categorisations to statistics regarding ECE teaching staff in New Zealand, and these statistics are discussed in the Conclusion chapter. While it is unclear how the parameter of 'Asian' is defined by the Education Counts (2013), immigrants from the PRC are the second largest immigrant group, after England, and the largest Asian and/or Chinese group in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). There are many spoken languages in the PRC, but Mandarin and Cantonese are the most common. When all the spoken languages are added together, the latest census statistics indicate that Chinese language becomes the third largest language spoken in New Zealand, just below English and Māori (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Given that the value of parental involvement and partnership between families and teachers in relation to children's learning is promoted in *Te Whāriki* and a range of national and international literature as discussed earlier, it is pertinent to explore how immigrant parents from the PRC are involved in the New Zealand ECE.

Auckland provides an ideal location for this study. Like many English-speaking metropolitan cities, such as Sydney and New York, Auckland's population is ethnically diverse. Auckland "is the most important immigrant destination in New Zealand" (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012, p. 282) because of job opportunity and the existence of numerous immigrant ethnic communities. Chinese immigrants are also attracted to Auckland (Bartley, 2003; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012), and according to Spoonley and Bedford (2012, p. 109), "80 percent of those who had arrived since 2000 were from China. Their numbers

and impact were on a scale that was unprecedented in New Zealand's history of immigration".

*Te Whāriki* acknowledges that "different cultures have different child-rearing patterns, beliefs, and traditions and may place value on different knowledge, skills and attitudes" (MoE, 1996, p. 42) and that culturally appropriate ways of communicating with and encouraging the participation of families should be encouraged. With such a high population of Chinese families in Auckland, this thesis intended to investigate how, according to the perceptions of a group of Chinese immigrant parents, this espoused value of *Te Whāriki* was enacted and what culturally appropriate pedagogies have been developed and implemented by ECE teachers. Finally, although the participants were from the PRC, the theoretical framework adopted in this study might well be applicable to developing strategies to work with families from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

## **A life story methodological approach and an eclectic theorising**

This study used a life story methodological approach (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Miller, 2000; Plummer, 2001) to explore aspects of the participants' life stories in order to answer these research questions:

- How do immigrant parents from the People's Republic of China participate in their children's early childhood education in New Zealand?
- What are the factors that impact on their participation?

It investigated the participants' parental aspirations and expectations, their participation in their children's ECE in New Zealand, and the factors that influenced their involvement. The participants' perceptions and stories of their children's ECE experiences were shaped by a wide range of aspects, including their personal cultural beliefs and their experiences in ECE centres. These contextual backgrounds of the study are interconnected. New understanding that emerged from the data was multi-layered and required multiple "treatment" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.vii).

Documentary analysis (Fitzgerald, 2007), individual life story interviews (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Miller, 2000; Plummer, 2001), and critical discourse analysis (Clarke, 2005; Locke, 2004; Rogers, 2004; Woodside-Jiron, 2004) were used to investigate how Chinese immigrant parents negotiate and navigate the cultural borders of ECE in order to identify the needs of these families in New Zealand ECE. My English and Chinese linguistic ability offered the participants language options for both verbal and written communications to minimise misunderstanding. All information regarding the study was written in both English and Chinese, and the interviews were all conducted in the participants' preferred spoken language, Mandarin or Cantonese. Being able to choose a language that they felt most comfortable with gave the participants a 'louder' and clearer voice.

This study crosses two disciplines, education and sociology. Due to its interdisciplinary nature and the complex identities of the participants, an eclectic theoretical approach has been adopted. A range of theories and concepts from the dual disciplines have been drawn upon to theorise PRC immigrant parents' involvement in their children's ECE, and their experiences of and attitudes

towards inclusion within the ECE community as well as the wider New Zealand society.

Identity theories (Hall, 1992, 1996, 2000; Davis, 2009; Goldberg & Solomos, 2002) and notions of transnationalism (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008; Huang & Yeoh, 2005; Levitt, 2003; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007; Waters, 2005) have been applied in this study to examine the identities of PRC immigrants and to analyse the relationship between identity and in/exclusion. The concepts of social spaces (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989; Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007) and third and in-between spaces (Bhabha, 1994) are used to examine PRC immigrant parents' navigation and negotiation across multiple social spaces and their transcultural spatial parenting strategies. The word 'spatial' is applied beyond the geographical sense in this thesis, and this is explained in Chapter Three. The concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989) and key ideas from critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) are utilised to highlight the power and hierarchy of discourses in privileging and marginalising certain knowledge. Finally, critical multicultural pedagogy (Banks, 2004, 2006a; May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010) and González's (2005) idea of funds of knowledge are employed to emphasise the important role of teachers in bringing about a transformative approach (Banks, 2009, 2010) to ECE which is inclusive of diverse knowledge of parenting, learning and teaching.

## **Linguistic protocols**

This section outlines a few of the linguistic protocols that are deployed in this thesis. Firstly, early childhood education (ECE) is used throughout to refer to

children's early learning experiences. ECE, ECCE (early childhood care and education) and ECEC (early childhood education and care) are commonly used in national and international research and scholarship. While the importance of 'care' within ECE is recognised, the term ECE aligns with how the discourse is described in the New Zealand institutional documents examined in this thesis. Hence, within this thesis, ECE services refer to the diverse types of services, such as kindergartens and Playcentres, ECE settings or ECE centres refer to the general ECE environment and the different facilities that the participants' children attended. A range of acronyms are used in this thesis, and they are listed in the glossary at the end.

Due to the cross-cultural/linguistic nature of this study, some Chinese words and phrases are used in this thesis to minimise the potential for concepts and key words to become 'lost-in-translation'. Some of these phrases do not have a straightforward English equivalent and some are simply more culturally relevant than English terms in their application in relation to analysing the participants' responses. Most of these phrases are explained in-text. Those that appear frequently are marked with an asterisk on every usage and explained in the glossary (Appendix 1). This glossary also includes the denotations of a list of acronyms used and the explanation of the term 'Kiwi' that was used often by the participants. Finally, inverted commas and speech marks are applied with specific intent. Within the Chinese-translated-into-English narratives, speech marks are used to quote the exact English words used by the participants. Inverted commas, in contrast, signal discomfort, cynicism, and unconventional applications or connotations of certain notions.

## **Words of caution**

In this study, with its focus on cultural practices, a non-essentialist approach has been adopted in recognition of the potential risk in homogenising diverse groupings. As such, the term 'Chinese cultures' is used to acknowledge the multiple ethnic groups that make up China's population because each group has its unique cultural beliefs and practices. Given the bicultural history of New Zealand, the phrase 'New Zealand cultures' is adopted to recognise the differing epistemologies of Māori and European/Pākehā. Furthermore, beliefs and practices are subject to change (Bhabha, 1994; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Marotta, 2000), and therefore there are no fixed Chinese or New Zealand ways of being and knowing. Although specific labels for different cultural identities and/or ethnicities, such as 'Asian', 'Chinese', 'European', 'New Zealander' and 'Kiwi' (see glossary) are used throughout this thesis, particularly as they appear in the literature and data, this usage is not intended to over-generalise or homogenise the diversities that exist within and across any cultural/ethnic group(ings). These terms are mostly applied in line with how they are utilised in literature or in official websites.

## **Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is organised as follows. *Chapter Two* is the literature review which provides contextual background to this study. There are multiple contexts of this study, because as highlighted earlier, the topic involves the disciplines of sociology and education, and the identity of the participants is complex, being PRC immigrant parents in New Zealand. *Chapter Two* therefore includes examining the contextual backgrounds of New Zealand ECE, immigrants'



values, beliefs and practices in terms of their children's education, and traditional and common Chinese parenting, learning and teaching practices.

Chapter Two begins with an overview of ECE in New Zealand. It introduces the diverse ECE services available and their governance and regulations, including the compulsory implementation of *Te Whāriki*. By unpeeling and analysing the underpinning theories of *Te Whāriki*, the role of the curriculum in shaping and reinforcing dominant ECE discourses in New Zealand is critically evaluated. In terms of immigrant parents' common beliefs and practices, this chapter focuses on what the literature tells us about their perspectives of ECE, children's learning and play, and parental participation in ECE settings. International studies show that when immigrants do not agree with the dominant ECE discourses of the host countries, they usually do not engage with their children's ECE centres (De Gioia, 2013; Ebbeck & Glover, 1998; Obeng, 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007; Tobin et al, 2007). Previous studies in New Zealand have yielded similar results (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2010; Wu, 2011; Zhang, 2012). As such, the importance of communication, parent-teacher partnerships, and the notion of empowerment to engage parents in ECE settings are also examined in this chapter.

The last part of Chapter Two offers an examination of Chinese contexts. This includes a detailed overview of ECE and recent education reforms in China and Hong Kong, as well as of Chinese traditional and contemporary perspectives of play, learning, teaching and parenting. Chinese epistemology, particularly relating to parenting, teaching and learning, is underpinned by two key philosophical approaches, Confucianism and collectivism. A range of literature that utilises these two approaches to explain Chinese parenting, teaching and

learning preferences is reviewed to explore cultural differences between Chinese and New Zealand ECE discourses.

*Chapter Three* explains the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of this study. An eclectic approach is adopted due to the interdisciplinary nature and multiple contexts of this study, as previously highlighted. As a result, a mix of sociological, cultural and educational theories is applied in this chapter. Firstly, identity theories (Hall, 1992, 1996, 2000; Davis, 2009; Goldberg & Solomos, 2002) that relate identity with inclusion or exclusion are applied to examine how being Chinese and being immigrant parents in New Zealand might restrict the participants' involvement in ECE settings. An assimilation approach is no longer appropriate to analysing the fluid nature of contemporary migration (Bartley, 2003). Instead, notions of transnationalism (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008; Huang & Yeoh, 2005; Levitt, 2003; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007; Waters, 2005) are utilised to illuminate the hybrid and fluid identities of PRC immigrants. Concepts of social spaces (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989; Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007), third and in-between spaces (Bhabha, 1994) are used to understand the transnational Chinese immigrant participants' social-cultural spatial-crossings and the new parenting practices emerging from these navigations and negotiations. The term social-cultural, as opposed to socio-cultural, is used in this thesis with specific intent and this is explained in Chapter Three.

This chapter then draws on the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989) and notions from critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) to highlight the power and hierarchy of discourses, in privileging and perpetuating the dominant discourses but

negating and marginalising 'other' knowledge. The last part of the chapter examines the possibility of borrowing ideas from critical multicultural pedagogy (Banks, 2004, 2006a; May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010) and funds of knowledge (González, 2005; González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) to advocate for a transformative ECE curriculum that is inclusive of diverse childrearing and learning practices.

*Chapter Four* is the methodology chapter. It explains and rationalises the methodological approach and the research process of this study. Since a qualitative and narrative life story approach was adopted, the chapter progresses from examining qualitative inquiry to key issues pertaining to narrative research. Considerations that are central to life story investigations are then highlighted, including meaning co-construction between participants and researchers, the notion of 'truth', the importance of contextual understandings and acknowledgement of subjectivity, the motives and intentions of the participants and researchers, and the messiness of voices. Thereafter, the selection criteria of the participants and the recruitment process are described and rationalised.

Next, the research process is described. This involved the collection of data via a review of publicly available documents and two phases of face-to-face individual interviews. This part of the chapter also highlights the importance of establishing rapport and respectful relationships and the benefits of sharing similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds with the participants in narrative interviews. The two approaches to data interpretation adopted in this study, narrative and critical discourse analysis (Bryman, 2004; Clarke, 2005; Locke, 2004; Rogers, 2004; Woodside-Jiron, 2004) are explained. Together, the

approaches highlight the nature of power imbalances within social-cultural discourses. Later, this chapter evaluates the fluid role of insider/outsider-researcher and issues of reflexivity in this study. Considerations of ethics, (de)limitations and validity bring this chapter to an end.

*Chapter Five* is the first chapter to report the research findings. It reports on data collected from an ongoing review process of documents. Findings from this chapter offer another form of data, in addition to the narratives collected from individual life story interviews. The list of documents reviewed is provided at the end of this chapter. These official documents play a crucial role in constructing institutional discourses. Several key discourses relevant to the topic of this study are identified from these documents, and each discourse is illustrated with citations and direct quotations. Key discourses analysed include parental involvement, and cultural and linguistic diversity and inclusivity.

The last part of this chapter examines documents in relation to key curriculum areas at kindergartens that are featured frequently in the narrative data. These areas include exploration and play, literacy, the use of portfolios to document children's learning, and transition to school. Particular attention is given to the evaluation reports of each participating kindergarten which were prepared by the Education Review Office (ERO). Findings from the documents reviewed are drawn upon and critically analysed against the narrative data in the following discussion chapters.

Chapters Six to Eight present and analyse the narrative data gathered from the interviews with participants. *Chapter Six* begins with offering ten abbreviated life stories of the participants. These stories provide an insight into the

participants' demographic and familial backgrounds. The chapter then discusses the participants' parenting practices that inform understanding of their involvement in New Zealand ECE. The data suggests that these practices are fluid and hybrid. As such, essentialised and binarised parenting models, including the notion of 'tiger mother' (Chua, 2011) which is recently promoted in international pop-culture, are challenged in this chapter. Instead, an ancient Chinese proverbial story is used as an analogy for the migration intent of the participants, to illustrate their search for the best environment for their children's upbringing.

Next, the chapter moves on to examine the participants' involvement in their children's ECE in both private and public social spaces. Narrative data collected from the interviews indicates that the participants were actively involved in their children's learning in private spaces, particularly within the home environment. In contrast, their engagement in children's education in the public spaces, for example at the kindergartens, was passive and minimal. Their (dis)engagement was explained by overt pragmatic reasons. The underlying causes of disengagement are analysed in the next two chapters. This chapter sets the scene for illuminating the participants' (non)involvement in ECE in New Zealand.

*Chapter Seven* focuses on scrutinising the identities of the participants and drawing connections between their dual identities of being both immigrants and Chinese, and their involvement in their children's ECE in New Zealand. Beliefs regarding parenting and education are complex issues associated with the two identities. Each of these factors is analysed in this chapter.

The chapter firstly explores how being immigrants constrained the participants' social network and childcare support, and consequently their participation in New Zealand ECE. Their immigrant identity and ideology further led them to have high parental expectations with regard to their children's achievements. Thereafter, the attention of the chapter shifts to unfolding the multi-layered issues regarding the participants' Chinese identity. Their decisive and similar responses in identifying themselves as Chinese are surprising and telling.

A third form of identity, transnational identity, emerged out of the identities of being Chinese and being immigrants. The participants were transnationals who frequently participated in a range of transnational activities. Together with the two identities previously identified, the transnational identity of the participants contributed towards a sense of displacement and non-belonging in their children's kindergartens and the wider New Zealand society. Next, the many tiers of cultural and language barriers restricting communication with English-speaking teachers and parents are unpeeled to highlight the interdependent relationship between language and culture.

Various dimensions of the participants' parental expectations make up the last few sections of this chapter. Narrative findings suggest that the participants utilised a range of strategies in private social spaces to help them fulfil their expectations of their children, which include maintaining their children's Chinese linguistic and cultural capital. Finally, the chapter provides an analysis of the participants' high expectations of children's achievement. A Chinese common saying, 望子成龙/wangzi chenglong (wishing for dragon children), and the notions

of \*脸子/lian zi (face, see glossary) and competition are utilised to interpret the cultural beliefs of the participants regarding their children's academic success.

*Chapter Eight* focuses on the participants' perspectives and perceptions in relation to their children's ECE in New Zealand and the strategies they employed to support their children's learning. The participants' perceptions and expectations of kindergarten teachers were strongly shaped by their previous encounters with New Zealand ECE teachers. Findings indicate that the participants felt disempowered by some of these experiences, revealing unequal power relations between the prevalent institutional discourses and the families' funds of knowledge. A range of learning experiences provided at the kindergartens were evaluated by the participants. Their evaluations are compared to relevant findings from the documents reviewed to highlight a tension between institutional discourses and parental perceptions.

The last part of the chapter draws connections between the participants' Chinese immigrant identity and their transnational perspectives of ECE. Although the previous chapter notes their desires with regard to maintaining the Chinese cultural and linguistic ability of their children, the participants were realistic about the need to adapt culturally. Rather than accepting a loss of parenting efficacy, the participants were active agents in utilising a mixed repertoire of transcultural spatial strategies to fulfil the needs of their transnational Chinese immigrant identity, their ongoing navigation and negotiation across social-cultural spaces, and their children's upbringing and learning in New Zealand.

*Chapter Nine* is the conclusion which summarises the study and its key findings. Contributions of the thesis are highlighted. This chapter also provides pedagogical recommendations that are informed by the framework of critical multicultural education. Policy implications are discussed before suggestions are provided for future research.



## 2. Contexts Matter

### Introduction

This study involves dual disciplines and multiple contexts. Firstly, it crosses the domains of sociology and education, specifically immigrant studies and ECE respectively, and secondly, although it is situated in New Zealand, the participants are Chinese immigrant parents from the PRC, including Hong Kong. Due to the participants' identity, background knowledge regarding ECE in China and Hong Kong is as important as the contexts of New Zealand ECE. It is thus necessary to examine literature pertaining to New Zealand ECE and the parenting and education practices of Chinese families. The participants' immigrant identity further indicates the importance of including research findings relating to parental aspirations of immigrants. The range of literature reviewed in this chapter, therefore, is multi-contextual. In order to present contemporary understandings of ECE in the countries involved, information and sources are drawn from recent literature and official websites. At the time of writing this thesis, no ECE information was available from the official website of the PRC Ministry of Education.

This chapter comprises four main sections: contexts of New Zealand ECE; discourses regarding parental involvement; beliefs and practices of immigrant parents; and Chinese contexts of parenting and ECE. Understanding the contexts of New Zealand ECE entails examining the governance and regulations of diverse ECE services, as well as the influence of *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand ECE curriculum, in shaping ECE discourses and teaching

practices. Notions of parental involvement and parent-teacher partnership are also critiqued, and the importance of communication, engagement and empowerment in relation to facilitating genuine partnership is highlighted.

International studies indicate that most immigrant parents are education-oriented and use children's academic success for upward social mobility (Benton & Gomez, 2003; Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; Feliciano, 2006; Li, 2001; Wu & Singh, 2004). Other studies further show that many immigrants' perceptions of children's education and learning are different from the dominant parenting and teaching practices of the host society, and that they usually feel uncomfortable to engage in their children's ECE settings (De Gioia, 2013; Ebbeck & Glover, 1998; Obeng, 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007; Tobin et al, 2007). The impacts of a lack of engagement in children's learning and social cohesion are discussed in this chapter. Likewise, traditional Chinese parenting and education beliefs differ from the dominant New Zealand ECE discourses in many ways. Previous New Zealand studies indicate that many Chinese immigrant parents are unfamiliar with New Zealand teachers' expectations and that these parents are reluctant to be involved in ECE settings (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2010; Wu, 2011; Zhang, 2012).

Finally, it is easy to assume that since the PRC is founded upon communist ideologies, communism would play a role in shaping the values and practices of the country's population. However, both Confucianism and collectivism are used often by researchers, including Chinese academics, to explain the practices of Chinese parents and learners (Bai, 2005; Chan, 2004; Li, 2004; Luo, Tamis-LeMonda & Song, 2013; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Rao & Chan, 2009; Salili, 1996; Woodrow & Sham, 2001; Yang, Zheng & Li, 2006). None of the literature

reviewed about Chinese parenting, teaching and learning practices makes any connection to communism.

## **Contexts of New Zealand ECE**

### **Diverse ECE services**

ECE services in New Zealand are non-compulsory and cater for children from birth to school entry which is usually five years of age. There is a diverse range of ECE services in New Zealand and they are “categorised broadly as teacher-led and parent/whānau-led to differentiate between how the services operate and are funded” (Lee, Carr, Soutar & Mitchell, 2013, p. 4). A qualified and registered ECE teacher is required to be the person responsible for teacher-led services which include kindergartens, education and care services (privately-owned and community-based childcare centres), and home-based services (Lee et al, 2013). Education and care services further include A’oga Amata and Pasifika language nests. On the other hand, Playcentres, Kōhanga Reo and playgroups are led by parents. The three teacher-led services account for the highest number of enrolments (Education Counts, 2013).

Most *kindergartens* are owned and managed by Kindergarten Associations (Davison, Mitchell & Peter, 2012). The Associations receive bulk funding from the MoE, which is used to pay for staff salaries and some other resourcing, and parents are usually asked to pay a donation or nominal fees. They have historically provided half-day sessional programmes for children from three to five (school age). However, in response to an increasing number of full-time working parents, many kindergartens are extending their hours to match the full-day school model (Davison et al, 2012). Kindergarten teachers are all qualified.

Furthermore, each kindergarten is run by a committee of teachers, parents and people from the community. This committee reports to a local kindergarten association, such as the Auckland Kindergarten Association (AKA) which has “107 public kindergartens throughout Auckland” (AKA, 2007a). The role of the AKA includes overseeing the bulk funding of these kindergartens. Parents and families are encouraged to work in partnership with teaching teams and management (AKA, 2007b), for example, by joining the committee or the association, or volunteering as parent-helpers or fundraisers. Since the term ‘public kindergartens’ is used by the AKA and the participants of this study were recruited from these kindergartens, the term ‘public kindergarten’ is utilised in this thesis to distinguish this type of kindergartens from those community or privately owned and managed kindergartens.

*Education and care services* offer sessional and all day services. They are privately or community owned and managed but licensed by the MoE, and they also receive government subsidies. Services that practise a particular educational philosophy, such as the Montessori and Rudolf Steiner centres, fall under this category as well (MoE, 2009a). *Home-based early childhood services* provide education and care for small groups of up to four young children in a home setting, and are also partially funded by the Ministry (MoE, 2009a).

*Playcentres* are led by parents collaboratively, providing sessional programmes for children from birth to school age and education programmes for parents (MoE, 2009a). Most Playcentres are licensed and funded by the Ministry. Since parents are highly involved in the running of Playcentres (Mitchell & Davison, 2010) and there is a lack of need to pay for staffing, the fees and donations requested from parents are low.

*Ngā Kōhanga Reo* centres are licensed by the MoE to cater for children from birth. Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust is the governing body and umbrella organisation for all Te Kōhanga Reo centres which provide Māori immersion programmes that aim at strengthening the knowledge of te reo Māori (language) and tikanga (culture) of children and their families (MoE, 2009a; Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, 2013). Families are highly involved in the management and operation of Kōhanga Reo, and they are expected to pay fees or a donation. Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust offers training opportunities for the Kōhanga Reo families (Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, 2013). Finally, *Pasifika playgroups* are usually community-based and offer the opportunity for young children to develop their own Pasifika language and culture (MoE, 2009a). Parents contribute to the operation of the programmes.

The wide range of ECE services that receive different levels of government funding offer a mixed provision model and diverse options for families. While each centre and/or service may practise a different philosophy and approach to reflect its beliefs regarding childhood, children, childrearing, teaching and learning, all centres have to comply with mandatory regulations legislated by the government.

### **Regulations, ‘quality’ and challenges**

Education policy reforms in the 1980s saw the introduction of a charter system to New Zealand ECE that required each ECE centre to develop “a statement of objectives and practices, drawn up in consultation with parents, in keeping with the national guidelines for early childhood” (McLachlan, 2011, p. 37). Chartered ECE centres would be bulk-funded and receive differing levels

of funding from the government (McLachlan, 2011; Scrivens, 2002). Currently, all ECE centres are regulated by the Ministry and to operate, each centre must meet the criteria, set out in the *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008* (New Zealand Government, 2009) and the *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008* (MoE, 2008). Regulations include “a comprehensive list of requirements including licensing, health and safety, curriculum, management, and staffing standards” (Scrivens, 2002, p. 159). Only upon meeting these licensing and chartering requirements will an ECE centre receive government subsidised funding, whilst non-government funding includes parental donations, fees and fundraising (McLachlan, 2011; Scrivens, 2002). Each ECE centre has the freedom to decide how to spend the government grant (May, 2007; Mitchell, 2001; Scrivens, 2002).

The discourse of ‘quality’ in ECE has received a significant amount of attention in the last two decades (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999, 2007; May, 2009; McLachlan, 2011; Scrivens, 2002). After the promulgation of *Te Whāriki* in 1996, the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (DOPs) set out quality standards for the learning and development of children, guidelines for communication and consultation, and the processes of operation and administration (The New Zealand Gazette, 1996). *Quality in Action/Te Mahi Whai Hua* (MoE, 1998), a printed Ministry resource, further “provided user-friendly guidance for implementing the DOPs” (May, 2009, p. 238). Quality is further monitored by the ERO, which is a New Zealand government agency that reviews, evaluates and reports on the performance of schools and ECE services (ERO, 2014).

ERO recently introduced in the document, *He PouTātaki: How ERO Reviews Early Childhood Services*, a two-tiered process of “complementary evaluation” (ERO, 2013b, p.10) which involves external and internal evaluation reviewed by ERO and the individual ECE centre respectively (ERO, 2013b). Despite the fact that ERO maintains its role in the external reviews of ECE centres, Ken Blaiklock, an ECE teacher-educator, is sceptical of the internal self-review approach promoted by ERO, claiming that there is a lack of evidence to support the robustness of this approach and that there is a “wide variation between services in self-review practices” (Blaiklock, 2012, p. 2). A “differentiated return times” model is used by ERO, which means the frequency of their external reviews depends on “how well placed” each ECE centre is “to promote positive learning outcomes for children”, with most “well placed” centres being likely “to be reviewed every three years” (ERO, 2013b, p. 47). Each centre’s ERO reports are available to the public via its official website. ERO also generates ongoing national reports on various facets of educational provision, such as issues around cultural diversity, quality and literacy in ECE services. These reports are discussed in the documentary review chapter of this thesis.

Improving the quality of ECE services was one of the three main goals set out in *Pathways to the Future/Ngā Huarahi Arataki: A 10-Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* (MoE, 2002). A strategy suggested by the Ministry of Education to achieve this goal was to increase the number of registered teachers and to have a fully qualified teaching force by 2012 (MoE, 2002). Unfortunately, with a change of government, starting from December 2007, only 50% of the teachers in the education and care sector are required to be registered and qualified with at least a Diploma in Teaching (ECE) or similar

qualification (MoE, 2009a), although teachers working in the public kindergartens must all be qualified and registered (AKA, 2007a).

The lack of professional qualifications in the education and care services has been considered to be one of the key challenges impeding the appropriate and effective implementation of *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand ECE curriculum (Scrivens, 2002; May, 2007, 2009; May & Mitchell, 2009). When the curriculum was first released in 1996, very few of the teachers working in ECE services, other than those in the kindergarten sector, had a three-year tertiary ECE qualification. The curriculum was criticised by ERO, which was dominated by “school-sector reviewers”, as too complex and that therefore its implementation would require a “high level of training and/or guidance” (May, 2009, p. 246).

The conceptualisation of *Te Whāriki* was underpinned by a bicultural, sociocultural and integrative model, incorporating key principles of holistic development, relationships, families and communities, and empowerment. This was very different from those of the school model which focused on separate “basic subjects, the three Rs... pre-planned and measurable learning objectives” (Carr & May, 1993, p. 74). Competency-based learning dispositions were further developed to assist providing evidence of children’s learning, against the “deficit models that dominated school assessment practice” (May, 2009, p. 248). Hence, one of the ongoing challenges experienced by the ECE sector in relation to the provision of quality programmes include pressure from parents and primary school teachers who expect children to be prepared and ready for school (May, 2009).



In general, many parents and educators from the primary school sector expect children to have acquired the basic literacy and numeracy skills, as in reading, writing and mathematics, before starting primary schools. Yet, most ECE teachers believe that a dispositional approach to learning is fundamental and prepares children for life-long learning, including schooling, and that the learning opportunities offered to children within ECE should be discovery, inquiry and play-based, rather than skill acquisition-focused, in order to provide children with a “social and playful preparation for school” (May, 2009, p. 296).

In terms of assessment, ECE teachers are expected to document children’s learning and dispositions for learning, using narrative learning stories which are usually collected in the child’s portfolio (Carr, 2001). This formative model of assessment based on the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* is also particularly challenging for primary school teachers to understand (May, 2009; Scrivens, 2002). Many parents and primary school teachers, who are used to an outcomes-based assessment model, struggle to make sense of the broad learning dispositions and narrative assessments that are promoted in *Te Whāriki* (May, 2009; Scrivens, 2002).

### ***Te Whāriki***

This section provides a contextual and theoretical understanding of *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō nga mokopuna o Aotearoa/The New Zealand early childhood education curriculum* (MoE, 1996). Since it is a curriculum document, *Te Whāriki* is also examined in the documentary review chapter, but from a different perspective than is offered in this section. The implementation of *Te Whāriki* is a mandatory requirement for all licensed ECE

centres (McLachlan, 2011; MoE, 2008). As such, New Zealand ECE reflects *Te Whāriki*'s aspirations for children: "To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (MoE, 1996, p. 9).

In the early 1990s, two senior New Zealand ECE academics, Margaret Carr and Helen May, of the University of Waikato, were contracted by the government to coordinate the development of a national ECE curriculum. When the curriculum document, *Te Whāriki*, was released in 1996, it was acknowledged positively, both nationally and internationally (May, 2009; Ritchie, 2012). It is "one of the first formal curriculum documents for early childhood education, not only in Aotearoa New Zealand, but throughout the Western world" (Farquhar, 2010, p. 77). It was the first bicultural and bilingual curriculum in New Zealand (Ritchie, 2012), reflecting the understanding that New Zealand is a bicultural nation which acknowledges the cultural heritages of both Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand) and Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent). The section written in te reo Māori reflects conceptualisations of te ao Māori, the Māori world view, and it is not a translation of the English version, even though it is based on the similar principles and goals (Scrivens, 2002). These principles and goals are to be explained on the next page.

*Te Whāriki* provides a non-prescriptive framework for each ECE centre to develop its own curriculum that reflects its community's aspirations (Nuttall, 2013; Ritchie, 2012). It also embraces a holistic approach that sees children as social beings who develop within strong family and community social networks

(Farquhar, 2010), and stresses child-centred and discovery-based learning strategies and responsive pedagogy that caters for the strengths, interests and needs of children (Ritchie, 2001, 2012). Hence, an integrated approach is suggested by *Te Whāriki* to incorporate curriculum learning areas like mathematics, language and science into children's daily routines and activities as interests emerge (Ritchie, 2012).

Interwoven throughout *Te Whāriki* (literally translated as the woven mat) are four principles (empowerment/whakamana, holistic development/kotahitanga, family and community/whānau tangata, and relationships/ngā hononga) and five strands (well-being/mana atua, belonging/mana whenua, contribution/mana tangata, communication/mana reo, and exploration/mana aotūroa). Examples of learning experiences to meet the learning outcomes of each strand and goal are categorised into three 'stages' of children's development: infants, toddlers and young children (MoE, 1996).

These learning outcomes, however, are indicative not definitive (Lee et al, 2013; MoE, 1996), hence they only serve as guidelines but not as prescriptions for practice (Blaklock, 2012; Nuttall, 2013; Ritchie, 2012). These learning outcomes and the particular mode of assessing and documenting children's learning dispositions through narrative learning stories, as explained earlier, are endorsed by ERO (2012), and consequently there is a strong expectation that they are implemented by ECE teachers. Nevertheless, Blaklock (2012) is critical of both, arguing that the outcomes are too broad and provide little support for ECE teachers to assess children's learning. He also criticises *Te Whāriki* for assigning little attention to the literacy skills that are so important for children's development, and that nowhere "in the description of the principles,

strands, goals or learning outcomes is there any specific mention of letters or the alphabet” (Blaiklock, 2008, p. 13). The non-prescriptive nature of *Te Whāriki* remains a challenge for the ECE sector (Nuttall, 2013), particularly when teachers are asked to explain what children are learning.

Finally, *Te Whāriki* also includes an entire section that describes connections with the essential learning areas and skills of the school curriculum, the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (MoE, 1993), which was later revised to the current *New Zealand Curriculum* (MoE, 2007a). During the development of the *New Zealand Curriculum*, ECE advocates pressed for “an alignment with *Te Whāriki*” (Lee et al, 2013, p. 153), and thus the five key competencies of the *New Zealand Curriculum* are now aligned with the five strands of *Te Whāriki* (Lee et al, 2013; MoE, 2007a). Some researchers, however, do not believe in positioning ECE as preparation for school (Alcock & Haggerty, 2013).

### **Theoretical underpinnings of *Te Whāriki***

*Te Whāriki* is underpinned by four theoretical frameworks, metaphorically described by its authors as the “four tall kauri” (Carr & May, 1996, p. 103), which are the stage/age developmental theories of Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, and the sociocultural theories of Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner. With its strong sociocultural nature (Ritchie, 2012), *Te Whāriki* recognises the increasing cultural diversity of New Zealand, and also applies Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to emphasise the social and cultural influences on young children’s learning and development (Lee et al, 2013; MoE, 1996). While the three ‘stages’ of growth and development suggested in *Te Whāriki*, being the infant, the toddler, and the young child, clearly reflect the

developmental perspectives of Erikson and Piaget, other key concepts of these two developmental theories, such as the notion of identity (Erikson) and exploration (Piaget) are also evidenced in the curriculum.

### ***Erik Erikson***

Education policy, curriculum practice and advice to parents in New Zealand during the 1950s were strongly influenced by the stage theory of Erikson (May, 2001) in which the following first three stages apply to early childhood: infancy, early childhood and play age (Erikson, 1997). Following the same order, each stage is linked to a pair of “psychosocial crises”: trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, and initiative versus guilt; and overcoming each crisis leads to the development of “hope, will and purpose” (Erikson, 1997, p. 32). According to Erikson, infants need to trust that their caregivers are always available in order to develop a sense of hope to confidently participate in the subsequent stages; toddlers need to experience autonomy to develop the will power to exercise free choice; young children need a sense of initiative to plan, set goals and persevere so that they can develop a sense of purpose to pursue future adventures (Erikson, 1997). The ideas of Erikson are particularly reflected in the *Well-Being* strand of *Te Whāriki* which states that if children are able to trust that their needs will be met, they will develop confidence to explore, to “participate and take risks without fear of harm” (MoE, 1996, p. 52), and thus the disposition to “tackle new challenges” (MoE, 1996, p.9) during exploration.

Issues around identity are discussed extensively by Erikson (1968) in *Identity, Youth and Crisis* in which he highlighted the importance of “group identity” and “ego identity” (Erikson, 1968, p. 45) in children’s development. He

believes that a child needs assurance and approval from his/her significant others to develop positive ego identity, and also to know that his/her individuality is similar to that of his/her significant others in the community in order to develop group identity (Erikson, 1968). Identity is mentioned frequently in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) which for example, recognises the “cultural identity of all children” (MoE, 1996, p. 18) and “enables all children to develop an enhanced sense of self-worth and identity” (MoE, 1996, p. 40).

In his book, *Childhood and Society* (Erikson, 1995), Erikson examined the value of play in relation to the development of healthy ego identity. He “promoted a pedagogy for learning and development through the medium of play within a climate of motherly (or mother-like substitute) love and attention” (May, 2001, p. 15). Erikson further recognised that culture plays a key role in children’s play because it shapes play materials, social roles during play, and social rules of play (Erikson, 1995). The importance of play and providing children with culturally relevant play materials is, consequently, highly emphasised in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996). The value of play is also recognised by another developmental theorist, Jean Piaget.

### ***Jean Piaget***

The constructivist Piagetian approach, another theory underpinning *Te Whāriki*, emphasises the importance of exploration and play for children’s cognitive development, although Piaget used the term ‘intelligence’ instead (Piaget, 1952, 1962). The *Exploration* strand in *Te Whāriki* specifically reflects the ideas of Piaget who emphasised the “discovery of new means through active experimentation” (Piaget, 1952, p. 263). Piaget believed that by

providing children with “new objects”, they would engage in “exploration by chance” which resulted in “the discovery of unknown phenomenon” (Piaget, 1952, p. 255). As children explore, they apply “familiar means ... to new situations” (Piaget, 1952, p. 267) and discover new means to make sense of the objects. These twin processes are represented in Piaget’s concepts of assimilation and accommodation which involve active experimentation and discovery, facilitating cognitive development (Piaget, 1952). Piaget’s detailed observation records of individual children indicate that his main role during the observations focused on the provision of the objects to the observed child and observing the child’s behaviour (Piaget, 1952). Reflecting Piagetian perspectives, *Te Whāriki* suggests ECE teachers should provide opportunities that encourage children to learn “by setting up theories or ideas of how things work and trying them out, and by the purposeful use of resources” (MoE, 1996, p. 82).

The role of play in children’s cognitive development is explained in great detail in Piaget’s book, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (Piaget, 1962). Piaget believed that play with rules, spontaneous play, imaginative play, and pretence or make-believe play all contribute to children’s cognitive development (Piaget, 1962). He further highlighted the important role of signs and symbols in pretence or make-believe play (Piaget, 1962). The Piagetian approach asserts that as children explore, discover and engage in varied forms of play, they develop cognitively and progress through a series of developmental stages (Piaget, 1952, 1962; Dockett & Fler, 2002). The first two stages: sensori-motor (birth to two years) and preoperational (two to seven) apply to ECE. The notion of play, therefore, is emphasised in the Exploration strand of *Te Whāriki* where

it states that “children experience an environment where their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised” (MoE, 1996, p. 82).

### ***Lev Vygotsky***

Vygotsky stressed the importance of social, cultural and historical influences on children’s development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1994). He believed that children acquired cultural behaviour through “socially rooted and historically developed activities” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). In his view, there are two lines of development:

First, there is the line of natural development of behaviour which is closely bound up with the processes of general organic growth and the maturation of the child. Second, there is the line of cultural improvement of the psychological functions, the working out of new methods of reasoning, the mastering of the cultural methods of behaviour. (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 57)

The two lines of psychological development (the natural and the cultural) usually work together and are difficult to separate. Additionally, culturally relevant activities provide contextually and personally meaningful experiences for children, making learning far more effective (Vygotsky, 1987a).

The “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) is an iconic concept developed by Vygotsky who claimed that “with collaboration, direction, or some kind of help the child is always able to do more and solve more difficult tasks than he can independently” (Vygotsky, 1987a, p. 209). Hence the ZPD is the gap between



the child's actual achievement level without the support from another person and his/her potential achievement level with the assistance of a more capable person (Crain, 2000). Vygotsky believed that the external assistance through social interactions provided by the more capable persons assists the child to eventually internalise the new learning (Vygotsky, 1994).

Vygotsky used the term "transitional age" to explain that children's development is neither age-bound nor "mechanical processes where each new phase begins only with the completion of the previous one" (Vygotsky, 1987b, p. 160), thus highlighting the fluidity of children's learning and development. Although *Te Whāriki* utilises three stages to describe the characteristics of children's growth, learning and development, the stages are broad enough to acknowledge the possibility of children transitioning between stages at variable individual ages and to allow flexible planning to accommodate these fluctuations (MoE, 1996).

Vygotsky examined the role of play in cognitive development (the term mental development is used in his book) of children, and believed that play has an enormous influence on the development of preschool children (Dockett & Fler, 2002; Vygotsky, 1966). According to Vygotsky (1966), play is more than a pleasurable experience; instead it is saturated with learning opportunities and assists children's cognitive development. He further claimed that play is heavily embedded with cultural rules, and children can act out their imagination and desires through engagement with these rules (Vygotsky, 1966).

Being a curriculum that is underpinned by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, *Te Whāriki* highlights the importance of recognising and respecting the diverse

cultures of children, families and communities (MoE, 1996). Children are encouraged to collaborate with adults and peers during culturally relevant activities “by doing, by asking questions, by interacting with others” (MoE, 1996, p. 82). Through teachers’ provision of “scaffolding” (MoE, 1996, p. 43), a concept coined by Jerome Bruner (1996), children are able to extend their achievement within the ZPD.

### ***Jerome Bruner***

Like Piaget, Bruner is a constructivist who believes in the vital role of “discovery in the learning of the young” (Bruner, 2006, p. 57) and that learners construct new ideas and meanings based on their current knowledge (Bruner, 1996). While Bruner recognises the contribution of Piaget’s “relatively context-free conception”, he also advocates for a “context-sensitive view” of children’s learning (Bruner, 2006, p. 190). Hence, he emphasises the importance of culture on learning and the shaping of the mind, and states that “while mind creates culture, culture also creates mind” (Bruner, 1996, p. 166).

Recognising Vygotsky’s idea of the ZPD, Bruner believes that learners are capable of achieving beyond their current ability level if there is an adult, a teacher, or a more capable peer who is “willing and prepared to give and share aid, to comfort and to scaffold” (Bruner, 1996, p. 84). He uses the term “intentional pedagogy” (Bruner, 2006, p. 145) to describe the important role of adults in supporting children’s learning in novel situations. He further claims that since all learning activities occur within a cultural setting, their effectiveness is influenced by whether the learners are provided with the relevant “cultural

toolkit” (Bruner, 1996, p. 68), for example whether they have the language and cultural understanding to make sense of the learning (Bruner, 2006).

Bruner examines extensively the role of play in children’s learning and development in his book, *In Search of Pedagogy* (Bruner, 2006). He claims that play allows children to try out a mix of novel behaviours and that children’s play is “saturated heavily with symbolism” (Bruner, 2006, p. 149). Children learn about and apply cultural tools, social signs and symbols during play activities (Bruner, 2006). Early language acquisition which involves the learning of social rules and conventions of language is also strongly implicated in children’s play (Bruner, 2006). Consequently, the importance of “language and cultural tools” (MoE, 1996, p. 19) in children’s learning and development is recognised in *Te Whāriki*. With the national ECE curriculum supported by these ‘grand narratives’, theories that have a strong focus on play, it is no surprise that a play-based ECE approach is a dominant discourse in New Zealand.

### **The discourse of play in New Zealand ECE**

During the late 1950s, educators in New Zealand advocated for active and spontaneous play to help children develop creativity and skills; outdoor and indoor resources and equipment were set up to promote ‘free choice’ with regard to play possibilities (May, 2009, 2013). By the mid-1960s, the benefits of ‘free play’ were embraced and recognised by teachers, parents, education policy makers and theorists, and most New Zealand kindergartens had already shifted “from timetabled play to free play” (May, 2009, p. 22). The notion of free play was further promoted and explained in a wide range of Playcentre publications (Densem, 1980; Grey, 1974; Morris, 1967; Somerset, 1976a,

1976b) which were used by the teacher training colleges at the time (Stover, 2011).

The importance of play and using play as key medium of learning in ECE has a strong history in many English-speaking countries, including New Zealand. Play as the preferred pedagogy in ECE is supported by an extensive pool of international research (Dockett & Fleer, 2002; Fleer, 2013; Frost, 2010; Klien, Wirth, & Linas, 2004; Oliver & Klugman, 2002; Van Hoorn, Scales, Nourot & Alward, 1999) and a range of national literature (Hill, 2006; Penrose, 1998; Smith, 1993; Smith & Swain, 1988; White, Ellis, O'Malley, Rockel, Stover & Toso, 2009; White & Rockel, 2008).

As a result of their research carried out in New Zealand in which they interviewed five ECE teachers and the families of five toddlers, White and Rockel (2008) state that play in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is seen as the right of every child, and the value of play for children's learning and development was supported by families/whānau and teacher participants in their study. Parent participants recognised the value of play and the role of play in transmitting and upholding cultural and family values; whereas teacher participants believed that play supports children's emotional development and their learning through self-chosen and initiated exploration, imitation and discovery (White & Rockel, 2008). Responses from teacher participants reflect their application of *Te Whāriki* which stresses the value of child-directed play.

Just as play has more than one definition in *Te Whāriki*, being viewed for example as both a means for purposeful learning as well as leisure enjoyment (White et al, 2009), the discursive implementation of play can be enacted

differently across different ECE settings, depending on the teachers' theoretical beliefs. On the one hand, the application of play pedagogy is suggested to be aligned with a child-centred approach (May, 2009; Ritchie, 2001; White et al, 2009) which reflects the personal discovery perspective of Piaget (1952, 1962). This approach towards play emphasises that children's developmental maturity is considered, their needs met, their interests served by offering them choices of learning experiences, and that learning should occur through play that is enjoyable and self-directed (May, 2009; Ritchie, 2001). Within a free-play and child-centred environment, teachers who believe in this approach are likely to take on a supervisory and observing role rather than becoming actively involved in children's play (May, 2009; White et al, 2009; White & Rockel, 2008). On the other hand, due to the emphasis of socio-cultural pedagogy in *Te Whāriki*, teachers are also supposed to "provide scaffolding for children's endeavours" (MoE, 1996, p. 43), implying that they are to be involved in children's play in order to extend their learning.

Historical establishment of the notion of free-play and the emphasis on play in *Te Whāriki* have both contributed to the significant role of play and reinforced discourses favouring play in contemporary New Zealand ECE. Discourses of play that are validated by institutional policies and documents normalise children's ability to play as a universal competence, and play has thus been privileged as the preferred way for children to learn (Cannella & Viruru, 2002; Rhedding-Jones & Otterstad, 2011). Yet, there are multiple meanings and definitions of play, and teachers hold varied beliefs "about what constitutes play" (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010, p. 334). Most importantly, play is defined, interpreted, valued and enacted differently across diverse cultures (Cheng,

2001; Mellor, 2000; O’Gorman & Ailwood, 2012; Rhedding-Jones & Otterstad, 2011; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2001; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010).

For example, parents (whose ethnicity was unspecified) participating in a research project carried out in south-east Queensland, Australia, mainly interpreted play activities as “involving children in practical, small-group activities” that are adult-directed (O’Gorman & Ailwood, 2012, p. 273). Free play activities that are child-initiated and without adults’ intervention were preferred by the parents in this research project to be “confined to after-lunch sessions or when the children were ‘hot’ or ‘tired’ ... at the end of the day, when ‘work’ was complete” (O’Gorman & Ailwood, 2012, p. 273). Other studies further indicate that play is commonly used by parents with diverse cultural backgrounds, as a reward to encourage children to complete their work (Cooney & Sha, 1999; O’Gorman & Ailwood, 2012; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2001).

The central role of play in New Zealand ECE has presented some challenges with the recent diversification of immigrants arriving in New Zealand. For example, many Asian and/or Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand consider the role of preschools as getting children ready for formal schooling, and prefer children to have less play but more structured academic learning in their ECE centres (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2004, 2005, 2010; Wu, 2009). Nonetheless, with the support of a national curriculum and other Ministry documents that are to be examined in the documentary review chapter, the pedagogy of play is likely to remain a dominant practice of New Zealand ECE teachers. Immigrant parents’ perceptions of children’s early learning and play are examined in a latter section. The next section scrutinises the discourses pertaining to parental involvement.

## **The discourse of parental involvement & parent-teacher partnership**

The notions of parent-teacher partnership and parental involvement in their children's ECE have been widely discussed nationally and internationally (Billman et al, 2005; Blanc, Clausier & Murcier, 2004; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Grey & Horgan, 2003; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2002; Keesing Styles, 2000; MacNaughton, 2004; Mitchell et al, 2006; Prior & Gerard, 2007; Ward, 2009). Partnership involves a trusting relationship, two-way communication, collaboration, empowerment, equal power and shared decision-making, rather than parents being 'advised' of how to rear their children or expected to conform to the teachers' expectations (Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Hartzell & Zlotoff, 2004; Keesing Styles, 2000; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Stonehouse & Gonzalez-Mena, 2004). Although partnership with parents and communities is an espoused value of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), findings from previous New Zealand studies do not reflect the existence of a sense of partnership, that meets the definitions and descriptions of literature, between ECE teachers and Chinese immigrant parents (Guo, 2010; Wu, 2009). In addition, since this study examines the holistic involvement of Chinese immigrant parents in their children's ECE, both at home and in the kindergartens, parental involvement is the preferred terminology used in this thesis.

The value of parental involvement in their children's ECE is widely recognised (Billman et al, 2005; Blanc et al, 2004; Glick & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Grey & Horgan, 2003; Hartzell & Zlotoff, 2004; Keesing Styles, 2000; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Mercedes Nalls, Mullis, Cornille, Mullis & Jeter, 2009; Stonehouse & Gonzalez-Mena, 2004; Ward, 2009). In New Zealand, *Te Whāriki*

recognises the importance of parent-teacher partnerships, interdependence among teachers, families and local communities, family involvement in assessment and curriculum planning and evaluation, a sense of belonging for all families, and culturally appropriate communication with families (MoE, 1996). Promoting collaboration between families and ECE services is further highlighted in a range of New Zealand official documents (Children's Commissioner, 2013; ECE Taskforce, 2011; MoE, 2002; see also documentary review). The aspiration of involving families in New Zealand ECE is clearly evidenced.

When parents and teachers share knowledge of children's interests and wellbeing, both parties develop a better understanding of children's learning needs, and children experience a continuity of expectations between home and education setting and thus they benefit immensely from this collaboration (Billman et al, 2005; De Gioia, 2013; Mitchell et al, 2006; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010; Stonehouse & Gonzalez-Mena, 2004). Parental involvement in ECE settings is seen as further benefitting the parents by fostering friendships amongst them, and helping them to expand their social networks and to create a sense of community and belonging (Hartzell & Zlotoff, 2004; Ward, 2009).

However, parental involvement is often narrowly interpreted by teachers as parents participating and supporting activities and routines in ECE settings (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; González, 2005; Joshi, Eberly & Konzal, 2005; Obeng, 2007), and parents are mostly expected to follow the teachers' guidelines rather than to engage in decision-making with the teachers (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; González, 2005). It is also easy for teachers to assume that they have positive relationships with parents and that they understand what is best for children and



parents; but, in fact, parents may hold diverse perspectives regarding the parameters of parental involvement (Knopf & Swick, 2007; Prior & Gerard, 2007). For example, some parents may be highly visible in the ECE centres by working alongside children and/or being actively involved in curriculum decisions (Mercedes Nalls et al, 2009). Other parents, particularly those who have experienced previous intimidating and negative encounters with teachers and the education system may lack the confidence and be daunted to make connections and to work with teachers (Prior & Gerard, 2007; Ward, 2009). Parents, particularly Asian and/or Chinese parents, who respect teachers as authority figures may consider working alongside teachers as intervening and disrespectful (De Gioia, 2013; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Ward, 2009). Nevertheless, this does not imply that these parents are not involved in their children's learning at home.

Much of the literature has argued for the value of parental involvement in their children's activities at home in relation to learning and achievements (Children's Commissioner, 2013; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Gonzalez, 2009; Lareau, 2011; Mitchell et al, 2006; Prior & Gerard, 2007). Mitchell et al (2006) claim that simply involving parents in the centre is not sufficient, and that teachers should also support parents to create a positive home learning environment for their children. Research indicates that children who engage in a range of adult-organised activities achieve higher academic performance than children who are autonomous in deciding upon their leisure activities (Lareau, 2011). Furthermore, children's literacy skills and cognitive abilities are enhanced when parents are involved in children's literacy activities at home, such as reading the books assigned by teachers to children and making reading

materials available (Children's Commissioner, 2013; Gonzalez, 2009; Mitchell et al, 2006; Prior & Gerard, 2007).

Many studies have argued that while some parents, particularly immigrant parents with a non-English speaking background, tend to communicate with teachers less often, they are highly involved in their children's learning by controlling their daily activities outside the ECE settings, which is a form of involvement that is unobservable by teachers (Guo, 2005; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Lahman & Park, 2004; Okagaki & Bojczyk, 2002; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004). Compared to those parents who participate visibly in the learning settings, this form of 'invisible' parental involvement is similarly valid and effective in supporting parents to gain the knowledge about their children's learning and in enhancing their children's numeracy and literacy abilities (Harper & Pelletier, 2010). Unfortunately, some teachers assume that parents who are not visible at the learning settings are uninvolved and disinterested in their children's education (Banks, 2002; Joshi, Eberly and Konzal, 2005; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Prior & Gerard, 2007).

The term "hard to reach" is sometimes used to describe immigrant families in education settings (Mercedes Nalls et al, 2009, p. 1054; Ward, 2009, p. 51) due to social barriers, such as language constraints and lack of understanding of the education systems and practices of the host countries. Using a title such as, *How can we reach reluctant parents in childcare programmes?* (Mercedes Nalls et al, 2009), further runs the risk of perpetuating negativity towards the 'invisible' immigrant parents. Communication, engagement and empowerment are keys to encouraging these parents to participate in ECE settings.

## **Communication, engagement and empowerment**

Two-way communication is crucial to successful parent-teacher partnership (De Gioia, 2013; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Meade, 2012). Communication is more than informal conversations during drop-off and pick-up times. Other popular communication channels used by ECE teachers include parent conferences and meetings, message books, emails, and centre blogs (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2002; Meade, 2012). Much of the literature has provided a wide range of strategies for ECE teachers to enhance communication with families who have diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Barrera & Corso, 2003; De Gioia, 2013; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2002; Joshi et al, 2005; MacNaughton, 2004; Prior & Gerard, 2007). For instance, the “skilled dialogue” approach which involves respect, reciprocity and responsiveness is recommended by Barrera and Corso (2003, p. 41) to “meet the challenges posed by cultural diversity”. Teachers who are respectful accept that there are differences between people. They reciprocate by recognising the strengths of each person, promoting opportunities to contribute, and encouraging power sharing in decision-making. Finally, responsive teachers adjust their assumptions and avoid the complacency of a sense of certainty so that they can accommodate the different, and perhaps unexpected, perspectives and needs of each individual family. This approach to communication promotes the emergence of new ideas and practices that complement each other (Barrera & Corso, 2003, p. 41).

According to a national survey, Asian, including Chinese-speaking, teachers, are under-represented in New Zealand ECE settings (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012). Most teachers who participated in this survey “were second or third

generation New Zealanders and only 40% had experienced living overseas” (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012, p. 87). Another international study further points out that some teachers have an inadequate understanding of the importance and influence of cultures on children’s learning and families, and they lack the skills and knowledge to meaningfully and effectively integrate families’ cultures into curriculum and teaching practices (Joshi et al, 2005). When teachers and families do not speak the same language, additional challenges are posed. Much literature has suggested that extra effort is required to avoid misunderstanding and to engage with these families, to ensure they do not feel excluded (De Gioia, 2013; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2002; Mercedes Nalls, 2009; Prior & Gerard, 2007).

In New Zealand, the assessment of children’s learning is expected to be communicated to parents through the use of “learning stories” that are written in a narrative manner (Carr, 2001; MoE, 2004a). These learning stories are usually collated in individual portfolios which some ECE teachers encourage parents to take home so that children and wider family members can revisit children’s learning experiences. Some teachers further encourage families to contribute to the learning stories in order to inform teachers about their children’s experiences at home. As such, the portfolios are a means of two-way communication between ECE teachers and families (Meade, 2012; Mitchell et al, 2006; Zhang, 2012).

Empowerment is a widely recognised key criterion of genuine parent-teacher partnership (Banks, 2002; De Gioia, 2013; González, 2005; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Rouse, 2012; Stonehouse & Gonzalez-Mena, 2004). Simply expecting parents to be involved in ECE settings according to the guidelines of routines

and activities provided by teachers is a tokenistic approach towards parental involvement rather than a form of empowerment (De Gioia, 2013). Parents are likely to feel disempowered when their childrearing knowledge and aspirations for their children are not recognised by teachers, making them reluctant to share their home practices with teachers (De Gioia, 2013). Disempowerment “refers to a loss of control, unwillingness or discomfort in sharing information or knowledge” (De Gioia, 2013, p. 117).

Due to the politics of knowledge, familial knowledge is often subordinated and considered as less important than professional knowledge (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000, 2002). Recognising parents’ expertise is imperative to genuine parent-teacher partnership. When teachers are unwilling to relinquish their positioning as the ‘experts’, some parents are likely to feel silenced and may withdraw because “speaking out is not equally easy for all parents” (MacNaughton, 2004, p. 6). On the other hand, when parents feel that teachers are supportive and treat them as equal partners, they may feel empowered to communicate and connect with professionals (Mercedes Nalls et al, 2009). Including parents in the centre decision-making processes, such as assessments and curriculum planning, may further encourage parents to see themselves as active agents who have control over their children and families, and as capable of making contributions to their children’s learning and working with teachers in a power-balanced partnership to developing shared educational aims for their children (González, 2005; Mitchell et al, 2006; Prior & Gerard, 2007; Rouse, 2012).

## **Immigrant parents: Values, beliefs and practices**

### **Children's education: Upward social mobility**

A view of diverse immigrant groups in various English-speaking countries about the importance of education and using it as a means towards future success and upward social mobility is highlighted in a range of international studies (Benton & Gomez, 2003; Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; Feliciano, 2006; Li, 2001; Wu & Singh, 2004). In addition, a model of “segmented assimilation” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 55) has often been applied by researchers to explain the academic achievement of different ethnic groups of immigrant children (Feliciano, 2006; Hibel, 2009).

The model of “segmented assimilation” explains how contextual variables, such as government policies and the support and resources provided by family and community play a decisive role in the upward or downward social mobility of second generation immigrants, and therefore into which “segment” of the society they “assimilate” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 55). Favourable determinants that assist the second generation immigrants to climb up the social ladder include a positive reception by the host country's population, supportive government policies, the availability of resources from the ethnic community that the immigrant family belongs to, and parental capital which includes linguistic, education and occupational skills.

Feliciano (2006) extends the application of this model to include immigrant groups' pre-migration status. Parents who belong to an immigrant group that is collectively identified as having a high level of pre-migration educational status are found to have higher educational expectations of their children who in turn

achieve higher academic attainments (Feliciano, 2006). It is also suggested that parental educational advice and aspirations are able to compensate for the lack of cultural and social capital and motivate immigrant children to use education to turn around their life chances in the host countries (Basit, 2012).

In applying the model of segmented assimilation to his research, Hibel (2009) found that since Asian families tend to have higher levels of socio-economic status, parental education, cultural capital and out-of-school activity participation, their second generation immigrant children have more chance of moving socially upward. In general, Asian immigrant parents, particularly Chinese immigrants, believe educational success requires active parental support and involvement, especially in out-of-school activities, such as taking their children to Chinese language schools (Wu & Singh, 2004; Zhou & Kim, 2006). These schools provide opportunities for immigrant parents and children to develop their own community and to support each other; yet they also generate peer parental pressure to compare children's attainments which indirectly enhances children's academic success (Wu & Singh, 2004; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Chinese immigrant parent participants in a Canadian study displayed a large degree of helplessness and vulnerability due to the unjust treatment they had experienced in the host country (Li, 2001). To avoid their children experiencing the discrimination they encountered in job searching, these parents discouraged their children from pursuing education and career pathways that involved competition with the non-immigrants so they would have a higher chance of career success and improved social and economic status in the future. Instead, these parents believed that "minority immigrants must align their career

aspirations to the demands of the Canadian labour market and their visible minority status” (Li, 2001, p. 485-486).

Literature claims that although most Chinese immigrants living in English-speaking countries, including New Zealand, are highly educated and professionally trained in their homeland, they are willing to sacrifice their previous high status job, to remain underemployed or to work in unskilled jobs, to give up furthering their personal study and thereby career opportunities, in order to bring home a reasonable income and have more spare time to support their children’s education (Ip & Murphy, 2005; Li, 2001; Wu & Singh, 2004). These Chinese immigrant parents often remind their children to stand out academically and professionally in order to secure a good life, and that it is their responsibility to bring pride to the family, and to socially advance the family (Li, 2001; Wu & Singh, 2004).

### **Perceptions of children’s early learning and play**

Previous national and international studies involving immigrant parents in different English-speaking countries indicate that immigrants, who consider their children’s education as key to providing the families with the opportunity for upward social mobility, expect their very young children to engage in academic learning and therefore, they disagree with the idea of learning through play. These include African immigrant parents in the United States (Obeng, 2007), Mexican, Central American and Caribbean immigrants in New York City (Adair & Tobin, 2008; Tobin et al, 2007), Cambodian families in Australia (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000), and Asian/Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2004; Wu, 2011). It appears that these diverse immigrant parents



prefer their children to have less play and more structured academic learning in ECE centres. While they may hold different perspectives regarding the benefits of ECE services for their children, many of them consider preparing children for the next phase of their education as one of the most important goals of ECE and, therefore, one of the main tasks of the teachers (Ebbeck & Glover, 1998; Tobin et al, 2007; Wu, 2011). Asian immigrant parents, in particular, believe children “are ready for school-related learning at a very early age” (Parmar, 2008, p. 173).

Other immigrants send their children to ECE services mainly to learn English from native English-speakers in order to better prepare them for primary schooling and academic success (Obeng, 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007). Furthermore, some immigrants believe that their children learn and develop social skills through interactions with teachers as well as other children (Obeng, 2007). Finally, while immigrant parents in a Canadian study displayed no sense of belonging in their children’s ECE settings, they utilised the ECE settings as opportunities for their children to acquire cultural citizenship and a sense of belonging in Canada (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007).

Some immigrant parents believe that the key role of teachers is to impart knowledge to children, and simply allowing children to engage in child-initiated and child-directed play is insufficient (Obeng, 2007; Wu, 2011). In New Zealand, according to *Te Whāriki*, as previously discussed, play is supposed to be voluntary, spontaneous, and child-directed, and it is the teachers’ responsibility to provide interesting and culturally “sensitive and responsive” play equipment and resources to encourage children to choose their own play (MoE, 1996, p. 18). Hence, the teachers in a New Zealand study that involved five ECE centres

carefully set up the environment with resources to facilitate spontaneous children's play, and to "follow the children's interests and take advantage of the teachable moments" (White et al, 2009, p. 36). A "standing back" approach that involves limited teacher intervention was observed across the different centres although other teaching strategies, such as modelling and "playing *with* [original emphasis] children" were also evidenced (White et al, 2009, p. 39).

This 'standing back' approach seems to also appear in a recent New Zealand ECE study that involved a group of PRC immigrant parents who displayed "ambivalent attitudes towards play" (Wu, 2011, p. 100). Although in general this group of parents agreed with the strength of learning through play, they were disappointed that their children were mostly left to play alone with "not-much-help" from the teachers (Wu, 2011, p. 96). They questioned how individual children learn through play without teachers' involvement, and if there was any evidence to prove that learning was actually taking place through their children's free play experiences (Wu, 2011).

Some New Zealand studies indicate that Chinese immigrant parents usually are not in favour of play; instead they support introducing academic related activities to very young children (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2010; Wu, 2011). Cross-cultural comparative studies that took place in the United States show that Chinese immigrant parents and their Euro-American counterparts do not share the same beliefs and practices regarding play, and that they are more controlling and engaging in their children's activities and learning at home (Huntsinger, Jose & Larson, 1998, as cited in Okagaki & Bojczyk, 2002; Parmar, 2008). Young Chinese-American children in these studies spent more time in homework and skill-based practices, such as playing musical

instruments, and thus they had less free time to play than the Euro-American children. In addition, Asian parents, including Chinese, were also found to engage in more constructive play with their children and provide them with fewer toys, except those with academic value, whereas their Euro-American counterparts participated in more pretend play (Parmar, 2008). Parents across different countries who were brought up in a play-focused culture are more likely to agree with the benefits of play, to endorse the notion of learning through play, and to engage in more play activities with their children (Parmar, 2008; Rhedding-Jones & Otterstad, 2011; White et al, 2009).

### **Perspectives and experiences of participation in children's ECE**

Although the value of parental involvement is widely recognised in many English-speaking countries (Billman et al, 2005; Blanc, Clausier & Murcier, 2004; Grey & Horgan, 2003; Keesing Styles, 2000), some immigrant parents express different perspectives. While these parents believe they should be actively involved in decision-making in the ECE centres, they disagree that they should be working with their child in the centre because this hinders the child's ability to settle into the centre independently (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000). Other researchers claim that many immigrant parents find coming to the child's learning institution to meet the teachers or other parents intimidating, and that although these parents want teachers to listen to them and understand their needs, "they do not expect or want to tell their children's teachers what to do" (Tobin et al 2007, p. 38). Other immigrant parents further consider themselves to be outsiders feeling no sense of belonging in their children's ECE centres (Pacini-Ketchabaw's, 2007).

Asian immigrant parents in New Zealand who value education and are themselves highly educated also prefer not to become involved in their children's ECE centres for a range of reasons. Previous New Zealand studies claim that while some of these parents lack enough confidence in their understanding of the mainstream education system and teaching practice to contribute (Chan, 2006), others assert that they are too busy and it is unnecessary to work with their child's teachers (Guo, 2005). Many Chinese parents find it difficult to communicate with teachers and be involved in New Zealand ECE settings due to cultural and language barriers (Guo, 2010; Wu, 2011; Zhang, 2012). In a study that involved a small sample of Asian immigrant parents in Auckland in which half of the participants were Chinese, Guo (2005) states that Asian immigrant parents' disposition of non-involvement is due to their preference to avoid conflict rather than their trust in the teachers to be the experts. This finding contrasts with another study which claims that because of their trust in teachers, African immigrant parents expect their children in ECE services "to be obedient, listen, and learn responsibility as requested by an adult" (Obeng, 2007, p. 263).

Although the benefits of parent-teacher partnership are widely recognised (Billman et al, 2005; Blanc, Clausier & Murcier, 2004; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Grey & Horgan, 2003; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2002; Keesing Styles, 2000; MacNaughton, 2004; Mitchell et al, 2006; Prior & Gerard, 2007; Ward, 2009) and, on average, Asian children continue to excel academically in English-speaking host countries (Li, 2004; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Salili, 1996; Woodrow & Sham, 2001), Asian parents seldom participate in children's education settings. They tend to intervene or involve themselves indirectly in their

children's learning by controlling daily home activities, such as assigning drill-and-practice-oriented exercises for their children and expecting them to spend an appropriate amount of time in these exercises at home (Guo, 2005, 2010; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Lahman & Park, 2004; Okagaki & Bojczyk, 2002; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004). Supporting and assigning their children to out-of-school skill development activities is another popular indirect parental involvement strategy used by Chinese and/or Asian parents (Guo, 2006; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Parmar, 2008; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005). Rather than sharing their concerns and discontentedness with teachers, some Chinese and/or Asian parents simply work with their children using their preferred strategies at home (Guo, 2005, 2010; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Lahman & Park, 2004; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004; Wu, 2011).

### **Social cohesion: Immigrants' participation in ECE settings**

In New Zealand, belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy have been identified as the five key elements to creating social cohesion; participation in children's ECE settings is suggested to be critical in promoting a sense of belonging for immigrant parents and as a way to facilitate social cohesion (Spoonley et al, 2005). In a Canadian ECE study that involved immigrant parents with diverse ethnicities, indicators of social cohesion include a "sense of belonging in Canada, trust in others, self-identification as Canadians, acquisition of citizenship, life satisfaction, volunteering and voting patterns" (Ali, 2008, p. 150).

In order to create a cohesive and inclusive society, new immigrants need to develop a sense of belonging to the wider community and its core institutions, and to expand their limited social networks through their participation in a range of social and cultural activities (Hartzell & Zlotoff, 2004; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010; Ward, 2009). These activities include institutional engagements, such as being involved in their children's ECE settings (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010; Spoonley et al, 2005) or their after-school/kindergarten learning institutions, like the language schools that teach immigrant children their native languages (Zhou & Kim, 2006). New immigrants also need to feel included through equitable opportunities, to trust that their values and practices are recognised and that their rights and interests are legitimately protected within institutions (Spoonley et al, 2005).

Pacini-Ketchabaw (2007) claims that when promoting or maintaining social cohesion, acculturation-based policies and practices, which focus on changing or adjusting the perspectives of immigrant parents, are often used to align immigrants' beliefs with the dominant ECE practices of the host countries. Yet, it is common for immigrant parents to comment on the host country's ECE in reference to the services and approaches they have experienced in their home countries. Pacini-Ketchabaw (2007) reminds teachers not to consider these references as a threat to cohesion. Much of the literature has highlighted the danger of homogenising any cultural group and creating opposing binaries between immigrants and non-immigrants as 'them' and 'us', that is, as being exclusive of one another (Arzubiaga, Noguerón & Sullivan, 2009; Ni Laoire, Carpena-Méndez; Tyrrell, & White, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007). When immigrants do not agree with the dominant and/or mainstream beliefs and

practices of parenting and education, and they feel that their ways of knowing and doing are not recognised and legitimised in their children's ECE centres, they are likely to suffer from a loss of parental self-efficacy (Ali, 2008). This makes it difficult for them to have the confidence to communicate and work with teachers and to develop a sense of belonging and entitlement in the ECE settings.

### **Fluid, selective and adaptive practices**

Immigration has profound impacts on parents' practices and expectations. The process of immigration and acculturation, for example, is found to 'westernise' the parenting practices of Asian immigrants in the United States (Kim & Wong, 2002; Okagaki & Bojczyk, 2002). According to Tobin et al (2007), immigrant parents are prepared to accommodate and embrace the practices of their host countries and to change their pre-migration customs. This is particularly relevant when immigrant parents perceive the new practices as beneficial to their children and the other family members (Yamamoto & Li, 2012).

Acculturation imperatives also mean immigrant parents are under pressure to give up some of their traditional values and beliefs (Meléndez, 2005; Sanagavarapu, 2010). Cultural practices that are perceived by immigrant parents to be valuable and useful are more likely to be maintained than other traditions (Cheah & Leung, 2011). While some old strategies continue to evolve, new ones also emerge during the inevitable process of acculturation (Cheah & Li, 2010). For example, Li's (2001) research in Canada which involved highly educated and professional Chinese families from the PRC

indicates that some Chinese immigrant parents preferred to integrate Chinese and Canadian culture in order to benefit from the strengths of both, and that they were prepared to acculturate, to a certain extent. They particularly believed that a mix of 'western' and Chinese ways of learning was beneficial to their children's education and future achievements (Li, 2001).

Recent Chinese and/or Asian immigrants in New Zealand often maintain close contact with their homeland and frequently engage in border-crossing activities (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008; Ho, 2003; Ip, 2002, 2003; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012; Spoonley & Macpherson, 2004). These mobile immigrants do not necessarily submit to all the cultural demands of the host country, and they refuse to be subjected to the normative process of assimilation; instead they challenge or contest conventional dominant discourses when necessary, but at the same time expand their cultural repertoire by integrating selected practices of the host country (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008). The childrearing practices of immigrant parents are dynamic and constantly in a state of flux as a result of their migration experiences, awareness of the benefits of acculturation, and the desire to maintain their traditional values (Li, 2001; Meléndez, 2005).

## **The Chinese contexts: Parenting and ECE**

### **Overview of ECE in China and Hong Kong**

Despite unification in 1997, Hong Kong and China still have different social and governmental structures and systems which operate under a "one country, two systems arrangement" (Pearson, 2011, p. 214). Yet, ECE in both places is undergoing major and considerably similar reforms which put great emphasis on 'quality' (Chan & Chan, 2002; Liu & Feng, 2005; Pearson, 2011; Wong &



Pang, 2002; Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009). China's significant urbanisation and economic growth in the last 30 years (Chen & Li, 2012; Liu & Feng, 2005; Pan & Li, 2012; Wong & Pang, 2002) and Hong Kong's desire to remain as an international financial and business hub (Pearson, 2011) have prompted both places to introduce many changes to their ECE curriculum and pedagogy in the last few decades.

The ECE sector in China is not homogeneous. Basically, it caters for "children from birth to age six or seven" and the sector includes "nurseries for children under three, kindergartens for children from age three to six or seven, and preschool classes for children aged five to six or seven" (Wong & Pang, 2002, p. 65). ECE is not compulsory in China, and although most kindergartens are state-managed, many self-financed and privately-operated kindergartens have emerged in the developed regions, and parents are expected to pay a variable amount of fees which is considered by many parents to be reflective of the quality of each ECE centre (Wong & Pang, 2002). The qualification requirements of ECE teachers varies across different regions, from teacher certificates to college and university levels, even though some form of initial teacher training is a prerequisite to working as ECE teachers (Wong & Pang, 2002). The state provides national guidelines, for example, the *Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)* highlights the country's commitment to strengthening teachers' trainings and standards, and the management and governance of preschool education, as well as to "universalizing preschool education" (Beijing, 2010, p. 12).

There are also diverse ECE services in Hong Kong, including crèches, childcare centres, nursery schools, kindergartens, play groups and many more. The two main services are childcare centres which serve children from birth to three, and kindergartens for children three to six years old (Yim, Lee & Ebbeck, 2010). The first type of service is regulated under the Social Welfare Department (Social Welfare Department, 2014) whereas kindergartens are registered with the Education Bureau (Education Bureau, 2013). Most ECE services in Hong Kong are private and market-driven, and receive minimal financial support from the government (Chan & Chan, 2002). There are diverse requirements of ECE training, and a range of pre-service and in-service training courses which offer from certificate, diploma, undergraduate to postgraduate qualifications are available in Hong Kong (Chan & Chan, 2002; Yim et al, 2010). The ECE curriculum guideline document, *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (The Curriculum Development Council, 2006), provides a framework for each ECE centre in Hong Kong to develop its own curriculum programme and content according to the teachers' interpretations (Chan & Chan, 2002; Yim et al, 2010).

Recent ECE curriculum reforms in China and Hong Kong share remarkably similar focuses. Both places have a strong Confucian-heritage, involving competitive schooling systems, and a traditional learning environment that emphasises rote learning, teacher-directed and structured activities (Chen & Li, 2012; Pearson, 2011). Current official documents from both places recommend some aspects of active and child-centred learning, which aim at giving children a 'happy childhood' and supporting them to foster good habits (Beijing, 2010; The Curriculum Development Council, 2006). Nevertheless, in both China and

Hong Kong, there remains a gap between some of the espoused values of the curriculum and their implementation because of ingrained societal and parental academic-oriented attitudes, and teachers' unpreparedness and inability to change the traditional instruction-oriented pedagogy (Cheng, 2006; Li, Wang & Wong, 2011; Liu & Feng, 2005; Wang, Elicker, McMullen & Mao, 2008; Pan & Li, 2012; Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009). Parts of the Hong Kong ECE curriculum guideline document, *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (The Curriculum Development Council, 2006), also reflect more traditional than child-centred values, for example, its emphasis on skill-based development. Some literature further argues that top-down reforms imposed by both governments is failing to support ECE teachers to truly change their deep-rooted traditional beliefs about teaching and learning, and to enact the reforms in a genuine manner (Cheng, 2006; Liu & Feng, 2005; Rao, Ng & Pearson, 2009). As such, certain parenting, learning and teaching practices in both China and Hong Kong continue to reflect the traditional Chinese cultures that are strongly influenced by Confucianism and collectivism.

### **Confucianism and collectivism**

The influence of Confucianism in Asia is significant and widespread. "East Asian societies such as those of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Korea and Japan share an obvious Confucian tradition" (Lee, 1996, p. 26). Confucianism was initially developed by K'ung Fu-tzu (later Latinised to Confucius) in about 500BC. His greatest follower, Mencius, further contributed to the development of this philosophy. Confucius was "an itinerant teacher and government bureaucrat" whose humanistic philosophy had and continues to have a profound impact on Chinese societal, cultural and spiritual development

(Haley, Tan & Haley, 1998, p. 29). *The Analects*, in Chinese the *Lun Yu*, is a book on Confucius' personality, thinking, behaviour and teaching. It contains a collection of Chinese sayings that are underpinned by Confucian beliefs. Over the years, these sayings have been interpreted and applied by scholars to inform Chinese values and they have survived to modern times (Hayley et al, 1998).

A significant amount of contemporary research still applies the ancient philosophy of Confucianism to understanding and explaining the ways of thinking and doing of modern Chinese. For example, previous research findings identify notions of Confucianism as significant factors in influencing a range of aspects relevant to this study: Chinese family values and parenting practices (Chan, 2006, 2009; Li, 2001; Luo et al, 2013; Pearson & Rao, 2003), the socialisation process of Chinese children (Hadley, 2003; Wu, 2011; Yim, Lee & Ebbeck, 2011), and the education and academic achievement of Chinese students (Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; Lee, 1996; Li, 2004; Woodrow & Sham, 2001; Wu & Singh, 2004; Yang, Zheng & Li, 2006).

Research further indicates that Chinese immigrant families who are living in English-speaking and non-Chinese dominated societies continue to deploy certain traditional Confucian beliefs in the parenting, socialisation and education of their children, and as a result, it is claimed that their children conform to parental expectations and excel academically (Li, 2004; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Salili, 1996; Woodrow & Sham, 2001). However, due to the impacts of globalisation, urbanisation, telecommunications and information technologies, and the concomitant increased exposure to 'western' cultures, socialisation goals for children in Chinese societies like China and Hong Kong are

transforming (Chen & Li, 2012; Naftali, 2010a, 2010b; Pearson, 2011; Rao et al, 2009). Some families may no longer apply Confucianism 'religiously', making Chinese parenting practices far from homogeneous.

Confucianism emphasises the importance of the external environment for human development. It argues that all people are created equal and it is the learning that contributes to individual differences, and hence a person's success or failure is attributed to one's effort, not innate abilities (Chang & Wong, 1998). Confucianism is a holistic and relational philosophy that promotes self-cultivation, hard work, conservation of traditional values, humanity's innate goodness, filial piety, hierarchically structured social and family relationships, responsibility towards the collective good of the society, and the importance of society over individual and family over society (Haley et al, 1998).

In particular, the notion of \*孝/xiao (filial piety, see glossary) which is underpinned by Confucianism is frequently applied in literature that examines the socialisation process of Chinese children (Chen & Li, 2012; Li, 2004; Luo et al, 2013; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Rao, McHale & Pearson, 2003; Yim et al, 2011). To demonstrate filial piety, children's responsibilities, according to Confucianism, include cheerful obedience to parents, the obligation to provide them with unconditional care and support through their old age, and to bring them credit and pride by achieving academic and career success and a good reputation (Hayley et al, 1998; Luo et al, 2013; Mather, 1995; Naftali, 2010a, 2010b; Wu, 2011).

Research has also identified notions of collectivism as key factors in shaping the family-focused and community-oriented nature of most Chinese (Lee, 1996;

Rao & Chan, 2009; Salili, 1996; Yang et al, 2006). In fact, collectivism is an aspect of Confucianism (Luo et al, 2013). Collectivists stress social harmony, group identity, conformity and modesty, and they place social and family needs before personal desires (Gonzalez-Mena, 2003; Lee, 1996; Rao & Chan, 2009; Yang et al, 2006). Whereas independence and autonomy are often promoted in 'western' societies, collectivists emphasise the importance of shared social responsibilities, collaboration, and interdependence (Gonzalez-Mena, 2003; Nie, 2007; Ritchie, 2001; Wu, 2011). Children are taught that "they need adults and even older children" and "it is good to let the others help" (Gonzalez-Mena, 2003, p. 3).

Within Chinese collectivist culture, children are expected to work hard to achieve the goals set by families and community, and they are socialised to believe academic achievement and career success brings pride, glory, wealth and happiness to their families (Chang & Wong, 1998; Salili, 1996; Wu, 2011; Wu & Singh, 2004). This group-mindedness and work ethic, both informed by Confucianism and collectivism, translate into a strong parenting belief and practice that expects Chinese children to develop an intrinsic motivation to learn and achieve (Chang & Wong, 1998). Yet, this style of parenting practices may easily be misinterpreted as authoritarian by those who are unfamiliar with the traditional Chinese cultural values.

### **Beyond authoritarian and authoritative parenting**

Traditional Chinese parenting practices are often overly simplified as being authoritarian (Chao, 1994; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Xu et al, 2005). Authoritarian parents are stern, demand strict obedience, and apply punishment to control

children's behaviour; whereas authoritative parents are loving and respectful of their children, and use reasoning and explanation to guide their children (Baumrind, 1996). It is, however, necessary to remember that descriptions of authoritarian and authoritative parenting involve the application of Anglo-centric perspectives to the examination of parental practices, and understanding Chinese parenting practices from an Anglo-centric perspective can be problematic. Research indicates that Chinese parents, including those living in China, use not only a combination of authoritarian and authoritative approaches (Chao, 1994; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Wu et al, 2002; Xu et al, 2005), but also a "fusion of Chinese traditional values with Western educational ideas" (Sun & Rao, 2012, p. 249) when socialising their children.

Literature argues that due to China's economic growth and subsequent increased exposure to 'western' values and practices, urban Chinese who are generally more educated and have higher social and economic status tend to adopt an authoritative parenting approach (Chen, Liu, Li, Cen, Chen & Wang, 2000; Naftali, 2010a, 2010b; Xu et al, 2005). Chinese rural families who were urbanised due to China's rapid urbanisation reform, are also found to have moved away from the traditional authoritarian parenting to encouraging children to become more socially assertive because "traditional Chinese child-rearing attitudes are clearly incompatible with the requirements of an urban, market-oriented society that emphasises individual initiatives and competitiveness" (Chen & Li, 2012, p. 928).

In a recent cross-cultural study carried out in Auckland, Chinese immigrant parents and non-Chinese parents displayed no significant differences of parenting styles, and both groups of parents deployed a mix of authoritarian and

authoritative parenting practices (Zhang, 2012). Zhang (2012) proposes that the Chinese participants might have accepted some of the parenting values of New Zealand while they continued to maintain their traditional parenting practices. However, Chinese participants in this study used a lot more shaming strategies than the non-Chinese participants (Zhang, 2012). Chinese-American parents in the United States also were observed to use fewer encouraging comments with their children than their European-American counterparts, and they felt that American teachers used too much praise (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009).

Traditional Chinese authoritarian parenting strategies may utilise shame, guilt and withdrawal of love (Li, 2009; Wu et al, 2002). “Closely related to shame is the emphasis on face, self-criticism and self-evaluation” (Guo, 2006, p. 8). To protect the face or the reputation of the family, some Chinese adults exercise authoritarian strategies, such as using harsh and negative comments to shame and embarrass their children, in order to make them recognise their inadequacy and to motivate or pressurise them to improve (Guo, 2010; Li, 2009; Luo et al, 2013; Salili, 1996; Zhang, 2012). Finally, authoritarian parents are more likely to endorse the notion of \*孝/xiao (filial piety) and \*教训/jiao xun (teach, instruct and train, see glossary), both of which are traditional Chinese childrearing practices. Chinese parents, mothers in particular, who practise the two notions are actively involved in their children’s learning, and have high expectations of their children, from an early age, to assume family responsibilities and conform to familial expectations (Chao, 1994; Guo, 2006; Rao et al, 2003; Rao et al, 2009; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Salili, 1996).



## **Perspectives of education, learning and teaching**

Education is highly valued in Confucian culture. The high aspirations of Asian students and parents with regard to education is, to a great extent, attributed to the strong influence of Confucian traditions in East Asian countries like China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan (Lee, 1996). Education in ancient China was only accessible to a small group of cultured elites, and it was perceived by Confucian Chinese as an instrument for personal improvement and to cultivate morality in noble persons in order to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in maintaining social harmony (de Bary, 2007; Li, 2009; Yang et al, 2006). For many contemporary Chinese, educational achievement is considered to be imperative for future social status and honour, as well as career and economic success (Li, 2009; Salili, 1996; Woodrow & Sham, 2001). Most Chinese learners attribute personal success and failure to incentive, self-determination and effort, instead of to innate ability (Biggs, 1996; Lee, 1996; Rao & Chan, 2009). It is common for them to use academic success to please their parents and themselves (Rao & Chan, 2009), and parents are considered as having performed their duties well when their children have achieved academic excellence (Cheah & Li, 2010; Wu & Singh, 2004). 望子成龙/Wangzi chenglong (wishing for dragon children) is an old saying still commonly used nowadays in Chinese families, meaning Chinese parents expect their children “to learn as much as possible in order to succeed and stand out from their fellows in society” (Wu & Singh, 2004, p. 30).

To measure students’ academic achievement, tests and examinations that require a significant amount of memorisation are still heavily practised in China and other East Asian countries, despite strong criticism of these modes of

assessment from all over the world (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Li, 2009; Salili, 1996; Yang et al, 2006). According to Biggs and Watkins (1996), the learning of Chinese characters requires a higher degree of memorisation than the English alphabet system. Some Chinese learners believe that memorisation is a precondition for understanding, becoming familiar with the text through memorisation leads to understanding, reflection and questioning (Lee, 1996; Yang et al, 2006). As a result, from an early age, most Chinese children are expected to acquire knowledge through rote-learning, and the traditional drill-and-practice approach is commonly used when Chinese young children in Hong Kong learn to read and write the Chinese characters by following teachers' explicit instructions (Rao et al, 2009).

Traditionally, Chinese children are mostly socialised to be obedient recipients of knowledge, and to focus on skills acquisition during teaching and learning processes that are highly structured, dogmatic, didactic and instructor-centred (Biggs, 1996; Freeman, 1998). These deep-rooted socialisation goals and pedagogy are still influential in many contemporary Chinese learning settings, including ECE (Li, Wang & Wong, 2011; Liu & Feng, 2005; Pan & Li, 2012; Wang et al, 2008; Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009). Since many Chinese still believe that skill development should come before the ability to explore (Freeman, 1998), there is a strong emphasis on practising newly acquired literacy and numeracy skills (Rao et al, 2009).

Chinese traditionally consider teachers to be the source of wisdom (Woodrow & Sham, 2001), and believe teaching involves 把着手教/ba zhe shou jiao, that is holding the learners' hands in order to help them accomplish the tasks as perfectly as possible (Freeman, 1998). Results from Woodrow and

Sham's (2001) study indicate that British-Chinese students expect to be told what to do by their teachers who are believed to be responsible for their success in examinations. As such, Chinese learners are usually submissive, compliant and respectful of the teachers; and disagreement and confrontation are mostly avoided (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Rao et al, 2009; Yang et al, 2006).

Chinese teachers are expected to be very strict with students as reflected in an old Chinese saying, 教不严, 师之惰/jiao bu yan, shi zhi duo, which means teaching without strict discipline reflects a teacher's laziness (Cheng, 2001). The Confucian concept of \*管/ guǎn (govern, control and monitor, see glossary), which is endorsed by many Chinese parents (Luo et al, 2013), can be used to understand this ideology. The process of \*管 /guǎn involves governing, controlling and monitoring children's learning and behaviour to prepare them for future success and to become good members of a group, despite the fact that the process may seem harsh and strict (Hadley, 2003; Luo et al, 2013). When Euro-centric cultural values are applied to judge the teaching practices of Chinese teachers without recognising that some 'western' values are incompatible with and inapplicable to 'non-western' contexts, Chinese teachers can be perceived as non-affectionate, harsh and regimented who seldom use praise, and insist on good manners and behaviour (Hsueh & Barton, 2005). Affection and praise are considered by Chinese adults to be harmful to building children's character, and ridicule and shame are frequently used by Chinese adults to pressurise children to improve (Guo, 2006, 2010; Luo et al, 2013; Salili, 1996; Zhang, 2012). As education is so important and is held in such a high regard, most Chinese children from a young age are expected to work hard, but not to indulge in play, particularly when they are at ECE centres.

## **Perspectives of play and ECE**

As previously discussed, there is no universal definition of play or shared agreement of what constitutes play (Cheng, 2001; Mellor, 2000; O’Gorman & Ailwood, 2012; Rhedding-Jones & Otterstad, 2011; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2001; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). The word ‘play’ in Chinese has the “connotations of relaxation and recreation” (Mellor, 2000, p. 106), and it is therefore difficult for most Chinese parents to agree with the notion of learning through play and to recognise the value of play for children’s learning.

Since Confucianism considers education to be a serious and sober matter, it places emphasis on the influence of environment and the negative impact of play on children (Bai, 2005). According to Bai (2005, p. 15), in ancient China, “most Confucian educators were worried that play and a playful environment would divert children’s attention from serious study”, and this belief is still upheld by some modern Chinese parents. An old Chinese saying, 勤有功, 戏无益/ qin you gong; xi wu yi, which means effort and hard work yield success whereas play brings a child nowhere, reflects a common belief of many Chinese parents. This saying is also mentioned in the literature to illustrate the negative connotations of play within traditional Chinese cultural beliefs (Chan, 2004; Chan, 2006; Cheng, 2001). Some Chinese parents further believe that the processes of learning and teaching “do not have to be enjoyable, or even interesting” (Mellor, 2000, p. 105).

Much literature has explained that child-initiated and active exploratory learning approaches are becoming increasingly acceptable in some Chinese ECE contexts, and the notion of ‘learning through play’ has become the

espoused ECE pedagogy in urban China (Chen & Li, 2012; Wang et al, 2008; Naftali, 2010b) and Hong Kong (Chan, 2004; Cheng, 2006; Yim et al, 2010; Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009). The actual implementation of a play-focused and child-centred activity curriculum is, however, not without challenges and obstacles; teacher-controlled and skills-oriented activities instead are still commonly endorsed and enacted because most teachers have not experienced these new pedagogies themselves as children and they also have had limited training and understanding in the application of these espoused pedagogies (Cheng, 2001; Mellor, 2000; Wang et al, 2008; Yim et al, 2010).

Some new teachers, who were introduced to the child-centred and play-based approach of learning and teaching during their training, experience 'peer pressure' and find it difficult to enact the concept of learning through play when the majority of the teachers still adhere to the traditional and entrenched Chinese ways of teaching and learning which are highly didactic and teacher-directed (Cheng, 2001). Chinese teachers who take a non-directive role and allow children to indulge in play are also often regarded by parents as negligent (Cheng, 2001). Consequently, a 'fusion' of pedagogy that reflects a mix of structured and adult-directed activities and child-centred and play-based educational ideas is becoming increasingly common within ECE settings in both China and Hong Kong (Rao et al, 2009).

Furthermore, education is highly competitive in both China and Hong Kong, and ECE is considered by parents as a preparation for children to undertake entry tests and examinations of primary schools and to get them ready for formal schooling (Wong & Pang, 2002; Yim et al, 2010). Due to this push-down effect from a highly structured primary curriculum and the fact that Chinese

parents have high expectations of their children's learning and education even from a very young age (Biggs, 1996; Guo, 2005; Lee, 1996; Wu & Singh, 2004), most Chinese parents still prefer their preschool children to have formal and teacher-directed learning, particularly in the area of literacy and numeracy (Rao et al, 2009). Parental expectations continue to put pressure on Chinese ECE teachers to focus on pre-academic skills such as reading and writing since "many parents think that play is not necessary and should not feature prominently in the curriculum" (Yim et al, 2010, p. 261). Most Chinese immigrant parent participants in New Zealand research projects were also sceptical about the value of play and displayed an ambivalent attitude towards it; instead they believed that since their children engaged too often in free play but not enough teacher-directed 'serious' learning in ECE settings, the parents felt that they had to make up for this lack of learning by involving their children in 'academic' work at home (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2004, 2011; Wu, 2011).

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to highlight that although findings from several New Zealand studies with a broadly similar focus (Guo, 2010; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012) have been referenced often in this literature review, these studies differ from the current doctoral study in both their participant selection, methodological approaches and theoretical underpinnings. For example, Guo's study (2010) involved a mix of participants from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, and Zhang (2012) provides no specification regarding the origins of the 120 'Chinese' participants in his study. Without this clarification, it is challengeable as to whether traditional Chinese perspective regarding parenting, learning and teaching are appropriate to be used to interpret some of the data in his study. Some participants might very well be

second or third generation Chinese who might have grown up in English-speaking countries, such as the United States of America or Canada, before coming to New Zealand. The large scale survey conducted in this study also generated quantitative data that is restricted by the choices of answers provided in the questionnaires.

Wu (2009) is the only study that focused on the experiences of “skilled migrant mothers from China” (p. 90) in relation to their cultural capital. The term ‘middle class’ was used frequently to describe the participants’ status in their home country, but without articulating how ‘middle class’ was measured or problematising this classification. Since all the participants share a similar socio-economic status, it is easy to generate a set of consistent data, which presents the risk of universalising these findings across other more diverse sets of parents. The diverse backgrounds of the immigrant participants from the PRC in this current study is described in Chapter Six, and the notion of ‘middle-class’ is scrutinised in Chapter Three. Finally, this current doctoral study has adopted an eclectic approach of theorising, which none of the previous studies (Guo, 2010; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012) utilised. The suitability of this approach is rationalised in the upcoming chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the multiple contexts of this study. Examination of literature pertaining to New Zealand ECE reveals how the historical development of the sector and the underpinning theories of *Te Whāriki* have constructed and/or perpetuated a range of dominant ECE discourses, including the discourse of play as the favoured pedagogical approach and the espoused

value of parental involvement in children's learning. Consequently, children in ECE settings are expected to learn through active exploration and play, while their parents are encouraged to be involved in the settings.

Engaging immigrant parents in their children's ECE settings is advocated in much of the research literature (Ali, 2008; De Gioia, 2013; Spoonley et al, 2005; Tobin et al, 2007). This is because not only do parent-teacher partnerships have immense benefits for children's learning, but encouraging immigrant families to connect with teachers and parents in their children's ECE settings helps them develop a sense of belonging in the community. ECE settings often provide immigrant families with their first experience of a community in their host country (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). Positive experiences are likely to support them to feel that they have a place and help them settle in the new country, thus contributing towards creating social cohesion.

Literature, however, suggests that parenting practices of Chinese immigrants do not always align with the dominant New Zealand discourses, and that the Chinese immigrant parents prefer not to engage in ECE settings (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2004, 2006, 2010; Wu, 2011; Zhang, 2012). For example, many Chinese immigrant parents do not agree with the discourse of learning through play because they are usually very concerned about their children's early learning, and it is common for them to consider children's education as a means for upward social mobility. Some Chinese immigrant parents continue to endorse certain traditional Chinese values and beliefs that are underpinned by Confucianism and collectivism to inform their parenting practices. Concurrently, these immigrants expand their cultural repertoire by adopting practices of the host country that are considered to be useful and valuable to their children's



learning and development (Li, 2001; Meléndez, 2005). Their parenting strategies are fluid, selective and adaptive.

This literature review has highlighted areas and themes that are most salient for this study. These themes are pertinent to analysing the findings from the participants' interview responses. Most importantly, the review has indicated that there is a discontinuity of practices due to the disparity between institutionally endorsed dominant New Zealand ECE discourses and the hybrid and fluid childrearing practices of Chinese immigrant parents. Although the notion of parent-teacher partnership has the potential to bridge this discontinuity, effective partnership would require that teachers see themselves as equals to the immigrant parents, and create spaces for them to voice their aspirations and for diverse beliefs and practices to be included. For the purpose of this study, a range of theoretical perspectives is required to analyse the identity of Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand, to critique the hierarchy of discourses and the positioning of parents and teachers, and to highlight the importance of applying transformative practices to bring about an ECE curriculum that is equitable and inclusive of diverse discourses. These theories are to be explored in the following chapter.

# 3. Theorising

## Introduction

This chapter outlines and explains the underpinning conceptual framework of this thesis. The literature reviewed in the previous chapter suggests that the parental expectations and childrearing practices of Chinese and immigrant parents do not necessarily align with the dominant ECE discourses and practices in New Zealand. This thesis argues that such a tension is possibly due to the dual or even multiple identities of being Chinese and being immigrants in New Zealand, and one of its aims is to critically examine the relationship between the identities of PRC immigrants and their involvement in New Zealand ECE. How does their identity of being 'Chinese' and being 'immigrants' in New Zealand contribute towards their inclusion or exclusion in New Zealand ECE settings?

PRC immigrants in New Zealand are transnationals who maintain close connections with families and friends in China (Ip, 2002). They are likely to utilise a repertoire of cultural-spatial strategies, which reflect the hybrid and fluid nature of their transnational identities, to meet the needs of their children and families as they continuously navigate and negotiate across social-cultural spaces, that is between (public and private) social spaces and between (Chinese and New Zealand) cultures. The term social-cultural is used intentionally in this thesis to distinguish itself from the socio-cultural theories. Bourdieu's ideas of social space and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989) are applicable here to examine the ongoing navigation and negotiation experienced

by PRC immigrants. The concept of third space (Bhabha, 1994) further signals the possibilities and multiplicities of newly emerged cultural-spatial strategies utilised by PRC immigrants as they engage in social-cultural spatial-crossings.

Cultural-spatial strategies employed by PRC immigrant parents, however, may not be consistent with the dominant discourses of New Zealand ECE promoted in the national ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, and national policies and regulations of ECE services. An aim of this thesis is to apply concepts from critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) to problematise the politics of differences and the hierarchies of habitus and knowledge, and thereby to also analyse how certain ECE discourses include or exclude PRC immigrant parents from the landscape of New Zealand ECE. The notion of funds of knowledge highlights the importance of recognising and including families' diverse beliefs and practices (González, 2005), and it is key to bringing about a transformative curriculum (Banks, 2009, 2010; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007) that is equitable for all and an aspiration of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996).

An eclectic approach of theorisation is adopted in this thesis because of the interdisciplinary nature of the study which encompasses the education and sociological domains, the fluid and/or hybrid identities of the participants, and the many social, cultural and linguistic contexts that they encounter daily. A range of theoretical frameworks is drawn upon in this chapter to theorise about the identities and practices of PRC immigrant parents and how these intersect with ECE in New Zealand, and the diagram at the end of this chapter further indicates how the theories and concepts utilised are connected, as well as their roles in this study.

Firstly, identity theories (Hall, 1992, 1996, 2000; Davis, 2009; Goldberg & Solomos, 2002) and notions of transnationalism (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008; Huang & Yeoh, 2005; Levitt, 2003; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007; Waters, 2005) are applied to analyse the hybrid and fluid identities of PRC immigrant parents in New Zealand. Then notions around social spaces (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989; Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007) and Homi Bhabha's (1994) ideas of third and in-between spaces are drawn upon to examine the social-cultural spatial-crossings that PRC immigrant parents undertake, as well as the cultural-spatial parenting strategies that emerge. The concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989) and key ideas from critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) are employed to highlight the politics of cultural differences and the power and hierarchy of discourses in subordinating certain knowledge, and thereby creating the possibility of excluding PRC immigrant parents from New Zealand ECE. Finally, I draw on critical multicultural pedagogy (Banks, 2004, 2006a; May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010) and González's (2005) idea of funds of knowledge to emphasise teachers' important role in bringing about a transformative curriculum that values and includes diverse knowledge of parenting, learning and teaching in New Zealand ECE.

## **The politics of identity**

Identity theories highlight the relationship between identities and in/exclusion. Although some PRC immigrants in New Zealand may identify themselves as New Zealanders or 'Kiwis' (see glossary), this thesis argues that recent PRC immigrants and those who are locally born and raised in New

Zealand do not share the same identity because of differences in ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The identities of PRC immigrants in New Zealand are scrutinised later in this section. The following discussion focuses on theorising the politics of identity construction.

### **Social construction of collective and individual identity: Commonalities and differences**

Identity is constructed through the recognition of commonalities and differences amongst groups. It is used to create a form of closure and boundary, and to determine who is included and excluded (Hall, 1991a, 1992, 1996, 2000; Davis, 2009; Goldberg & Solomos, 2002). Anderson's (1991) concept of imagined communities has been applied in literature that examines the construction of identity and its relation with in/exclusion (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1991a, 1992, 1996, 2000; Goldberg & Solomos, 2002; Willis, Yeoh, & Abdul Khader Fakhri, 2004). Communities are 'imagined' because, most of the time, members of a community do not really know each other, but they imagine and create particular characteristics of the community as boundaries to include or exclude those who are similar or dissimilar respectively (Anderson, 1991).

Homi Bhabha (1994), in particular, applies the notion of imagined communities to highlight how culture can be used to 'imagine' the collective identity and interests of a community. For instance, traditions can be powerfully used by "those who are in the minority" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2) to articulate differences, create boundaries, include and exclude, and construct a collective identity for members of its community. This thesis further argues that collective identity is politically and culturally constructed (Hall, 1992). Anderson (1991, p.

6), for example, defines the concept of 'nation' as "an imagined political community" that is used to promote nationalism.

An imagined collective national identity for the nation's citizens promotes a sense of shared values and practices which is reinforced via media, education, institutions, laws and regulations, and it highlights the uniformity and comradeship of the dominant group under the political banners of nationalism and patriotism, and protects social coherence (Anderson, 1991). In relation to emigration, the discourse of nationalism is used by sending countries to create imagined communities in order to maintain close ties with their ex-citizens who "no longer live within the territorial boundaries over which the state institutions have power" (Willis et al, 2004, p. 7). For example, since its opening up more than thirty years ago, people in China no longer see overseas Chinese as traitors or treacherous, but as patriots who contribute to improving China's economy and the status of Chinese immigrants in host societies (Nyíri, 2004).

While constructing a collective identity acknowledges common experiences, social norms, togetherness and even nationalism, it fails to recognise heterogeneity of interests and identities (Bank, 2010). Any broad and taken-for-granted categorised identity, such as ethnicity, can be problematic (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). As an example, contemporary Chinese immigrants who arrived in New Zealand in the last thirty years are a diverse group with varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They came from varied countries, such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia. Using the collective term 'Chinese' or 'Asian' to represent all Chinese immigrant groups fails to acknowledge heterogeneity, and to distinguish and reflect the unique social and cultural values and beliefs of each Chinese immigrant community.

An essentialist view of identity creates a binary division between the dominant group and the 'other'. Constructing a collective identity not only normalises the practices of all those who belong and share a similar identity, it also assists the identification of the 'others' who are dissimilar (Farquhar, 2010). It creates cultural boundaries to defend against the threat of the alien cultures of the 'other' (Essed & Goldberg, 2002; Goldberg & Solomos, 2002; Hall, 1991a, 2000), and members of the dominant group can homogenise and 'other' any one or group that is different (Hall, 1991a, 1991b, 1992; Davis, 2009).

Nonetheless, while the idea of difference can be used by the dominant group to exclude those who are dissimilar, it can also be used politically and strategically by the subordinated to proclaim and legitimise their interests and power, and to demonstrate their resistance against assimilation and racism. The subordinated may retreat into exclusive identities to protect their native languages and cultural practices and proclaim their sense of non-belonging (Essed & Goldberg, 2002; Hall, 1991a, 2000). A person's individual identity representation is a result of interplay between class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity; it is cultural, historical, contextual, local and situational at a particular space and time (Hall, 1991a, 1992). The construction of self-identity is a continuous process during which a person's identity can be altered and used strategically to highlight differences, to move between boundaries, and to position (non)belongingness (Hall, 1996; Ong, 1999).

While some PRC immigrants in New Zealand may choose to identify themselves as New Zealanders to proclaim their belongingness in the host country, others may decide to maintain their Chinese identity. It was pointed out in Benton and Gomez (2003) that as China's economy prospers and its

international status grows, contemporary Chinese immigrants are more prepared than the previous sojourner generations to identify themselves with their ancestral homeland even though they continue to reside in the receiving countries. Hence, it can be argued that the ethnicity affiliation(s) or identity representation(s) adopted by the participants in this study provide an insight into their sense of (non)belonging and in/exclusion in New Zealand.

Under the impact of global human migration, new, plural and diverse identities are being constructed, thereby disturbing and eroding a sense of collective national identity (Hall, 1991a, 1991b, 2000). For example, those who have “translated identities” understand “they are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit” (Hall, 2000, pp. 118-119) and that there may be no return to the homeland; yet they insist on maintaining their traditions in fear of losing their original identities (Hall, 2000). As a result, they must learn to translate and negotiate between at least two identities, two cultures and two languages, and “belong to two worlds at once” (Hall, 2000, p. 119).

This thesis asserts that PRC immigrants in New Zealand are likely to engage in this process of negotiation as a result of their positioning and repositioning. Their choice of identity may shift over time as their sentiments towards the sending and receiving country change. Asian adolescents who participated in a New Zealand study initially objected to being essentialised and subsumed as ‘Asian’; however eventually some accepted their imagined ‘Asian’ identity which they felt gave them “a sense of belonging to a larger group” (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008, p. 72). Hence identity is continuously created and recreated, negotiated and renegotiated (Goldberg, 2002). Nonetheless, choices of identity are constrained by wider social factors, such as the public perception towards



an ethnic group (Bartley, 2003). Therefore, when Chinese immigrants are being portrayed negatively by the New Zealand media, it is possible that this may deter the participants from proclaiming their Chinese identity.

### **Identities of Chinese immigrants: Complexities & problematisation**

Since Chinese immigrant parents from the PRC were the participants in this study, the identities of Chinese immigrants deserve particular attention. Identities of Chinese immigrants have been studied widely (Ang, 2004; Benton & Gomez, 2003; Ong, 1999). A range of collective identities, including the term 'Chinese', based on certain commonalities has been constructed by overseas Chinese to define 'Chineseness', to represent themselves, and to create a sense of belonging for their communities, particularly when they feel excluded from the host countries (Ang, 2004; Benton & Gomez, 2003). Some of these collective identities are no longer commonly used by contemporary Chinese immigrants. For example, "huaqiao" is used to describe the generations of overseas sojourner Chinese who are "now dying out" (Benton & Gomez, 2003, p. 293), naturalised overseas Chinese are "huaren", and "huayi" are their "second and later generations" (Benton & Gomez, 2003, p. 293). Additionally, it is common for overseas Chinese who feel excluded from the host countries to retreat into "their own networks and clubs" (Ong, 1999, p. 104). As such, specific Chinese organisations, based on sharing a similar native-place, for example from the same province of China or the same country (Nyíri, 2004), or on sharing similar surname (Benton & Gomez, 2003), become popular communities in the host countries for overseas Chinese.

Using a collective Chinese identity, however, runs the risk of essentialising and homogenising diverse Chinese immigrants. This is because each group of Chinese immigrants has a deep history rooted in different regions and countries, and thus cultural values and beliefs. This is particularly true for recent Chinese immigrants from various Chinese-populated countries/cities, like Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, who are likely to identify with their ancestral homeland, China, *and* their country/city of origin before emigration. Consequently, dual and hyphenated identities are common among Chinese immigrants (Ang, 2004). The emergence of ‘hyphenated Chinese’, such as Singaporean-Chinese and New Zealand-Singaporean-Chinese, illustrates that there are diverse Chinese immigrants who have “variously settled in and oriented towards their new countries of residence” (Ang, 2004, p. 187).

According to the 2013 New Zealand Census, about 170,000 people identified themselves as “Chinese”, only 90,000 claimed that they were born in the PRC and about 3000 have chosen a hyphenated Chinese identity, such as Malaysian-Chinese (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Furthermore, the statistics provided by *ECE Education Counts* use a very broad-brush, employing the generic term ‘Asian’ as a category, which represents one of the largest ethnic groups enrolled in licensed New Zealand ECE services (Education Counts, 2013). Using the collective identity terms of ‘Chinese’ and/or ‘Asian’ is a racialised statistical box which fails to distinguish the unique social and cultural values and beliefs of each Chinese immigrant community in New Zealand. Each artificial category utilised by government statisticians, instead, constructs an imagined community (and boundary) for its members. The following takes a closer look at the identity of PRC immigrants in New Zealand.

## **PRC immigrants in New Zealand**

Literature claims that Chinese immigrants arriving in New Zealand in the last twenty to thirty years are transnationals who are highly educated professionals and sought-after by different countries, they maintain close contact with their homeland and frequently engage in cross border activities (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008; Ho, 2003; Ip, 2002, 2003; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012; Spoonley & Macpherson, 2004). Ip (2002) specifies that Chinese immigrants from the PRC are more likely to settle and commit themselves in New Zealand long term than Hong Kong-Chinese and Taiwanese, but due to modern telecommunication and easy travel arrangements, PRC Chinese are as active as the other groups of Chinese in maintaining relations and ties with family, friends and business networks in their homeland. It is possible that they also participate in transnational activities, such as returning to China for family reunions during the Chinese New Year.

For transnational Chinese immigrants, “commuting is the norm, and [it is likely] that they will remain bi-local or multi-local, never forfeiting their options of maintaining frequent contact with both their country of origin and their country of adoption” (Ip, 2000, p. 4). Ip (2000) believes that transnational practices are more closely related to ‘class’ than to ethnicity. This thesis, nonetheless, argues otherwise because ‘class’ is complex within transnational families (Dreby & Adkins, 2011) due to their fluid and hybrid identities. In addition, the availability of affordable airfares and modern technologies makes transnational practices accessible for most immigrants, despite the ‘class’ to which they belong(ed). The notion of ‘class’ is further scrutinised within the discussion of habitus. The next section focuses on examining the ideas around transnationalism.

## **Transnationalism**

The previous section has asserted that PRC immigrants in New Zealand are transnationals. The notion of transnationalism has been used often in contemporary immigrant studies (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008, Huang & Yeoh, 2005, Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007, Waters, 2005). Ong (1999, p. 4) explains transnationality as “the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space... *trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something”. Transnationalism conceptualises a new form of migration. It challenges previous understandings of migration which involve permanent settlement and ultimate assimilation; instead it suggests that immigrants today are mobile, hybrid and resist assimilation (Bartley, 2003). Transnational practice is made possible by modern technologies, higher acceptance of cultural diversity, and globalisation that brings about heightened cultural connectedness (Levitt, 2001; Levitt, DeWind & Vertovec, 2003). Transnational practices introduce a new form of identity. This section takes a closer look at transnational identities, the relations between transnationalism and nationalism, and how this transnational mode of migration challenges traditional discourses of family and parenting.

### **Transnational identities**

New, plural and diverse identities are being constructed continuously under the impact of globalisation and mass human migration (Hall, 1991a, 1991b, 2000). Transnational movement or ‘border-crossing’ of immigrants destabilises the homogeneity of cultures and social values of the receiving as well as the sending countries (Goldberg, 2002). Nations have become increasingly

dynamic and heterogeneous, and are filled with members of communities who have multiple citizenships or identities, and who engage in ongoing movement between countries and cultures (Goldberg, 2002). Cultural boundaries are further weakened when children and families with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds share the same group membership and identity, such as belonging to the same church or sporting team (Banks, 2006a).

In contrast to Hall's (2000) idea of translated identity and the concepts of diaspora and sojourner in which there is no returning to one's homeland, many contemporary immigrants engage in frequent transnational activities and have their homes and families established concurrently in the sending and receiving country. An imagined community of transnationals requires reconceptualisation because, as previously discussed, the notion of imagined communities fails to recognise the hybridity and fluidity of cultural practices; instead the practices of each imagined community are simplified and essentialised (Bhabha, 1994). The fluidity of transnational practices and identity necessitates re-imagining the boundaries of this imagined community, if there are any.

Transnational identities are fluid and flexible. Transnationals have conflicting motivations underlying their citizenship and identity choices because they have experienced and made connection with at least two cultural settings and are making a future in two or more places (Bartley, 2003; Levitt, 2003; Yeoh, Lai, Charney & Tong, 2003). Differences of cultural beliefs and practices position immigrants to transit between cultures, creating an in-between or hybrid culture (Bhabha, 1996). Their dual memberships and dual loyalties, when used instrumentally, allow them to simultaneously integrate and remain transnational (Levitt, 2003). They may selectively identify with a specific place at a specific

time to serve their settlement and transnational needs. Their choices of membership reflect their intentions to adopt a localised ethnicity or a transnational identity.

Transnational identities are shaped and reconfigured by multiple factors, such as the social and economic status of the individuals and their countries of origin, their personal education background, their motives and aspirations, their feelings of displacement, and whether they feel excluded by the host society (Bartley, 2003; Benton & Gomez, 2003; Yeoh, Huang & Lam, 2005). Under the influence of globalisation and mass migration, new boundaries are continually created and recreated. Although essentialised and exclusive nationalism still resists such fluidity, it has become increasingly common for individuals to have a repertoire of identities, multiple memberships and shifting ethnicities (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; May, 2008; Rhedding-Jones, 2001).

Finally, while most transnational studies focus on the experiences of first generation immigrants, many children of immigrants are also routinely engaged in crossing national and cultural borders (Prout, 2005). Even if these children are not directly involved in as many transnational activities as their parents, they are exposed continuously to their parents' transnational perspectives and experiences, and therefore are also familiar with transnational practices (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Furthermore, practices of transnational immigrants cannot be simply studied from the perspectives of the host country (Levitt et al, 2003; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). The international status of the sending country and the social status of its emigrant community in the receiving country impact strongly on how the community is perceived and received in the host country and beyond (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

## **Transnationalism and nationalism**

'Stable' nations were traditionally considered as the centralised hub for the building of collective identity, ideology and security, but are increasingly being challenged and disrupted by hypermobile transnationals and their 'unstable' practices (Yeoh, 2006). Transnational immigrants can be perceived by both the receiving and sending countries as disloyal and become marginalised and excluded when they identify themselves with their ancestral homeland and the adopted country respectively (Goldberg, 2002). Some transnational individuals who engage in frequent border-crossings also do not necessarily have fluid and flexible identities. They simply maintain strong identifications with the sending countries because of their intention to return (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). A transnational identity that is fluid and hybrid can be seen by members of the receiving country as a threat to national identity and loyalty to the nation, and to maintaining a collective heritage, culture and ideology (Marotta, 2000; Spoonley, Bedford & Macpherson, 2003; Willis et al, 2004).

Contemporary Chinese transnationals are sometimes characterised as 'astronauts' who are usually educated business entrepreneurs and professionals (Ong, 1999; Waters, 2005). Ip (2000) explains that the term astronaut was originally coined to describe the Hong Kong-Chinese immigrants who commuted frequently between the host and home country. The astronaut is "usually the chief breadwinner of the family, usually the man, who flies periodically back to his wife and children left at the new destination, while he continues with his business in Hong Kong" (Ip, 2000, p. 4). In addition, it is common for these astronauts to "drop off" their "parachute kids" (Ong, 1999, p. 19) or "satellite kids" as Waters (2005, p. 365) calls them, possibly with relatives

in the host countries to experience a 'western' education. Family reunions are sporadic as these astronauts continue to work and live in the home country. These astronaut strategies are commonly employed by diverse Chinese immigrants in New Zealand (Henderson, 2003; Ip, 2000), and the commitment of transnational immigrants who engage in an astronaut mode of migration is often challenged by members in the adopted country (Ip, 2000; Chen, 2000). To most people, the decision to migrate and leave behind all one's friends and families is not taken lightly, but when the new life in the new country does not unfold as planned, such as failing to find satisfactory employment, it is common for some immigrants to engage in transnational activities "by necessity" and to reluctantly adopt an astronaut lifestyle (Ip, 2000, p. 8).

As a bilingual immigrant from Hong Kong, I would argue that the astronaut analogy is problematic and it is a classic 'lost-in-translation' example. The Cantonese translation of astronaut, 太空人, was coined by Hong Kong-Chinese who use Cantonese as a first spoken language, and hence Mandarin pinyin is unavailable for this term. Pinyin uses Roman alphabet to transcribe the sounds of Chinese characters, and is a system used mainly in the PRC to support learning Mandarin. The term in its Cantonese form, 太 is the wife, 空 is empty, and 人 is a person. Together the term is mainly used to describe husbands without their wives because the wives and the children are staying in the host countries while the husbands return to Hong Kong to work. Over time, the term has been widely used to simply analogise the frequent commute of transnational immigrants. Instead of using a gendered astronaut analogy, the term transnationals, which is gender inclusive, is used in this thesis to describe the participants.



## **Transnational Chinese immigrants**

While many Chinese immigrants have no intention of returning to their homeland, some Chinese transnationals prefer to remain as cosmopolitan citizens who continue to engage in border-crossings (Chan, 2003). For them, migration “is not necessarily an irrevocable step” (Ip, 2000, p. 6), and some of them have “flexible citizenship” (Ong, 1999, p. 6) with multiple passports and/or identities for convenience. The identities of these citizens of the world are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. They may commit and have their sense of belonging to more than one country simultaneously (Chan, 2003; Ong, 1999). It is also possible for Chinese transnationals to leave New Zealand for another country after obtaining their New Zealand citizenship and passports to continue their transnational journey or simply to return to their home country. This is particularly probable when they are unable to gain satisfactory employment or investment returns, making them “reluctant transnationals” (Bartley, 2003, p. 71).

These ‘flexible’ and ‘reluctant’ Chinese transnationals “acquire a range of symbolic capital to facilitate their positioning, economic negotiation, and cultural acceptance in different geographical sites” (Ong, 1999, p. 18). Research indicates that many Chinese immigrants come to New Zealand to seek a better education for their children (Ip, 2002; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012) and it is common for immigrants to use education as a form of capital for upward social mobility (Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; Levitt, 2001; Li, 2001; Ong, 1999; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Waters, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004). Part of this study, therefore, is to critically investigate how structural and institutional expectations constrain

or facilitate the social positioning of Chinese immigrant families within the ECE community.

Finally, due to their fluid and hybrid transnational identities, this thesis also includes exploring how PRC immigrant parents have to continuously navigate and negotiate across social-cultural spaces where different languages and cultures are practised. The parenting strategies of PRC immigrants are a reflection of their fluid transnational identities, and these may not align with some of the dominant ECE discourses in New Zealand. The terms navigation and negotiation have different meanings in this thesis: while navigation describes the process of individuals crossing physical or imagined borders, negotiation depicts the challenges which arise during the navigation. The next section conceptualises the social-cultural navigations and negotiations, and the cultural-spatial strategies undertaken by immigrant families. Notions from hybridity theory (Bhabha, 1994, 1996) are integrated to emphasise the hybrid and fluid nature of identities and practices. Hybridity theory challenges singular identities, recognises the non-static and unsettled nature of cultures and discourses within a continuous process of hybridisation, and celebrates new spaces created (Bhabha, 1994, 1996).

## **Social-cultural spaces**

Transnational immigrants 'belong' to more than one country, and they frequently engage in border-crossing activities that take place across a range of social spaces. Bourdieu (1989, p. 16) defines space as "the system of relations" and each space involves "positions of power". He believes the world is structured by social spaces and highlights the relationship between social

space, habitus and classification (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989). Those (agents) who share similar habitus (dispositions) are likely to situate in close proximity within a space; whereas those who are further apart are unlikely to have as many commonalities (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989). The hierarchy of habitus and its relation to the creation of social classes are discussed in more depth in the critical multiculturalism section that follows. This section focuses on examining transnational immigrants' navigation and negotiation of spaces.

Sharing the same place in the same space gives individual agents a sense of belonging. As a result, commonalities and differences within a space determine the sense of (be)longing and in/exclusion of individuals (Bourdieu, 1985, 1989). Bourdieu (1989) compares social spaces to geographical spaces, and highlights:

a tendency towards spatial segregation, people who are close together in social space tending to find themselves, by choice or by necessity, close to one another in geographic space; nevertheless, people who are very distant from each other in social space can encounter one another and interact, if only briefly and intermittently, in physical space. (p. 16)

As individuals cross boundaries of different spaces, they develop hybrid and multiple senses of belonging and positioning (Georgiou, 2006). More importantly, although each space may have its (imagined) boundaries and carry its own social and cultural meanings that facilitate or deny access of its inhabitants to limited resources (Bourdieu, 1985, 1989), all spaces are possibly interconnected, facilitating the exchange and transformation of ideas and practices (Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

Within this thesis, social spaces refer to the physical and geographical settings where PRC immigrants participate. They include the public spaces, such as kindergartens and schools, and private spaces like home. Due to the cultural backgrounds of PRC immigrants, this thesis further argues that they are obliged to participate in spaces where different, sometimes even conflicting, cultural values are practised. As such, the terms 'social-cultural spaces' is utilised in this study to represent the social and cultural settings that PRC transnational immigrants navigate and negotiate on a daily basis, and the word 'spatial' is applied beyond the geographical sense to describe any actions or activities associated with social spaces. For example, "spatial strategies" is borrowed from Waters (2005, p. 368) to denote the family practices adopted by immigrants in crossing the borders of private and public social-cultural spaces.

### **Social spaces of transnational immigrants: Private and public spaces**

Private and public spaces are the two main social spaces. A private space is usually home and is for private familial activities; whereas the public is "the space where the intimate gets challenged by social rules and regulations" (Georgiou, 2006, p. 6). The two spaces are far from binary and disconnected from each other because what happens within the private is strongly shaped by the social meanings of the public space, often filtered through institutions, the media and communication technologies (Georgiou, 2006). Participation within a space gives each individual an identity and a sense of belonging to an (imagined) community; and multi-spatial belongings imply multiple identities (Georgiou, 2006).

The activities and experiences of transnational immigrants are embedded in multi-layered social spaces which are interrelated and interdependent (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Within the adopted nations, the main social spaces of transnational immigrants may include their home and the range of institutions that they 'belong' to (Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Each space has its own structures embedded, and a range of transnational activities and cultural exchanges happens within and across these different social spaces.

Immigrants are likely to receive conflicting messages and to experience possible cultural displacement and disorientation when translating between public and private spaces, during which there is a constant time-space exchange of cultures and practices (Bhabha, 1994; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Chinese immigrant parent participants in this study, for example, have to make sense of the practices in New Zealand kindergartens which may not align with traditional Chinese parenting practices. Their child-rearing practices in the private space may also be challenged by the dominant discourses that are promoted and supported in the public space. They need to reconcile these conflicting discourses when they negotiate across the public space of kindergartens and the private space of home.

The practices of inhabitants and the established structures that are embedded in each space are shaped by historical experiences, political and economic structures of power, and cultural contexts. Therefore, in addition to investigating the different social spaces that immigrants have to navigate and negotiate plus their spatial relationships, this study also explores how transnational immigrants within particular social spaces perceive these spaces, how these spaces impact on the transnationals' practices, and how ongoing

spatial-crossings weaken boundaries and territories, creating new spaces (Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

Immigrants are active agents in creating new spaces to cope with structural constraints (Levitt, 2007). The concept of agency (Willis, 1977) stresses how individuals actively select and adapt strategies to resist imposed and unchangeable structural restrictions. Willis (1977) used the concept to illustrate how white working-class boys are active agents in applying strategies to challenge and oppose authority at school, but unfortunately in doing so, they end up in labourer jobs and perpetuating and reproducing the existing social hierarchy. The concept of agency was, however, later applied by others in a different manner, to denote how individuals actively develop new space, knowledge, practices and strategies to cope with structural constraints (González, 2005; Levitt, 2007). The next subsection theorises new spatial knowledge and strategies with the concept of third space (Bhabha, 1994) and negotiated space (Smith et al, 2008, cited in Mila-Schaaf, 2010). Both concepts celebrate new possibilities and multiplicities. Practices are not static, but remain fluid and hybrid across time and spaces.

### **New possibilities: Third spaces**

Bhabha (1994) argues that each person experiences an ongoing negotiation between gender, class and culture, and hence each identity is complex, fluid, and always in transition, translation and transformation within the intersection of time, place and space. New spaces emerge during these 'trans' processes, and these "in-between" spaces are "neither the one nor the other" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 25). Bhabha (1994) further identifies these spaces as 'third spaces', which are

better described as parts of a spectrum rather than a continuum, in order to avoid polarisation and to allow the emergence of multiple options that complement each other (Barrera & Corso, 2003; Bhabha, 1994). Hence third spaces give rise to new practices or identities that are fluid and hybrid.

Bhabha (1996) claims that a third space is created in an unconscious manner, and within it there is an ongoing negotiation of new understanding of cultural symbols and meanings. This thesis, however, argues that the creation of a third space is also a conscious and instrumental/strategic process during which immigrants intentionally develop coping mechanisms to avoid becoming the target of discrimination, to integrate, and to possibly move up the social ladder. By doing so, they exploit the social-cultural spaces where they negotiate and/or expand their cultural repertoire. Within the context of this study, when Chinese immigrant parents navigate and negotiate between the space of kindergarten and home, they are likely to selectively bring home new cultural-spatial parenting strategies that are inspired by what they have heard and observed from kindergartens, creating a third space of parenting practices. The idea of cross cultural-spatial strategies is revisited in the following subsection.

Bhabha highlights the importance of the third space when theorising cultural practices and suggests a “dialectical” approach that involves “negotiation rather than negation” to articulate cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, p. 25). Hybrid discourses open up spaces of negotiation rather than assimilation. The concept of ‘negotiated space’, coined by Smith et al (2008) is cited in Mila-Schaaf (2010) and Mila-Schaaf and Hudson (2009) to describe the exchange of knowledge and epistemologies. Within the negotiated space, differences are considered to be complementary. A dialectical approach which values multiple perspectives

gives voices to hybrid agents to engage in open interactions and dialogues, allowing agents to negotiate differences and thereby give rise to new knowledge and understanding (Mila-Schaaf, 2010; Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009). The concepts of third space (Bhabha, 1994) and negotiated space (Mila-Schaaf, 2010; Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009) share many similarities. To be consistent, third space is utilised in this thesis because of its originality, its implication of 'in-betweenness' that is particularly relevant to PRC immigrants' in-between cultures, and its applicability to understanding the hybrid and fluid transnational identities and practices of PRC immigrants.

As people become increasingly mobile, cultural boundaries are weakened, and beliefs and practices are subject to change and transformation (Bhabha, 1994; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Marotta, 2000). Hence it is argued in this thesis that there are no fixed and static Chinese or New Zealand ways of being and knowing, and that they should not be collapsed into simplistic binaries. Additionally, there is no static, essentialised and universal discourse of parenting and ECE practices (Cannella, 2002). The avoidance of binary positioning and essentialising is further emphasised in the critical multiculturalism section.

It is acknowledged that the notion of hybridity fails to recognise the importance of ethnicity to those who value a strong ethnic bond and sense of belonging to an ethnic group (May et al, 2004). For example, Chinese immigrants who are new to New Zealand and feel that they have not successfully integrated into its mainstream society may long for a sense of belonging in the (imagined) Chinese community, and traditions and customs are likely to remind them of their attachment to their homeland and support them to



maintain their home cultures. Nevertheless, the concept of agency and third spaces affirm the capability of Chinese transnational immigrant parents in employing a range of fluid “spatial strategies” (Waters, 2005, p. 368) to help them navigate and negotiate across the many social-cultural spaces in which they participate daily.

### **Crossing cultural-spatial strategies**

As transnational immigrants cross social-cultural spaces, they engage in varying degrees of transnational practices, ranging from comprehensive to selective, intensive to occasional, flexible to formal, and they live a transnational social life that involves economic, religious, political, social and cultural dimensions that are different from non-immigrants (Levitt et al, 2003; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Transnational immigrants’ beliefs and practices often reflect the notion of ‘in-between’ space (Bhabha, 1994) or ‘in betweenness’ (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008), and these beliefs and practices are a mix of the past and present, foreign and local, and they continue to evolve (Benton & Gomez, 2003; Levitt et al, 2003; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Furthermore, due to this ‘in-betweenness’, it is common for transnational immigrants to display ambivalent attitudes towards their choices of practices (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008).

There are strong interrelationships between immigrants’ social and cultural capital and the nature and degree of their interaction within the host society (Levitt, 2001). Levitt identifies three broad interaction patterns along the spectrum; “recipient observers” who have limited capital and contact with the new society but maintain close ties with their own ethnic community, “instrumental adapters” who adapt and integrate new skills to their existing

capital in order to survive and to get by in the host society, and “purposeful innovators” who extend their “cultural repertoire” by mixing and matching their old and new capital in order to “get ahead” (Levitt, 2001, p. 57) in the host society.

While the notion of ‘middle class’ is scrutinised in the later section that examines the habitus effect, its usage is particularly problematic when applied to transnational immigrant communities. For example, Wu (2011) argues that immigrants who belong to the ‘middle-class’ in China are not necessarily able to live a ‘middle-class’ lifestyle in New Zealand. Nonetheless, ‘middle-class’ and professional immigrants who start out with more resources have more options of cultural-spatial strategies, and they are usually more able to move upwards socially (Levitt, 2001, 2003; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The next section uses critical multiculturalism to conceptualise how the hierarchy of discourses and knowledge impacts on the cultural-spatial negotiations and strategies that transnational immigrants undertake.

## **Critical multiculturalism**

The New Zealand ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), recognises that there are diverse immigrants living in New Zealand and different cultures have different parenting practices. It celebrates the multicultural heritage of New Zealand, supports cultural diversity, and promotes culturally responsive pedagogies to include all families (MoE, 1996). This section draws upon some theoretical concepts from critical multiculturalism to analyse how to transform pedagogy in order to realise these aspirations of *Te Whariki*. For example, notions such as the hierarchy of discourses and identities, and the politics of

cultural difference and habitus are used to highlight the importance of empowering immigrant parents to share their familial funds of knowledge and to include diverse knowledge and practices.

Theoretical concepts from critical multiculturalism are also applicable to problematise identities. Ethnicity is commonly used as a form of identity, and members of an ethnic group:

share a sense of group identification, a common set of values, political and economic interests, behavioural patterns, and other culture elements that differ from those of other groups within a society... [They] have a shared sense of peoplehood, culture, identity, and shared languages and dialects. (Banks, 2009, p. 16)

Ethnicity, however, is not the sole determinant of a person's identity. Variables such as social and economic status, education backgrounds, sexual and religion orientation, all interact and contribute to a fluidity of an individual's identity in different situations, settings and stages of the life span (Banks, 2009). The identities of the PRC participants in this study, both self-selected and imposed, are likely to be influenced by their phenotypical, cultural and linguistic characteristics. Yet, using physical and/or cultural differences to categorise PRC immigrants runs the risk of simplifying and essentialising their fluid and hybrid repertoire of identities, as previously established.

Building upon this argument, this section of the thesis first emphasises the need to move beyond placing these differences in binary positions. Then Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989, 2008) is applied to critique the politics of difference and to understand the in/exclusion of PRC

immigrant parents. Finally, a range of critical multicultural pedagogies (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rdedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) and González's (2005) idea of funds of knowledge are utilised to highlight the benefits of including the voices of PRC immigrant parents and of having a transformative curriculum that is equitable for all, which is an aspiration of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996). It is important to first make a distinction between the notion of equality and equity. While equality implies treating everyone in the same manner, teachers who adopt "an equity pedagogy" (Banks, 2010, p. 22) modify their teaching strategies to meet individual needs in order to facilitate the achievement of children with diverse backgrounds. This thesis recognises the different levels of constraints experienced by children and families with various social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and hence the term 'equity' is preferred.

### **Discourse and power: Moving beyond the binaries and the notion of 'the West and the Rest'**

Stuart Hall (2007) uses the phrase 'the West and the Rest' to explain how some discourses are used to create and reinforce unequal power relations between the two opposing 'entities'. "A discourse is a way of talking about or representing something. It produces knowledge that shapes perceptions and practice" (Hall, 2007, pp. 59-60). Hence discourses shape and structure the lives of individuals; yet not all discourses share equal power (Hall, 2007). This framing of a "discourse of the West about the Rest" (Hall, 2007, p. 56) echoes the arguments concerning Orientalism (Said, 1978, 2008). Both ideas highlight how perceptions and practices of the West towards the Rest are legitimised, therefore validating knowledge of the West as a form of 'truth'. This truth claim

consolidates the power of the West while subordinating the discourses of the Rest who have less power, thus perpetuating a global hierarchy (Hall, 2007; Said, 1978, 2008; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

Signs and languages are embedded within discourses and they have significant effects on practices. Sleeter and McLaren (1995, p.45) argue that “western language and thought are constructed as a system of differences ... and as binary oppositions”, and that the term ‘ethnic minorities’, for example, denotes and perpetuates the ‘minor’ status of certain ethnic groups by contrasting their culture and identity against the dominant status of the ‘majorities’. Through the use of language, differences are socially and historically constructed and unequal power perpetuated. This thesis seeks to use and critically interrogate language and to avoid using terminologies that encourage and perpetuate essentialism and power imbalances.

Much cross-cultural education research has been carried out in English-speaking countries like Australia, the United States of America, United Kingdom and New Zealand to understand the parenting and learning styles of the ‘imagined Asians’ by making comparisons to the ‘western’ paradigm of socialisation and education (Dandy & Nettlebeck, 2002; Parmar, 2008; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Woodrow & Sham, 2001; Zhang, 2012). Furthermore, some studies investigate specifically the academic success of ‘Chinese’ immigrant children in English-speaking countries (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Li, 2001, 2004; Wu & Singh, 2004; Zhou & Kim, 2006). These studies seem to suggest that there are universal and binarised ‘Asian’ and ‘European’ parenting and education practices, and that there are essentialised ‘Chinese’ formulae for academic success.

The essentialised notion of 'Eastern' culture is seen to have been heavily influenced by Confucianism and is commonly described as communitarian, collective, conservative, spiritual and authoritarian, emphasising social and familial harmony (Nie, 2007). Although Confucianism is an ancient philosophy, as discussed in the literature review, much contemporary research and literature still applies its beliefs to understand and explain the thinking and doing of modern Chinese, despite the fact that 'Chinese' is a heterogeneous group. According to Nie, "the East, and especially China, has been too long treated as a homogeneous entity in contrast with the West" (2007, p. 147), but practices of the 'East' and 'West' are plural, fluid and diverse.

Dichotomising East and West highlights binary differences and implies each is incompatible with the other. For example, as discussed in the literature review chapter, Chinese parenting styles are often essentialised as authoritarian when compared to the 'European' ways of childrearing which are often described as authoritative (Chao, 1994; Nie, 2007; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Xu et al, 2005). Nonetheless, research indicates that parenting styles in modern China are undergoing significant transformation and are hardly homogenised. Instead, Chinese parents apply a mix of authoritarian and authoritative parenting strategies which are contextually transferable (Chen et al, 2000; Naftali, 2010a; Xu et al, 2005).

Additionally, it is common for Asian and/or Chinese scholars to locate and develop an imagined 'Asian' or 'Chinese' epistemology despite the danger of oversimplifying either culture (Benton-Gomez, 2003; Nie, 2007). These scholars and political leaders draw on an understanding of Confucian beliefs to create a set of 'Asian' core values that are opposed to the assumed 'European' ways of

knowing and being, in order to assert an 'Asian' identity (Benton & Gomez, 2003; Robinson, 2000). Chinese values, when positioned in binary opposition to 'European' ideals, may also be used by Chinese families to justify and legitimise their parental expectations as well as their disapproval of certain 'western' practices.

This thesis seeks to resist essentialism and positioning cultures in binary oppositions. Instead it aims at applying hybridity theory and the concept of the third space (Bhabha, 1994) to understand cultural beliefs and practices. It asserts that new culturally inspired beliefs and practices are bound to emerge when immigrants navigate and negotiate across social-cultural spaces. These novel parenting strategies may reflect a mix of cultural practices. Nonetheless, cultural differences are often used to marginalise and exclude those who do not follow the dominant practices, rather than being embraced to transform practices (Young, 2008).

### **The politics of cultural differences and the habitus effects**

While *Te Whāriki* acknowledges the "increasing cultural diversity" in New Zealand (MoE, 1996, p. 18), using the notion of cultural diversity to celebrate diverse cultural life styles and customs may not be sufficient (Bhabha, 1994; Farquhar, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Instead, learning a limited amount about the lifestyle of ethnic groups has the potential to reinforce stereotypical and racist attitudes (Short & Carrington, 1999). As such, the term 'cultural difference' instead of 'cultural diversity' is applied in this thesis to steer away from making assumptions about cultural practices, and at the same time to highlight the politics of cultural differences. The concept of cultural difference

can also be used to problematise binary approaches and understanding of “culture-as-difference” (Bhabha, 1996, p. 55). Immigrants experience at least two cultures, and they constantly shift between the cultures of their homeland and the adopted country. The degree of transitioning, however, is influenced by multiple factors, such as the individual’s cultural capital, length of residency, frequency of visiting the home country and so on.

Whereas this study acknowledges the heterogeneous cultural understandings and enactments within an ethnic group, cross-cultural studies suggest that Chinese immigrant parents and children in English-speaking countries have different parenting and learning styles from their European counterparts (Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; Parmar, 2008; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Woodrow & Sham, 2001). This study, therefore, highlights and problematises certain dominant discourses in relation to New Zealand ECE and Chinese immigrants’ parenting in order to investigate the politics of cultural differences of ECE perspectives.

Politics of difference marginalise and exclude those who do not follow and conform to the dominant cultural practices (Young, 2008). Assimilationist policies further perpetuate the disadvantaged positioning of those who are different. While Banks (2006b) advocates for a form of multiculturalism that is situated between cultural pluralist and assimilationist ends, Young (2008, p. 267) argues against any form of assimilation because “the assimilationist ideal still denies that group difference can be positive and desirable; thus any form of the ideal of assimilationist constructs group difference as a liability or disadvantage”.



According to Young (2008, p. 267), full participation in any social space should not involve “rejection and devaluation of one’s culture and perspective”; instead, group autonomy in organisations empowers its members to discover their specific needs and interests and to develop a “group-specific voice and perspective” (Young, 2008, p. 268). However, a collective voice also risks neglecting the specific needs and choices of individuals within the group. As an example, within New Zealand ECE, *Te Whāriki* states that “adults should respect and encourage children’s home language” (MoE, 1996, p. 73) and it is likely that teachers will follow this guideline. Nevertheless, those parents who are eager for their non-English speaking children to learn English in order to be able to make friends and communicate with teachers may not agree with this aspiration of *Te Whāriki*. For instance, some PRC immigrant parents in Sydney who participated in an ECE study “felt that the development of the home language could negatively affect their child’s English language acquisition” (Hu, Torr & Whiteman, 2014, p. 151). These parents may request the teachers stop their children from using their home languages and encourage them to use only English in the ECE centres. This thesis advocates for the exploration of the many third spaces in ECE to recognise diverse possibilities and multiplicities.

In relation to respecting an individual’s choices, hybridity theory (Bhabha, 1994) does not consider constraints of choices and habitus that individuals may experience. Bourdieu (1984, 1989, 2008) describes habitus as the form of life that an agent practices as well as the dispositions the agent possesses to make sense of the world. During the course of socialisation, habitus becomes a set of embodied dispositions that operates mostly at the unconscious level. Structural constraints and the availability of different forms and amount of capital imply

that not all choices of habitus are possible for each agent (Bourdieu, 1984, 1989, 2008).

Habitus also produces “practices and representations which are available for classification” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 19). Those who have similar habitus often share the same place in the same social space. Habitus thus gives agents “a sense of one’s place” as well as a “sense of the place of others” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 19). This gives rise to a ‘common sense’ or ‘taken for granted’ perception of how the world is structured as well as a social hierarchy, even disallowing the disadvantaged to realise how they are being disadvantaged. It is pertinent at this point to clarify that while the terms ‘class’, ‘middle class’ and ‘social class’ are cited in this thesis to reflect their usage in the literature, this thesis has no intention to ‘classify’ the participants according to any criterion. Their backgrounds are described holistically in Chapter Six instead. Furthermore, since social class criteria vary across time and space (Banks, 2010) and the identities of PRC immigrants are fluid, hybrid and transnational, as already established, their worlds may be ‘structured’ differently and they may also be ‘classified’ differently across the many social spaces that they navigate. In this thesis, the stance is taken that it is inappropriate to ‘classify’ the participants.

The availability and constraint of choices further impact on individuals’ actions and reactions to unfamiliar habitus practised by the others. May (1999b, 2008) examines the issues of choice in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to explain the weaknesses of multicultural education. He believes that while the habitus of some ethnic groups is so often being marginalised because people from the dominant social groups do not have the choices available in their habitus to see

its relevancy to their world, this limitation of choices also inhibits the disadvantaged to access the habitus of the privileged (May, 1999, 2008). The constraint of habitus also highlights the constraint of identity choices. Although hybridity theory claims that all identities are fluid and subject to change, due to unequal power relations, identity options are, nevertheless, inhibited by one's social positioning and cultural capital (May, 1999; May & Sleeter, 2010). The notions around habitus, its constraint and availability are highly relevant to understanding the choices of parenting practices as well as the social mobility of different immigrant groups that are discussed next.

### **Concerted cultivation and segmented assimilation**

The repertoire of parenting practices is shaped by a family's resources. Although the notion of social 'class' has been problematised in the previous sub-section, Lareau (2011) does categorise the participants in her study, carried out in the United States, into 'middle-class' and 'working-class'. She uses the ideas of "concerted cultivation" (2011, p. 2) and "accomplishment of natural growth" (2011, p. 3) to describe the parenting practices of 'middle-class' and 'working-class' families respectively. Concerted cultivation refers to a form of 'middle-class' parenting style which involves engaging children to participate in a range of adult-organised activities, and encouraging them to ask adults questions and to see adults as equals. 'Middle-class' children, hence, are instilled with a sense of entitlement and confidence through this practice (Lareau, 2011). On the other hand, Lareau (2011) claims that 'working-class' parents, who have fewer resources than 'middle-class' families, allow their children to engage in self-initiated activities and these parents emphasise hierarchal relations between extended family members, adults and children.

Research shows that children participating in a range of extra-curricular activities usually have higher achievement (Bodovski, 2010). Nonetheless, activities like swimming, dance and music lessons are often only affordable by some families, and consequently, the resources of parents clearly shape the habitus of their children and children's subsequent accomplishment (Bodovski, 2010).

While Lareau (2011) associates the notion of concerted cultivation primarily with social 'class', Bodovski (2010, p. 152) further highlights "the complex ways in which race, social class and gender are intertwined, shaping parental behaviours that differentially affect children's educational outcomes". Both researchers claim that 'white middle-class' children may miss out on leisure time, but since their parents' cultural logic of child-rearing at home and the cultural repertoire of their families comply and are in synch with the expectations of professionals and institutions, they end up achieving more, socially, culturally and educationally (Bodovski, 2010; Lareau, 2011). Conversely, even though PRC immigrant parents may have the economic capital to facilitate a concerted cultivation style of parenting, their lack of certain cultural capital to connect with New Zealand teachers is likely to disadvantage their children in the public space, such as the kindergartens.

Furthermore, the academic achievements of diverse immigrant children have often been analysed using the theory of segmented assimilation (Feliciano, 2006; Hibel, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), as previously explained in the literature review chapter. The theory was initially used to examine the upward or downward assimilation of different ethnic immigrant groups in the United States. It illustrates how the support and resources provided by family and community

determine which segment of the society the members of their second generation are assimilated into - whether they move upwards socially or assimilate into an underprivileged segment (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

In order to support their children to achieve academic excellence and for the family to move up the social ladder, PRC immigrant parents are potential active agents who develop new parenting strategies in the private spaces, for example by engaging their children in numeracy and literacy activities at home or enrolling them in after-kindergarten activities, to maximise their children's learning and thus opportunities to succeed. The ability to apply a concerted cultivation of parenting style, which involves engaging children in a range of activities, and to eventually achieve upward social mobility, however, depends upon the social, economic, cultural and linguistic resources of each family.

Multicultural policies that only aim at including everyone to give equal learning opportunity to all have not considered the complexities of habitus and the resulting limitation of choices. A critical form of multiculturalism encourages critical engagement with all forms of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and social identities and with the complex power relations of differing backgrounds and identities between oneself and the 'others' (Davis, 2009; May, 1999; May & Sleeter, 2010). Accepting differences between groups and within a group means recognising the differential cultural capital that each possesses as well as unequal power relations. Although multiplicities, possibilities and third spaces, which are key notions of hybridity theory, are promoted in this study, it is acknowledged that they are all restricted by the choices that are available. Most importantly, acknowledging one's ethnicity and cultural identity should not undermine the legitimacy of the 'other' cultures and identities (May, 1999). The

following explores how identities and the hierarchy of discourses impact on the in/exclusion of PRC immigrants' involvement in New Zealand ECE.

### **Identities, hierarchy of discourses, and exclusion**

As previously established, due to their identities, certain parenting practices of PRC immigrant parents are likely to be different from the dominant ECE discourses in New Zealand. Research shows that when immigrant parents express their perspectives regarding the host country's ECE, they often use "practices from their country of origin as terms of reference" (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007, p. 75). Moreover, transnational PRC immigrant parents who engage in frequent border-crossings, spend limited time in New Zealand, and continue to make comparisons of practices between the home and adopted country may find it difficult to understand and respond to the expectations of the ECE settings. The participants' perspectives of ECE may continue to transit between their traditional beliefs of childrearing and the practices prevailed in New Zealand ECE settings. This study uses official documents, such as evaluation reports prepared by the New Zealand ERO and *Te Whāriki* to identify and critically analyse institutionalised ECE discourses. Dominant discourses become a body of knowledge that exercises power in relation to 'other' discourses (Hall, 2007).

Within the ECE context, certain dominant discourses either directly or implicitly and subtly, exclude parents from institutional participation (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). As an example, the importance of parental involvement and parent-teacher partnership is highly promoted in *Te Whāriki* and national and international literature (Billman et al, 2005; Gonzalez-

Mena, 2007; Grey & Horgan, 2003; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2002; Keesing Styles, 2000; MacNaughton, 2004; Mitchell et al, 2006; Prior & Gerard, 2007; Ward, 2009), and the two notions have become socially-constructed and dominant ECE discourses. Involving in their children's ECE centres or forming partnerships with teachers, however, can be challenging for some Chinese immigrant parents who are used to the traditional Chinese ways of teaching and learning that consider teachers to be the experts and authority (Chan, 2006, 2009; Cheng, 2001; Woodrow & Sham, 2001). When these Chinese parents migrate to an English-speaking country like New Zealand, they are likely to be unaware of the teachers' expectation in relation to parental involvement in their children's ECE centres. Those who are aware of the expectation but disagree with the notion of parental involvement and the other dominant discourses, such as learning through play, may feel uncomfortable to blindly conform and may struggle to fit in, and eventually choose to exclude themselves from the ECE community (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007). These immigrant parents also may not have the habitus required to appreciate these discourses and to work in partnership with teachers.

Research on Asian (including Chinese) families indicates that rather than articulating their alternative understandings with teachers, these parents prefer to work with their children in their own ways within the private spaces (Guo, 2005, 2010; Lahman & Park, 2004; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004). It is likely that they do not even have the habitus to express their disagreement, not to mention the possibility of a lack of linguistic capital. Previous studies indicate that parental knowledge is often subordinated by professional knowledge in a hierarchical manner (Hughes & MacNaughton,

2000, 2002), that the parenting practices of immigrants when measured against the 'norms' are particularly perceived negatively by teachers as not good enough (Reiff, Neuharth-Pritchett, & Pearson, 2000), and that some dominant discourses further identify immigrant parents collectively as deficient in educating their children (Arzubiaga et al, 2009). For example, the discourse of "residential fixity and domestication" for children highlights that a stable and secure "domestic and familial environment" (Ni Laoire et al, 2010, p. 156) is essential to children's development. Findings from this study are able to illuminate if some discourses, if there are any, encouraged teachers to negatively identify transnational Chinese immigrant parents as unsettled, and discouraged ECE teachers to see the value of recognising and including third spaces of parenting beliefs practised by immigrant families. The next subsection looks at the application of concepts of critical multiculturalism to pedagogical practices. It highlights the possibility for critical multicultural education to break down the ingrained hierarchy of discourses and exclusive practices in order to generate a transformative curriculum that includes and accepts diverse knowledge and practices.

### **Critical multicultural education and pedagogy**

Originally, "the term *multiethnic education* was used to bridge racial and ethnic groups; *multicultural education* broadened the umbrella to include gender and other forms of diversity" (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995, p. 12). However, over the years, multicultural education reverted to its focus on cultural differences of ethnic groups (Banks, 2009; May & Sleeter, 2010). Multicultural education recognises the benefits of ethnic and cultural diversity for a nation and for citizens to increase their experience of and exposure to other cultures (Banks,



2002). An uncritical 'tourist' or 'additive' approach that focuses on ethnic celebrations, festivals, stories of ethnic heroes and heroines, however, is regarded by many scholars to be an ineffective approach to multicultural education (Banks, 2009, 2010; Derman-Sparks, 2004; Jones & Mules, 2001; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

In addition, critical scholars and educators who aim at advocating for a fair, just and inclusive learning and social environment for diverse children and families are sceptical about multicultural education. They believe that multicultural education neither improves the life chances of ethnic 'minority' students nor challenges the racist attitudes of students from the dominant ethnic group unless a critical form of pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, is implemented (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). They also argue that multicultural education needs to contest inequities and unequal power relations between different ethnic groups through the application of critical pedagogy (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Critical multicultural education is also recommended by some EC researchers as the approach that should be used to work with children, families and educators with diverse ethnic backgrounds (Chan, 2009, 2011; Rhedding-Jones, 2002, 2010; Robinson & Diaz, 2006).

Critical education theory emphasises emancipating and empowering the subordinated by highlighting power relationships between the dominant group and those who are dominated (Giroux, 2001). The purpose is to bring about transformation, new knowledge and practices, and new forms of social relations (Giroux, 2001). Critical pedagogy promotes justice and equity, and aims to give a voice to the marginalised (Kincheloe, 2004). It requires using critical

consciousness (democratic consciousness in Kincheloe's term) and pedagogy to scrutinise education discourses, everyday institutional routines and practices, curriculum content and methodology (Giroux, 2001). Critical consciousness is pivotal in this study which involves analysing the dominant socio-historically constructed ECE discourses in New Zealand and evaluating their (privileged) positioning.

Critical multicultural education involves structural analysis in order to critique and politicise the notion of what constitutes 'knowledge', specifically in relation to how dominant knowledge is legitimised historically and socially, and to examine the role of institutions in reproducing dominant social and cultural ideologies (Banks, 2004; Davis, 2009; Giroux, 2001; May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Giroux (2001, p. 154) defines ideology as "a process whereby meaning is produced, represented, and consumed". 'Common-sense' ideology further becomes taken-for-granted knowledge that is treated as the legitimate truth which gets to be reproduced (Bourdieu, 1989; Giroux, 2001). A national curriculum contributes to developing a collective ideology and identity for the nation, and it also serves "to include and exclude, emphasize and de-emphasize, and embrace and isolate different content knowledge, different identities, and different politics" (Au & Apple, 2009, p.102).

Banks (2010) introduces five dimensions of multicultural education. They include "content integration" that incorporates content of diverse cultures and ethnic groups into the curriculum; the "knowledge construction" process that enables students to critically analyse how knowledge is constructed under the influence of the positions and power of different ethnic and social-class groups;

“prejudice reduction” that involves using teaching materials and pedagogies to modify students’ stereotypical attitudes and prejudice; “an equity pedagogy” that requires teachers to adjust their teaching styles to cater for the varied learning styles of diverse cultural and social-class groups in order to improve their academic achievement; and finally he stresses the need for educators to create an “empowering school culture” for students from diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Banks, 2010, p. 23). These dimensions are applicable in the documentary review chapter when evaluating New Zealand institutional documents in relation to commitment towards supporting multicultural education. Narratives from the PRC parent participants in this study would further reveal which dimension(s) of multicultural education were indeed applied (by teachers) and observed (by parents).

A major goal of multicultural education is to provide equitable learning opportunities for all by adopting a “transformative approach” (Banks, 2009, p. 20) to programmes, curriculum and pedagogy that includes diverse perspectives, and encourages different parties to work together in such a way that all learn something new, and are changed for the better through the collaboration (Gonzalez-Mena, 2007). Such an approach requires critical multicultural pedagogy to challenge and change basic assumptions of the existing curriculum, and to encourage students to use multiple and diverse multi-ethnic perspectives, rather than only the mainstream-centric beliefs to view concepts, events, issues and problems (Banks, 2006a, 2009, 2010; Kincheloe, 2004; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

Finally, critical multicultural education involves connecting with those who have been marginalised by issues of power and injustice, and to give them “a

preferential option” (McLaren, 1995, p. 55). These issues of marginalisation might apply to the experiences of PRC immigrant parent participants. The in/exclusion of Chinese immigrant parents in ECE settings and consequentially the learning of their children are affected by the power (im)balance between themselves and the teachers as well as the in/exclusivity of their voices in the ECE community.

### **Including the voices of families with diverse backgrounds**

To practise genuine and effective critical multicultural pedagogy, it is important to engage in intergroup dialogue and listen to the voices of those who are culturally different. This contributes to the recognition and adoption of epistemologies that differ from the mainstream ideologies, and the construction of new knowledge. Newly acquired knowledge can be used to challenge dominant and institutionalised discourses, to legitimise varied forms of epistemologies, and to deliberately develop intervention strategies that cater for different individuals and ethnic groups (Banks, 2004, 2006a; McLaren, 1995; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Dominant education discourses are not universally applicable, and a one-size-fits-all curriculum approach in a learning environment with diverse children and families is inadequate (Banks, 2006a; May, 1999; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). Critical multicultural pedagogy not only accepts diverse and different (and even conflicting) epistemologies, it also seeks to create non-hierarchically structured values, beliefs and practices of all cultures (May, 1999).

For multiple voices to be heard and legitimised in a transformative curriculum, Banks (2006a, 2009) suggests integrating positive and personalised

stories and narratives of ethnic groups with different cultural and linguistic characteristics in the curriculum to reduce prejudice. Including authentic knowledge of different ethnic groups through contributions from families with diverse ethnicities not only provides opportunities for parental involvement, it also encourages diverse families and members of the community to be involved in shared, democratic and collaborative decision-making regarding institutional matters and policies (Banks, 2006a, 2009, 2010). Nonetheless, it is unjust to assume that non-involved parents are disinterested in their child's learning because many parents, immigrant parents in particular, "lack a sense of empowerment and believe that their opinion will not matter anyway" (Banks, 2002, p. 120). The next section examines how diverse beliefs and practices of families can be embraced in a culturally responsive manner by applying the notion of funds of knowledge.

### **Funds of knowledge: Recognising hybridity and fluidity**

Although parental involvement is highly valued in many English-speaking countries, including New Zealand (Billman et al, 2005; Blanc, Clausier & Murcier, 2004; Grey & Horgan, 2003), the notion is often narrowly defined (González, 2005). As explained in the literature review chapter, parental involvement is commonly interpreted as parents participating in learning institutions to facilitate and support the work of teachers (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; González, 2005; Joshi et al, 2005; Obeng, 2007). This definition of parental involvement expects families to conform to the structural requirements of educational institutions, such as daily routines and expectations of teachers. Most importantly, this approach to parental involvement does not utilise familial

and community funds of knowledge and perpetuates an asymmetrical power relation between parents and teachers (González, 2005; Mitchell et al, 2006).

The daily activities of families are “a manifestation of particular historically accumulated funds of knowledge that households possess” (González, 2005, p. 41) and the concept of funds of knowledge can even be considered as a cultural artefact (González et al, 2005). Critical pedagogues perceive families and communities as resourceful and capable, and their practices as funds of knowledge. They promote open-ended and meaningful dialogues with parents from diverse backgrounds to identify parental aspirations and expectations, and children’s learning styles that may or may not be congruent with the dominant discourses. Dialogues and narratives reveal not only the knowledge of families, but also the knowledge of extended family members and participants in the family’s community and social networks (González et al, 2005). *Te Whāriki* aligns with the concept of funds of knowledge and states that “parents and caregivers have a wealth of valuable information and understandings regarding their children” (MoE, 1996, p. 30).

The concept of funds of knowledge focuses on practice rather than culture; it examines what families do and how the family members articulate what they do (González, 2005; González et al, 2005). Parental involvement is likely to increase when critical pedagogues validate the knowledge of all families and communities and include parental values and practices, dominant and non-dominant discourses in the programmes (González, 2005; Knopf & Swick, 2007). Children’s learning experiences in the private spaces, such as participating in extra-curricular activities and engaging in literacy and numeracy

activities at home, are all useful and valuable funds of knowledge to be considered by critical pedagogues (González et al, 2005).

By integrating home and community knowledge (including home languages) that children are already familiar with, learning becomes more interesting, meaningful, contextualised and effective (González et al, 2005). Within English-speaking learning contexts, the linguistic capital of non-English speaking families is insufficiently being acknowledged and utilised (González et al, 2005; May & Sleeter, 2010). Including diverse languages in the learning environment and explaining to non-English speaking parents about the importance of maintaining home languages help all children and adults to see the benefits of being bilingual or multilingual; otherwise English will continue to be the only language that matters.

Finally, the concept of funds of knowledge applies hybridity theory (Bhabha, 1994) and the metaphor of 'borderlands' to highlight how families continuously select new and pragmatic strategies to adapt or replace their existing practices (González, 2005; González et al, 2005). As such, it is important to recognise the fluidity and hybridity of families' practices, and not to categorise any community as having or possessing essentialised funds of knowledge. During the process of border/spatial-crossings, individuals adapt existing knowledge and new funds of knowledge emerge (González, 2005). This idea is in congruence with the concept of in-between space and third space of hybridity theory (Bhabha, 1994) and the notion of "instrumental adapters" and "purposeful innovators" within the transnational study of Levitt (2001, p. 57) discussed previously. By integrating non-dominant discourses and non-institutional knowledge into the mainstream curriculum and acknowledging the

fluidity of knowledge and practices across space and time, institutional practices are open to continual transformation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a range of theoretical approaches that underpin this study which aims at investigating the participation of PRC immigrant parents in New Zealand ECE. To achieve this aim, it involves scrutinising the identities of PRC immigrant parents and their daily cultural-spatial crossings during which there is a significant exchange of language and culture. Due to the complex identities of the participants, the multiple contexts and the interdisciplinary nature of this study which involves different disciplinary frameworks, an eclectic approach of conceptualisation and theorisation has been applied. Building upon the findings from the literature reviewed in the previous chapter which indicate a tension between the parenting practices of most Chinese immigrant parents and dominant New Zealand ECE discourses, the theories and concepts explored in this chapter, such as identity theories, transnationalism, social and third spaces, habitus, critical multiculturalism and funds of knowledge, are pertinent to understanding the involvement of PRC immigrant parents in the New Zealand ECE landscape.

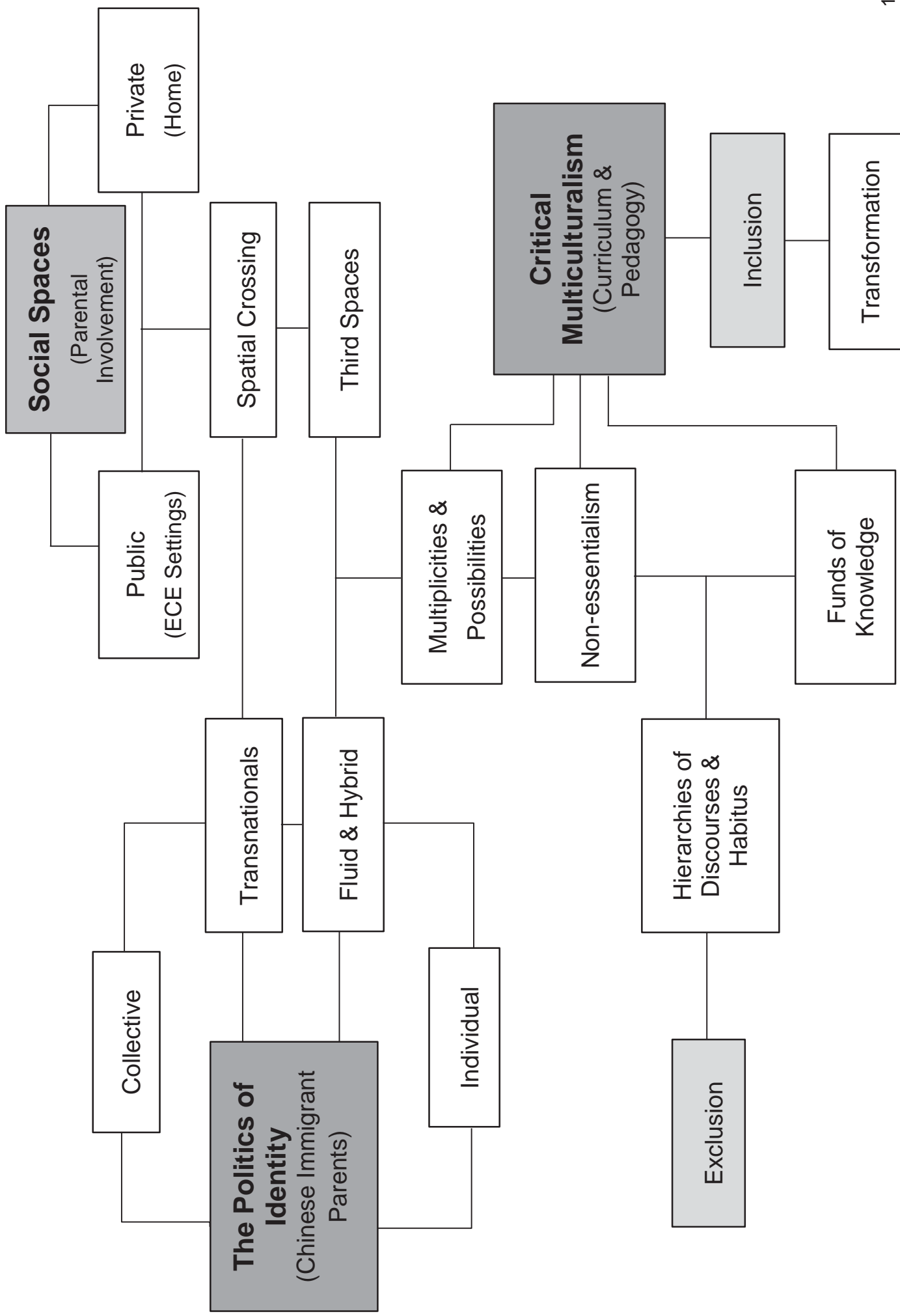
Findings of earlier research indicate that PRC immigrants in New Zealand are mostly transnationals. This thesis, therefore, argues that PRC immigrants do not share the same identity as the dominant social-cultural group in New Zealand, and that they have to constantly navigate and negotiate across social-cultural spaces where differing languages and cultures prevail. Hierarchies of discourses and habitus suggest that cultural-spatial strategies practised in the



private spaces that are different from the institutional dominant practices are likely to be subordinated in the public spaces, and identity theories further claim that those who are different are being excluded. Failing to align languages and cultures of private spaces with the institutional practices may thus lead to the exclusion of PRC immigrant parents from the New Zealand ECE public space.

Finally, critical multicultural pedagogy critiques socially constructed and privileged ideologies. It highlights stratifications of knowledge and practices, and embraces third spaces and culturally inclusive practices so that all parents feel safe and a sense of being invited to participate and contribute. It aims at bringing about a transformative curriculum that recognises and includes funds of knowledge of diverse families. Critical multicultural education, it is argued here, requires political awareness and a commitment to action.

Many of the theoretical concepts discussed in this chapter are further explored in the following chapter which details the methodology, research instruments, and ethical and reflexivity issues of this study. A qualitative and narrative life story methodological approach reflects the theorisation and conceptualisation of this study. Acknowledging hierarchies of knowledge and politics of difference, this study uses individual semi-structured interviews to give the PRC parent participants a voice that is seldom heard within the New Zealand ECE community. In line with the non-essentialist approach of this study, individual interviews not only generate detailed qualitative and narrative data, they also allow unexpected stories and memories to emerge. Stories and memories are particularly applicable when exploring the multi-facets of transnational practices and activities in each social-cultural space.



# 4. Methodology

## Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology and process applied in this study. A qualitative and narrative research approach, life story methodology (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Miller, 2000; Plummer, 2001), was used to investigate the involvement and experiences of PRC immigrant parents in New Zealand ECE, as well as their perspectives of early years learning. Ten participants, recruited from three public kindergartens that are located in different suburbs of Auckland, participated in two phases of life story individual interviews. Findings from a documentary analysis (Fitzgerald, 2007) and narratives collected from the interviews were interpreted and analysed using narrative and critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2004; Locke, 2004; Rogers, 2004).

As the researcher, I share to a certain extent similar identities, cultural and language backgrounds with the participants. My experience as an immigrant from Hong Kong, my ability to use the participants' spoken languages (Mandarin and Cantonese), my knowledge and experience of the parenting and teaching styles commonly practised in Chinese-populated countries, and my role as an ECE teacher-educator in New Zealand all contributed to developing rapport and positive relationships with the participants, enabling engagement with them in open communication and in-depth narratives, including co-constructing the meanings of their life stories. These factors were highly relevant in the data collection and interpretation process. My role as an

insider/outsider-researcher (Gregory & Ruby, 2011) and the importance of reflexivity in this study are also highlighted. Considerations of ethics, delimitations and the validity of this study are explained towards the end of this chapter.

## **Why a life story methodological approach?**

This study aimed at exploring a group of PRC immigrant parents' participatory experiences in New Zealand ECE. A qualitative and narrative life story inquiry which utilised individual interviews in the research process enabled the participants to share, in-depth, their experiences and stories, as well as their personal beliefs and values regarding the learning and socialisation of children. Stories emerging from interviews are often used "to understand and define relationships as well as group interactions and memberships" (Atkinson, 2004, p. 567). In line with identity theory, this study particularly focusses on understanding the relationships between the participants' identities and their sense of membership and involvement in their children's ECE settings. Self-identity and its relation to group identity are key elements of life stories. The process of storytelling allows the narrator to explore, realise and construct his/her individual or collective identity (Atkinson, 2007; Cortazzi, 2001; Cortazzi & Jin, 2006).

Although qualitative inquiry is not appropriate for generating universal generalisations (Pring, 2000; Scott & Usher, 1999), the particulars do illuminate the general (Stivers, 2009). "Life story offers a way, perhaps more than any other, for another to step inside the personal world of the storyteller and discover larger worlds" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 224). Life stories can be the stories

of individuals or a community. Those told by the participants in this study may be their individual and personal experiences, but since they are all immigrants from China who have young children in New Zealand ECE, it is possible that they might share some common experiences. Their personal stories may very well be a story of this particular community. The qualitative and narrative life story methodology used in this study generated findings to discern the involvement of PRC immigrant parents within New Zealand ECE. The following sections further explain and rationalise the application of a qualitative, narrative and life story methodology in this study.

## **Qualitative inquiry**

Qualitative inquiry examines the beliefs and practices of individuals and collectives that are influenced by multifaceted social and cultural issues (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). It provides a contextual analysis of social behaviour via “a detailed account of what goes on in the setting being investigated” (Bryman, 2004, p. 280), and aims at constructing meaning and making sense of the social worlds of participants (Denscombe, 2003; Pring, 2000; Wolcott, 2009).

Since human behaviour is far from universal and standardised, qualitative researchers do not generate ‘evidences’ that can be generalised from one setting to another (Pring, 2000). Instead, qualitative research methodologies, ethnographic approaches and narrative inquiries in particular, provide rich, detailed, contextualised and individualised findings (Trawick-Smith, 2003). Although patterns may arise from data, findings generated from a qualitative study do not give us the ‘truth’ or a ‘truer’ understanding of the research topic. Instead, they provide insights to the problem investigated and certain

perspectives of the selected group of participants, contributing additional knowledge to the existing pool of understanding (Pring, 2000; Scott & Usher, 1999).

Qualitative research is value-laden. It reflects the values of the researcher and the researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Scott & Usher, 1999). In contrast to naïve objectivism, a belief that our practice or our world view is isolated from theoretical or conceptual influences, the researcher's theoretical beliefs always explicitly and implicitly shape his/her practice of inquiry (Pring, 2000; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Scott & Usher, 1999).

A qualitative inquiry approach allows flexibility and accommodates the unexpected, which may happen during the research process (Bryman, 2004; Punch, 2001). It was therefore a suitable methodology for this research project which looked at complex and unpredictable human behaviours. Since qualitative inquiry allows flexibility, further data collection and tighter specification of research questions can occur after the initial stage of data interpretation (Bryman, 2004). Qualitative methodology also allows multiple data collection methods (Bryman, 2004; Denscombe, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Scott & Usher, 1999), and two research methods of qualitative inquiry, individual interviewing and documentary analysis, were implemented in this study to generate narrative and textual findings.

## **Narrative research**

Narrative research is a key strategy used in biographies and life stories (Cortazzi, 2001). Within a narrative research context, narratives usually refer to explicit answers to interview questions (Cortazzi & Jin, 2006). Narrative

interviews involve participants sharing and making sense of past experiences that are usually relevant to the research topic (Cortazzi, 2001). They are used to collect stories from participants, and narrative analysis is a strategy to analyse the qualitative data generated (Bryman, 2004).

During the process of a narrative study, each event episode contributes towards a greater understanding of the whole (Elliott, 2005; Harrison, 2009; Stivers, 2009). A significant life changing event, such as leaving one's home country and migrating to another, can be the plot of the story and it links to a succession of events (Czarniawska, 2004; Elliott, 2005). As stories are narrated, the meaning of events, behaviour and experiences is constructed, often co-constructed between the narrator and the researcher.

The narrator chooses what and how to share with the audiences as past experiences are relived, recounted and reinterpreted (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Most narratives are not only event descriptions that focus on facts, but also present the narrator with an opportunity to externalise and evaluate his/her feeling and perspectives of the event (Bryman, 2004; Cortazzi, 2001; Cortazzi & Jin, 2006; Reed-Danahay, 2001; Stivers, 2009). Each event is at least double-interpreted by the narrator. Initially, interpretation occurs when the event happens and then the meaning of the event is evaluated again during the narration (Cortazzi, 2001). The narrator gives meaning to the story through the twin process of telling the knowing, telling what he/she knows, and knowing by telling, making sense through recounting and evaluating (Cortazzi, 2001). Furthermore, this process of meaning-making is continual as the narrator re-remembers and re-tells the events, and reconstructs the meaning of his/her story (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Meanings of narratives are further

(co)constructed and complicated when the narratives are written, analysed and interpreted by the researcher (Cortazzi, 2001; Miller, 2000).

Within narrative research, it is important to read the participants' multi-layered voices, such as their use of I/we/you, and how they assume individual and/or collective identity (Erel, 2009; Goodley, Lawthom, Clough & Moore, 2004) in order to identify implicit meanings and evaluations. The choice of pronoun reveals the participants' positioning of themselves, and it is the role of the researcher to help readers distinguish the multi-layered narratives. In-depth and complex narratives are often collected via life story interviews.

## **Life story**

Life story comes in many forms, such as life history, autobiography, biography, oral history and life narrative, and it is becoming a key feature of research (Plummer, 2001). While life story and life history often mean the same thing, and are used interchangeably in much of the literature (Atkinson, 2004, 2007), some authors distinguish between the two. Atkinson (2007, p. 228) claims that life history uses the voice of the researcher more in first or third person narratives; whereas the life story "retains the voice of the storyteller, often in its entirety". Miller (2000) refers to life history as stories of chronologically arranged life events whereas life stories emphasise the ordering of stories into themes or topics that the storyteller chooses to share.

Within this thesis, the term 'life story' is adopted because it is not the intention of this study to compose biographies for participants. Instead, the study focuses in the life events of the participants that are related to their experiences of being Chinese immigrants in New Zealand, especially in ECE,



and stories are presented, as much as possible, in the participants' own voices. Stories generated from in-depth qualitative and narrative data are particularly important when investigating immigrants' transnational practices and their contexts (Levitt, 2001; Levitt, DeWind & Vertovec, 2003).

Life events are usually "shared with others in time and place" (Harrison, 2009, p. xxx), and life story research generates data that is not exclusively about the storytellers; instead their family members and friends are all implicated in the narratives. Each life story is different, and immigration does not invariably lead to similar experiences for all immigrants. This study provides an opportunity to look into the varied impacts of immigration on a group of PRC immigrant parents with different backgrounds.

Although a story usually has "a beginning, a middle, and an end" (Elliott, 2005, p. 12), it is unlikely that events will simply be narrated in a uni-linear order; instead "events are selected, compressed, shaped, recreated and reconstructed for the occasion of the telling" (Cortazzi, 2001, p. 388). The sequencing of events may imply how events are related, but the causality may not be directly linked. Life story is often about past events and their influences on the present experiences of the storyteller. As the recounting, evaluation and meaning-construction of the story continue, past and present experiences further give the storyteller direction for the future (Atkinson, 2007).

Stories are often told in parts that focus on specific aspects of a person's life in a chronological or thematic manner (Atkinson, 2004, 2007). The researcher organises the parts into a whole and analyses their implications. This study has collected and analysed details specifically related to the research questions,

such as how the participants' prior experiences in China, their cultural beliefs in education, and their new identities in New Zealand, impacted on their engagement in New Zealand ECE. As meanings of the stories were co-constructed between the participants and the researcher, key factors contributing to the past, present and future experiences of PRC immigrant parents were co-identified.

### **Meaning co-construction**

This study has applied a co-constructivist approach of life story methodology, which involved collaboration between the researcher and storyteller. Life story research is often perceived as a joint action and collective enterprise (Atkinson, 2004; Plummer, 2001) in which findings are co-constructed and co-negotiated, rather than 'discovered' by the researcher (Pring, 2000). The issue of power has always been central in research (Scott & Usher, 1999) because the researcher often has more influence and motivation than the researched in driving the research process. Yet, a relationship between the researcher and the researched that is as close as possible to 'equality' is essential to generating quality data, particularly in collaborative life story inquiry in which meanings of the stories are co-constructed (Harrison, 2009). Relationality is especially important in research involving Chinese participants, many of whom are collectivists sharing an emphasis on social harmony (Liu, 2009).

As discussed earlier, narratives of each life event are at least double-interpreted by the storyteller (Cortazzi, 2001), and it is possible that each time a story is revisited or discussed with others, it is altered and its meanings

reconstructed further (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). During the data collection and analysis process, researchers further apply their cultural expectations to the interpretation of the narratives. The intended meanings are often lost during cross-cultural interpretation in situations where the researcher and participants do not share the same cultural understandings (Cortazzi & Jin, 2006). Insider-researchers from the same community as the participants are more able to understand and appreciate the participants' cultures, histories, worldviews, values and practices, so are in a better position to analyse the narratives in detail and to construct meanings of the stories (Cortazzi & Jin, 2006; Trawick-Smith, 2003). Yet, the researcher cannot be an insider in all occasions (Gregory & Ruby, 2011) because of varied cultural, social and educational backgrounds between the researcher and the participants.

Researchers who share the participants' cultural identity and have the conventional academic background possess a dual (insider and outsider) perspective that may enable them to consider both the expectations of the participants and the academic research community (Cortazzi & Jin, 2006). The advantages, challenges and dilemmas of being an insider-researcher in an inquiry that involves Chinese participants and my fluid insider-outsider role in this study are revisited throughout this chapter. Nonetheless, insider-research does not necessarily generate 'truer' findings.

### **Truth, contextual knowledge and subjectivity**

Narratives told in life story research are not necessarily 'true', instead they are the subjective interpreted version of accounts remembered by the storyteller (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Goodley et al, 2004; Plummer, 2001; Reed-Danahay,

2001; Stivers, 2009; Wolcott, 2010). Each storyteller decides how he/she wants to remember the events and how and what to share with the life researcher. There is no absolute truth in life story inquiry, and the stories are considered to be the “narrative truth” (Plummer, 2001, p. 401) or “subjective reality” (Atkinson, 2007, p. 239). Although life researchers do not evaluate the truthfulness of stories according to historical, factual or “reality checks”, they have to ensure that the stories they make public are trustworthy and authentic (Bryman, 2004; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012), that is, to ensure that the stories are exactly how the participants want them to be told. Internal validity of stories can be evaluated against external events and highlighted, but not challenged according to the researcher’s interpretation (Wolcott, 2005, 2010). The validity of the findings collected in this study is revisited towards the end of this chapter.

Life stories are the results of subjective and contextual interpretations of storytellers and researchers (Erel, 2009; Harrison, 2009; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012; Stivers, 2009). Each personal life event happens within wider historical, political, sociocultural contexts (Harrison, 2009; Stivers, 2009), and the researcher’s assumptions, contextual knowledge and personal life experiences mediate its interpretation (Gregory & Ruby, 2011; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012; Stivers, 2009). Therefore, contextual knowledge of the storyteller’s experiences is key to understanding the meaning of narratives.

It is the researchers’ role to acknowledge their interpretations of the narratives, if meanings were constructed without the collaboration of participants. Declaration and acknowledgement made by the researchers allow narrative exploration to be considered as an honest contextual research method in which complex multiple forms of voices are recognised and subjectivity is

celebrated (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012; Stivers, 2009). Protocols of the interviewing process are as socio-culturally, historically, and politically contextualised as the data interpretations, and these are further discussed under the section of research process.

### **Motives & intentions**

It is impossible to understand the 'true' meaning of narratives without considering the narrator's motives or intentions (Beverly, 2008; Cortazzi, 2001; Czarniawska, 2004; Plummer, 2001). For example, the use of 'I' and 'we' interchangeably in life stories highlights the intents of immigrant participants in proclaiming their individual and collective identities (Erel, 2009). Immigrant interviewees often use an individualistic identity when they are only partially integrated and accepted by the dominant ethnic group, but use 'we' when they want to create an (imagined) community, claiming their individual opinions as representative of collective perspectives of the community (Erel, 2009).

Storytellers are active agents in deciding which and how life episodes are shared. The sharing of certain events but not others implicates the tellers' motives and intentions which are situated within particular social and cultural contexts (Pring, 2000). Sometimes, the storyteller may provide stories that are untrue to satisfy the interviewer or to bring an end to the interview (Cortazzi, 2001). The participants' perceptions of the researcher's motives and intentions also influence the 'truthfulness' of the events shared (Cortazzi & Jin, 2006). Participants may emphasise or share only the events they believe are what the researcher is after.

## Voices

According to Erel (2009), immigrants are often expected to tell their life stories involuntarily to explain and defend their actions of migration. Stories elicited in these kinds of circumstances reflect a situation of disempowerment. Instead, narrative research should empower participants by giving them a voice that may not be heard otherwise (Elliott, 2005). Some researchers claim that academic communities are often dominated by voices of the dominant group, and the knowing and being of the 'others' are unheard or unnoticed (Atkinson, 2007, 2004; Cortazzi & Jin, 2006; Erel, 2009; Plummer, 2001). Hence, life stories of immigrants collectively have the potential to construct and transform knowledge beyond dominant discourses (Erel, 2009).

Narrative research like this study provides immigrants opportunities to share their stories and less-heard-of experiences. Nonetheless, the participants are only able to speak via the institutional intellectuals who decide on the content and form of the narratives to be shared with wider audiences. "Letting participants speak for themselves" has been described as a naïve claim (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012, p. 746). An "assemblage" (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012, p. 747) of voices, voices of the participants, the researcher, theories, research protocols and many more, is implicated instead.

It becomes problematic if researchers assume that they had facilitated the collection of a non-distorted single voice from the participants (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012) or perhaps are too keen to provide the generalisation that the collective participants are victims who need support and advocacy (Beverly, 2008). Each life story contains a multitude of voices and perspectives, which

include the individual perspectives of the storyteller and the researcher, as well as the collective perspectives 'represented' in the voice of the storyteller.

## **Participants**

### **Selection criteria**

The aim of this study was to investigate the involvement of Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand ECE. As previously established, contemporary Chinese immigrants in New Zealand are a diverse group who come from varied countries. It was, therefore, a primary consideration to decide upon a specific group of Chinese immigrants to be invited to participate. Much of the previous research, carried out in English-speaking countries, that compares parenting styles and parental expectations between immigrants and locals of European descent tends to involve diverse Asian groups, such as Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian; and usually Chinese is included as just one of many different 'Asian' ethnicities (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; Guo, 2005; Lahman & Park, 2004; Parmar, 2008; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005). These studies often essentialise 'Asian' and 'European' families as one homogeneous group and fail to recognise the heterogeneous values, practices, experiences and needs of individuals. Sometimes, even using the collective term 'Chinese' to represent all Chinese immigrants from diverse countries can be problematic. The terminologies fail to distinguish and reflect the differing social and cultural values and beliefs of each Chinese immigrant community.

Since this qualitative study involved only a small sample of participants, it was decided to confine it to one specific group of Chinese immigrants, those from the PRC, in order to identify their specific experiences in New Zealand

ECE. This, therefore, became the primary selection criterion of participants to be involved in this study. This criterion was to avoid running the risk of homogenising and generalising findings to other diverse Chinese immigrants, as well as to acknowledge that the number of immigrants from the PRC is significantly higher than from other Chinese-populated countries, such as Taiwan and Singapore (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Consequently, except for one participant who was originally from Hong Kong, this research only involved Chinese immigrant parents who were born and brought up in the PRC and spoke Chinese, Mandarin or Cantonese. The inclusion of this Hong Kong participant is explained in the next subsection.

The participants would also need to have children in ECE. Another selection criterion was to only recruit participants whose children were enrolled in Auckland public kindergartens as opposed to private education and care services. This is because most parents who send their children full-time to education and care services work full-time, so are less likely to be actively involved in the centres. On the other hand, the hours of service of Auckland public kindergartens are much shorter than private education and care services, with many kindergarten children between the age of three to five attending only three to five morning or afternoon sessions per week. Parents from public kindergartens are more likely to be full-time carers of their children or have part-time jobs, so presumably they are more available to engage in the kindergartens. A gender-inclusive selection criterion was also adopted, and invitations to participate were extended to both fathers and mothers introduced via the teachers, however, only the mothers responded and agreed to be interviewed.



In terms of the number of participants to be involved in this study, it was initially decided that a sample of six to eight immigrant parents from the PRC who had been in New Zealand for less than five years would be selected. This decision was based upon the assumption that five years would be an insufficient time for the participants to have shifted away from their original Chinese cultural values and practices. However, initial conversations with possible participants revealed that almost all of them have been in New Zealand for more than five years. After consultation with my research supervisors, this selection criterion was dropped to allow a sufficient number of participants to be recruited. As a result, eleven participants who met the selection criteria expressed interest in participating. In appreciation of their support, it was decided to include them all, knowing that this would only enhance the richness of the findings. However, only the narratives of ten participants are included in this thesis, and this is explained in the following subsection.

Finally, this thesis acknowledges that the study has not included the voices of ECE teachers. The intention was to maximise the use of my cultural and linguistic compatibility via interviews in order to allow the participants to speak in ways that they might not have felt as comfortable to do so with an English-speaking researcher. Chinese-speaking researchers are not often available in English-dominated New Zealand research communities. This study offered the opportunity for Chinese parents to share their stories in their home language.

In addition, if the parents had thought that the teachers of their children were also to be interviewed or to be involved in the originally planned focus group discussion, it would have placed a constraint on their willingness to be fully open and honest, thus limiting the depth and range of data gathered. It was an

ethical consideration to avoid placing the parents' voices in some sort of uncomfortable position alongside those of teachers' voices. As such, instead of seeking to also interview kindergarten teachers, institutional documents were examined in order to identify differences between written educational aspirations and parents' experiences. Employing a process of documentary analysis further avoided a 'he said, she said' exchange and scenario. The reasons to not carry out focus group discussion are explained later in another section.

## **Recruitment**

After the ethics application was approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC), letters explaining details of the research and requesting access to the selected kindergartens and their policies were sent to the AKA (Appendix 2), the organisation that oversees the operation of all public kindergartens in Auckland. With the consent granted by the AKA, I approached many public kindergartens in the Auckland suburbs where there is a high density of Chinese immigrant families to begin the recruitment process. Information letters (Appendix 3 & 4) and consent forms (Appendix 5 & 6), for both the kindergarten teachers and participants were emailed to each kindergarten for the head teacher to consider participation. Only a few kindergartens felt they had a large enough pool of Chinese families to participate in this research.

A date was selected by the head teacher of each kindergarten for me to be introduced to the Chinese families during drop-off/pick-up times. Having the kindergarten teachers to introduce the researcher was intended to support the

participants to feel more comfortable and secure in being approached. This is because some Chinese are rather reserved and since some participants were still 'new' to the country, it was thought that they might feel unsafe being approached by a stranger, the researcher. This discomfort might in turn lead them to feel reluctant to consider participating in this study.

After being introduced by the teachers, I verbally explained the study to each possible participant in their native spoken language, Mandarin or Cantonese, and gave each of them the information letter (Appendix 4 & 7) and consent form (Appendix 6 & 8), written in both English and Chinese, to take away to consider whether to participate. Communicating with each of them in their home language meant they could ask questions regarding the study and my background.

It was my intention not to rely on the teachers to help me recruit participants because ethically, this would be an unfair burden on them. Most importantly, I did not want potential participants to perceive that participation was expected, required or doing the teachers a favour. When Chinese participants see participation as "looking at someone's face" (Liu, 2009, p. 230), which means doing a respected person a favour, they do not genuinely want to participate, and give vague and brief responses. As an example, I explained the study to a grandmother who seemed to be interested and told me she would ask her daughter to participate. The responses provided by her daughter during the first interview were short and shallow, and required a lot of prompting. The responses at the follow-up interview were more detailed and thoughtful only after our relationship was established. Relationship is vital to getting genuine and meaningful responses from PRC participants (Liu, 2009).

While most PRC parents I approached at the kindergartens provided me with their contact details and agreed to consider participation, some declined the invitations straight away. I rang each of the families who agreed to consider after a few weeks to finalise the recruitment. Not all agreed to participate after consideration and discussion with their spouses, but most agreed. A total of eleven participants, spread across three kindergartens in Auckland suburbs were secured. Yet, as mentioned earlier, only the narratives of ten participants are included in this thesis because one participant took part in the first interview and then was no longer contactable. Since I was unable to 'authenticate' my interpretations of her narratives, a 'validity' process to be explained later, her responses were not included in this thesis.

One PRC parent was so keen to participate that she rang me to ask for the first interview before I had even started contacting the families to confirm their participation. Another participant who was originally from Hong Kong expressed her interest to be involved. She believed that she met the selection criteria because Hong Kong reunited with China since 1997. After consulting my research supervisors, she was included in the sample group. Hong Kong and the PRC share many commonalities in terms of parenting, learning and teaching practices, which are strongly shaped by notions of Confucianism (Chan, 2006; Lee, 1996; Li, 2004; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Woodrow & Sham, 2001; Yang, Zheng & Li, 2006).

## **Research process**

The research process of a qualitative inquiry approach is flexible and accommodates the unexpected happening (Bryman, 2004; Punch, 2001).

Within this study, individual and focus group interviews were originally proposed to collect the participants' stories, but the idea of focus group discussions was replaced with a second phase of individual interviews. This is because the final group of participants came from three kindergartens located in different Auckland suburbs, four participants from one kindergarten, and three from each of the remaining two kindergartens. Having only three participants in a focus group appeared to present a situation whereby the participants would be unable to benefit from the group dynamics which characterises this data collection instrument. Yet, requesting participants to travel to another suburb for a combined focus group discussion with a larger number of participants seemed inappropriate since some participants did not drive.

Most importantly, during the first phase of interviews, many participants indicated that while they were happy to tell me their personal experiences and perspectives in individual interviews, they preferred not to share their life stories, face-to-face, with a group of 'strangers' who they often bumped into at the kindergartens. Their identity would also be revealed, at least to those in the focus group interview; whereas individual interviews would allow them to share their stories in a confidential manner. In consultation with my research supervisors, focus group discussions were deemed to be unsuitable for this study, and two phases of individual interviews with various follow-up conversations were carried out instead.

### **Data collection: Ongoing documentary analysis**

Within this study, a process of ongoing documentary analysis (Fitzgerald, 2007) was undertaken before and during the two stages of individual interviews.

This involved reviewing and analysing publicly available documents and policies, such as *Te Whāriki*, the ERO report for each kindergarten and other national ERO reports that are relevant to the topic of this study. The list of reports examined is described in the upcoming documentary review chapter. Various themes emerged from the documents (Bryman, 2004), and they contributed towards identifying and analysing the dominant discourses of New Zealand ECE, as well as institutional collective aspirations for children and future citizens.

Textual analysis highlights sociocultural and discursive practices of the research context. It explores how institutions, such as the MoE and ERO support and privilege certain practices, and whether they aspire to counter hegemonic discourses (Locke, 2004). When certain discourses are repeatedly promoted and endorsed in a collection of official texts published by influential ‘authorities’, the unfamiliar ‘facts’ become familiar taken-for-granted knowledge, naturalising and privileging certain discursive practices that dominate (Woodside-Jiron, 2004).

Dominant discourses normalise practices and they often, sometimes unintentionally, marginalise and exclude those who refuse to conform (Hall, 2007; Locke, 2004). Rather than simply accepting the institutional ‘facts’ presented and promoted in a range of relevant official documents, this study borrowed strategies from critical discourse analysis to problematise the explicit, sometimes implicit, dominant discourses embedded in these texts, and to highlight power relations amongst the different discourses (Locke, 2004; Woodside-Jiron, 2004). The approach of critical discourse analysis is further

utilised to interpret narrative data, and this is explained in the upcoming data interpretation section.

Themes such as the importance of play and parental involvement in ECE, which emerged from the initial review of literature and publicly available documents, were used to inform the development of interview questions. After the participants were selected and the participating kindergartens finalised, I requested permission from the kindergarten head teachers for access to their kindergarten's philosophy, policies and other documents related to parental involvement and families with diverse language and cultural backgrounds. Together with the ERO reports of the three participating kindergartens and information available on the AKA official website, such as its philosophy and policies, these documents provided me with a clearer contextual understanding of the research settings. Having this understanding prior to conducting the interviews enriched the open-ended discussion during interviewing.

The NVivo qualitative software analysis programme was utilised to organise findings collected from the documents. Application of this programme is described and explained under the subsection of data interpretation. This is because findings from the reviewed documents, more importantly, were integrated into the discussion chapters to cross-check and analyse narrative data collected from the participants. For example, whereas the ERO reports of the participating kindergartens indicate that teachers had made great effort to enhance children's literacy skills, most participants felt that the kindergarten teachers could have done a lot more to improve their children's English linguistic ability.

The goal of utilising documentary analysis in a research project is not to “triangulate for the ‘truth’ of interview or ethnographic data, but rather [to serve] as additional data sources” (Clarke, 2005, p. 152). In this study, most of the findings from the reviewed documents were neither aligned nor in agreement with the narratives collected from interviews. Therefore, overall they did not confirm validity; instead they revealed dissensus of findings collected from both methods of data collection. Dissensus of findings are highlighted in the discussion and conclusion chapters.

### **Data collection: Individual interviews**

Life story interviews are one kind of narrative inquiry methodologies (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Plummer, 2001), and they should be natural, flexible and contextualized to accommodate the differing personal needs of respondents (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Cortazzi, 2001). Additionally, interview questions should be as open-ended as possible to encourage in-depth and reflexive responses, Hence, semi-structured interviews guided by an interview schedule with open-ended questions was the approach used in this study.

The participants had a great deal of freedom to discuss the topics and to decide how to reply. This is particularly important in life story interviews in which the storytellers should decide how and what to tell about their stories (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Bryman, 2004; Miller, 2000; Plummer, 2001). Spontaneous questions which respond to unexpected answers from participants can emerge in the course of interviews (Bryman, 2004). According to Liu (2009), Chinese research participants are likely to believe that they are not worthy of being ‘interviewed’. In order to minimise the feeling of being ‘interviewed’ and



'questioned', sometimes the meanings of events and experiences were reciprocally discussed and my personal experiences were shared to transform the interviews into causal conversations.

This study applied a three-step approach to life story interviews: pre-interview, interviewing, post-interview (Atkinson, 2004, 2007). The pre-interview stage involves planning for the interviews, interviewing involves guiding the interviewee through story sharing and recording the stories, and post-interview involves a process during which interview notes and data are transcribed and interpreted. The interview questions were trialled with some of my friends who are immigrants to see how they would be interpreted and to gauge the approximate time required for each interview. As a result, some questions were revised to ensure that they were able to be interpreted in the most straightforward manner. A few questions were also eliminated so that the interviews would take approximately two hours, as suggested in the information sheet for parent participants.

The interview schedules, written in both English (Appendix 9) and Chinese (Appendix 10), were given to each participant, together with the information letter and consent form when we first met, prior to the participants agreeing to participate. This was to ensure that the participants were well aware of the questions before consenting to be interviewed. With the approval of the kindergarten teachers and AKA, the participants were invited to engage in individual interviews at the kindergarten where their child attended, an environment that they were familiar with. Some participants were particularly welcoming and invited me to have the interviews at their homes.

Sharing similar linguistic background with the participants was an asset for me as the researcher in this study. All interviews were conducted in either Mandarin or Cantonese, depending on the spoken language each participant preferred. Seven participants chose to be interviewed in Mandarin while three opted for Cantonese, and quite often, the participants also integrated English in their responses. During the interviews, responses were recorded using a digital recording device, with the permission of the participants. Notes were also taken after the device was switched off when useful data was further supplied by the participants. Within this study, the participants were officially interviewed twice, with interim follow-up communication. In general, most of the interviewees were generous in sharing their stories and very capable of articulating detailed responses. Their opinions were often justified, and illustrated with examples and evidence.

Interviews were translated and transcribed. The consent form indicated to the participants that the transcribed stories, written in their preferred language, would be made available to them, but some of them did not request a copy. For those who requested, a copy of the transcription was given to them. They were encouraged to contact me if they had concerns after reading the transcripts. Three of the participants requested an English transcription, probably because they had tertiary education in New Zealand. Whenever I was unsure about my interpretations of the participants' responses, I sought clarification during and after the interviews.

Due to the flexible nature of a qualitative inquiry (Bryman, 2004), the questions for the second phase of interviews were developed after initial analysis of data gathered in the first phase of interviews. Before each of the

second interviews, I re-visited both the transcription and the audio-recording of the first interview to ensure I asked the most relevant questions and sought for clarification for certain responses. Hence, although a standard second phase interview schedule written in English (Appendix 11) and Chinese (Appendix 12) was provided to the participants, the questions asked at the second interviews differed slightly for each participant, depending on the responses each participant gave at the first interview.

As such, the second phase interviews allowed authentication of findings and transcripts by the participants, and statements like “Last time you told me ...”, “I would like to know this time...”, and “Did you mean...?” were often used. The participants were surprised at how I remembered so much of their stories and told me they felt respected. This unanticipated outcome further enhanced our relationships. These follow-up interviews provided further opportunities for the participants to clarify, to go more deeply into their explanations, and to share more of their stories when my relationships with them were stronger. Cross-checking findings using follow-up interviews highlighted (in)consistencies within responses from the participants. Due to the importance of the second interview, it was decided not to include the responses from one participant who took part in only the first interview, as mentioned earlier.

Liu (2009) highlights the importance of a trusting and reliable relationship between interviewer and interviewee in collecting meaningful and genuine life stories from PRC research participants. She believes that due to the sensitivity of certain topics, there are always issues that interviewees feel reluctant to discuss (Liu, 2009). I noticed particularly short responses were given when I asked about their opinions of the teachers’ practices. To indicate their

reluctance to engage in the topic, some participants occasionally gave brief and vague responses, such as 还好吧/hai hao ba (not bad) and 还可以吧/hai ke yi ba (okay), and implicit messages, such as by using their body language, providing a long pause, or remaining silent. Whilst these responses were respected, I later asked for clarification in the follow-up interviews to confirm my interpretations, when our relationships were strengthened.

Although all the interviews were audio-digitally recorded, not all responses can be captured in the recording. Each interviewee's non-verbal messages can be as important as verbal messages within a two-party communication that is shaped by interview discourse. The cultural norms of turn-taking during the interviews, lexical choice and body language (gestures and facial expressions) of the narrator, and the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee are all part of the interview narratives (Harrison, 2009). Performance factors such as the intonation and pitch applied by the narrator for emphasis are also an important part of the story (Cortazzi, 2001; Cortazzi & Jin, 2006).

On the whole, applying contextual knowledge to deciphering the cultural meanings of the narrator's responses is important to understanding the intended meaning of life stories (Gregory & Ruby, 2011; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012). Since I shared, to a certain extent, a similar cultural background with the participants, contextual knowledge of their experiences was often readily available during the process of data collection and analysis. The next subsection describes the process of data interpretation, with a focus on narrative and critical discourse analysis.

## **Data interpretation: Narrative and critical discourse analysis**

The approaches of narrative and critical discourse analysis were used in this study to interpret the stories collected from the participants. Describing, interpreting and constructing meaning are all heavily shaped by discourses (Locke, 2004). The participants' interpretation and description of their stories were also likely to be influenced by discourses, and hence, their narratives were analysed against the discourses that emerged in the literature and documents reviewed, as well as the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis.

Discourse analysis can be applied to a range of research methodologies and instruments, including analysis of narratives and texts (Bryman, 2004; Clarke, 2005; Locke, 2004). As this study was underpinned by critical multiculturalism that involved scrutinising power relations operating within and between different sociocultural beliefs and practices, critical discourse analysis, instead of discourse analysis, was employed to highlight the power imbalance between certain sociocultural discourses. The aim of critical discourse analysis is:

not to reveal some sinister and manipulative hand aiming to impose power over others, but to provide opportunities for critical detachment and review of the ways in which discourses act to pervade and construct our textual and social practices in a range of contexts. (Locke, 2004, p. 89)

A discourse is a way of being, doing and representing (Hall, 2004; Locke, 2004). Whilst discourses are socially constructed, they also construct knowledge and arrange the social order (Clarke, 2005). Dominant and powerful discourses are ranked higher, socially privileged, stabilised and naturalised, and

thus construct taken-for-granted and 'common-sense' knowledge (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Bryman, 2004; Clarke, 2005; Locke, 2004). "Subscribers of non-powerful discourses are therefore marginalised and relatively disempowered" (Locke, 2004, p. 37). It is the role of critical discourse analysts to destabilise and denaturalise these 'common-senses' (Clarke, 2005; Locke, 2004; Woodside-Jiron, 2004).

Educational practices, the socialisation of children and teachers' expectations are highly shaped, reinforced and sustained by the social and educational discourses embedded in the curriculum and other institutional documents. Critical textual and discourse analysis can be used in education research to reveal power imbalance of discourses within the education system, to critique unequal power relations particularly between familial and institutional discourses, to reconstruct and renegotiate social relationships, and to transform institutional discursive practices (Clarke, 2005; Locke, 2004; Rogers, 2004; Woodside-Jiron, 2004).

Findings collected from individual interviews and reviews of the documents were organised using the coding system in the NVivo software programme. The transcripts and documents were imported into the programme, and the themes emerging were coded as nodes and sub-nodes in which relevant quotes from each document and transcript were arranged. Finally, narrative and textual findings were critically analysed in light of the discourses identified, to examine how PRC immigrant parents' participation in New Zealand ECE was influenced by discourses that might not be evident to teachers.

Quotes from narratives and documents were drawn upon and integrated within the data discussion chapters. “Keeping the story in the words and voice of the one telling it” (Atkinson, 2007, p. 233) is crucial to life story research. Except for the English words or phrases that were used by the participants during the interviews, the quotes of narratives appearing in this thesis are the result of a translation process. In order to maintain the authenticity of the participants’ voices and to avoid the ‘lost-in-translation’ syndrome, some Chinese words used by the participants have to be retained because they have no direct English equivalents. These Chinese words are explained in English instead.

Critical discourse analysis of the language and other linguistic expressions can also be applied to dissect the implicit underlying meanings in narratives (Bryman, 2004; Clarke, 2005; Gee, 2004; Locke, 2004). As explained earlier, researchers need to pay attention to participants’ multi-layered voices, non-verbal messages, utterances and performance factors during life story interviews (Cortazzi, 2001; Cortazzi & Jin, 2006; Erel, 2009; Harrison, 2009). For example in this study, while “I” was used by the participants to describe personal experiences and perspectives, the use of “we” indicated they were speaking for and thus representing all Chinese immigrants, and “they” was used by the participants to signify all those who were different.

Interpretations of narratives, implicit responses in particular, were cross-checked with the participants and adjustments were made accordingly. To ensure that I captured the intended meaning of the narratives, questions like: “Are you saying...?” and “Do you mean...?” were used often during the interviews. Furthermore, as previously explained, the cross-checking was

mainly carried out in the follow-up interviews, providing a means of respondent validation, a process whereby the researcher validates an account of his or her findings with the respondent (Bryman, 2004). As research findings are the result of subjective interpretations of the researcher, a high level of reflexivity is required to ensure that the researcher's influences towards the findings are recognised.

## **Reflexivity and the role of the researcher**

Reflexivity is a key component in narrative research (Gregory & Ruby, 2011; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Suárez-Ortega, 2013). It involves the researcher's reflection upon one's position in the research, and an acknowledgement of involvement in all aspects of it. During the course of this inquiry, I constantly evaluated aspects of the research process, kept a record of concerns and discussed them with my research supervisors, mainly via emails and supervision meetings. Moreover, since I am an ECE teacher-educator, I have had many opportunities to engage in critical discussions with my colleagues regarding aspects of my study. These ongoing reflections and discussions have contributed towards a high level of reflexivity in this study.

Since the researcher is strongly implicated in the collection, analysis and theorising of data, the role of the researcher should be part of the data to be analysed as well (Harrison, 2009; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Rogers, 2004). Narrative researchers need to reflect upon their identities, motives and cultural expectations in conducting the interviews and in interpreting the interview transcripts as they hear stories during interviews and rehear them afterwards in recordings (Cortazzi, 2001; Cortazzi & Jin, 2006; Plummer, 2001). The whole



research process is highly subjective, subjective organisation and implementation of data collection and subjective interpretation of data (Atkinson, 2007; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Life story researchers need to be self-conscious (Plummer, 2001), and be aware that they are also narrators during the research process (Elliott, 2005). The researchers' values, bias, assumptions and intents brought to the study need to be acknowledged and recognised (Bryman, 2004; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Pring, 2000; Rogers, 2004; Scott & Usher, 1999; Wolcott, 2005). My Chinese identity and experience of being an immigrant, and my role as a New Zealand ECE teacher-educator were significantly implicated in this study. The decision to report and highlight certain findings, but not others, reflects the researcher's beliefs and values that are shaped and informed by discourses (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Dahlberg, Drew, & Nyström, 2001).

Since it is important for the researcher to critically reflect upon and interpret the range of possible interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000), ongoing clarifications of my interpretations were sought from the participants in this study. Sometimes during the interviews, when the participants gave responses without rationalisation, I prompted them with possibilities, such as "could it be because ...?", intending to help them make sense of their feelings as well as to seek clarifications from them. The issue of power is central in research (Scott & Usher, 1999), and the researcher should reflect frequently on how the researcher-participant relationship may impact on data validity (Harrison, 2009). Life story research emphasises collaboration between the interviewer and storyteller in their co-construction of the meanings of stories, and it is important

for the researcher to ensure that the participants feel confident to choose what and how to share, and to give meanings to their own stories.

Research shows that Chinese participants tend to give broad and superficial answers, and only express their real feelings and thoughts to insiders who share something similar with them (Liu, 2009). Trusting relationships with participants are vital for researchers to be considered as insiders and to collect in-depth meaningful data (Gregory & Ruby, 2011). As such, much effort was made from the start of this study to build trust and confidence between myself and the participants, so I could be regarded as an insider to promote open communication which is paramount to eliciting genuine and in-depth responses from the participants. For example, I was responsive and respectful in organising and conducting the interviews to suit the individual needs of participants. Additionally, after the first phase of interviews, I made use of the Christmas occasion to deliver a box of chocolates and a Christmas card to each participant to show my appreciation and to 'remind' them that I might need to talk to them again (that is follow-up interviews) in the new year. I also shared with the participants many of my personal experiences of migration and childrearing in order to identify some commonalities with them and to be perceived as an insider.

While I shared, to a certain degree, the same identity with the participants, we were also different on many levels, due to our dissimilar education and social backgrounds. Consequently, I am both an insider and outsider in this study. For example, during the interviews, the participants often recognised my insider identity and treated me as one of them by giving me implicit responses, assuming that I was capable of understanding their views and feelings without

explicit explanations, to which I had to awkwardly ask for clarifications. Yet, at times, the participants withdrew their inclusivity. I was particularly considered as an outsider when they talked about practices and policies in China because of my Hong Kong background, or when they highlighted my advantageous social status in New Zealand due to my English ability and occupation. My insider/outsider role was fluid.

## **Ethical considerations**

Comprehensive details regarding the intent and process of this research were provided in the application submitted to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) and to the AKA, and their approvals were received before I started approaching possible kindergartens and participants. Key ethical practices, such as respect, honesty, truthfulness, trustworthiness, and confidentiality were maintained.

Life story research invades the personal privacy of the storyteller (Miller, 2000) and brings personal stories to the public audiences, and this intent should be made clear to the participants at the outset of the study. The aim of this study and the possible consequences of participation were explained to the participants before they were invited to consent to be involved. The information letter and consent forms were written in both English and Chinese to ensure that the participants understood what they were signing themselves into. Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw were emphasised. Participants were assured that their identity would not be recognisable and would be protected by using pseudonyms to replace their names as well as that of the kindergartens they were recruited from.

The interviews were conducted in a relaxing and conversational manner, and the participants were not under any pressure to respond. Meanings of narratives were cross-checked with the participants in follow-up interviews and communication, to ensure that the interpretations reflected their voices. However, at the follow-up interviews, most participants were explicit that they did not feel the need to check and 'approve' my interpretations of their narratives and they were happy for me to use their narratives as needed, as long as their identities were not revealed. To ensure authenticity and trustworthiness of narrative findings, Atkinson (2004) advises researchers to check the consistency of events but emphasises that people can interpret the same event differently from time to time, and that the truthfulness of stories as interpreted by the participants need not be challenged.

Finally, the notion of "an ethics of care" that involves demonstrating "attentiveness, responsiveness, and responsibility" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 123) was adopted during the research process. For example, being introduced to the participants via the kindergarten teachers and conducting the interviews at the kindergartens positively impacted on their sense of safety to participate. I also picked up each participant from the kindergarten for the interview, if it was to be conducted out of the kindergarten. I listened to their stories attentively and expressed empathy and understanding on many occasions when they talked about their struggles and frustrations. Furthermore, some participants might have considered myself as 'the expert' in education and chose to ring me and ask for my advice regarding their children's education issues, such as the quality of different ECE services, primary and secondary schools, sometimes long after the interviews were completed. I shared my knowledge and

experience in these areas with them and offered as much information as was possible and professionally ethical.

## **(De)limitations, ‘disclaimers’ and validity**

Delimitation is a term used by Harry Wolcott (2009, p. 34) as “a broad disclaimer” to “acknowledge the limitations” of the study. The messiness of the narrative approach and its situatedness within complex socio-cultural, historical and political contexts need to be acknowledged (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). This study is context dependent, and “it occurred in a particular place, at a particular time, under particular circumstances” (Wolcott, 2009, p. 34).

When analysing the factors that impact on PRC immigrant parents’ involvement in their children’s early years learning in New Zealand, a holistic approach was adopted in which social and cultural factors, including the participants’ age, gender, education background, and social and economic status, were all considered. A key limitation of this study is the lack of the fathers’ voices. Nonetheless, their voices were often embedded in the narratives of the female participants when they shared the perspectives of their husbands. The stories collected reflect the personal experiences of a small sample of participants. Consequently, findings of this study can neither be generalised nor transferred to other research settings, and this can be considered as its main limitation. This does not, however, preclude the possibility that the theorised findings contribute towards additional understanding of this topic and have wider relevance to teachers and teacher-educators. When the researcher is open and sensitive in viewing new perspectives, knowledge and phenomena of the social world under

investigation, high quality data collected from life story inquiry can generate new understandings (Dahlberg et al, 2001). Life story data in this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of a particular group of parents in New Zealand ECE, and the contexts that shape these experiences.

To ensure the integrity of life story narratives, honest and trusting relationships between the researcher and the participants are required. Yet developing trusting relationships with a researcher who the participants hardly knew was difficult, and expecting the participants to share honest and in-depth personal stories with me when we just met was even harder. In order to develop some level of trust so that the participants would be more willing to share their stories, I engaged with them in many casual conversations outside the 'official' interviews. Other relationship-building strategies have been described throughout this chapter.

It is easy to compromise the integrity of narratives during the multi-layered research process (Cortazzi, 2001). A 'true' and detailed story relies on the accurate memory of the storyteller (Plummer, 2001; Wolcott, 2010), but what is told by the storyteller may not really be what he/she thinks or believes, or sometimes the storyteller simply does not have an opinion (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). The storyteller may also provide stories that are untrue to satisfy the interviewer or to bring an end to the interview (Cortazzi, 2001).

As an example, while PRC immigrant parents expressed how they felt that they were not needed in the kindergartens, I knew (from my knowledge and experience) that most public kindergartens have a policy that encourages parents to be involved as parent-helpers. The accuracy or truthfulness of the

participants' narratives, however, was not challenged; instead the discrepancy between the teachers' espoused values and actual practices, and the 'true' experiences of participants were highlighted. It is also possible that some participants did not want to be perceived as not supportive of teachers and not meeting the requirement of the kindergartens, and they used cultural and language barriers to rationalise their non-involvement in ECE centres. This does not, however, exclude other unmentioned possibilities, such as the need to work long hours and therefore a practical inability to be involved.

Subjectivity is also a key limitation of this study. The whole research process was subjective. Not only was the interpretation of what was said by the participants subjective, what was not said was also subjectively 'imagined'. Quite often, what was not said was more telling. For example, none of the participants mentioned the quality of kindergartens as the reason for choosing this specific ECE service and no participants articulated the benefits of play even though they often cited the phrase, 'free play'. The researcher was left to 'imagine' the significance and implications of these omissions. My voice is highly implicated within the selection and presentation of the participants' voices. Separating the two voices has not been always possible.

The stories were received by the researcher whose knowledge of the original events is limited. My notes and records relied strongly on the information provided by the storytellers, and my personal subjective interpretation inevitably applied when I transcribed and interpreted what they provided. Employing critical discourse analysis to data interpretation has its own limitations. This study might not have included all the relevant domains of discourses due to its limited parameter. The translation process in this study, using English as a

medium to present interpretations narrated in Mandarin and/or Cantonese, added another layer of (the researcher's) interpretations to the final findings in this thesis. Further, certain discourses had to be presented in Chinese and interpreted using Chinese epistemologies, such as Confucianism. It is acknowledged that this may present some inconvenience for the readers who lack Chinese linguistic and cultural understandings.

Although the validity of findings from life story research cannot be assessed or measured using the mainstream scientific process (Harrison, 2009; Wolcott, 2005), a considerable effort has been made in this study to report the findings as accurately and completely as possible. Internal (in)consistency of stories was evaluated against responses collected at different phases of interviews, as well as external events that include findings from the documents reviewed. Motives, intents and beliefs of the participants and researcher, and the conditions and relationships that produced these narratives were considered and acknowledged. My frequent reflection, reflexivity and self-awareness were pivotal to ensuring the 'validity' of this study. Nonetheless, researchers may not be completely self-aware at all times and the limits of self-awareness may not necessarily be fully recognised and acknowledged (Dahlberg et al, 2001).

Finally, the integrity of a study is more likely to be compromised when the researcher is an outsider of the participants' community (Cortazzi & Jin, 2006). Although I considered that I was very much an insider-researcher in this study, I was still occasionally an outsider. Stories narrated might have been wrongly perceived with my outsider lens. It is also likely that another level of meaning may be lost as the stories are read by the readers.



## Conclusion

A qualitative, narrative life story methodological approach was used in this inquiry to explore the experiences of ten Chinese immigrant parents in the New Zealand ECE landscape. Individual interviews were conducted to elicit personal life stories and those of their community. An ongoing process of documentary analysis identified the dominant New Zealand ECE discourses and provided an additional source of data to this study. The data interpretation process involved the application of critical discourse analysis to highlight how certain cultural discourses were privileged and others marginalised within New Zealand ECE. Stories were also interpreted against findings from previous research, and documentary and theoretical analysis.

The participants were given a voice in co-constructing the meanings of their stories with the researcher. Meanings were subjective, value-laden and contextualised which reflected the intents, motives, values and beliefs of both the participants and researcher. As the researcher, I played a strong role in this inquiry, particularly due to the similar identity, cultural and language backgrounds that I shared with the participants. Lastly, a high level of reflexivity was applied throughout this research to highlight self-awareness and to ensure findings are ethical, authentic and trustworthy.

# Findings and Discussion

## 5. Documentary Review

### Introduction

The use of a documentary analysis (Fitzgerald, 2007) in this study provides important contextual understanding of the research setting that is under investigation, the ECE sector in New Zealand, and an additional source of data. The process of reviewing and analysing documents was ongoing throughout the duration of this study. Key themes emerging from the initial literature review gave direction and set parameters for the range of documents to be examined, and as the data collection progressed, further specific documents related to the participating kindergartens were included. The complete list of documents reviewed and analysed is provided at the end of this chapter. Collectively, they reflect the institutionally espoused ECE values and practices in New Zealand. As this study evolved, new themes emerged and were added to this review.

The theoretical framework and methodology chapters have explained how critical multiculturalism and critical discourse analysis have been applied in this study to highlight the imbalance of power between different socio-cultural discourses. Discourses promoted and endorsed by the MoE and ERO in official documents have become dominant practices of New Zealand teachers. As teachers enact these practices or share their 'expert' knowledge with parents, these discourses further become the 'norm', thus also influencing parenting in

New Zealand. However, the Chinese immigrant parent participants who were not brought up in New Zealand might not be familiar with or may even disagree with these 'normative' discourses. Although the findings presented in this chapter may seem descriptive, they are further critically analysed against the narratives presented in the following discussion chapters, using critical discourse analysis to highlight the (in)consistency between textual and narrative data.

A range of New Zealand ECE discourses that are relevant to this study is identified and embedded within the key themes to be discussed in this chapter. They include institutional expectations and practices regarding parental involvement in children's ECE, cultural and linguistic diversity in ECE settings and children's learning. In terms of children's learning, institutional practices in the areas of exploration and play, literacy, assessment via portfolio documentation and readiness for transition to schools are examined. The philosophies and policies of the three participating kindergartens and the AKA, which is the umbrella organisation of all public kindergartens in Auckland are also reviewed in this study. In order to protect the identity of the participating kindergartens, not only are pseudonyms used in this thesis, but the internet link that provides access to each kindergarten's ERO evaluation report is only partial. It is acknowledged that ERO reviews and reports are only a snapshot of ECE services. Interpretations reported by ERO may not reflect in entirety the curriculum and pedagogy of each service.

## **A brief context of New Zealand ECE and *Te Whāriki***

Since a detailed contextual background of this study has already been described in the literature review chapter, only a brief revisiting of the contexts of New Zealand ECE and its national curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, is provided here. As explained in the literature review chapter, there is a range of ECE services in New Zealand, and all ECE centres must comply with the regulations legislated by the government. One such mandatory requirement is the compulsory implementation of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), so all ECE centres have to integrate and apply it in practice. However, the learning outcomes stated in *Te Whāriki* are broad and “indicative rather than definitive. Each early childhood education setting will develop its own emphases and priorities” (MoE, 1996, p. 44). As a result, the learning outcomes in *Te Whāriki* may reflect the espoused values of the curriculum, but each ECE centre has much freedom and flexibility in deciding how these indicative learning outcomes are met.

ERO has recently evaluated the implementation of *Te Whāriki* in 627 ECE centres (ERO, 2013a), and its report states that only ten per cent of the centres “were working in-depth with *Te Whāriki*” (ERO, 2013a, p.1). The report highlights concern regarding *Te Whāriki* being a “non-prescriptive curriculum” that relies on professional knowledge to realise the intent of the curriculum. It further states that the flexibility and broad nature of *Te Whāriki* accommodates “a wide range of practice, including poor quality practice” (ERO, 2013a, p. 2) and allows ECE teachers to “affirm and justify current practice” (ERO, 2013a, p. 17), and to become complacent and reluctant to transform practice. More

importantly, the report questions whether *Te Whāriki*, which has been used since 1996, is due for a review or revision (ERO, 2013a).

*Te Whāriki* is underpinned by a combination of stage/age developmental theories (Piaget and Erikson) and sociocultural theories (Vygotsky and Bruner), reflecting its emphasis on “the whole child and a developmental context, and with learning in a social and cultural context” (Carr & May, 1996, p. 104). The principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* provide guidelines for teaching practices and set indicators for self-review (ERO, 2013b) and external evaluations by, for example, the ERO, which reports on its reviews of schools and ECE services. ERO noted that some ECE centres implement *Te Whāriki* selectively, with certain principles such as Family and Community and Relationships, and strands such as Wellbeing and Belonging being referred to most often; whereas there was a “distinct absence” of other principles, such as Empowerment and Holistic Development (ERO, 2013a, p. 10).

Certain discourses promoted in *Te Whāriki* appear frequently in documents published by the MoE and the ERO, and are particularly relevant to the topic of this study. They include exploration and play, cultural diversity, and parental and community involvement. The application of these broad notions in practice are further analysed and problematised in the discussion chapters. The following section examines how parental involvement is promoted in a range of documents.

## **Parental involvement**

The notions of ‘parental involvement’ and ‘parent-teacher partnership’ are emphasised in a range of influential political documents, such as the *Revised*

*Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs)* (The New Zealand Gazette, 1996), *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), *Quality in Action* (MoE, 1998), *Pathways to the Future: A 10-Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* (MoE, 2002), *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008* (New Zealand Government, 2009) and the *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008* (MoE, 2008). The important role of these macro documents in New Zealand ECE have been examined in Chapter Two. These notions are further embraced by many recent New Zealand institutional documents (Children’s Commissioner, 2013; ECE Taskforce, 2011; ERO, 2004, 2006, 2011a, 2013b).

Family and Community is one of the principles of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996). According to ERO, for those ECE centres that implement *Te Whāriki* selectively, this principle is often “highlighted in documentation, such as planning or assessment records” (ERO, 2013a, p. 10). This principle emphasises the importance of parental participation and the interdependence of teachers, families and local communities. It states that “families should be part of the assessment and evaluation of the curriculum as well as of children’s learning and development” (MoE, 1996, p. 30), and all families “should feel that they belong and are able to participate in the early childhood programme and in decision making” (MoE, 1996, p. 54).

An independent advisory taskforce which comprised ten members was established by the Minister of Education in 2010 to report on “the future of early childhood education in New Zealand” (ECE Taskforce, 2011, p.7), and its final report, *An Agenda for Amazing Children*, includes an entire essay on supporting parents through ECE and the importance of parental involvement and teacher-

parent connection in children's education. The Children's Commissioner of New Zealand (2013) has also written a working paper, *Parents', Families' and Whānau Contributions to Educational Success*, to highlight the importance of parental involvement in children's education. Both reports state that it is important for ECE services to understand, support and meet the needs of families; they also advocate for partnership between ECE services and families, and emphasise that parents should be empowered and their strengths valued and celebrated (Children's Commissioner, 2013; ECE Taskforce, 2011).

The Taskforce report emphasises that establishing effective parent support "does not mean telling parents how to parent" (ECE Taskforce, 2011, p. 115). A trusting relationship between parents and teachers helps to turn an ECE service into a "community hub where parents, whānau and children feel that you count, that you belong, that people notice you, that you notice them" (ECE Taskforce, 2011, p. 115). Creating a sense of belonging for children and families enrolled in the centre is a vital goal for ECE centres (MoE, 1996, 2007b). Finally, the document, *Partnership with Whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services*, promotes recognising "identity, language and culture" when forming a "culturally responsive partnership" with Māori families (ERO, 2012, p. 1), and these ideas are applicable to working collaboratively with families from other cultural backgrounds.

### **Issues of parental (dis)engagement**

The philosophy commitment of the AKA states that it values "ongoing partnerships between families/whānau, teaching teams and management" (AKA, 2007b), and parent-teacher partnership is an espoused value in the

philosophy document of each of the three kindergartens involved in this study. Yet, according to the ERO report of the AKA, “some kindergartens have yet to implement successful strategies to involve families in their children's early childhood education”, particularly by contributing to the “planning and assessment of children’s learning and development” (ERO, 2006, p. 8). This report also acknowledges the key role of parent committees in fund-raising activities and highlights the increasing difficulty for kindergartens to recruit parent committee members (ERO, 2006). ERO further encourages teachers to have “formal meetings and interviews about children’s learning and development ... include parent and whānau aspirations, expectations and perspectives in the programme, particularly in planning and assessment processes” (ERO, 2011a, pp.13-14).

The enactment of partnership with parents and inclusivity of families receives favourable comments in the ERO reports of the three kindergartens involved in this study. Examples of this include: parents from Elephant Kindergarten made valuable contributions to children’s assessment via the portfolios (ERO, 2011c, p. 4); Lion Kindergarten encourages active community involvement and successfully helps parents to develop a sense of belonging in the centre (ERO, 2010a); and Monkey Kindergarten supports families to network with other community members (ERO, 2010b).

## **Catering for cultural diversity**

While the word ‘culture’ has many meanings across contexts, within this study, it refers to the varied beliefs and practices of families with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. *Te Whāriki* recognises the increasing cultural



diversity of New Zealand and acknowledges that “different cultures have different child-rearing patterns, beliefs, and traditions and may place value on different knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (MoE, 1996, p. 42). It promotes culturally “sensitive and responsive” pedagogies to communicate with and include all families (MoE, 1996, p. 18), and a few strategies are suggested, such as encouraging “care practices which are culturally appropriate in relation to feeding, sleeping, toileting, clothing, and washing” and “each child’s culture is included in the programme through song, language, pictures, playthings, and dance” (MoE, 1996, p. 67). These broad strategies are open to differing interpretations and allow each ECE centre to decide upon specific practical implementations that are contextually relevant.

When positioning *Te Whāriki* alongside the five dimensions of multicultural education suggested by Banks (2010) that are discussed in Chapter Three, it reveals that they share many similarities. Firstly, in terms of “content integration” (Banks, 2010, p. 23), the “communication” strand of *Te Whāriki* states that children “experience stories and symbols of their own and other cultures” (MoE, 1996, p. 72). Secondly, in relation to “prejudice reduction” (Banks, 2010, p. 23), *Te Whāriki* requires teachers to engage in pedagogies that work towards “countering racism and other forms of prejudice” (MoE, 1996, p. 18). Thirdly, when it comes to “equity pedagogy” (Banks, 2010, p. 23), the notion of equitable learning opportunity is mentioned frequently within *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996). Finally, ‘empowerment’ is one of the principles of *Te Whāriki* which aligns clearly with Banks’ last dimension, “empowering school culture” (Banks, 2010, p. 23). At face value, it seems that the aspirations of *Te Whāriki* and of Banks (2010) are aligned. Nonetheless, the strands and principles of *Te Whāriki*

are only the espoused values and expectations of the curriculum. They are not necessarily enacted by all teachers in the same manner due to the non-prescriptive nature of the curriculum.

An intention to cater for diversity is demonstrated at the macro level by the MoE and ERO. For example, supporting children to develop “an understanding, and respect for other cultures” is one of the curriculum standards prescribed in the *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008* (MoE, 2008), and recognising and responding to cultural diversity is considered by ERO to be one of the indicators of high quality provision of services (ERO, 2010c). In addition, “responding to the interests, strengths and capabilities of diverse groups of children who attend the service and supporting them to achieve success” (ERO, 2013b, p. 26, 29, 32, 36) is one of the “priority questions” throughout *He Pou Tātaki: How ERO Reviews Early Childhood Services*, which guides ERO evaluators and ECE services assessing the effectiveness of a service’s different aspects.

Catering for diversity is also emphasised in the *Positive Foundations for Learning: Confident and Competent Children in Early Childhood Services* (ERO, 2011a), and in the “Community” book (Book 5) of *Kei Tua o te Pae/ Assessment for Learning* (MoE, 2004b). A series of booklets with the collective title *Kei Tua o te Pae* provide explanations and exemplars to ECE teachers on how to engage in assessment of children’s learning and development using learning stories. ECE services are expected to “be more responsive to cultural diversity by acknowledging and valuing children’s language and culture” (ERO, 2011a, p. 14) and assessments should “document literacies and ongoing relationships with people from a diversity of cultures in the community” (MoE, 2004b, p. 6).

In 2004, ERO completed a report, *Catering for Diversity in Early Childhood Services*, which evaluated how ECE services catered for the diversity of cultures, languages, families, children's interests, abilities and special needs. The evaluation was based on a random selection of ERO reports of 100 ECE centres. While the report states that only a small number of the centres need to improve communication with parents and communities, in terms of "responding to differing cultures of families within their service and community" (ERO, 2004, p. 9), almost half of the centres were not doing sufficiently well and should move beyond tokenistic practices of cultural inclusivity.

The importance of responding to cultural diversity is further highlighted in a range of official documents (ERO, 2010c, 2011a) and is identified as one of the main areas that require improvement (ERO, 2004, 2006; ECE Taskforce, 2011). ERO recognises that many ECE services invite parents to share "information about their family and child's interests at enrolment" and use this information to understand the child's family and cultural background, but it "found little evidence that educators used this information in planning or to reflect on children's learning" (ERO, 2007b, p. 20).

The AKA website states that their "kindergarten environments reflect the diversity of New Zealand society, and are inclusive of and support all children and their families. Cultural diversity is celebrated for its ability to enhance and enrich the learning environment" (AKA, 2007a). Cultural inclusiveness seems to be a key aspiration of the AKA. Its 2006 ERO report claims that kindergarten teachers work hard to support children and families with non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), but developing multicultural programmes and resources to be shared by kindergarten teachers are identified as key areas that warrant

improvement (ERO, 2006). It is, however, unclear what kind of multicultural programmes and resources ERO was expecting.

None of the latest ERO reports of the three kindergartens involved in this study identifies cultural diversity as an area for improvement, although the term 'diversity' appears in all of their philosophy statements. Both Monkey and Elephant Kindergarten received positive comments from ERO regarding their responsiveness to diverse cultures of children and families (ERO, 2010b, 2011c). Significant commendations are particularly given to the Monkey Kindergarten to acknowledge the outstanding performance of its multicultural teaching team in promoting cultural inclusiveness and engaging parents with diverse cultural backgrounds (ERO, 2010b). The documents provided by Elephant Kindergarten for this analysis include policies and parent notices that were translated into Chinese; yet this extra effort made by the teachers is not acknowledged in its ERO report (ERO, 2011c). Lion Kindergarten does not receive any comments or suggestions in the area of cultural diversity (ERO, 2010a). Finally, considering the multi-ethnic nature of these kindergartens, particularly the Elephant and Monkey Kindergarten (ERO, 2011c; ERO, 2010b), it is worth noting that none of their ERO reports commented on the ethnic make-up of their parent committees.

## **Catering for linguistic diversity & supporting NESB children to learn English**

Another domain that is relevant to the purpose of this thesis is the evaluation of language learning support for NESB children. Within its Communication strand, *Te Whāriki* states that children should “experience an environment

where they experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures” (MoE, 1996, p. 16) and that “the written language of the child’s culture is used as well as the English language” (MoE, 1996, p. 79). This strand is reflected in the AKA website which states children will experience “songs, games, rhymes and stories in their own and other languages of the world” (AKA, 2007c).

The importance of incorporating children’s home languages in ECE services, such as by encouraging parents and their children to speak their home languages in the centres and inviting parents to use home languages to contribute to children’s portfolios is emphasised in a range of documents (ECE Taskforce, 2011; ERO, 2011b; MoE, 1996, 2004a, 2004c). According to ERO, teachers in high quality services implement “inclusive” practice and “celebrate the bilingual abilities of children and families who speak other languages in addition to English” (ERO, 2010c, p. 12). Yet, ERO neither explains what “inclusive” practice entails nor how diverse languages are “celebrated”. This is an area identified as easily being overlooked (MoE, 2009b) and of needing improvement (ECE Taskforce, 2011; ERO, 2004).

Seven out of twenty-four services were evaluated by ERO in 2004 as not meeting the required criterion of “provision for children from NESB” (ERO, 2004, p. 11), and the criteria for evaluation include examining how the services utilised extra resources to actively assist NESB children to learn English as well as their first language, and how families were involved in this journey. Seven years later, *An Agenda for Amazing Children* still recommends comprehensively reviewing the “provision of resources in a broader range of languages” and calls “for more support for services to work with children from non-English speaking backgrounds” (ECE Taskforce, 2011, p. 113).

However, the AKA's ERO report states that "teachers work hard to provide support for children and families whose first language is not English" (ERO, 2006, p.7). Elephant Kindergarten displays "artefacts from children's diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as languages and scripts other than English" (ERO, 2011c, p. 7), but how it moves beyond 'displaying' these cultural artefacts is not mentioned in the report. Monkey Kindergarten was also commended by ERO on their effort to "support the use of first languages", but its implementation was also not explained (ERO, 2010b, p. 5). Finally, catering for the linguistic needs of NESB children and families is not mentioned in the ERO report of Lion Kindergarten (ERO, 2010a).

## **Children's learning at kindergartens**

### **Exploration and play**

The literature review has established that the value of exploration and play for children's learning and development is highly promoted in the underpinning theories of *Te Whāriki*. Consequently, the curriculum states that children "learn through active exploration of the environment" (MoE, 1996, p. 82), even though ERO noted that this strand is often absent from the planning and implementation of the curriculum in some ECE centres (ERO, 2013). The notion of 'learning through play' is highlighted in the Exploration strand in which it states that "children experience an environment where their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised" (MoE, 1996, p. 82). Therefore, this notion of meaningful learning through spontaneous play and exploration is also highly embedded in the assessment of children's learning (MoE, 2004a).

Since the pedagogy of play and exploration is an expected practice in New Zealand ECE, it often becomes part of the philosophy statements of ECE centres and appears frequently in ERO's reviews. Exploration and play are strongly featured in the AKA philosophy statement (AKA, 2007b), and their teachers' practices in regards to these two aspects of children's learning are highly commended by ERO (2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2011c). The AKA's 2006 ERO report states that kindergarten teachers embrace child-initiated play, and children have "easy access to a well-resourced learning environment" (ERO, 2006, p. 6) that supports their independent investigation and exploration.

Although only Monkey Kindergarten includes the idea of 'learning and teaching through play' in its philosophy statement, all three kindergartens received a significant number of positive comments from ERO on their provision of play and exploration opportunities for children. For example, play areas, resources and activities provided in Elephant Kindergarten are thoughtfully set up to facilitate child-initiated play and exploration (ERO, 2011c). Children at Lion Kindergarten are able to initiate play ideas, and literacy experiences are provided via children's play (ERO, 2010a). Monkey Kindergarten creates an effective learning environment with challenging resources to encourage children's play and independent exploration, and teachers work closely with children to provide support and encouragement (ERO, 2010b). Thus, ERO's emphasis on setting up a physical learning environment that is conducive to play is clearly evidenced. Yet, only Monkey Kindergarten received commendation about their teachers' involvement and engagement in supporting children's play and exploration (ERO, 2010b). The role of the teachers in

facilitating children's literacy development, on the contrary, receives more attention in the ERO reports.

## **Literacy**

Literacy learning goals are woven through the five strands in *Te Whāriki*, but are mainly found under the Communication strand. Literacy includes verbal, non-verbal and written communication. According to the AKA's ERO report (ERO, 2006, p. 6),

Children are well supported to become confident communicators ... The provision for literacy learning is a strength in kindergartens and this aspect of children's learning is well integrated into most programmes. Some teachers implement literacy programmes of a very high quality. Children's emergent writing is valued and affirmed and examples displayed throughout the environment. Children have access to books and writing tools both indoors and outdoors and their understanding of the use of print is evident. Children have very good opportunities to develop a sound foundation of literacy knowledge.

ERO has given an increased attention to literacy in recent years due to the Ministry of Education's strategic direction (ERO, 2011b, 2011d). The *Statement of Intent* published by the Ministry in 2009 outlines six priority outcomes, one of which is that "every child achieves literacy and numeracy levels that enable their success" (MoE, 2009c, p.6). ERO selected thirteen ECE centres across New Zealand "to gather in-depth information about specific practices that underpinned their literacy teaching and learning" (ERO, 2011b, p. 3), and it related high quality ECE to quality literacy resources and activities provided for



children in ECE settings. This focus on literacy (and numeracy) serves as a relevant example to illustrate the politics of curriculum and pedagogy, demonstrating how governmental decisions influence the discourse of teaching and learning.

Literacy is positively commented upon in the three kindergartens' ERO reports even though it is not included in any one of their philosophy statements. For example, according to ERO, literacy is included naturally in the programme of Elephant Kindergarten where teachers use conversations to provide very good support for children's language development, and children have access to reading and writing resources all the time (ERO, 2011c). Similar positive comments are found in Lion Kindergarten's ERO report which acknowledges how children develop an understanding of print through enjoyable learning experiences with reading and writing (ERO, 2010a). Finally, teachers at Monkey Kindergarten support children to develop literacy skills by providing a range of effective learning activities, like writing their own names and reading to/with each other (ERO, 2010b). However, the ERO report on the AKA and all three individual reports of the kindergartens describe an 'integrated' approach to the provision of literacy learning experiences in the kindergarten learning programme. An 'integrated' approach facilitates literacy learning, such as reading and writing, in a spontaneous, flexible and voluntary manner, rather than through timetabled and structured activities, and therefore is not easily 'observed' by parents.

A few participants in this study believed that Montessori kindergartens pay more attention to reading and writing, and two parents actually sent their children to a Montessori kindergarten in addition to a public kindergarten

because of the provision of literacy and numeracy learning opportunities in Montessori kindergartens. As such, it is worthwhile examining ERO's evaluation of this specific provision. ERO agrees that "literacy and numeracy were strong features of Montessori education programmes. In many Montessori ECE centres, teachers used conversation to extend children's oral language, and when reading poems and stories, teachers discussed literacy and numeracy concepts" (ERO, 2007a, p. 6) even though some centres (7 out of 44 centres reviewed) need to work on integrating literacy experiences within meaningful contexts.

### **Children's portfolios: Documentation of children's learning and development**

Using narrative learning stories to document children's learning and development is the MoE's assessment model that supports the use of *Te Whāriki* (Carr, 2001). Each child at the kindergarten has a personal portfolio with a collection of learning stories written by the teachers, and children's portfolios are placed in the kindergarten where they are easily accessible for children and families to revisit learning events/episodes. Involving parents in children's assessment by encouraging them to make contributions to children's portfolios is also highlighted in several documents (ECE Taskforce, 2011; ERO, 2011a; MoE, 2004c).

Children's portfolios are considered to be a means of communication between families and teachers. *Kei Tua o te Pae* states that assessments should be:

accessible and detailed enough to invite children and families to suggest developments and alternatives and to bring knowledge and expectations from home. They can be revisited at home with family, whānau, and the wider community of friends and neighbours. They also clarify teachers' interpretations and expectations. (MoE, 2004b, p. 6)

ERO also acknowledges that “parents and whānau have a wealth of information and understanding about their children, particularly about their participation in the world outside the early childhood service” (ERO, 2007b, p.19), and portfolios are to be easily accessible to families and be taken home for family members to make a written contribution (ERO, 2007b). However, only about half of the ECE centres being assessed in the ERO report, *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Education*, “involved parents and whānau in assessment activities” (ERO, 2007b, p. 19).

Children's assessment is identified by ERO (2007b) and ECE Taskforce (2011) as an area recommended for improvement. For example, ERO claims that parents have limited understanding of children's assessment records in the form of portfolios and it “recommends that early childhood educators encourage and increase the genuine involvement of children, parents, whānau, and other educators in assessment of children's learning and development” (ERO, 2007b, p. 2). Furthermore, *Kei Tua o te Pae* provides suggestions on documenting assessment in the child's first language if a teacher who speaks the language is available, and states that doing so “presents an opportunity to assure families that bilingualism and biliteracy are actively supported in that setting” (MoE, 2009b, p. 2). One of the exemplars includes “a traditional Chinese story with drawings” (MoE, 2009b, p. 4) and some Chinese words. It aims at

demonstrating to teachers how families' home languages can be integrated in teaching and assessment practices. Nonetheless, supporting bilingualism and biliteracy in ECE settings requires strong commitment from teachers and management, such as employing teachers or teacher aides who speak diverse languages.

Although the quality of assessment differs across services, ERO found that “kindergartens were the most likely to provide professional support for their educators” (ERO, 2007b, p. 8). The effort contributed by kindergarten teachers to children’s portfolios is acknowledged in the AKA’s ERO report, but children’s assessment remains a focus of development for AKA (ERO, 2006). Of the three kindergartens’ reports, ERO recommends that both Lion Kindergarten and Monkey Kindergarten should continue reviewing and developing their assessment processes (ERO, 2010a, 2010b), and Lion Kindergarten further needs to develop assessment strategies that reflect teacher-parent partnership (ERO, 2010a). Nonetheless, Elephant Kindergarten is commended by ERO regarding the learning stories contributed by parents, and for including parents in the assessment process (ERO, 2011c).

### **Transition to school**

*Te Whāriki* “is an ECE curriculum specifically designed for children from the time of birth to school entry, and it provides links to learning in school settings” (MoE, 1996, p. 9). Its principles, strands and goals describe “some of the expectations for children as they move from early childhood settings to school” (MoE, 1996, p. 10). Within each strand, *Te Whāriki* describes the expectations of children who transition from ECE settings to school, and the curriculum

further dedicates an entire section to explaining how each strand links “with the essential skills and essential learning areas of the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* for schools” (MoE, 1996, p. 10).

The *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (MoE, 1993) was revised in 2007 and the current *New Zealand Curriculum* highlights the role of primary schools in supporting a smooth transition for children moving from ECE to school and explains how the strands of *Te Whāriki* “correspond to the key competencies” (MoE, 2007a, p. 41) of the school curriculum. Considering the detailed explanations in *Te Whāriki* about the continuity between ECE and school, it is puzzling that transition to school is not given attention in the books of *Kei Tua o te Pae*; and that it is hardly mentioned in any of the ERO documents reviewed. This is an area identified in the *ECE Taskforce Overview* as requiring a comprehensive review (ECE Taskforce, 2011). Nonetheless, recently, the MoE webpage began to partner ECE with National Standards, an assessment system used in New Zealand schools to measure children’s academic achievement in numeracy and literacy (MoE, 2014a). It seems that the Ministry intends to re-emphasise the role of ECE in preparing children ready for school.

Lastly, none of the philosophy statements of the three kindergartens includes anything related to transition to school and ERO does not comment on how AKA supports children’s smooth transition to school either (ERO, 2006). However, in their ERO reports, both Elephant Kindergarten (ERO, 2011c) and Lion Kindergarten (ERO, 2010a) are commended for their positive relationships with local schools and their efforts in ensuring that children experience a smooth transition to primary schools. ERO, however, recommends Monkey Kindergarten to provide more opportunities to extend the learning of children

who are the oldest and most capable (ERO, 2010b). The lack of emphasis on transition to school in the documents reviewed would have impacted on the kindergarten teachers' practices, and this is analysed in the discussion chapters.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an analysis of a range of New Zealand ECE institutional documents mainly prepared by the MoE and ERO. Whereas the *ECE Taskforce* report is informed by research and numerous submissions from the ECE sector, most ERO documents are minimally supported by literature. Instead they mainly make references to *Te Whāriki* and previous ERO publications. By not integrating the latest research findings to evaluate or inform teaching practices, these documents reinforce the status quo and limit the opportunity for transformation.

Findings of this documentary review chapter have contributed a source of data to this study, in addition to the narratives collected from individual interviews. The upcoming discussion chapters interpret and critically analyse both sources of data in light of theories and literature, using critical discourse analysis to highlight the imbalance of power between socio-cultural discourses, namely the relationship between certain ECE discourses prevalent in New Zealand and Chinese participants' parental expectations and aspirations of their children's learning.

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# 6. The participants' stories: (Non)involvement in children's ECE

## Introduction

This is the first of the three chapters that discuss the narrative findings of this study. It begins with the presentation of the ten participants' abbreviated life stories. The table at the end of the stories further provides an overview of their demographic and familial backgrounds. The quotes of narratives presented in these three finding chapters are the result of a translation process. English words/phrases that were used by the participants during the interviews are indicated with speech marks to highlight their originality. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the participants' involvement in their children's ECE and the overt functional rationalisation of their (non)involvement in ECE settings. This chapter sets the scene for the next two chapters that further analyse the underlying multi-layered factors that impacted on the participants' (non)involvement.

In order to investigate the participants' involvement in their children's early learning, it is pertinent to first explore their approach of parenting practices. Findings collected from the two stages of individual interviews show that the participants' childrearing strategies entail a mix of parenting styles, and the conventional frameworks that essentialise and binarise practices of 'Chinese' and 'European' parents are inapplicable to understanding the participants' parenting practices. This chapter, therefore, challenges the myth of 'tiger

mother', a contemporary 'pop-culture' that generalises Chinese parenting as extreme and authoritarian. Instead, an ancient Chinese story is used to analogise the practices of the immigrant participants who relocated their families to New Zealand in the hope of providing a good environment for their children's upbringing.

Thereafter, discussions focus on examining the participants' involvement in their children's learning in the private and public spaces. The narrative responses indicate that the participants were actively involved in their private domains, such as the home environment and children's extra-curricular activities, but their involvement in the public spaces, such as at the kindergartens, was minimal. Since there is a diverse range of ECE services available in New Zealand, the participants were asked to rationalise why public kindergarten was their preferred option. Instead of focusing on the quality of the kindergartens, functional reasons, such as close proximity between the kindergarten and home, were mostly used in the justification.

Overt pragmatic reasons for their involvement in the kindergartens include meeting the teachers' expectations, developing new friendships, and expanding social networks. The chapter concludes with describing and interpreting the participants' minimal and passive engagement in communicating with the kindergarten teachers, contributing to their children's portfolios that are used to document and assess the learning of each child, and volunteering at the parent-teacher committee. Diverse reasons influenced their (non)involvement in New Zealand ECE.

## **Let the stories begin ...**

The ten participants came from various regions of the PRC and each had a unique story to share. This study is particularly interested in aspects of their life stories that relate to their children's ECE. Each of the short stories in this chapter constructs a brief picture for each participant, providing contextual information of the participant's familial, educational and vocational backgrounds, experiences of migration and parenting, and expectations of children's education.

Whilst it is common for Chinese immigrants in New Zealand to have Anglicised names, some choose to continue using only their Chinese names. As such, a mix of Anglicised and Chinese pseudonyms is used in this thesis, respecting and reflecting the choice of each participant. Their Chinese names are represented in Mandarin pinyin, but Anglicised pseudonyms are used for all husbands/partners because their names were not mentioned during the interviews. Anglicised pseudonyms are also used for all children because they all used Anglicised names at kindergartens/schools.

Finally, of the ten participants, nine were originally from the PRC and one from Hong Kong, the Special Administrative Region of China. Although Hong Kong is part of China, the two places do not have identical governmental structures and education systems. Nonetheless, the literature reviewed in Chapter Two regarding parenting and ECE within the Chinese contexts indicates that the two places share certain commonalities in terms of parental practices, socialisation of children and recent ECE reforms.

## Anita and her family

Anita emigrated from Hong Kong, the Special Administrative Region of China, to New Zealand with her husband, Adam, and two children, Danny and Claudia, in 2011. Prior to 2011, the family came to Auckland every year to visit Adam's parents. Adam's family immigrated to New Zealand, from Hong Kong, in the 1980s. Adam studied at Auckland Grammar School and the University of Auckland, but returned to Hong Kong upon completing his university study because he disliked living in New Zealand at that time.

Anita finished high school and worked in a logistic company in Hong Kong before she married Adam, after which she became a full-time housewife. Her parents and siblings were all in Hong Kong, and they had never visited New Zealand. Adam had one brother in Hong Kong and one with children in Auckland. Anita and Adam decided to move back to Auckland because Adam's parents were ageing and the couple also wanted their children to be educated in New Zealand. The family lived with Adam's parents in an affluent Auckland suburb. However, due to their old age, Adam's parents were unable to help Anita with childcare.

Danny and Claudia were both born in Hong Kong, Danny in 2005 and Claudia in 2008. Danny attended a Hong Kong kindergarten for 3 years and a private childcare centre in Auckland for 3 months before the family officially migrated to Auckland. After arriving in Auckland in 2011, Danny was enrolled in a local primary school and Claudia started attending the public kindergarten where Anita was recruited for this study. Anita preferred private childcare centres but she found them too costly since she did not work.

The family spoke Cantonese at home, and as Anita felt that her English was not good, she relied on Adam to communicate with the teachers. Anita had no concern about Danny's social and learning ability, but Claudia was very shy and struggled with understanding and expressing herself in English. Claudia did not have many friends at the kindergarten and Anita did not have many friends in New Zealand. However, Adam had many friends from the University of Auckland, all with young children and all originally from Hong Kong. They met every week and their children played together. Danny and Claudia also had some cousins in both Hong Kong and Auckland.

Anita and Adam provided a lot of numeracy and literacy practice, in both Chinese and English, to Danny at home. They expected to do the same with Claudia when she was older. Danny also had weekly swimming and guitar lessons, and Anita would like Claudia to have piano lessons in the future. The couple believed they should teach their children themselves rather than rely on private tutors for as long as possible, unless their teaching was damaging to the parent-child relationship. Anita and Adam believed that they were a traditional Chinese family, and continued to observe many Chinese customs and practices while living in New Zealand.

## Ella and her family

Ella grew up in Guangzhou, a large city in southern China. She had six siblings and was the second youngest. After finishing her secondary schooling in China, she enrolled in an accounting course but did not complete it. Later she spent six months in an English language course and felt the need to go overseas to improve her English. At the same time, one of her brothers went to Malta for two years while Ella came to New Zealand on her own as an international student in 2003. An immigration agent helped Ella with the visa application and made a home-stay arrangement for her.

After she arrived in New Zealand, she spent one year in an English course at Unitec Institute of Technology (Unitec) and then studied towards a diploma in business. While studying at Unitec, she met her husband, Edward, who was completing a Bachelor of Information Technology degree. Ella stopped studying once they got married, and soon after, her first daughter was born. She had returned to China only twice, but she and Edward would consider moving to China if they could find a well-paid job.

Edward was a New Zealand-born-Chinese. His parents immigrated to New Zealand from the Philippines, and they spoke many different languages: English, Spanish, Fukian and Mien Nam (two different Chinese spoken languages). Edward had completed a few Mandarin courses, and had no problem understanding spoken Mandarin, but he struggled to converse in it. He used English to communicate with Ella and their daughters, who preferred to use English over Chinese even though Ella talked to them mainly in Mandarin.

Ella had little working experience, although she helped her father look after the family store in China and worked in a restaurant when she was studying in Auckland. She also had a few short term, part-time work experiences. Ella did not need to work for financial reasons, but preferred to work because she was bored. Unfortunately, there was no one to look after her daughters.

Ella felt she did not have much childcare and housework support from her family. Her mother, who did not like living in New Zealand, came briefly from China to help her when her daughters were born. Although Ella's in-laws lived close-by, they were always busy catering for their home-stayers and looking after their own parents. Ella's mother-in-law, however, did babysit her daughters when needed. Edward had a brother in Auckland and a sister in Wellington.

Both daughters, Catherine and Anne, went to the kindergarten where Ella was recruited for this study. Catherine, the elder daughter, had attended a Playcentre before being enrolled in this kindergarten. The girls had ballet and swimming classes every Saturday. Since they mostly communicated in English, they preferred to play with English-speaking children. They also had many cousins in China. Ella also worked with them often at home, such as engaging them in literacy exercises, in both Chinese and English, numeracy worksheets, and artworks.



## Jan and her family

Jan came to Auckland from China in 1999. She was originally from Guangzhou where she studied accounting, and her husband, Jimmy, was from Tianjin. Although Mandarin was Jan's native spoken language, she understood Cantonese too. Jan had an elder sister who was already living in New Zealand before Jan arrived. Jan's sister was pregnant when she came to New Zealand from China in 1995. A few months later, her parents came on tourist visas to help her look after the new born baby, and applied for residency during their stay in New Zealand. While they were waiting for the application to be approved, they decided to return to China because they did not like living in New Zealand. However, six months later, their application for permanent residency was approved, and they moved back to Auckland. Jan's parents continued to move back and forth between New Zealand and China, spending a few months in New Zealand every two to three years, and they convinced Jimmy to apply for New Zealand residency.

Jan and Jimmy were working on their own import and export business in Shenzhen before migrating to New Zealand, and they got married after moving here. Jan studied English at Unitec while Jimmy worked towards a Master's degree in computer science at the University of Auckland. Jan stopped studying once she was pregnant. Her two sons, Eason and Ross, were born in 2002 and 2006 respectively. Although Jan sometimes helped Jimmy with the business, she spent most of her time looking after the two children as she did not have much support with childcare. Her sister's family had moved to Australia a few years previously because they preferred the Australian education system, and

Jan did not think her parents were suitable to help her look after the children. At the time of the interview, Jan was also pondering moving to Australia.

Jan's sons attended the public kindergarten where she was recruited for this study. She sent Eason to a private childcare centre when he was two and a half for about a year. He was then enrolled at the public kindergarten when he was four, and attended a Montessori kindergarten at the same time. Ross also attended the same Montessori kindergarten and another private kindergarten simultaneously. When he turned four, Ross did not want to go to the Montessori centre anymore, and he was offered a place at the public kindergarten instantly. The two children participated in a number of out-of-kindergarten activities, including piano, swimming and gymnastics lessons every week. Eason also had to attend a weekly Chinese lesson, each session lasting for one and half hours. When Ross turns six, he will have to do the same.

## Jean and her family

Jean came to New Zealand from Hunan, China, in 2002 with her then husband. She had an English degree and worked in an export business in China. After she arrived in New Zealand, she completed a marketing and international business degree at the University of Auckland, which took her four years instead of three to finish, as her two children, Cate and Liam, were born during the course of her study. She had a part-time job while studying in Auckland, but no other working experience. Jean and her husband later split up. He returned to China after the separation while Jean remained in New Zealand with her two children. He sporadically participated in some of the school/kindergarten's activities when he was back in Auckland visiting his children.

Jean had a younger brother and sister in China, but no extended family members in New Zealand, and her parents had never visited. Therefore she had always been solely responsible for the care and education of her children, which kept her very busy. She had returned to China only once, in 2003, before her children were born, so Cate and Liam had never been back there. Jean would really like to return to China for a year so her children could learn some Chinese. Jean spoke fluent English and she enjoyed participating in the social activities organised by the parents in Cate's primary school.

Cate and Liam did not attend the same public kindergarten. Cate attended a private childcare centre before being enrolled in kindergarten; whereas Liam spent more than a year in a crèche before starting at the kindergarten where Jean was recruited. Since Jean was a single full-time mother, she found private

childcare a financial burden and unnecessary. Although Jean used Mandarin with her children, the siblings spoke to each other in English. Liam was active and outgoing and was often invited to play at his friends' places. He seemed to play more with English-speaking children, whereas Cate seemed to get along better with Chinese children even though her English was good.

Jean worked with her children's numeracy and English literacy skills at home. She spent a lot more time with Cate than with Liam in these learning areas because Cate was in Year 3, and Jean believed that Cate is more 'developmentally' ready to engage in numeracy and literacy activities. Cate also used to go for after-school Chinese classes weekly, but had quit because it was too much work and pressure for her and Jean. Cate learnt swimming at a private swim school, and Liam would do the same soon. Cate also had piano and ballet classes during the week. The trio usually had some family activities at the weekend, and Jean expected Cate to do some literacy and numeracy work, and to practice playing the piano daily. The two children had some cousins in China whom they had never met, and they sometimes talked to Jean's parents over the phone.

## Katie and her family

Katie came to New Zealand from the Jiangsu province in 2000 when she was half way through university. She came on a student visa and studied towards a conjoint degree in accounting and finance at the University of Auckland. After graduating, she worked as an accountant. Her husband, Keith, was also an accountant. They met through work and later got married. Their two children, Sally and George, were born in New Zealand, in 2005 and 2007 respectively.

Katie took Sally back to China at 7 months old to be looked after by the grandparents so Katie could continue full-time employment in Auckland. Six months later, the grandparents brought Sally back to Auckland, and stayed on to look after Sally. Katie stopped working full-time in 2006, just before George was born. However, she continued to work part-time at Keith's accounting firm which he established in 2003.

Keith immigrated to New Zealand from Hong Kong in 1997 as a skilled migrant, and he worked in an accounting firm before he started his own accounting business. All of his siblings, except one, were in New Zealand. Keith's father had passed away, and his mother lived in another Auckland suburb where she looked after the two young children of his younger brother, so she was unable to help Katie with childcare.

Katie's parents came to visit New Zealand every year, and became New Zealand permanent residents in 2011. Katie's elder sister and her family were still in China, and had never been to New Zealand, but they were applying to come to New Zealand because of their child's education. Katie used to return to

China more often in the past. With two young children, she now only visited China every two to three years.

Sally and George attended childcare centres before enrolling in the public kindergarten where Katie was recruited for this study. For about a year, George attended an English-Chinese bilingual childcare centre, where Katie believed he confused English and Chinese and also over-used Chinese. Hence she withdrew George and placed him in another childcare centre where he stayed for two months until he expressed that he wanted to go to his sister's 'big' kindergarten.

Katie used Mandarin with the children, and the siblings also communicated with each other mainly in Mandarin because George's English was not strong enough. Sally had many after-school and weekend activities, including dancing, swimming and piano lessons. She used to also have gymnastic and drawing lessons. However, Sally was long-sighted and Katie believed drawing was harmful to eye-sight, so she stopped sending Sally to drawing class. George had only tried gymnastic classes because Katie believed that he was too young and that boys needed different and fewer activities.

## Lian and her family

Lian came from Jiangsu, China, where she and her husband, Neil, were married. Neil wanted to emigrate, so he came to New Zealand on his own in 2003 to see if his family could settle. In 2006 when she was pregnant with the first child, Lian joined Neil in New Zealand under the immigration policy of family reunion. They had two sons, John and Eddy, who were born in New Zealand, in 2006 and 2008 respectively.

Neil was a manager of a five-star hotel in China, and the couple also had their own business. After coming to New Zealand, Neil worked as a builder because his English was not good. Lian finished high school in China and did not know any English before coming to New Zealand. She had now completed half of a three-year English programme at Unitec, and planned to pursue a professional qualification afterwards.

Neil's parents and sister were already in New Zealand when he arrived in 2003. Lian's father had passed away and her mother, whose health was not good enough to manage a long-haul flight, was in China. Lian also had a brother and sister in China, and their children were studying at university. Lian therefore had no extended family members in New Zealand and none had visited. However, the family lived quite close to Neil's parents who helped with childcare when needed, such as looking after John when Eddy was born and baby-sitting Eddy when Lian needed to stay at the kindergarten with John. Lian and her children had never been back to China, but Neil would like to move back when he retires.

John spent about two months in a public kindergarten, but could not settle, so Lian had to stay with him there. She withdrew him, and later placed him in a private childcare centre. Soon Eddy joined his brother in this centre, but they later switched to another private centre. When John left the centre for primary school, Eddy wanted to quit too. So Lian withdrew him and enrolled him in the public kindergarten where she was recruited for this study.

Lian and Neil spoke Mandarin with the boys, but the boys talked to each other mainly in English and played mostly with English-speaking children. John's reading age is way above his birth age, and Lian gave him some mathematics exercises to do at home when he was interested. She also taught the boys how to read Chinese, but did not expect them to be able to write Chinese. The boys did not attend any after-school/kindergarten activities, but Lian was considering enrolling them in swimming classes. She also planned to send Eddy to the same primary school that his brother was attending.



## Mei and her family

Mei and her husband, Matthew, were married in China. Matthew came to New Zealand in 2000 while Mei remained in China. Their first son, Ned, was born in China in 2005. A year later, Mei left Fukian to join her husband in Auckland because her parents told her education and living conditions for children in New Zealand are much better. Nathan, the second son, was born in New Zealand in 2007. Mei took the children back to China in 2008, but came back to New Zealand in 2009, and had not been back since then.

Mei finished middle school and did some vocational training, but did not go to university in China. After the training, she worked as an electrical worker in a power plant. When Matthew first arrived in Auckland, he worked as a baker. At first, they lived in east Auckland where there was a high population of Chinese. The couple bought a dairy in an Auckland suburb in 2009. They then moved and lived above the dairy, with their children attending the local primary school and kindergarten.

Matthew's parents lived in east Auckland whereas Mei's parents were in China. Mei also had an elder brother in China, but his family had no intention of moving to New Zealand. The children had some cousins in different provinces of China. Since Matthew's parents lived in a different suburb, they could not help Mei with childcare, but Mei took her children to visit their paternal grandparents every weekend.

Both Ned and Nathan attended the same kindergarten where Mei was recruited for this study. Before the family moved to the current suburb, Ned was enrolled in a kindergarten in east Auckland for four months. Mei did not agree

with full-time institutional childcare. Kindergarten was the only ECE experience for the boys. Mei enjoyed taking her sons to different places for outdoor activities during the weekends while Mathew looked after the dairy.

The family spoke Mandarin with each other. Mei claimed that she and Matthew shared a similar standard of English, which was not good enough to engage in conversation with native English speakers. While Ned's English had improved a lot since he started primary school, Nathan still struggled to express himself in English. Hence he played mainly with Mandarin-speaking children.

Ned had to attend mathematics tuitions twice a week and also had to complete after-tuition exercises at home. He took a reading book home from school every day, and Mei also asked him to read it aloud to Nathan. Mei taught Ned written Chinese at home. Ned also had a swimming lesson once a week. The family had a piano at home, and grandma taught the boys how to play in a casual manner. Mei had planned that when Nathan turned five, he would participate in the same out-of-school activities as Ned.

## Nan and her family

Nan first came to New Zealand for a week in 2003, on her own. Then she went back to Ning Bo, China, but left for New Zealand again in 2004. Nan came to Auckland twice on her own because her husband, Nolan, wanted her to get used to the environment before bringing Sean, her son who was born in China in 2001. Nan returned to China the following year to take Sean to Auckland. Nolan joined the family in Auckland in 2007 when Nan was about to give birth to their daughter, Jenny.

Nan had a materials engineering degree and worked in the human resource department in a large company in China before coming to New Zealand. She was enrolled in a diploma of business course at Unitec for eight months, but quit her study when Sean arrived in New Zealand. She then became a full-time housewife, but planned to pursue a qualification and career in New Zealand in the future. Nolan had an electrical engineering degree in China, and upon graduation, he worked in the business sector. In Auckland, he had his own business and worked mainly from home.

The couple had no extended family in New Zealand, so Nan was solely in charge of childcare, with Sean's help. They went back to China to visit their family every year, usually for a month, and they still had a house in Ning Bo. The grandparents often came to Auckland to visit. Nan's parents stayed in Auckland for about nine months to support her when Jenny was born. Nan also had an elder brother in Shanghai. The children's cousins were all in China.

Both Sean and Jenny attended the same public kindergarten where Nan was recruited for this study. Before coming to Auckland, Sean attended a kindergarten in China for about one and a half years. He spent a year in the Auckland public kindergarten before starting primary school. Jenny first attended a crèche for a few months and then a private English-Chinese bilingual childcare centre. She was unsettled in both centres, so Nan withdrew her and later enrolled her in the public kindergarten in May 2011. Nan committed herself to be a parent-helper at the kindergarten once a week. She also helped the teachers to translate the kindergarten's newsletters and notices into Chinese.

Sean had weekly English, swimming, piano and drawing lessons after school. Nan would also like him to pick up a wind instrument so he could get into the school's orchestra. Jenny had swimming and ballet lessons every week and Nan would also like her to learn how to play piano and violin. Jenny attended the kindergarten for two morning and two afternoon sessions, and also a Montessori centre for three afternoons per week. Nan did a lot of reading and writing work, in English, with the children at home, and she also taught Sean Chinese because she considered that he was old enough. The siblings mainly talked to each other in Mandarin, but with some English at times. Their parents mainly used Mandarin with them.

## Sonia and her family

Sonia arrived on her own in 2001 as an international student in Rotorua, a tourist town in New Zealand, where she first studied English and where she met her husband, Steve. Then she completed a diploma in tourism at Waikato Institute of Technology. Steve was also an international student from China. Both of them came from Guangzhou. When Steve moved to Auckland to pursue a degree at Massey University, Sonia moved to Auckland too. The couple later married, and their son, Jess, was born in 2007, and daughter, Julie, in 2010.

Sonia studied a diploma in business and English for a year in China before coming to New Zealand, and she had not worked in China. Once she obtained her work visa in New Zealand, she worked as a cleaner in a motel, a receptionist in a hostel, and a waitress in a Chinese restaurant. She was working in a dental clinic during the time of interviews.

After Steve obtained his permanent residency in New Zealand, he applied for Sonia to have the same status. Sonia is an only child. Her parents visited Auckland a few times briefly before becoming permanent residents in March 2011. Steve's parents were still in China and visited New Zealand every two to three years. Sonia returned to China for a holiday a few times. Jess visited China three times to be looked after by Steve's mother so that Sonia could continue to work in New Zealand, but Julie had never been there. The children had a number of cousins in China. Steve now wanted to move the family to Australia, but Sonia preferred not to because it would take a while for her parents to be able to join them, and she would lose their childcare support.

Sonia put Jess in a private childcare centre when he was two, so that she could work. When Sonia's parents became New Zealand residents and started living with her, she enrolled Jess in the public kindergarten where she was recruited for this study. This kindergarten was located opposite to where they lived, so Grandma could walk back and forth to help with dropping off and picking up Jess. Grandma did not drive. Sonia sometimes put Julie in a Barnados home-based childcare service in emergency situations when she struggled to find childcare support. She wanted to send Julie to a community childcare centre when she turned three, and then enrol her in the same kindergarten that Jess was attending.

Sonia tried to teach Jess some literacy (both English and Chinese) and numeracy skills at home, but he did not seem to be interested. Jess did not have any out-of-kindergarten learning activities, but the couple planned to send him to Chinese, mathematics and swimming lessons when he was older. Jess was an active and social child, and he had many friends at the kindergarten. The family communicated with each other in Cantonese, but Sonia could speak Mandarin too.

## Vicky and her family

Vicky immigrated to New Zealand from Fu Zhou, China, with her parents in 1998 when she was 19. After completing some English courses, she began studying towards a Bachelor of Commerce degree at University of Auckland where she met her husband, Vernon, who was also from China. Vicky's parents returned to China soon after she finished her degree and started working, but they came back to visit from time to time. For example, they returned to New Zealand to help Vicky when her two daughters, Cecilia and Angela, were born. Vicky's father passed away a week before the first interview and her mother came to visit her a month later. Vernon returned long term to China two years ago to attend to family business because he felt there were more opportunities and his parents were still there. He came back to visit his wife and children once or twice a year, but he often talked to them over the phone.

Vicky was the youngest in her family. She had two elder sisters, one in New Zealand and one in China. The one in New Zealand lived quite far away from Vicky, and she had two teenage children to look after. The one in China had a teenage son and had no intention of coming to live in New Zealand. Vicky had lots of child-rearing advice from both sisters who had children much older than hers, and as a result, she was aware of the ECE issues in both New Zealand and China.

Vicky was an accountant, but with two young children and no family members to help her with childcare, she could only work part-time. Having flexible working hours that accommodated her childcare needs was important for Vicky. A caregiver from the Barnados home-based childcare service looked

after her two daughters before they were enrolled in the public kindergarten where Vicky was recruited for this study. Since Vicky had a good relationship with the caregiver, she could sometimes pick her children up late if she was busy with work and other commitments. Her eldest daughter, Cecilia, started kindergarten in 2011 when she was three and a half, and attended the kindergarten four full days a week. Cecilia also attended a weekly art class outside kindergarten.

At the second interview, Vicky revealed that she had returned to further her studies. She admitted that she had always been a very competitive person. She expected herself to be better than the others and her children to be ahead of the other children too. Mandarin was Vicky's native spoken language, but she had no difficulty communicating in English. However, she insisted that her daughters should use as much Mandarin as possible at home so that they could still communicate with their grandmother.



## Demographic and familial background of participants

|       | Year of arrival in NZ | Citizenship              | Highest qualification                         | Pre-migration career              | Career at the time of interview                                | Immediate family members in New Zealand              | Spoken language used at home | Experiences of EC services                                      |
|-------|-----------------------|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|--|------------------------------|---|
| Anita | 2011                  | PR                       | Secondary schooling (HK)                      | Logistic administrator            | Full-time housewife  | Husband – Adam<br>Son – Danny<br>Daughter – Claudia  | Cantonese                    | Private childcare, public kindergarten                          |
| Ella  | 2003                  | Applying for NZ passport | Tertiary – short English courses (China & NZ) | Support family business           | Full-time housewife  | Husband – Edward<br>2 daughters – Catherine and Anne | Cantonese & English          | Play centre, public kindergarten                                |
| Jan   | 1999                  | PR                       | Tertiary – accounting (China) & English (NZ)  | Family import and export business | Full-time housewife & support husband's import/export business | Husband – Jimmy<br>2 sons – Eason and Ross           | Mandarin                     | Private childcare, Montessori kindergarten, public kindergarten |

|       |      |                    |   |                                    |                                       |   |          |   |
|-------|------|--------------------|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|----------|---|
| Jean  | 2002 | NZ passport holder | Tertiary – English degree (China), marketing and business degree (NZ) | Export business                    | Full-time housewife                   | Daughter – Cate<br>Son – Liam                       | Mandarin | Private childcare, public kindergarten  |
| Katie | 2000 | PR                 | Tertiary – Conjoint degree in account and finance (NZ)                | N/A                                | Support husband's accounting business | Husband – Keith<br>Daughter – Sally<br>Son – George | Mandarin | Private bilingual childcare centre, private childcare centre, public kindergarten |
| Lian  | 2006 | PR                 | High school (China)   | N/A                                | Full-time housewife                   | Husband – Neil<br>2 sons – John and Eddy            | Mandarin | Private childcare, public kindergarten  |
| Mei   | 2006 | PR                 | Tertiary - Vocational training (China)                                | Electrical worker in a power plant | Family business – a dairy             | Husband – Matthew<br>2 sons – Ned and Nathan        | Mandarin | Public kindergarten   |

|       |      |                    |   |  |                              |   |           |  |
|-------|------|--------------------|---|--|------------------------------|---|-----------|--|
| Nan   | 2003 | NZ passport holder | Tertiary – engineering degree (China)                                       | Professional training in human resource department | Full-time housewife          | Husband – Nolan<br>Son – Sean<br>Daughter – Jenny                         | Mandarin  | Community crèche, private bilingual childcare centre, Montessori kindergarten, public kindergarten |
| Sonia | 2001 | PR                 | Tertiary – diploma in business and English (China), diploma in tourism (NZ) | N/A  | Part-time in a dental clinic | Husband – Steve<br>Son – Jess<br>Daughter – Julie                         | Cantonese | Private childcare, Barnado home-based centre, public kindergarten                                  |
| Vicky | 1998 | NZ passport holder | Tertiary – bachelor of commerce degree (NZ)                                 | N/A  | Part-time accountant         | 2 daughters – Cecilia and Angela (husband, Vernon, is in China long term) | Mandarin  | Barnado home-based centre, public kindergarten   |

## **Chinese parenting models: Beyond authoritarian and authoritative**

Some scholars claim that people from outside China often essentialise and simplify traditional Chinese parenting styles as authoritarian (Chao, 1994; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Xu et al, 2005). As explained in the literature review chapter, according to Baumrind (1996), authoritarian parents are controlling and demand unquestionable obedience; whereas authoritative parents are respectful of children's decisions and employ reasoning strategies to guide children's behaviour. Rather than following the authoritarian parenting model, several participants displayed certain authoritative parenting practices. For example, as stated in their earlier stories, when their children expressed a dislike with regard to attending a particular ECE centre, Jan, Katie, Lian and Nan all responded to their children's emotional needs and withdrew them from the centre. These parents did not expect their children to merely obey and conform.

Historically, Chinese parenting styles have tended to align more with the authoritarian model, but contemporary parenting practices in China are transforming due to globalisation, advanced telecommunication, information technology, and the subsequent influx of cultural influences from other countries (Chen et al, 2000; Chao, 1994; Naftali, 2010a; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Rao et al, 2003; Sun & Rao, 2012; Xu et al, 2005). Some researchers further argue that it is common for parents living in urban China and those who have higher education, greater exposure to diverse values and practices, and higher social and economic status, to lean towards adopting authoritative parenting styles (Chen et al, 2000; Naftali, 2010a; Xu et al, 2005). This argument can be

applied to explain the dissimilar parental expectations of Mei and Vicky who have different educational and social backgrounds. Vicky was an accountant with a degree from University of Auckland; whereas Mei was a dairy-owner with a vocational training qualification from China. Vicky seemed to practise a more authoritative parenting than Mei who displayed aspects of an authoritarian approach.

Vicky: I think as long as the child is receptive to learning, parents should teach as much as possible. Like the other day, I asked Cecilia to do some writing and she found the experience fun, so I think it's pretty good and I am willing to teach her... This is how I think, but only because she likes to learn, so I teach her.

Mei: Just like his mathematics work. If he has finished his work, and I have checked it already, he can play; otherwise, he can't play and he will need to do heaps of mathematics exercises. I will give him all the workbooks and ask him to finish them all. Then he will say he will never do that again.

Other researchers also challenge that both authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles are Anglo-centric ways of understanding parental attitudes, and both cannot be applied without critique to the context of Chinese parenting (Chao, 1994; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Xu et al, 2005). These researchers believe that although the traditional Chinese parenting style emphasises strict obedience and discipline, which is normally considered as authoritarian within a 'western' context, Chinese parents are also accepting and responsive to their children's needs, traits that are considered as in keeping with the authoritative

model of parenting. Pearson and Rao (2003, p. 141) state that “Chinese parenting typically involves a high degree of parental involvement, which may be erroneously interpreted as authoritarianism when assessed using Western parenting measures”.

Rather than using a ‘western’ dichotomy of authoritative versus authoritarian, two traditional Chinese parenting concepts, \*管/guǎn (govern and control, see glossary) and \*教训/jiao xun (teach and train, see glossary) have been examined in several studies to understand Chinese parental practices (Chao, 1994; Guo, 2006; Luo et al, 2013; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Sun & Rao, 2012; Rao et al, 2003). These studies claim that by applying strict governance, Chinese parents train their children to achieve certain goals, such as academic attainment or personal traits like obedience and being conforming. \*管/Guǎn encompasses more than unreasonable parental control. It includes caring, concerning, sensitive and responsive parental involvement (Guo, 2006; Luo et al, 2013). The notion of \*管/guǎn was displayed by Ella and highlighted by Mei.

Ella: Parents cannot give children no pressure at all. They should negotiate with children and try to persuade them to do some work by saying “after you have done some writing, you can do whatever you want”.

Mei: I prefer them to have finished their work first, then they can play, and I won’t “管/ guǎn” what they want to do. They finished their work already anyway.

On the whole, instead of being strictly authoritarian and enforcing traditional Chinese parenting strategies uncritically, the participants also employed

authoritative practices to respond sensitively to their children's interests and emotional needs. For example, the participants relaxed and compromised their expectations of their children's ability to read and write Chinese and to observe certain traditional cultural practices. These examples are provided in the following chapters. This thesis, therefore, challenges the notion of 'tiger mother' (Chua, 2011) promoted in contemporary popular literature that has contributed to perpetuating the stereotypical view of Chinese parenting as simply authoritarian.

### **An inappropriate metaphor: 'Tiger mothers'**

The book, *Battle Hymns of the Tiger Mother*, written by Amy Chua came out in 2011. Chua is a second generation American-Chinese, a Harvard graduate, and a law professor at Yale. She attributes her personal success to the strict and tough Chinese parenting of her parents, and is determined to apply the same parenting strategies to her two daughters (Chua, 2011). These strategies include active intervention in their daily activities, like not allowing them to watch television, to have a sleep-over, or to choose their own extra-curricular activities, but requiring them to spend hours on daily piano practice or to achieve an A grade or above in every assessment (Chua, 2011).

Nonetheless, within this study, Mei was the only participant who described herself and all Chinese mothers as 'tiger mothers'.

We are tiger mothers. We are very fierce. For \*洋人/yang ren (see glossary) mothers, they allow their children not to do any work if that's what their children want. They let children decide what they want to do and when they want to do it; whereas Chinese mothers will insist that

children have to sit and finish a task. We will withdraw something that they like [from them] if they don't comply or we will cancel all the fun activities unless they finish all they are expected to do.

With the use of “we”, Mei inadvertently homogenised all Chinese mothers as ‘tiger mothers’ to contrast the different parenting practices between Chinese and \*洋人/yang ren parents. Although the expectations described above sound like a universal representation of Chinese parenting, they were only her personal childrearing strategies.

Unlike Chua (2011), most of the immigrant participants in this study recognised the unsuitability of some traditional Chinese parenting practices for New Zealand, and the need to embrace the culture of the host country. Their shift in parental expectations is examined in the following two chapters. The participants’ childrearing approaches were dynamic and evolving. For example,

Jan: I am gradually changing my expectations. I feel that I need to change my ways of thinking. Chinese do believe that studying is the most important thing. But I now feel that it's not. I think personality is more important.

The notion of ‘tiger mother’ reinforces the essentialisation of Chinese parenting as authoritarian and controlling which is not a reflection of the parenting styles of most participants. This metaphor of ‘tiger mothers’ is, therefore, inappropriate to describe the participants in this study. The participants’ commitment and effort in providing a better environment for their children’s upbringing and education, instead, align them with an ancient Chinese story and saying.



## **Mother of Mencius in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

孟母三迁/Meng mu san qian is a historical Chinese saying that has been passed on for generations. While it literally means the mother of Mencius relocated three times, the saying is often used to connote the importance of sacrifices made by mothers and the external environment for children's upbringing. 孟母三迁/Meng mu san qian involves a story about how Mencius' mother moved houses three times in order to find the 'best' neighbourhood and environment to give Mencius the best upbringing (Bai, 2005; Chan, 2004; Wu, 2009).

Mencius was a disciple of the grandson of Confucius, and as discussed in the literature review chapter, Confucianism has influentially shaped the knowing and being of Chinese all over the world. Mencius was a great scholar who believed that the innate character and ability of children were originally good, but the external environment, if not carefully controlled, could lead to evil. Mencius' father died when he was little so he was brought up by his mother who recognised the importance of the external environment on her child's behavior, habits and learning attitudes. This story highlights the importance of the environment and the efforts made by parents, mothers in particular, in contributing to children's development and future success.

This ancient Chinese story seems to be applicable to contemporary Chinese immigrant families in New Zealand. Firstly, the house prices of the 'grammar zone' in Auckland were said to be driven up by Chinese immigrant families who wanted to enroll their children in the 'top' state schools in order to give their children the (perceived) 'best' education (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012). Secondly,

according to a longitudinal immigration survey in New Zealand, providing a better future for their children was one of the most common reasons for immigrants to come to New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2008), and education is one of the main factors that particularly attract Chinese immigrants to New Zealand (Ip, 2002; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012).

Almost all participants in this study considered New Zealand to be a better place than China to bring up children, due to its education and living environment.

Jan: I think I also do not have confidence in the food in China. When we took our children back, we wouldn't let them eat the local food ... I think children in China have too much homework and they have a lot of pressure.

Mei: It's all for the children. The living conditions for children here is much better ... After my first child was born, my parents kept telling me to leave China. They said the education in China is too rigid. It only expects students to memorise and it spoon-feeds children ... They encouraged me to take my child out of China and be educated here ... so we left China for our children's education.

Nan: My children like it here ... there is too much homework in China ... they will not be able to cope.

Sonia: I am worried that they may pick up some bad habits when they go back to China.

All participants intended to remain in New Zealand long term, except Sonia and Jan who were considering moving to Australia at the time of the interview because “there are more [job] opportunities in Australia”, according to Jan. Nonetheless, some participants believed they would leave New Zealand once their children completed university qualifications, indicating that they chose to remain in New Zealand only because of their children’s education and upbringing.

Mei: When our children are older and become independent, we actually do not want to stay here anymore. This country is “太老了”/tai lao le [literally means too old, but implying New Zealand does not have enough activities for young people]. Only old people want to live here, all the younger ones are gone. To be honest, what is so good about New Zealand?

Anita: I have *never* [emphasised] thought of staying here forever until I died [laugh] ... My husband told me the main reasons for us to come here are because his parents are getting old and the education system in Hong Kong is not good. It’s likely that my children may want to work overseas or return to Hong Kong when they are about twenty and finished university. They may want to go to Australia. My husband and I will follow them, of course only if they want us to go with them. I will only be fifty or sixty in twenty years when they finish studying. I think I don’t have to stay here. I should still be able to leave.

Lian: My husband wants to return to China to live once he is retired.

Confucianism stresses the impact of environment on children (Bai, 2005). Like the mother of Mencius, the participants chose to 'relocate' their children to New Zealand for a better environment to bring them up. In addition, as in the earlier abbreviated stories, many had left behind their extended families, and had stopped pursuing their own education and career because of their children's upbringing. While the ancient story does not tell whether the mother of Mencius returned to her old neighbourhood when her son grew up and turned into a great scholar, it is apparent that some participants intended to leave New Zealand when they are no longer needed by their children. They only remained in New Zealand because they believed it is a better place than China to raise their children.

As their children's education and upbringing was one of the main reasons that kept them in New Zealand, the participants were particularly concerned about their children's education and socialisation. However, their involvement in their children's education varied greatly across the different social spaces. On the whole, while they were actively engaged in the private spaces, such as at home, their participation in the public spaces, such as at the kindergartens, was nominal.

## **Parental involvement: Private and public spaces**

Since the children's upbringing and education were key factors that motivated the participants to reside in New Zealand, and most of them were full-time stay-at-home mothers or worked part-time with flexible work-hours, they were prepared to be highly involved in their children's early learning and development. However, the manner of their involvement across the private and

public spaces is significantly different. Each space is a social network embedded with social and cultural meanings, rules, structures and power relations (Bourdieu, 1985, 1989; Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Those who share a common habitus share the same place within the same space, and they experience a sense of belonging and inclusion (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989, 2008).

Within the private spaces, such as the home environment, where the participants were familiar and comfortable with the expectations, they had a sense of belonging, control and confidence to assert their active parental involvement. On the other hand, their participation in the public spaces, such as the kindergartens, was passive, minimal and reflected a sense of disempowerment due to a range of factors. These include their identity as Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand, linguistic barriers and the challenges they experienced in making sense of the social and cultural expectations in the public spaces. These factors are analysed in Chapters Seven and Eight. This part of the chapter provides an overview of the participants' involvement across the two main social spaces.

### **Private spaces: Active involvement**

The findings generated in this study are consistent with previous research which indicates that Asian (including Chinese) parents in English-speaking countries are actively involved in their children's learning through controlling their daily activities in the private spaces (Guo, 2005, 2010; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Lahman & Park, 2004; Okagaki & Bojczyk, 2002; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004). The participants' involvement ranged between

engaging in children's learning at home to partaking in their weekly extra-curricular activities. It is noteworthy that since these participants either did not work or worked only part-time, they were able to utilise the services of public kindergartens that offer much shorter operating hours than private education and care services and thus were available to be highly and actively involved in their children's daily activities.

### ***Engaging children in learning at home***

Almost all the participants engaged their children in literacy work, both English and Chinese, at home. Recognising and writing the alphabet, and reading English language story books were common home activities. Most families also had resources, such as story books and exercise books to support these literacy activities.

Anita: We teach her how to write A to Z at home, but we haven't come to the stage where she knows "a" and "m" together makes "am".

Ella: I teach her some writing at home, like ABC... I also teach her the sound of the letters... I read to them every night before they go to bed, like a story time.

Mei: I teach him reading and writing at home because his elder brother has to do these at home, so I teach them both at the same time.

Vicky: I have started teaching her how to write ABC, starting with the alphabet first.

Many parents also 'tried' to teach their children Chinese poems verbally, such as \*唐诗/Tang shi (poems from the Tang Dynasty, see glossary), and Chinese

idioms, \*三字经/*San Zi Jing/Three Characters Classics* (see glossary). Their involvement in children's Chinese literacy skills is examined in more depth in the next chapter.

The participants in this study and those in Guo (2010), another New Zealand study, both used the word, 教/*jiao* (teach) frequently when asked about their children's home activities. This shows that Chinese immigrant parents expect their children to participate in some 'learning' at home. The participants in Guo's study claimed that "serious learning only happens at home ... serious things such as words, numbers, drawing, or piano" (Guo, 2010, p. 118). Another study in a New Zealand public kindergarten yielded a similar result (Mitchell et al, 2006, p. 53), that much learning takes place at home in Chinese immigrant families. Other national and international research findings also report that Asian (including Chinese) parents in English-speaking countries actively participate in their children's learning by controlling their daily home activities, and ensuring children spend an appropriate amount of time in 'serious learning' as opposed to watching television and unstructured activities, such as free play (Guo, 2005; Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Lahman & Park, 2004; Okagaki & Bojczyk, 2002; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004).

As in their earlier stories, although most participants gave their primary school children home exercises on numeracy and literacy, some of them, such as Anita, Jan, Jean and Nan, claimed their kindergarten children were too young to practise reading and writing in a serious manner. Considering that children in China begin formal and structured learning at preschool and kindergarten level (Cheng, 2001; Hsueh & Barton, 2005; Mellor, 2000), these participants' relaxed beliefs indicate that they were prepared to relinquish some

of the conventional practices of families in China and embrace new sets of expectations that were more aligned with the dominant culture of the host country. Besides actively participating in children's home activities, the Chinese immigrant mothers in this study were also busily involved in children's extra-curricular activities.

### ***Engaging children in extra-curricular activities***

While children's extra-curricular activities are discussed under the banner of private spaces in this thesis, it is acknowledged that the boundary between private and public spaces is sometimes indistinct, as social spaces are interrelated and interdependent on each other (Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). New spaces are often created by immigrants to resist constraints in the public spaces (Levitt, 2007), and participation in out-of-kindergarten skilled-based activities is one such space.

Their short stories show that almost all of the participants' children were enrolled in some extra-curricular activities. Those children who were in primary school had much more after-school activities than their kindergarten siblings because some parents believed that kindergarten children were not (developmentally) ready for certain skill-based activities. Even so, more than half of the participants enrolled their kindergarten-aged children in out-of-kindergarten skill development lessons. For those children who were not enrolled in any activity at the time of the interviews, their parents said they were researching and planning to locate the best option(s) for them.

Ballet, piano, swimming, gymnastic and drawing classes were particularly popular. When asked to explain the reasons for choosing certain activities,



most participants claimed their choices were based on the children's interests and the benefits of an activity for children's learning and development. For example, drawing classes required Ada, Vicky's daughter, to hold on to a drawing pen for an hour and this enhanced her ability and confidence in holding a pen(cil) when writing the alphabet. While Ella believed that ballet helped her daughter, Catherine, to develop a gentle and calm character because she was over active at home, Nan said that it helped her daughter to become more confident in her movement, so she would join in with the other children during kindergarten music and movement time. Other pragmatic and strategic reasons include that the ability to play a musical instrument increases the chance of successful enrolment in prestigious schools, and certain musical instruments further provide an opportunity to join the school orchestra. The participants' responses indicate that these parents were responsive, careful and strategic in choosing extra-curricular activities for their children.

Moreover, some parents demonstrated a gendered opinion about certain activities.

Anita: For girls, I think piano is suitable... boys must know how to swim.

Katie: Girls need to be raised carefully, for example, to let them learn a lot of things. Boys are different ... probably some physical exercises.

Nan: Girls need to work on their appearance, manner, the way they talk and their temperament.

The participants had to take their children to attend these extra-curricular activities, and some children had two to three activities per week. Some parents, such as Jean, also had to stay for the lessons in order to learn how to

support children with home-practice. As stated in Guo (2006, p. 11), “children routinely practice the violin, piano, writing or drawing. Parents take an active part in teaching their children these skills”. The participants’ stories show that these parents invested a lot of time, effort and money in their children’s extra-curricular activities. Since it is culturally insensitive and inappropriate to ask the participants about their financial situation, the researcher could only assume that they had the resource and habitus to commit their children to a range of extra-curricular activities. Nonetheless, it seemed that even those participants who had to watch their spending prioritised enrolling children in these extra-curricular activities. For example, Jean was a single full-time mother, and the interviews were conducted at her house. Its condition was run-down and the interior was extremely modest. Nevertheless, Jean’s primary school daughter had piano and ballet lessons each week.

The responses collected indicate that the choices of extra-curricular activities for children were carefully considered and the activities were taken seriously because they were perceived as beneficial for children’s development and achievement. This finding is consistent with another New Zealand study which claims that activities like playing piano and drawing are considered as “serious learning” by Chinese immigrant parents (Guo, 2010, p. 118). These extra-curricular activities were a (private) means of building up children’s capital, including the capital required to be boys and girls, according to the participants’ gendered opinions. These responses are in contrast to the findings in another New Zealand research in which Chinese immigrant mothers believe extra-curricular activities are “just for them [the children] to have some fun” (Wu, 2011, p. 131). Wu (2011, p. 134) claims that those families “who have more

resources can afford to pursue pleasure or merely cultivate their children's interests". The findings of this current study, however, indicate that Chinese immigrant parents have a high level of expectation regarding their children's participation in these activities, irrespective of their financial resources.

The theories of segmented assimilation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) and concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2011) can be applied here to analyse the participants' involvement in their children's extra-curricular activities. Segmented assimilation illustrates how the support and resources provided by family and community help the second generation of some ethnic immigrant groups to move socially upward (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Those children who come from families with more resources, such as higher levels of parental education, financial status and out-of-school activities, usually achieve higher academic success (Feliciano, 2006; Hibel, 2009; Levitt, 2001, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Although no participant in this study used upward social mobility to justify the range of extra-curricular activities of their children, their children are likely to benefit from these adult-organised activities. An old Chinese saying, 望子成龙/Wangzi chenglong (wishing for dragon children), is used in the next chapter to explore parental expectations of the participants.

The phenomenon of "concerted cultivation" (Lareau, 2011, p. 2) explains how parents' intense involvement in childrearing at home through a range of adult-organised activities leads to higher children's achievement than when parents believe in the "accomplishment of natural growth" (Lareau, 2011, p. 3) and thus intervene little in children's learning and development. Participation in extra-curricular activities, like music and swimming, is considered as a means of building cultural capital and eventually greater achievement (Bodovski, 2010).

The findings discussed in this section indicate that the participants were aware of the immediate and wider value of investing in children's home learning and extra-curricular activities. With their resources and a concerted effort, their children are likely to achieve academically and move upward socially.

Nonetheless, the participants' concerted effort was confined mainly to the private spaces where they were familiar with the embedded social and cultural meanings and where they were able to make decisions about their children's activities. Their involvement in the public spaces, namely the kindergartens, as to be discussed in the next subsection, is passive and minimal. This thesis argues that the participants exercised agency (González, 2005; Levitt, 2007; Willis, 1977) to access and create new spaces, such as by engaging their children routinely in numeracy and literacy exercises and enrolling them in a range of extra-curricular activities, in order to supplement what they felt was not provided at the kindergarten public space. Other private spaces and strategies created and utilised by the participants to resist structural constraints in the kindergartens are further examined in the next two chapters.

### **Public spaces: Limited involvement in kindergartens**

Supporting families to develop a sense of belonging and empowerment in the ECE settings, and forming partnerships between teachers and parents are emphasised in a range of New Zealand official documents (Children's Commissioner, 2013; ECE Taskforce, 2011; ERO, 2004, 2006, 2011a; MoE, 1996, 2002, 2004b; see also documentary review). Nevertheless, no participant in this study claimed that they were actively involved in the kindergarten and the narratives indicate that their participation was, indeed, minimal and passive.

The philosophy of AKA also aspires to parent-teacher partnership, and all three kindergartens involved in this study received positive comments in their ERO reports regarding their enactment of partnership with parents and inclusivity of families (AKA, 2007b; ERO, 2010a, 2010b, 2011c; see also documentary review). It is unclear what evidence ERO reviewers used to base their comments upon, but it is clear that within these ERO reports, there is no specific reference to the involvement of different cultural groups. Therefore, the disengagement issues of the Chinese parents are also not mentioned. An ERO report on the AKA actually suggests that some kindergartens still have much work to do to integrate parental aspirations and expectations in the programme and to involve families in the “planning and assessment of children’s learning and development” (ERO, 2006, p. 8; see also documentary review).

According to the participants’ responses, their stated level of involvement ranged from being disinterested with no intention of being involved, to meeting the basic requirements of each kindergarten, to wanting to be involved but not knowing how to do so.

Anita: I am not interested to be involved.

Katie: I never have the intention to stay at the kindergarten.

Lian: I don’t really think I need to participate.

Nan: This kindergarten expects parents to help twice a term, and I have done that. I also came and helped when the teachers wanted parents to help tidy up before the end of term.

Jan: I normally participate in the usual activities ... I don't stay at the kindergarten regularly. If I have time, I will go there early, and if they don't have parent-help for the day, I will help ... I am embarrassed because I don't go and help at the kindergarten, but I always go with them [the children] to those excursions.

Ella: I signed up for different activities. I helped with the setting up, tidying up and decorating the kindergarten. It depends. If I do not feel tired and I can help, I will ... Since I have so much time, I actually want to help more at "kindy", but I have a feeling that the "kindy" does not need any help. There are always so many adults there. I don't even know what I should be doing at "kindy".

In addition, most participants justified their minimal involvement in kindergartens with a practical reason: they were too busy to be involved, because they needed to go to work, to attend to family business and household chores, and to look after younger children who were at home. This 'busy-ness' is related to their immigrant identity which is to be examined in the next chapter. Having a busy life seems to be one of the characteristics of Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand, and being too busy to be involved in their children's ECE settings is one of the reasons used by the participants in three previous New Zealand studies (Guo, 2005; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012).

The participants' limited involvement in the kindergartens suggests that partnership between teacher and the participants is still very much an espoused institutional ideal only. The factors that contributed to their minimal involvement are discussed in the next section, and then analysed in-depth in terms of their

identities and sense of belonging in Chapter Seven. However, before looking into the involvement of the participants in public kindergartens, it is pertinent to examine why they had chosen public kindergartens as the preferred ECE service for their children since there are diverse ECE services available in New Zealand.

### ***Reasons for choosing kindergartens***

While the findings of a research report to the MoE state that “the quality of different services is the most important factor taken into consideration by parents when choosing a service” (Robertson, Gunn, Lanumata & Pryor, 2007, p. 1), only a few participants implicitly mentioned the ‘quality’ of kindergartens as their reason for choosing this particular ECE service. For example, Sonia perceived kindergarten teachers to be more “committed” and Vicky believed that since teachers from private childcare centres worked longer hours, they had less patience with the children. Since ECE in New Zealand was a new experience for the immigrant participants, it is possible that the participants lacked the confidence and knowledge to evaluate the ‘quality’ of the different ECE services. Functional concerns seem to be more important for these immigrant parents.

‘Getting ready’ for primary school was a main consideration. For example, Sonia and Vicky believed that the routines of kindergartens were closer to that of primary schools, and therefore that attending kindergartens would help children to better adjust to the expectations at primary schools. Vicky and Jan further felt that since there were close to forty children per kindergarten session, children were better able to develop social skills and these skills were important

in primary schools; whereas home-based centres or community-based centres were much smaller and children had less opportunity to practise social skills.

Almost all the participants used 'convenience' spontaneously as the reason for their choice, such as the kindergarten being within walking distance from home. This is a particularly important reason for Sonia who relied on her parents to sometimes support her with the dropping off and picking up of children because her parents could not drive.

Ella: It [the kindergarten] is close to where we live. The most important consideration is convenience.

Lian: Mainly it [the kindergarten] is more convenient for me. I think kindergarten definitely is not as good as the private centres.

Sonia: This [kindergarten] is more convenient for my elderly parents to pick up and drop off.

Vicky: Kindergarten is convenient. I can pick them up when I finished work in the afternoon [This kindergarten used a full day model].

The minimal fees charged by public kindergartens is another key consideration. Although most participants could financially afford private ECE centres, those who were full-time mothers and did not work felt that private centres were too much of a monetary burden for the families and there was no need to utilise these private centres.

Ella: Yes, too expensive. I asked around before, because at some stage I wanted to put them in "daycare" so that I could go back to study. But wow, it's too expensive. So I thought about it and gave up the idea.



Jean: One is because I don't work. If I don't work and put the children there for the whole day, it's quite a financial burden. From the children's perspectives, it can be tiring and boring for them to stay at the centre for the whole day.

Mei also disagreed with the idea of leaving children in private centres for extended hours because it made children very tired. There is congruence between the findings of this study and that of the research report by Robertson et al (2007, p. 1) which highlights "practical considerations, such as opening hours, flexible use and service location" as key factors that impact on parental decision in choosing ECE services for their children. Practical considerations were also used by the participants to rationalise their limited involvement in the kindergartens.

### ***Diverse ways of (non)involvement in the kindergartens, diverse reasons***

Within the kindergarten settings, parents are expected and have opportunities to be involved in a range of areas, from being parent-help to becoming a parent committee member involved in decision-making. The level of involvement of the participants varied across the different areas for different reasons. Settling the unsettled child is one common reason for parents to stay at the kindergartens.

#### *Responding to the needs of children*

Most participants reported they found it necessary to stay at the kindergartens when their young child was unsettled. While some found it difficult to leave their crying child with the teachers, others were responding to the

requests of teachers who expected parents to stay and accompany their unsettled child at the kindergarten. Jan said her son would be happier if she stayed and would feel proud that his mother was helping. These findings, thereby, also provide evidence that the participants were neither authoritarian parents nor 'tiger mothers'; instead they were attuned to the emotional needs of their children.

Some parents simply felt that they could find out more about their children's interests and social skills if they participated in the kindergarten's activities.

Katie: To understand what my child does in kindergarten, know more about his friends and how he interacts with them.

Jan: I wanted to know what he did at kindergarten ... When I wasn't with him, I did not know if he has any social issue with his friends due to his character. When I went along [to the excursion] with him, I could find out.

Sonia: I went to find out what he did at the trip.

Nonetheless, most participants believed that they should leave once their child was comfortable and settled in the kindergarten.

Jan: If I stayed too long, he attached to me and cried when I left.

Katie: When I stayed, my child attached to me all the times. He felt that when mummy was there, he wanted to show and tell me every little thing. After I left, he had no option but to interact with someone else.

Mei: I often don't stay unless he is not in a good mood and doesn't want to come. Say after I have done a lot of convincing at home, and he still doesn't want to come, then I will stay a bit longer.

Nan: I stayed with her at the beginning when she first started. But once she settled, I don't stay anymore ...

These parents were eager for their children to develop social skills, to become more independent, and to seize the English-speaking opportunities available at kindergartens. These parental aspirations are later analysed in Chapter Eight. The participants felt that children were held back if parents stayed too long. For example, Nan told me, "It will not benefit Jenny [her daughter] if I stay at the kindergarten. She will keep coming to me rather than find some friends to play with". Immigrant parents in another study similarly disagreed that they should be working with their child in the centre because of their "perceptions of prolonged dependence by the child" (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000, p. 244).

Furthermore, since many of the children had previous experiences in other ECE centres before enrolling in kindergartens, most felt secure and settled on their first 'kindy' day, and they wanted their parents to leave.

Lian: He doesn't want me there. Basically, he thinks "mummy" should go. He doesn't want me to stay. Even when he first started, I did not stay with him.

Sonia: He asks me to leave and not to stay [laugh], he wants to do his own thing.

*Parent-help: Meeting the requirements and expectations*

When the participants stayed during kindergarten sessions, they mainly acted as parent-helpers and supported the teachers with routines, like preparing morning and afternoon tea, setting and tidying up the different areas, sorting children's art work, and joining in children's activities. Many parents also mentioned their involvement in excursions and social or fundraising activities, such as disco nights and weekend barbeques organised by kindergartens. A few parents were invited by teachers to promote Chinese cultural practices, such as making dumplings and sharing Chinese stories with children. Both Jan and Nan who were involved in different kindergartens helped teachers to translate notices and newsletters into Chinese, and Nan was also the weekly parent-helper of the kindergarten.

Nevertheless, none of the participants expressed eagerness to be involved. Those who participated in the kindergartens' activities reflected more of an attitude of compliance, responding and conforming to teachers' expectations. This attitude of compliance is linked to the work of many researchers who claim that Chinese parents tend to perceive teachers as having great authority and not to be challenged (Chan, 2006; Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; Guo, 2005; Woodrow & Sham, 2001; Wu, 2011). This parental perception of teachers is examined in more depth in the next chapter.

Literature (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; González, 2005; Obeng, 2007) suggests that it is common for some ECE teachers to consider parental involvement as being limited to parents providing support with daily routines and activities. When the participants of this doctoral study complied with the teachers'

expectations and engaged in supporting routines and activities, the teachers might believe that the espoused discourse of parental involvement was being attained, and therefore felt content with their existing practices.

### *New space, new friends*

At the second stage of interviews, each participant was asked about her opinion with regard to making new friends via the kindergarten, because while none of them mentioned developing new friendships as a reason to be more involved in kindergartens, many of them talked about their limited social network in New Zealand during the first stage of interviews. Some researchers claim that it is common for immigrant families to have little support from friends and extended family in the host countries and they are likely to feel lonely and isolated (Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Pio, 2010). Thus, kindergartens can provide an ideal environment for immigrant parents to be introduced to local families, to help them establish social and support networks and create a sense of community and belonging (Hartzell & Zlotoff, 2004; Mitchell et al, 2006; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010; Ward, 2009).

In this study, while some participants did not feel the need to make new friends, others found it challenging to develop new friendships via the kindergartens. According to Tobin et al (2007), most immigrants want to connect with non-immigrants, but fear being rejected.

Anita: I am not interested in meeting new friends [laugh]... I have a rather limited social network. Even when I was in Hong Kong, I seldom communicated with other parents.

Ella: Everyone is so busy. Each parent just drops off the child and leaves the kindergarten straight away. We do not have time to talk with and understand each other.

Katie: I don't have much communication with other parents, even with Chinese. We just briefly greet each other, and that's it.

Mei: I will, at the most, greet the other parents... conversations will be brief, usually about children ... it's very hard to be good friends with \*洋人 /yang ren. For Chinese parents, they have their own families, everyone is busy.

On the other hand, some participants were excited to share that they had developed new friendships with other parents met at the kindergartens.

Nan: You see, we won't be able to make many friends on our own. The opportunity for us to make new friends is "limited". I don't work, so I don't have workmates. It's true. I met many friends through my son's kindergarten. This is a good "experience", from strangers to become friends, but they are basically all Chinese. I don't think I need to make friends with \*洋人 /yang ren. With \*洋人 /yang ren, our relationship is very superficial, just a greeting and that's it.

Sonia: Even outside the kindergarten, I don't really have many friends anyway. So to meet some friends at the kindergarten is "okay".

Jean, who had an English degree from China, particularly enjoyed participating in social activities organised by \*洋人 /yang ren parents.

Jean: From the kindergarten, I got to know some \*洋人/ yang ren mother... I can expand my social network and I can also get to understand their cultures.

The 'ethnic-choice' of friends, of course, is influenced by multiple factors, including cultural and language repertoires. Language and cultural barriers, indeed, are intertwining factors in discouraging Chinese immigrants to develop friendships with the English-speaking parents, and this is explored further in the next chapter. Most participants, including Ella who married a New Zealand-born and raised Chinese man who used English to communicate at home, preferred to make friends with other Chinese and believed that relationships with \*洋人/ yang ren were superficial. Ella told me,

I know quite a few "Kiwi" [see glossary] parents from this "kindy", the mothers of my daughters' best friends, but we have superficial conversations only, not like the relationships with my "Chinese friends" who I can tell them what's bothering me. I feel that "Kiwis" can't share what's in my mind, maybe it's us that can't share with them.

Ella used "us" and "them" to create an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) for the Chinese and the "Kiwis" respectively. She essentialised each community and employed the politics of identity to establish boundaries between the two communities. By so doing, Ella established a sense of comradeship and belonging with her "Chinese friends" while at the same time excluded the "Kiwis". The participants in this study are Chinese immigrant parents whereas the majority of New Zealand ECE teachers are "NZ European" (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012, p. 82). When the identities of the participants and

that of the teachers are positioned in binaries, communication between the two imagined communities becomes challenging.

*Passive and limited communication with teachers*

Research indicates that when parents and teachers have good communication along with positive relationships, children benefit from improved continuity of learning between home and education settings (Billman et al, 2005; Mitchell et al, 2006; Stonehouse & Gonzalez-Mena, 2004). During the interviews, most parents demonstrated a sound knowledge of the various formal communication channels, namely newsletters, notice boards and emails, and they were attentive to the current issues of the kindergartens as well, such as warnings about the out-break of chicken-pox, requests for recycled resources and the due dates of donation payment. Informal face-to-face communication with teachers during drop-off and pick-up time was the preferred strategy used when the participants had concerns regarding their children.

Some participants did not feel the need to communicate with teachers because their children were settled and happy. A few believed that since there was hardly any 'learning' at kindergartens, naturally they had no concerns regarding their children's learning. For example, Anita and her husband did not talk to the teacher much about their daughter's learning because they "don't think there is any learning here [at the kindergarten]". Lian was also sceptical about the value of communicating with kindergarten teachers. She believed communication is important in primary school, not kindergarten, and she challenged, "What do children learn at kindy?"



Most participants had some educational concerns about their children, and admitted they would like the kindergarten teachers to inform them more about children's learning and development. However, they felt that teachers did not usually initiate this communication. For example, Vicky stressed that if she asked the teachers questions, they would definitely respond; but that the teachers would also definitely not initiate telling her about her daughter's progress. Other parents felt the same.

Ella: Unless I ask, they will give me some answers. But even if they see you, they won't initiate to tell you. Only if you ask them questions, they will talk to you briefly.

Lian: In the kindergarten, teachers do not initiate to talk to parents.

Understandably, effective communication with teachers depends on the English-speaking ability of parents. Out of the ten participants, only Anita, Lian and Mei said they had limited English to communicate with teachers. It seems that even without the language barrier, the participants still found it difficult to engage in conversations with teachers. Not all parents find it easy to voice their opinions and share their parental aspirations with teachers (De Gioia, 2013; MacNaughton, 2004).

Most participants, including those who were competent English-speakers, adopted a passive mode of communication, for example, by reading the newsletters of the kindergartens. This is consistent with previous research findings which indicate that most immigrant parents have minimal communication with teachers due to a range of reasons, such as a lack of linguistic ability, confidence and knowledge of the mainstream teaching

practices (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2005; Lahman & Park, 2004; Tobin et al, 2007; Zhang, 2012). In this study, parent-teacher communication was further discouraged when the teachers did not initiate and express an enthusiasm to engage in conversations with parents.

Research highlights that whereas many immigrant parents would like the teachers to listen to them and understand their needs, “they do not expect or want to tell their children’s teachers what to do” (Tobin et al, 2007, p. 38). Immigrant parents, Chinese or Asian in particular, very often consider teachers as someone with authority who are to be respected (Chan, 2006; Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; Guo, 2005; Wu, 2011). Hence it is possible that the participants might not feel comfortable or confident enough to initiate conversations with teachers, or to express their concerns and make suggestions to teachers. Recent New Zealand studies that involved Chinese immigrant parents in ECE settings attribute Chinese parents’ avoidance of parent-teacher communication to their unwillingness to ask, “the reticence that may be felt by parents in initiating a conversation” (Mitchell et al, 2006, p. 54) and their sense of powerlessness, because previous intimidating and negative encounters with teachers taught them not to make any suggestions and expect teachers to change their practices (Guo, 2010; Wu, 2011).

Each space involves “positions of power” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 16). Kindergarten is a public space where the participants were unfamiliar with its social meanings, and where the participants’ familial values and practices could be challenged, making them feel disempowered (Georgiou, 2006). It is possible that the participants experienced cultural displacement and disorientation when the social messages received from the public space conflicted with their familiar

practices within the private spaces (Bhabha, 1994; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Avoiding unnecessary communication with teachers could be their coping strategy to minimise confusion and confrontation. Issues of disempowerment are further explored in Chapter Eight.

#### *Limited contribution to children's portfolio*

As explained in the literature review chapter, each child at the kindergarten has a portfolio which includes documentation that can be written by both teachers and parents about the child's learning experiences. Hence the portfolio is a form of teacher-parent communication. Yet, the quality and quantity of documentation varies across different ECE centres, including kindergartens. All participants were very aware of the existence of portfolios, and most gave positive and appreciative responses about the effort made by teachers in compiling the documentation.

Nan: I am very "surprised" the teachers have that much time to write so much about each child. I feel that the teachers are really "committed".

This finding is in contrast to the responses from Chinese immigrant parents involved in another New Zealand study who criticised the portfolios as "irrelevant to their children's actual learning and growth" (Wu, 2011, p. 93). Most participants in this current study only commented about the lack of new entries over a long period of time, but quickly used the time-consuming nature of the documentation and high children-teacher ratio to justify the lack of new material on the part of the teachers. Similar to the findings in Wu (2011), almost all the participants thought the purpose of the portfolio was to ensure each child has a good memory of kindergarten experiences.

Jan: It provides good memory for children.

Jean: It provides good memory ... A few years later, he may forget what happened at “kindy”. But when he read what the teachers had written and looked at the photos, he will recall what happened.

Katie: Pretty good – leave some memory.

Mei: This arrangement [of the portfolio] is quite good, so children remember what had happened.

Only after I prompted and explained did some participants acknowledge that the documentation written by teachers helped them understand the interests and strengths of their child. Although portfolios were considered by kindergarten teachers as a means to promote reciprocal teacher-family communication (Meade, 2012; Mitchell et al, 2006; Zhang, 2012), only one parent had contributed written documentation and another one had included a photo of the child’s family holiday. The rest either were unaware of this expectation or had not considered contributing to the documentation to help teachers have a wider understanding of their children’s family and community experiences.

Children’s assessment is identified as an area for improvement in the AKA ERO report (ERO, 2006; see also documentary review). Involving parents in children’s assessment by encouraging them to make contributions to the portfolios is further highlighted as an area needing development in several documents (ECE Taskforce, 2011; ERO, 2011a; MoE, 2004c; see also documentary review). Only Elephant Kindergarten received a commendation in its ERO report for including parents in the assessment process and for the learning stories contributed by parents (ERO, 2011c). The participants’

responses suggest that there was a lack of communication, in terms of the purposes of the portfolios and the expected entries to be contributed by families.

#### *Zero involvement in parent-teacher committee*

The participatory experiences described by the Chinese parents in this study thus far were minimal and mainly aimed at responding to the basic expectations of kindergartens. Therefore it is not surprising that no participants were involved in the parent-teacher committee that is responsible for the administration and finance of each kindergarten, and only Ella had attended one of the committee meetings. In his research, Zhang (2012) also indicates a total lack of involvement of Chinese parents in New Zealand kindergartens' parent committees. The reasons for non-participation provided by the participants in both studies were very much alike, ranging from language and cultural barriers, being busy with housework and looking after pre-kindergarten children at home, to a lack of awareness of the existence of such a committee.

Parents in this study provided some insightful comments. Nan reported that she was concerned about the language barrier when the teachers invited her to join the PTC (Parent-Teacher Committee), she said,

Language barrier impacts on my willingness to join the "PTC". That's why I refused... "PTC" requires you to voice opinions during "discussion". I feel that I can't express myself very well.

Nan's English linguistic ability must have been considered good enough for the teachers to invite her to join the PTC, but she lacked the confidence to accept

the invitation. Linguistic barriers are examined in more depth in the next chapter.

A lack of understanding of the role of the PTC was another factor that discouraged the participants to be involved in the committee and its meetings. For instance, Ella told me she had considered joining the committee in the past because she had “nothing to do”. She attended one of the meetings when her elder daughter was enrolled in the kindergarten. She said,

I stopped going because they did not talk about children at the meeting. They only talked about “donation”, “budget”, and how to spend money. That’s why I never went anymore. .. With the donation, it really doesn’t matter how much we have to pay. But they should talk about the children, what they learnt at “kindy”.

Katie also mentioned about “donations” in her response.

When Sally [her daughter] was there, I thought of going to find out what was involved in these meetings. But I had to look after George [Sally’s younger brother] ... Then later I found out that they mostly talked about “donations” in the meetings because they normally let the parents know in advance what were to be discussed in the meeting. As long as we donate, that should be okay already. You know, they organised lots of fund-raising activities. I help whenever I can in these activities, but they need to lead. I will only help.

It seems that Ella and Katie had expectations of the committee that were different from its normative roles, and they saw no value in ‘discussing’ the operation and financial situation of kindergartens. Whilst *Te Whāriki* (MoE,

1996) and the philosophy statements of the kindergartens state that parents should be involved in decision-making and be encouraged to offer ideas and suggestions to improve the operation of kindergartens, Katie's response reflects her unwillingness to be involved in discussion and decision-making. Perhaps this is due to cultural differences.

Jean: I think it's cultural difference. This kind of autonomy operation, using a committee to run the kindergarten, is very rare in China. Parents are seldom expected to be involved. In here, the way of doing things is different.

This reluctance to engage in autonomous decision-making is in stark contrast to the findings in Ebbeck and Glover (2000) and Li (2010) which highlight the importance of including immigrant parents in decision-making for the learning settings. The findings from the current study indicate that Chinese immigrant parents need to first agree with the purpose of PTC meetings before they feel useful and ready to be part of the committee. This requires teachers to sensitively explain to the immigrant families about the role of the PTC, as well as to be prepared to embrace diverse ways of operating the PTC, such as having alternate focuses of the committee. "Most PTA [similar to PTC] events are unexamined routines which occur each year" (Brown, Souto-Manning & Laman, 2010, p. 528) and these events represent institutional discourses that may perpetuate the divides between families with different social and cultural backgrounds.

Chinese immigrant parents are likely to lack confidence and to feel uncomfortable to participate in unfamiliar events and may be unwilling to spend time in kindergarten activities where they can see no direct value for children's

learning. Perhaps the operation of parent-teacher committees and other dominant practices at kindergartens, which are to be examined in Chapter Eight, should be problematised and critiqued if kindergartens want to become genuinely inclusive. For example, the PTC should emphasise more evaluating children's learning and encouraging parents to contribute to programme planning. Otherwise the "structural and functional systems" of kindergartens will continue to maintain "unequal relations of power" (Li, 2010. p. 132) and to exclude some parents.

## Conclusion

This chapter has presented the stories of the ten participants and discussed the overt and pragmatic reasons related to their (non)involvement in their children's ECE. The findings show that parenting practices of the participants were heterogeneous. Essentialising and analogising all Chinese parents as authoritarian 'tiger mothers' is inappropriate, and this study prefers to align the participants' migration stories with an ancient Chinese story/saying, 孟母三迁 /Meng mu san qian. The participants in this study can be metaphorically described as 孟母/Meng mu (the mother of Mencius). Both Meng mu and the participants relocated their families to seek the best environment for their children's upbringing.

The findings further reveal that the participants were very concerned about their children's early learning and, therefore, they actively engaged in learning activities with children in their private spaces. In contrast, their participation in the kindergartens, a public space, was limited, despite the fact that the discourse of parent-teacher partnership is highly promoted in a range of New



Zealand official documents. The participants were keen to meet the requirements of the kindergartens' policies and to support the teachers accordingly. Yet, their communication with teachers was limited and understanding of teaching practices was also nominal. Teachers and parents did not seem to have mutual expectations with regard to children's portfolios and parent-teacher committee. This misunderstanding and consequently disparity of perspectives led to the participants' minimal contribution towards the portfolios and the committee.

Beside the explanations discussed in this chapter, this study is further interested in investigating the relationship between the in/exclusion of Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand ECE settings and the discourses of identity, particularly the identity of the participants, being Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand. The next chapter, therefore, examines how their identity, coupled with language and cultural barriers, and their parental expectations and practices that were different from the dominant ECE discourses in New Zealand created a sense of non-belonging in kindergartens. ECE settings, very often, are the first New Zealand community that immigrants experience. A positive experience of this community is pivotal to helping them to feel settled, and this experience is likely to subsequently influence how they engage with their children's primary and secondary school teachers in the future.

# 7. The politics of identity: Being Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand

## Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate the participation of Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand ECE and the factors that influenced their (non)involvement in their children's early education. The previous chapter has established that the participants were actively involved in their children's learning in private spaces, whereas their engagement in the kindergartens, a public space, is passive and minimal. It has also identified several practical reasons that impacted on the participants' involvement in New Zealand ECE. This chapter argues that these considerations extended beyond overt and pragmatic factors, such as availability and English-speaking ability. Instead, they are underpinned by complex issues of identity, cultural and linguistic capital, and cultural beliefs regarding parenting and education. Each of these facets is shaped by discourses. This chapter presents and analyses the findings on these complex factors and discourses.

The participants' involvement in New Zealand ECE was influenced by their identity as Chinese immigrant parents. This chapter begins with an examination of how their identity constrained their social network and childcare support whilst motivated them to set a high expectation for children's learning and attainment in order to fight against discrimination and prejudice. Then, the focus of the chapter shifts to analysing the ethnic identity of the participants. All of

them identified themselves, without any hesitation, as Chinese. This strength of conviction warrants exploration. Being Chinese immigrants in New Zealand also means they tend to be transnationals, an identity that is closely linked to their hybrid and fluid parenting practices, and to their sense of (be)longing and (non)involvement in New Zealand communities.

Thereafter, the chapter explores the multiple tiers of cultural and linguistic barriers that the participants experienced. This includes examining their lack of cultural capital to facilitate meaningful communication within the normative protocols and etiquettes of New Zealand society. Consequently, this study is also interested in gauging the value of having Chinese-speaking teachers in ECE settings. Then, the chapter explores the participants' expectations of children, and how these were again shaped by their identity of being Chinese immigrants in New Zealand. After many compromises, a range of pragmatic strategies was developed and employed by the participants within their private spaces to help their children as much as possible to maintain Chinese linguistic ability and cultural practices. In light of the notions of \*脸子/lian zi (face, see glossary) and competition, the chapter concludes with an analysis of how being Chinese and being immigrant parents contributed to the participants' high aspirations for their children's education. These parental aspirations and strategies of the participants differ from the dominant discourses practised in New Zealand ECE settings. Teaching practices are discussed in the upcoming chapter, but the participants' involvement in their children's ECE was influenced strongly by this disparity and the hierarchy of discourses.

## **Being immigrants**

### **Lack of childcare support**

Most of the participants reported that they received little childcare support from extended family members and friends. As discussed previously, research indicates that immigrants' social and supporting networks are usually limited because they often do not have many friends or family members in the host country (Ali, 2008; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Pio, 2010), a limitation particularly relevant to the participants' childcare arrangements. For example, both Katie and Sonia had to take their child back to China to be looked after by the grandparents, so they could continue to work in New Zealand.

Only one participant, Sonia, had consistent childcare support from her parents, who lived with her. The rest all claimed they were the main or sole carers of their children, with sporadic spousal participation. Many received short-term childcare support, particularly during their pre-natal and neo-natal period, from the children's grandparents. It is common for grandparents to visit New Zealand to provide support during this critical period. Most grandparents of the participants, nevertheless, did not intend to stay long term because of language and cultural barriers, the lack of friends, and unavailability of the Chinese food that they were accustomed to. The minimal and inconsistent support from grandparents was also not without drawbacks, for example, their inability to drive and speak English meant the mothers still have to do all the errands.

According to some researchers, Chinese families are usually collectivists who emphasise the importance of familial harmony, shared responsibilities and

interdependence (Lee, 1996; Rao & Chan, 2009; Salili, 1996; Wu, 2011; Yang et al, 2006). Hence, it was unexpected that many participants said grandparents were not suitable to be caregivers of children due to old age and conflicting approaches to childrearing practices.

Jan: Actually my parents or their generation are not well suited to look after children. They don't know how to take care of children. They don't have as much experience as I have. They can only play with the children for a little while. You can't ask them to look after the children.

Mei: I also do not like my children to be looked after by elderly people. I take care of my children most of the time.

None of the participants had trialled baby-sitters, and only Lian had a Chinese nanny for a short period of time. While Sonia and Vicky sent their children to a Barnados home-based centre when an unexpected event occurred, some participants left their children with neighbours or friends in emergency situations. Most of the participants took their children with them anywhere they went. They explained that their reluctance to employ nannies or baby-sitters was mainly due to cultural and language differences.

Mothers have an important role in traditional Chinese families, "it is considered a mother's duty to bring up her children well" (Rao et al, 2003, p. 478). The phrases 不放心 /bu fang xin (worry) and 不方便 /bu fang bian (inconvenient) were used often by the participants, expressing their sense of insecurity when leaving their children to be looked after by someone else, especially non-family members. Language barriers made it inconvenient to communicate with English-speaking baby-sitters; and cultural differences

discouraged Chinese parents from leaving children alone with baby-sitters who did not understand Chinese cultures. Yet, Chinese nannies were too costly, according to the participants.

It seems that most arrangements made by the participants for their children were based upon convenience and limited options. For example, a specific kindergarten was chosen because it was within walking distance, so a grandmother who was visiting from China and did not drive could help with dropping children off; the music teacher lived just across the road so the child could walk over to have the lesson independently; the choice of primary school was determined by where the neighbour sent her child so this neighbour could help with picking up during emergency situations. The emphasis on convenience suggests that being immigrants very often means lack of support and therefore pragmatic strategies are required to make things work 'conveniently'. Nonetheless, this criterion of convenience was not the participants' default parenting principle. Other considerations, which are also examined in this thesis, include their parental aspirations and the needs of their children.

### **Upward social mobility**

Research suggests that it is common for immigrants to experience downward social mobility in the host country when their overseas qualifications and working experience are not recognised, and Chinese immigrants in New Zealand are no exception (Ip & Murphy, 2005; Pio, 2010; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012). Consequently, it is common for immigrant families to use their children's education as a ladder for life betterment to resist downward social mobility

(Arzubiaga et al, 2009; Basit, 2012; Feliciano, 2006; Hibel, 2009; Li, 2001, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Although none of the participants in this study mentioned using children's education for upward social mobility as such, they all had high expectations of their children's learning and attainment. They believed that their children needed to work harder than their local peers in order to stand out academically because racial discrimination and prejudice were likely to disadvantage their children in the work force in New Zealand.

Jan: I told my son that his academic level can be the same with his "Kiwi" friends now. However, when he looks for a job, the employer will definitely pick a "Kiwi" when they compare his qualifications with the "Kiwi" if both are at the same level. That's why I keep telling him that he needs to be better than the "Kiwis". He needs to accept this fact unless he plans to go back to China. If he says he want to go back to China, I will ask him if he knows Chinese. That's why he needs to learn Chinese. I remind him that he needs to prepare himself with options.

Jean: I don't think they will be less capable than "Kiwi" children academically, but once they start working, there must be a certain level of discrimination, simply due to a Chinese face. That's why many [Chinese parents] think our children need to be bi-lingual, English and Chinese, to be in an advantageous position.

These parents believed that their children needed to work much harder than 'local' peers to enhance their competitiveness. Previous research shows that some Chinese immigrants perceived racism as unavoidable in New Zealand (Guo, 2010). The participants' responses in the above show that they were

concerned about racism and discrimination in New Zealand, and therefore found it necessary to better prepare their children for this perceived reality. Li (2001, 2004) calls this perception a 'minority ideology', a belief that drives Chinese immigrant parents to expect their children to work much harder than the local peers, and to use education to fight against racism.

By having high aspirations for children's achievement and sharing it with their children from a young age, immigrant parents reinforce the importance of academic excellence and hope that their children stand out from their peers (Basit, 2012). The participants' educational aspirations for their children are discussed later in another section because their high academic expectations were not simply in response to being immigrants, but also to their Chinese identity. They came from a country where education is highly competitive and considered as the most important means for upwards social mobility (Zhou & Kim, 2006), and they were all proud to identify themselves as Chinese.

## **Being a proud Chinese**

Although over half of the participants had been living in New Zealand for more than ten years, none identified themselves as being a New Zealander or 'Kiwi'. All of them, except Nan and Anita, identified as Chinese without hesitation. Nan said she usually told people that she was an Asian, and if there was further inquiry, she would say she came from China. Since Anita was from Hong Kong, she preferred identifying herself as a 'Hong Konger', although she did not mind claiming herself Chinese.

Most participants justified their choice of identity as based on their birth-place. They believed that since they were born in China, they were naturally



Chinese, no matter how many years they had resided in New Zealand. Some found the question redundant, arguing that since they looked hundred per cent Chinese, there was no reason to say otherwise, and that others would never believe them if they claimed to be New Zealanders.

Jan: What's wrong with telling people that we are Chinese? Our face naturally tells people who we are.

Katie: Even if I don't tell people I am Chinese, they can tell I am Chinese ... I am used to telling people I am Chinese. There is nothing bad about being Chinese.

Mei: But we have a Chinese face ... how can we say we are "Kiwi", not Chinese? This is impossible. It is nothing embarrassing to tell people you are Chinese.

Lian: You don't have to tell. People look at your face, they know straight away ... I am a Chinese. Why would I tell people that I am a New Zealander? There is nothing to be ashamed of being Chinese.

Sonia: They won't think that you are a New Zealander as your look and accent tell people that you are not a "Kiwi".

It is apparent that the 'Chinese' look of the participants made them the visible 'others' in New Zealand, and they thus refused to claim themselves as 'Kiwis'. This phenotypical justification is similar to the findings in another New Zealand study that involved Asian adolescences (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008). "Phenotypical differences ... constituted the most significant factor impacting on the identity" of the adolescent participants who "were cast as the "Other" in New

Zealand society” (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008, p. 70). Although the participants’ responses indicate a sense of pride in being Chinese, they also reveal a lack of agency and fluidity because their identity is innately determined and constrained, in a static manner, by how their recognisable characteristics are perceived. It is problematic to measure identity based on physical, visible or recognisable characteristics (Callister, 2008; Lyons, Madden, Chamberlain & Carr, 2011).

When it comes to the ethnic identity of their children who were mostly born in New Zealand, the participants’ responses were more varied and nuanced. The previous phenotypical and birth-place criteria do not necessarily apply to children.

Ella: I also tell my two girls that they are Chinese [they were born in New Zealand]. This is because I came from China and my husband also says he was from China. My father-in-law is very traditional. He will say that my girls are Chinese even though they were born in New Zealand.

Jan: They [the children] were born here, but they are Chinese. Their look is Chinese.

Jean: The children, they will probably identify themselves more as “Kiwi”. This is not very good, but they need to understand Chinese cultures first.

Katie: At the moment, I tell them they are Chinese, and they feel the same. No matter how good her [her daughter’s] English is, but at school, she knows she is different from the “Kiwis”. She knows she is Chinese ... Even though one day they do not speak Chinese anymore, they still know they are different.

Mei: I always tell my elder son that he was born in China, so he is a Chinese ... I also tell him [the younger son who was born in New Zealand] that he is a Chinese, and he has the highest status because he is a “citizen” whereas we all are only “PR” [permanent resident].

Lian: My children will say they are New Zealanders... I think they are still little. It doesn't matter who they think they are, as long as they are happy ... I haven't thought much about this. I have never told them what their ethnicity is. I only told them that their parents are Chinese, and they were born in New Zealand.

Vicky: I am Chinese because I am a first generation immigrant, my children may call themselves “Kiwi” because they were born here.

There are many criteria in terms of determining one's identity (Callister, 2008). The above responses demonstrate the politics, complexity and messiness of identity choices, and highlight variations and inconsistencies in how the participants chose their identities. Different criteria, in particular phenotypical differences and birth place, were adopted arbitrarily by the participants to suit their identity preferences for themselves and for their children. These identity choices selected during the interviews reflected the participants' perceptions of “subjective reality” (Atkinson, 2007, p. 239) and/or constraint.

The earlier narratives show that many participants were proud of identifying themselves as Chinese. This finding is consistent with the Canadian research with Chinese immigrant parents who identified themselves strongly as Chinese and were proud of their Chinese heritage, particularly regarding education (Li,

2001). As discussed in the theorising chapter, overseas Chinese are now seen in China as patriots who are still connected closely with their ancestral homeland (Nyíri, 2004), and contemporary Chinese immigrants are also comfortable to proclaim their Chinese identity because of China's expanding economy and international status (Benton & Gomez, 2003). It is possible that the growing power of China on the world stage and the participants' sense of patriotism might have contributed to their pride in identifying themselves as Chinese.

Claiming oneself to be Chinese may also mean distancing from or dissociating with a 'Kiwi' identity. For example, Anita's husband, who came to Auckland as a teenager and returned to Hong Kong after completing his university qualification, despised any Chinese who identify themselves as New Zealanders. Anita told me, "He feels that when you tell people you are a New Zealander, you are trying to increase your social status". Apparently, he also growled at his brother who told people in Hong Kong that he was a 'Kiwi' because his brother actually lived in Hong Kong much longer than in New Zealand. It is unclear if her husband's strong sentiment was due to pride in being a Chinese or shame at being a New Zealander because Anita also told me, "my husband actually does not really like 鬼佬/gui lao [Cantonese slang referring to white men], he finds them very discriminatory" due to his previous negative experiences as a Chinese immigrant in New Zealand. This binary perception of being Chinese or a New Zealander seems to suggest that Anita and her husband held an essentialising and polarised view of the two identities, and that they preferred one over the other.

The notion of dissociation may also apply to the children's identity, but in a reversed manner. Responses from Jean highlight her main concerns with how her children's identity was influenced by the negative images of China projected in mainstream society and possible adverse comments about China and Chinese at kindergartens and schools.

Jean: I don't know where they get this idea from. Sometimes, when we mentioned about China, they would say China is very messy, children are kidnapped ... a lot of negative things about China. I don't know where they get these ideas from, from the teachers or from their schoolmates. At home, I won't say these things to the children. But I feel that they talk about mostly negative things of China.

Research shows that Chinese immigrant adolescences in Canada feel that they are disconnected from the school curriculum because Chinese cultures or things about China are portrayed negatively in class (Li, 2010). The participants in this study and their children need to feel proud of China and its cultures before they can positively identify themselves as being Chinese. Furthermore, the identity of the participants goes beyond being Chinese because they also carry the identity of an immigrant. This dual-identity has strong influences on parenting practices.

## **Being Chinese immigrants in New Zealand**

Chinese immigrants in New Zealand constitute a diverse group, ranging from early gold-miners and later market gardeners who settled and integrated, to the current transnationals who are educated professionals or entrepreneurs who have largely arrived in the last thirty years (Ip, 2002, 2003; Spoonley & Bedford,

2012). Furthermore, not all of the participants came to New Zealand under the immigrant points selection system of the 1987 Immigration Act which gives preference to “immigrants who would contribute to skilled labour supply and the economic development of the country” (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012, p. 12). Some participants, for instance, first arrived as international students, and each participant experienced a unique migration journey.

In this study, the researcher has been particularly aware of the danger of essentialising Chinese immigrant parents into a homogeneous group. Immigrants’ parental expectations “were significantly shaped by their immigration experiences and acculturative attitudes” (Li, 2001, p. 490). Yet, the participants’ stories do reflect certain commonalities of contemporary Chinese immigrants in New Zealand, such as their situation of being transnationals who engage in frequent border-crossing in many different ways. This part of the chapter examines how the participants’ parental expectations and their (non)involvement in ECE settings were shaped by their identities, as being transnationals, Chinese and immigrants in New Zealand.

### **Transnational Chinese immigrants**

Transnational families are described as those “who are divided by international borders and who maintain significant emotional and economic ties in two countries” (Dreby, 2010, p.5). Although literature claims Chinese immigrants who arrived in New Zealand in the last thirty years are transnationals who remain connected to their homeland and engage in frequent border-crossing activities (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008; Ho, 2003; Ip, 2002, 2003; Spoonley & Macpherson, 2004), Chinese immigrants from the PRC are said to

be more likely to settle and commit themselves in New Zealand (Ip, 2002). Similarly, the participants in this study were prepared to remain in New Zealand, at least until their children finished their university qualifications, but Anita, Mei and Lian mentioned their desire to spend their retirement in China while Jan and Sonia pondered moving to Australia.

Ong (1999) considers contemporary Chinese transnationals as flexible citizens who have passports and identities for convenience. A few of the participants who had been in New Zealand for more than ten years were still holding onto their PRC passports. They explained that they still had to return to China periodically or even long term in the future, and since China does not allow dual citizenship, it is important to retain their Chinese nationality. On the other hand, those with New Zealand passports claimed it was inconvenient to travel on PRC passports. This notion of convenience aligns with the participants' childcare arrangements discussed earlier. Their choice of identity and citizenship is strategic and instrumental.

Literature suggests that transnational activities are more than geographical border-crossing; instead they also include emotional connections with the home country (Dreby, 2010) and continual references to its cultures and practices (Pacinin-Ketchabaw, 2007). Ip (2002) claims that PRC immigrants in New Zealand engage in a range of transnational activities, which include frequent telecommunications and travel in order to maintain connections with family, friends and business networks in China. The participants in this study were no exception. All of them had strong emotional ties with their homeland because most of their extended family members were still in China, and communications

with them were regular. As such, it is appropriate to consider the participants as transnationals.

Transnational subjects have conflicting motivations underpinning their identity choices as they construct a future in two places (Yeoh et al, 2003). Their identities are fluid and flexible, allowing immigrants to identify with a specific place at a specific time to serve their integration and transnational needs (Levitt, 2003). The participants' stories indicate that unlike their 'model minority' predecessors who were prepared to give up their traditional Chinese practices in order to integrate and become 'good' New Zealand citizens (Ip, 2003), all the participants in this study insisted on maintaining their native language and culture in private spaces. They were also eager for their children to learn New Zealand cultural practices, particularly English, to help their children build up their cultural and linguistic capital, which is crucial for academic success. All these are discussed further later in this chapter. A transnational identity has a strong implication for the participants' sense of (be)longing and (non)involvement in ECE settings.

### **Transnational identity: Lack of sense of belonging and involvement**

Transnational identities are shaped and reshaped by multiple factors, such as the social and economic status of the subjects and their countries of origin, their personal educational background, their feeling of displacement and whether they feel excluded by the host society (Benton & Gomez, 2003; Yeoh et al, 2005). The ten participants had diverse social, economic and education backgrounds, but they all identified as Chinese. The following two transcript



excerpts provide an insight into how they see their identity and sense of belonging in New Zealand.

Anita: I resisted calling myself a New Zealander because I have problems in understanding the cultural practices of this country. That's why I feel like a 二奶仔/er nai zai [literally means the son of the mistress, implying second class citizen].

Researcher: So no sense of belonging?

Anita: Absolutely – no sense of belonging and I do not have any family members here. This is the main reason.

Vicky's response below also explained her choice of identity and expressed her concerns regarding the identity of her children:

Vicky: Firstly, I have never thought of myself as "Kiwi" because I am a first generation immigrant. There is a phrase, 边缘人/bian yuan ren [a person on the edge], meaning we are neither "Kiwi" nor "Chinese", we are sandwiched in the middle. I spent nineteen years in China, in five to six years, I will be thirty-eight and I will have lived in New Zealand for nineteen years too, so it's "half-half". I know both cultures, but I have now become unfamiliar with many Chinese cultures. On the other hand, I will never be able to completely understand the "Kiwi" cultures. That's why we are forever in the 边缘/bian yuan [the edge]. I can only try my best to do things right and to improve myself, but I will never have a sense of belonging. With the children, I hope they are closer to being "Kiwis", but still do not forget about their own cultures. It will be very hard to control the next generation.

Identity is created and recreated through a continuous process, and it can be negotiated and altered when crossing the boundaries of time and space in order to position one's belongingness (Hall, 1996). Vicky constructed a new identity for herself, 边缘人/bian yuen ren, a person sitting on the edge of two boundaries who was "neither Kiwi nor Chinese". This demonstrates that she struggled to position her belongingness as she negotiated across Chinese and New Zealand social and cultural spaces. Her new identity reflects a sense of non-belonging. It seems that Vicky was situated within a third space (Bhabha, 1996) where she deployed a hybrid mix of cultural practices.

Since this study aimed to investigate the factors that impacted on Chinese immigrant parents' involvement in their children's ECE in New Zealand, and the notions of identity and belonging are emphasised in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), it was pertinent to find out if the participants' involvement in kindergartens was related to their identities and sense of belonging in New Zealand. Yet, it was an intention to leave the interview questions as open as possible, and not to pre-determine an association between relationship of identity, belonging and in/exclusion for the participants by signifying this connection in the interview schedules.

The notion of a sense of belonging was not introduced into the interview conversation by any of the participants, suggesting that it might not be a key concern. However, when I spontaneously mentioned the notion, Anita admitted that she felt she had no sense of belonging in New Zealand. When the notion was extended to kindergartens, participants, such as Jan and Katie, were bemused because they had not thought of the need to develop a sense of belonging within the kindergartens. For example, Jan said, "Sense of

belonging? What is this feeling? It's okay – since my child is there, I just go and help when I have the time, there isn't much problem, everyone is happy". The responses from Katie below highlight cultural differences regarding the discourse of belonging in the kindergartens.

Katie: With this, I believe we really think differently from \*洋人/yang ren. To us, we feel that schools and kindergartens are places where children learn, not communities that we have to integrate into. In China, families see schools and kindergartens as places to learn, and when children come home, we stop our connections with the learning institutions. We don't believe that we [parents] have to participate in kindergarten or school activities, or to know each other in the kindergarten very well. We don't consider schools or kindergartens as communities.

Researcher: So this is different from what "Kiwis" think. They believe that these learning places are "communities".

Katie: That's right – "communities"

Researcher: So you don't think you need any sense of belonging in the kindergarten because it's simply a place for children to learn?

Katie: Correct

Katie's responses coincide with the findings in another study, which claim that Chinese immigrant students in Britain believe "school is for the acquisition of knowledge, to pass tests and examinations and thus to obtain a good job" (Woodrow & Sham, 2001, p. 388). While there are no tests or examinations in New Zealand kindergartens, Katie, from a parent's perspective, also regarded

the kindergarten as a place for her child to learn. She did not believe that parents had to consider themselves as part of the kindergarten community. None of the participants complained about being excluded in kindergartens. Instead, all of them said the teachers welcomed parents to stay, and that they always felt comfortable at the kindergartens, even though Ella, Lian and Vicky claimed that the teachers did not initiate conversations with parents, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Considering parental involvement and creating a sense of community and belonging for families are emphasised in many New Zealand official documents, including *Te Whāriki* (Children's Commissioner, 2013; ECE Taskforce, 2011; ERO, 2004, 2006, 2011a; MoE, 1996, 2004b; also see documentary review), this non-belonging orientation of Chinese transnational parents is likely to create challenges for ECE teachers who tried to enact the aspiration of creating a sense of belonging for families. In addition, even if some of the participants had wanted to belong to the kindergarten community, cultural and language differences pose great challenges for them to be included.

### **Language and cultural barriers**

Three recent New Zealand studies that involved Chinese immigrant parents in ECE settings highlight language and cultural differences as barriers to active parental involvement (Guo, 2010; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012). This study has taken a more nuanced approach to analysing the complexities underpinning these differences. Considering the educational and family backgrounds of some participants in the current study, it is easy to 'assume' that some would not encounter communication difficulties, particularly those who had completed their

tertiary/university qualifications in New Zealand or who had an English-speaking spouse. Therefore, it is worth investigating why all participants, except Jean, still preferred to communicate and develop friendships with Chinese or Asians.

In terms of communication within the kindergarten settings, only three participants, Anita, Mei and Lian, said that they struggled to converse with teachers due to linguistic constraints. The rest of the participants felt confident to communicate with teachers. Some participants, however, provided insights into the overt and covert barriers that discouraged them from having meaningful dialogues with teachers and English-speaking parents.

Jan: There is no problem at all if they asked me to help with simple tasks. When they organised some regular functions, I went, but then I realised I could only talk to the other parents about something that is really simple. I think it's due to the fact that our ways of thinking are different from \*洋人 /yang ren ...

Jean: Our English may be okay during one-on-one conversation ... when people are discussing as a group, very often you cannot hear clearly what people are saying. I had this experience when I participated in a "coffee group". Once they started talking as a group, you felt excluded, and it's not a very good feeling.

Nan: It's [her English] okay, not really good. We people from China are all like that, even we can read English, we may not be able to speak. We [Nan and her husband] have our degrees, and our English is up to the standard. People in China call this 哑巴英语/ya ba ying yu [English of the mute] because we don't have the opportunity to practise ... There is not

much problem with basic superficial communication, as long as it's not in-depth ... When it comes to talking about their cultures, I will struggle. Furthermore, I am an intellectual person. If I can't express myself accurately or the others misunderstand what I say, it makes me feel bad. So I may as well not say anything. I don't want people to think that I can't even express simple things. So, it's better not to become involved. I really don't want to create any misunderstanding.

Lian: I think since our cultures are different, it impacts on our communication.

Vicky: There is nothing we can do to change the "cultural differences", and they have their value to exist. I believe in the usefulness of "communication" ... So it's a "reality", but it's not a problem.

The above responses demonstrate how inseparable language and culture are. Language is a form of capital that provides the window to deeper understanding of a culture. Not knowing the language to a sufficient extent not only inhibits communication, participation, and developing relationships and a sense of belonging, it also makes learning the culture difficult. On the other hand, a lack of cultural capital also limits communication at a superficial level. Differences in habitus, such as language and cultural capital, position the participants in a different place from the dominant social-cultural group in New Zealand even though both groups are situated in the same public space (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989, 2008). Not all choices of habitus are available for each agent, and a lack of it creates a sense of exclusion (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989, 2008). Sonia had a New Zealand tertiary qualification and worked at a

dental clinic, but she still found it hard to mix and mingle with her colleagues who grew up in New Zealand.

Sonia: Even at work, no matter what I do, I still don't feel I can talk comfortably to my colleagues ... and I don't understand much of what they talk about, movies and something else ... I cannot even remember the movie stars that they talk about [both laugh out loudly]. I just feel that I cannot integrate. In many areas, we also have different perspectives.

Sonia's experience was shared by the Chinese immigrant parent participants in another study who said they struggled to integrate into the mainstream New Zealand society (Wu, 2009). The fact that immigrants have to acquire the national language and culture also means they are inevitably the 'other' who are expected to integrate and fit in (Lyons et al, 2011). The more cultural capital they acquire, the more they fit in, and the higher chance of being included.

Even without linguistic barriers, cultural differences impact on parent-teacher communication. Having different cultural perspectives means parents do not necessarily agree with all the teachers' practices or parenting suggestions. For example, the kindergarten teachers told Mei to use English with her children at home, so they would settle sooner. Mei refused to do so because previous experiences of her Chinese friends had taught her that if the family started using English at home, the children very soon would lose their native language, and became unable to communicate with extended family members in China. However, Mei found explaining this to the teachers unnecessary because she felt they would not understand her difficulty and needs.

The participants' responses also reflected a Chinese belief, 眼不见, 心不烦/yan bu jian, xin bu fan (when we cannot see it, we will not be worried). This Chinese phrase and its idea were used by Jan and Katie to justify their non-involvement in kindergartens. There were practices at the kindergartens they disagreed with, such as the danger associated with allowing children to use real carpentry tools in kindergartens. Since they did not want to confront the teachers, they preferred not to stay and witness what was happening there.

Jan: During the times that I was there [at the kindergarten], I felt that I did not agree with their ways of teaching. I agree that their teaching is very flexible and it suits children, but there are still things that I disagree with. That's why I would rather not go. It wouldn't help them much with my presence... Previously they organised an evening costume party and I thought we were not used to this kind of activity due to language and cultural differences, so we decided not to go.

Previous research with immigrant families, including Chinese families, also indicates that instead of sharing their disagreement and parental aspirations with teachers, immigrant parents avoid confrontation and prefer to work with their children in their own way at home (De Gioia, 2013; Guo, 2005, 2010; Heng, 2014; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Lahman & Park, 2004; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004). A recent study carried out in New York further claims that Chinese immigrant parent participants "downplayed their own needs and resisted through silence" (Heng, 2014, p. 120). Without an understanding of parental expectations, it is difficult for teachers to ensure a continuity of practices between home and kindergarten. This does not, however, preclude the fact that sometimes teachers recommended inappropriate



strategies for this continuity. For example, if Mei had followed the teachers' advice and used English with her children at home, her children might end up losing their Chinese linguistic ability.

Finally, the discomfort experienced by participants during conversations with local parents and teachers could also be due to cultural differences in communication styles. Whereas assertive verbal expression is usually a positive trait in 'western' societies, Chinese cultures tends to promote quietness, attentive listening and restraint of self-expression (Yamamoto & Li, 2012). It is possible that the self-regulated silence of Chinese immigrant parents alienated and discouraged them from engaging in conversations with teachers and developing friendship with local families. The constraints of language and cultural barriers, therefore, give rise to the following question.

***Will having Chinese-speaking teachers promote parental involvement?***

Findings from a New Zealand survey indicate that Asian teachers and "languages other than English and Māori" are underrepresented in ECE centres (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012, p. 88). Therefore, it was appropriate to investigate the participants' perspectives of the usefulness of having ECE teachers who could understand Chinese language. Most participants responded positively to the idea and acknowledged that they would feel more at ease and motivated to communicate with Chinese-speaking teachers.

This finding is in contrast to an ECE study that involved immigrant parents in Sydney, a culturally diverse metropolitan city (De Gioia, 2013). Only one parent from an entire cohort of 18 participants with eight different ethnicities "stated a preference for staff to speak her home language" (De Gioia, 2013, p. 114).

Chinese participants in a previous New Zealand study indicated that they had a special relationship with Chinese teachers at the ECE centres and felt more comfortable talking to them; yet the Chinese teachers themselves did not believe they had to act differently from the native English-speaking teachers when interacting with Chinese parents (Guo, 2010).

The responses from most participants highlight a recurring notion emerged from the interviews – convenience. The participants claimed that having a teacher who speaks Chinese only makes parent-teacher communication more ‘convenient’. The possibility that this specific teacher would promote Chinese traditions, bridge cultural gaps, or enhance Chinese families’ sense of belonging and involvement was not mentioned. Only Sonia and Vicky recognised the benefit of such a teacher for helping their children learn some spoken Chinese.

### **Parental expectations: Maintaining the home language**

All participants emphasised that they expected their children to maintain the ability to communicate in Chinese. While a range of functional reasons was offered, none mentioned that children needed to be able to use Chinese language because of their Chinese heritage, despite the fact that all participants proudly identified themselves as Chinese and most claimed their local and overseas-born children as Chinese as well. This is different from the research findings in Francis, Archer and Mau (2010) in which nationalistic pride and positive ethnic identity were used by Chinese immigrant parents in Britain to justify the importance of maintaining Chinese linguistic ability. The ability in Chinese language is “conflated with an essential Chineseness” in that study (Francis et al, 2010, p. 112).

Instead, most participants explained that since their children might have to return to China to visit, to study, to work or to live, it is important for their children to be able to communicate in Chinese. Their children were expected to speak in Chinese with extended family members in China, not only face-to-face but also via telecommunication. This is particularly essential for those with grandparents who spoke no English. Having the ability to converse in Chinese helps children to maintain these family ties (Hu et al, 2014; Wu, 2011). Their transnational situation(s) was a factor underpinning the participants' desire for their children to maintain Chinese linguistic ability in order to continue the connections with their homeland. Mei's responses are further linked to the notion of \*脸子/lian zi, an idea that seems particularly concerning for Chinese, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Mei: If they [her children] talk to our family in China in English, I will have to translate. It will look really bad on me.

Sonia also brought up another interesting perspective. She said,

There are so many Chinese here [in New Zealand]. They may need to speak Chinese in the future when working with other Chinese here.

Auckland has a large population of Chinese immigrants and Mandarin has become "one of the most widely spoken languages in Auckland" (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012, p. 96). Being able to communicate with the other Chinese in New Zealand surely will benefit Sonia's children. Moreover, due to the increasing economic power and international status of China, Chinese linguistic ability may open up more opportunities for Chinese immigrant children in the future (Francis et al, 2010), and these opportunities may not be limited to New

Zealand. On the whole, the reasons for maintaining Chinese language were varied, and the strategies that were employed by Chinese participants were diverse as well.

### ***Many compromises, many strategies***

All participants claimed that they spoke Chinese with their children out of the kindergartens, and that their children still mostly responded to them in Chinese. However, between the siblings, some were already communicating with each other in English. Some parents shared their concerns:

Lian: Once he [the elder son] started attending childcare centre and primary school, his Mandarin deteriorated. For Eddy [the younger son], he was already at childcare centre when he began talking. So his English is better than his Chinese ... They are not even interested when I told them stories in Chinese.

Sonia: He [her son] seems to be more interested in learning \*唐诗/Tang shi when he was little. The older he is, the less interested he becomes.

Sonia further complained how her son, John, became more interested in watching English cartoons, such as “SpongeBob and Pooh Bear”, than Chinese DVDs, and he refused to engage in reciting Chinese poems or practise Chinese writing.

Sonia: He wouldn't listen to me. He just ran away ... he ran away from me when I asked him to do some writing.

Some participants learnt from their first child that their expectations were unrealistic, so very often, their expectations for the younger child were different.

As such, their parenting strategies were fluid. For example, some started exposing their first child to \*唐诗/Tang shi, which is a common parental practice in China, and soon realised the impossibility of expecting their three year old to develop the interests and the ability to memorise the poems within the New Zealand language environment. Consequently, they gave up this expectation with the second child. For example, Jan said,

This applied to Eason, my elder one. I taught him Chinese words and made him recite \*三子经/*San Zi Jing*. But I didn't do any of these with Ross [the younger son] ... I don't have that much energy when I have two children. I could do this when I had only one child. Plus when Eason got older, I noticed that these things became useless because he forgot them all. The only good thing with doing this is to enhance his memorising ability. But when there is not enough time, just forget it.

Most participants were also flexible with their children's choice of language because children picked up many vocabularies only in English and sometimes they simply had to use English to express themselves.

Jan: We hope that at least they spend half of the time at home using Chinese. Sometimes, they don't understand all the things we say to them in Chinese, including some vocabularies.

The participants' responses reflect varying degrees of both fluidity and compromise in different areas of their parenting. Wu (2011) claims that Chinese immigrant mothers in New Zealand realise the impossibility of achieving perfect bilingualism, that is equally fluent in both Chinese and English, and they use compromise as a pragmatic strategy. Compromises have to be made to ensure

that Chinese children acquire a good standard of English as well as the ability to communicate in basic Chinese. Within New Zealand, linguistic capital in English has far more value than in Chinese.

For example, Katie and Nan initially sent their children to a private Chinese-English bilingual ECE centre. Yet, both later withdrew their children because while Katie found that her child was becoming confused over English and Chinese, and not having enough exposure to English, Nan's daughter just could not settle. Katie's concern over confusion with the two languages was shared by Mei and Vicky, but in another dimension. They preferred not to teach their children pinyin, which is the Romanised method to learn the Mandarin pronunciation of Chinese characters, too early because their children might become confused while also learning the spelling and pronunciation of English words. This seems to suggest that the participants compromised and prioritised their children's learning of English over Chinese, and the importance of English linguistic capital is explored further in the next chapter.

It is therefore not surprising that although all participants in this study expected their children to be able to communicate in spoken Chinese, either Mandarin or Cantonese, only some insisted on their ability to read Chinese. Most further believed that being able to read was more important than the ability to write.

Ella: This can't be forced upon them. If they can only speak in Chinese, but can't write, just let it be at this stage. Their way of thinking may change as they grow up. They may become interested in learning how to

write Chinese in the future. Then I will definitely let them learn how to write.

Lian: I do not teach them how to write Chinese, only how to read ... My expectation of their Chinese is not very high ... It doesn't matter if he can write or not ... I just want him to be able to read some Chinese when we are back in China, something simple, like the signs.

Vicky: When my children turn seven or eight, I will slowly teach them to write Chinese in order not to give them any pressure.

Whereas most participants believed that their kindergarten age children were still too young to start writing Chinese characters, Chinese children in Hong Kong are expected to learn to write Chinese from a preschool age (Rio et al, 2009). According to research, "maturation and readiness are important determinants" of Chinese parents' expectations (Rao et al, 2003, p. 478), but the developmental expectations of the participants in this study is in contrast to the conventional writing expectations of Chinese parents.

Writing Chinese characters is a complex task that involves the simultaneous application of various skills, such as fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, spatial-awareness and concentration. It requires a higher level of memorisation and repetition than the English alphabet system (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Woodrow & Sham, 2001). Much exercise and drilling is needed before a child can master the skills, memorise and reproduce the characters, which normally happen before formal schooling begins (Wang et al, 2008). The participants, who as children had developed the ability to write in Chinese through the above rote learning process, would understand the complex skills required. Their

relaxed parental expectation regarding Chinese writing, therefore, is another example of their compromising attitude. Knowing that the ability to write Chinese requires so much effort and that in New Zealand, this ability is not as important as in their homeland, the participants compromised and adjusted their parental expectations.

In general, all families in this study had resources at home to expose children to Chinese language, such as Chinese story books, DVDs, word cards and connection to Chinese television channels. This demonstrates that they were determined to maintain the home language for their children, as much as possible. They were well aware that since exposure to Chinese language in public spaces in New Zealand was minimal, they needed to employ strategies in private spaces to ensure that children's Chinese linguistic ability was retained.

Most participants preferred teaching their primary school-aged children Chinese themselves, rather than sending them to private Chinese lessons because they felt that these lessons were too relaxed and easy, and children did not accomplish much. This is in contrast to the findings in two previous studies, one in Britain and the other in the United States, which highlight the benefits and popularity of Chinese schools as a form of ethnic institution for Chinese children as well as their parents (Francis et al, 2010; Zhou & Kim, 2009).

Finally, all but two families in this study planned to send their children back to China for a year or two, when they are eight to ten years old, to improve their Chinese linguistic ability and to pick up the Chinese ways of learning. According to the participants, this is a common arrangement for many Chinese immigrant



families in New Zealand; so customary that none had considered the possible negative impacts of this arrangement, such as the disruption to schooling and friendships. Since so many other families had done this before, the participants believed that their children should do the same. Overall, they felt that New Zealand does not provide a conducive and authentic Chinese learning environment. Hence, they had to outsource other possibilities. Jean's comments summed this up,

I think going back to China to learn Chinese is more practical because they have the right environment there. In here, you learn it only once a week. It's tiring for parents to take their children to classes, and the children struggled to learn [Chinese]. Most importantly, the outcome is not good.

A study in the United States suggests that preserving a person's native language is simply an imagined ideal, because the majority of children who "have attended ethnic-language schools have become English monolinguals with minimum conversational ability in the ethnic language" (Zhou & Kim, 2006, p. 19). The participants in this study were aware of the ineffectiveness of Chinese language schools in New Zealand and preferred to send their children back to China to experience a more robust Chinese-learning environment. The participants were "purposeful innovators" (Levitt, 2001, p. 57) who utilised their transnational and hybrid funds of knowledge, such as their understanding and experiences of Chinese and New Zealand educational systems and practices, to create third spaces (Bhabha, 1996) by fluidly adapting and selecting novel effective strategies to replace existing unworkable practices (González, 2005; González et al, 2005).

## **Parental expectations: Maintaining Chinese traditional virtues, values and cultures**

Families' funds of knowledge are hybrid and fluid, and parents keep on adapting and transforming their practices and strategies in order to meet the needs of family members and local circumstances (González, 2005; González et al, 2005). Transnational parents, in particular, are "instrumental adapters" and "purposeful innovators" (Levitt, 2001, p. 57). As they navigate and negotiate across social spaces with different cultural practices, they construct new spatial strategies (Waters, 2005). All participants in this study recognised the importance of maintaining certain traditional Chinese virtues, and they were flexible and selective in instilling values and beliefs in their children while living in New Zealand.

Vicky brought up a common metaphor used to describe overseas Chinese living in 'western' societies, "banana", which means a person with 'yellow' skin-colour, who, however, thinks and behaves like a 'white' person.

Vicky: I don't want to create a "banana". All Chinese parents do not want to have "bananas". Some Chinese cultural practices are very good. Actually not only Chinese cultures, there are many good things about Japanese cultures that we can teach children, but perhaps we do not understand. We should teach them anything that's good ... There are some Chinese cultural practices that I will not teach Cecilia.

Beliefs like 尊老爱幼/zun lao ai you (respect the elders and love the young), respect for the family members and teachers, and 礼讓/li rang (to be polite,

giving and generous) were mentioned often by most participants. Mei and Anita explained,

Anita: The elder one needs to 讓/rang [be giving and generous with] the younger one.

Vicky: I teach her she needs to respect teachers and parents because this is an important manner ... I don't like children to talk back to parents. You can argue or fight with your colleagues or friends, but children have to communicate with their parents in a different manner. You can question, but you can't talk back. This is not respectful ... teachers are someone who teach her, and they have lots of knowledge.

Mei: When children are old enough, they should know how to respect those who are older, and look after those who are younger ... I should let you have the best and not to fight with you for anything. Like I want to play with this toy, but since you want it as well, I will go and play with something else.

It is pertinent at this point to examine the idea of 讓/rang within the Chinese cultures as there is not an English word or phrase that shares the same meaning. To maintain social harmony, Chinese children are socialised to practice the notion of 讓/rang, that is they are expected to be generous, particularly with the younger ones and not to fight with them. For example, if a younger child wants the toy that an older child is having, the older child is expected to give up the toy, so the younger child can have it. This is different from the notions of sharing and turn-taking that are routinely promoted in New Zealand ECE (MoE, 1996).

The above participants' responses reflect how Confucianism is embedded in Chinese values. Since Confucianism emphasises social and family hierarchically structured relationships and collective effort to bring about social and familial harmony (Gonzalez-Mena, 2003; Lee, 1996; Luo et al, 2013; Rao & Chan, 2009; Yang et al, 2006), the notions of respect and 襁/rang (giving and generous) are important socialisation goals for Chinese children. Children are socialised from a young age to respect those who are older, particularly family members, and those who are above them in the social hierarchy, such as teachers. They are also expected not to fight for anything with those who are younger in order not to create any conflict.

\*孝/Xiao (see glossary) is another important virtue of Confucianism. Different participants seemed to have different expectations and interpretations.

Vicky: ... when it comes to \*孝/xiao, I will be selective. It's not good to expect children to obey blindly ... Children should respect parents and have an intention to look after parents. But when children grow up, I don't want them to see parents as a burden.

Jan: I don't think this [\*孝/xiao] needed to be taught. It depends on parents, and what they do. I don't think I teach much of these to my children.

The discourses of \*孝/xiao and \*教训/jiao xun are often discussed together in literature on Chinese parenting styles and are identified as the key socialisation goals for young Chinese children (Chan, 2004; Guo, 2006; Li, 2004; Luo et al, 2013; Naftali, 2010a; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Rao et al, 2003). According to Confucianism, children demonstrate \*孝/xiao by unconditionally obeying and

caring for their parents, and achieving academic and career success in order to make their parents proud and to give their families a good reputation (Hayley et al, 1998; Luo et al, 2013; Mather, 1995; Naftali, 2010a, 2010b; Wu, 2011). Chinese parents who practise Confucianism, therefore, are highly involved in their children's learning and development through strict control and high expectations because they want to train (socialise) their children in different aspects to ensure they later demonstrate \*孝/xiao through their success in education and career which in turn bring honour to parents. This traditional Chinese parental expectation might also have contributed to simplifying and essentialising Chinese parenting practices as being authoritarian (Chao, 1994; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Xu et al, 2005), which was discussed in the previous chapter.

In this study, it seems that the participants had their own interpretation of \*孝/xiao. None mentioned children 'repaying' parents by obeying, honouring and achieving well. Due to exposure to 'western' influences in New Zealand, it is likely that the participants had developed context-specific meanings of \*孝/xiao and its traditional meanings are weakened and transformed as the participants engaged in ongoing cultural crossing. Bhabha (1996) argues that cultural symbols and practices do not remain static, and they can have transformed meanings within the third space. Vicky's earlier response suggests that she was operating within a third space where new and fluid meanings of \*孝/xiao are practised. This is in contrast to Woodrow and Sham (2001, p. 392) who claim that second and third generation Chinese immigrant students in Britain continue to observe and practise the traditional Confucian interpretations of \*孝/xiao.

In general, the participants were more concerned about the development of children's character and social competence than academic achievements. Virtues such as diligence, attentiveness and so on were not mentioned during the interviews. The participants' parental expectations perhaps reflected the change of focus in the current ECE official documents of China (Beijing, 2010) and Hong Kong (The Curriculum Development Council, 2006), which no longer focus solely on scholastic abilities, as well as structured and skill-based learning. Instead, they now recommend some aspects of child-centred and play-based pedagogy (Beijing, 2010; The Curriculum Development Council, 2006).

Finally, as discussed earlier, since culture and language are intertwined, they were often brought up simultaneously.

Katie: The most important thing is to learn Chinese language. When you learn Chinese, you can learn more about the traditional ways of thinking, like the Confucian beliefs, \*三子经/*San Zi Jing*.

Sonia: It's more important to maintain the language, but not a must with cultures... Since they live here [in New Zealand], gradually they will "lose their [Chinese] cultures".

A few parents also discussed the value of using ancient Chinese poems, such as \*唐诗/Tang shi, old Chinese sayings, such as \*三子经/ *San Zi Jing*, and legends, such as 四大名著/si da ming zhu (the four famous legends) to expose children to Chinese traditional cultures. Nonetheless, as discussed earlier, they also recognised the challenges in motivating their children to learn these in New Zealand.

### **Parental expectations: Chinese cultures and language in public spaces**

Although the participants believed that it is important to keep Chinese language and cultures alive within the family, they did not expect kindergarten teachers to help them achieve such a goal because they believed that most New Zealand teachers lack an understanding of Chinese ways of being and knowing and the ability to speak Chinese. A previous study indicates that some ECE teachers do not know much about the cultures of immigrant families and they employ a “sameness-as-fairness” approach (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010, p. 28). These teachers claim that there is not much cultural difference between immigrant and local families and they treat everyone fairly, in the same manner (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010).

Some participants in the current study, such as Katie and Anita, further believed that since New Zealand is a non-Chinese society and there are diverse cultural and linguistic groups in the kindergartens, it is unnecessary to expect kindergarten teachers to teach much about Chinese cultures. All participants were appreciative of how their cultures were acknowledged, considered and included by the teachers, for example via the display of Chinese artefacts and greetings, celebrations of Chinese festivals, and the multicultural shared lunch organised by teachers. All parents made positive comments about the teachers’ effort, and some contributed actively to support them.

Jan: The teachers sometimes asked me to write a few Chinese words for them, and they put those words on the wall ... After we came back from China, we brought to the “kindy” some Chinese artefacts.

Nan: I talked to them [teachers] about Mid-Autumn Festival, and they were very interested. I told them that when I went back to China, I would bring some artefacts back. They were very keen to know more about the festival ... they asked us to make some Chinese food for fundraising ... sometimes, they organised a shared lunch, and Chinese parents would bring dumplings and buns. The Chinese parents felt quite good about these things.

Lian: Like when John [the elder son] was at the other centre, just before he started primary, the teachers asked me if I could go and make a Chinese meal for the children ... so I made dumplings there for the children once ... Since New Zealand has so many different ethnic groups, they asked mothers from different ethnic groups to make their traditional food for children at the centre.

Although catering for children's home languages and cultures in ECE centres is an area identified as easily overlooked (MoE, 2009b; see also documentary review) and of needing improvement (ECE Taskforce, 2011; ERO, 2004, 2006; see also documentary review), inclusivity and diversity are the key aspirations of the AKA, as indicated in its philosophy (AKA, 2007b). Similarly, its ERO report affirms that kindergarten teachers work hard to support children and families with non-English speaking backgrounds (ERO, 2006; see also documentary review). Monkey and Elephant Kindergarten received positive comments from ERO regarding their responsiveness to diverse cultures of children and families (ERO, 2010b, 2011c; see also documentary review). It seems that the views of some participants were aligned with the ERO



comments and were appreciative of the teachers' efforts in catering for cultural diversity.

The importance of recognising and respecting children's home languages and cultures in ECE settings in order to create a sense of belonging and inclusivity is emphasised in *Te Whāriki* and a wide range of New Zealand official documents (ERO, 2004, 2010c, 2011a; MoE, 1996, 2004b; see also documentary review). *Te Whāriki* states that "the languages and symbols of their [children's] own and other cultures are promoted and protected", and that children should "experience the stories of their own and other cultures" (MoE, 1996, p. 72). Diverse languages of the families are to be integrated and the bilingual abilities of children celebrated (ERO, 2010c; MoE, 2004b, 2009; see also documentary review). Children and parents are also encouraged to converse in their home language in the ECE settings (ECE Taskforce, 2011; ERO, 2011b; MoE, 1996, 2004a, 2004c, 2009; see also documentary review). Nonetheless, within the public space of kindergartens, the participants were more concerned about their children's acquisition of English linguistic ability than promoting their home language. They did not seem to share the institutional aspirations related to home languages. The importance of English linguistic capital for the participants' children is further discussed in the next chapter.

In terms of promoting families' home cultures, displaying cultural artefacts and sharing traditional food in ECE centres might be the common strategies. However, these alone are insufficient to transform curriculum and bring about inclusive pedagogies, which require teachers to challenge unequal power relations that occur for families with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds

(Banks, 2009, 2010; Derman-Sparks, 2004; Jones & Mules, 2001; (May & Sleeter, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). While developing multicultural programmes and resources to be shared by kindergarten teachers are suggested in the AKA's ERO report (ERO, 2006; see also documentary review), no detail is provided regarding ERO's expectations for these multicultural programmes and resources.

Finally, while the participants did not expect kindergarten teachers to promote Chinese heritage, some parents believed that exposing young children of different ethnic groups to Chinese customs could help more non-Chinese to understand and appreciate Chinese cultural practices.

Lian: ... so Chinese and \*洋人/yan ren children both have the opportunity to learn about some Chinese traditions. This is pretty good, a good idea.

Mei: Most children here [in New Zealand] and their parents do not know much about Chinese traditions. This will provide opportunities for them to understand Chinese cultures from a young age, understand that Chinese like to celebrate things together ... Some people in New Zealand discriminate against Chinese a lot. If they get to know more Chinese customs when they were young, maybe they won't discriminate us. They need to be taught that China is actually a very nice place, and how to get along well with all ethnic groups. So when they grow up, they still remember something positive about Chinese cultures. I think this is achievable.

Mei's responses corresponded with Jean's concerns about her children's negative perceptions of being Chinese that were discussed earlier. Considering

the narratives from the participants, perhaps the value of incorporating Chinese stories and symbols within the ECE curriculum is more than helping Chinese children and families to develop a sense of belonging and inclusion in the ECE centres. Equally important, it helps 'non-Chinese' children and adults to have a positive understanding of Chinese cultures and to be more accepting of Chinese immigrants, thus supporting Chinese to feel more confident and comfortable with their Chinese identity. Besides maintaining Chinese language and cultures, the participants were also keen for their children to experience certain Chinese ways of learning.

### **Parental expectations: Maintaining Chinese ways of learning**

Traditional Chinese ways of learning are teacher-directed and involve a lot of skill-oriented drilling practices, like rote-learning, memorising and copying (Chan & Chan, 2002; Chan, 2004; Sun & Rao, 2012; Wang et al, 2008; Wong & Pang, 2002). The participants in this study would have been exposed to these kinds of training during their own schooling, and therefore felt comfortable to expect their children to practise the same learning styles.

Nan: In China, children are expected to 背/bei [memorise and recite] some of the readings, and get every word correct. Even experts say reciting frequently can help memorising. Our children have never had this experience, so they may be disadvantaged.

Jean: [In China] We had to 背/bei [memorise and recite] and rote learn. I think these ways of learning are good, but is hard to practise ... I ask her [her daughter] to find a book to read each day, and then I expect her to copy it once.

Anita: With our son, we now ask him to copy some Chinese passages. I give him magazines to copy and ask him to read them out afterwards.

Young children experience a continuity of learning when parents and teachers collaborate and share their expectations of children (Billman et al, 2005; De Gioia, 2013; Mitchell et al, 2006; Stonehouse & Gonzalez-Mena, 2004), but some of the participants' children did not have this sense of continuity. This is because in order to engage in skill-based drilling practice, certain learning traits such as attention span, self-regulation and endurance are required. Since repetitive skill-oriented training and rote learning are often not emphasised within the New Zealand learning contexts, young Chinese children who are not expected by New Zealand teachers to take part in drilling exercises may not have acquired the required learning dispositions to meet parental expectations. This discontinuity was further perpetuated by the limited communication between the participants and the teachers that was discussed in the previous chapter. Without parent-teacher dialogue, the kindergarten teachers were unaware of the participants' expectations, while the participants continued to not understand and appreciate the value of child-centred and discovery-based learning.

Parents' personal experiences shape socialisation and learning expectations for children (Li, 2001, 2004). Previous negative experiences with rote-learning may deter some parents from applying the same expectations on their children. For example, Lian had a contrasting opinion from parents who value the benefits of drilling.

Lian: No, I don't have this expectation. I don't think there is much value in doing these. I had to memorise many \*唐诗/Tang shi when I was young, but I have forgotten most of them now.

Similar to their varied attitude of maintaining Chinese cultures, the participants did not have a collective opinion regarding traditional Chinese ways of learning. Their belief was mainly shaped by personal experiences. Nevertheless, several participants shared a similar view about children's mathematics ability.

***An essentialist belief: Chinese children should be good at mathematics***

A few participants emphasised the importance of their children's achievement in mathematics. In general, they expected their children to outperform their local peers in this particular learning area.

Ella: I believe the Chinese ways of learning mathematics are more effective, not simply memorise. Chinese teach children to apply, not memorise ... I am not saying they [New Zealanders] are not good [at mathematics]. But you know, the mathematics ability of many people is not as good as the Chinese. The way they think is not fast enough ... Ah, another problem, they use calculator all the time. We do not use calculator in China, we have to work it out ourselves, no matter how big the numbers are.

Mei: I told my elder son that I don't expect a lot from him at the moment, but his mathematics has to be good ... I believe if my children's mathematics is strong, they can think more flexibly and adapt to different

needs spontaneously. I believe if mathematics is good, the ability to respond to different situations will be stronger ... I believe if mathematics is good, the other areas will be supported and excel as well, and there will be no problem going to university.

Vicky: Like in mathematics, we [Chinese] are in an advantageous position ... [She needs to be better than other children in mathematics] because we are Chinese unless she is not interested in mathematics.

Anita: At the moment, the mathematics standard in Daniel's [primary] class is even lower than the level when he was at kindergarten in Hong Kong, so we don't need to worry yet. But we do teach him mathematics at home.

Although the present study does not have the data to indicate the actual mathematics performance of the participants' children, the participants' narratives seem to align with the findings of a previous cross-cultural study. This previous study found that by providing their preschool children with formal and informal mathematics instruction at home and by promoting a positive attitude towards learning mathematics, Chinese parents offered their children a much more solid foundation of mathematics than their Euro-American counterparts, thereby contributing towards their children's positive mathematics performance (Huntsinger, Jose, Liaw & Ching, 1997). Other researchers attribute the high mathematics achievement of Chinese children to the "specific mathematics knowledge" Chinese parents teach their children, but not the frequency of parental involvement (Pan, Gauvain, Liu & Cheng, 2006, p. 31).

It seems that the participants in this current study essentialised Chinese children as mathematics whiz-kids, at least when compared with New Zealand children, due to the perceived more effective Chinese ways of teaching mathematics. Their binary perception of Chinese and New Zealand ways of learning and teaching further drove them to have high aspirations for their children's achievement in this particular learning area. On the one hand, Ella and Vicky attributed and essentialised the perceived strong mathematics ability of Chinese children to a cultural factor, that is being Chinese should be good at mathematics. On the other hand, the participants' emphasis on mathematics could also be linked to their immigrant identity. Due to their "visible minority status", Chinese immigrant parents in Canada discouraged children from pursuing "careers in arts, politics, or law" which required strong English language competency; instead they directed their children's career pathways towards "professions in engineering and other technical fields" (Li, 2001, p. 486) which required sound knowledge of mathematics. It is possible that the participants in this study shared the same view as the Canadian-Chinese parents, and believed that their children were in a disadvantaged position if they had to compete with their English-speaking peers in the disciplines that emphasised English proficiency. Consequently, they preferred their children to excel in mathematics.

**Parental expectations: 望子成龙/Wangzi chenglong (High aspirations for children's achievement)**

All the participants in this study expected their children to have an above-average academic achievement and at least a university qualification. 望子成龙/Wangzi chenglong (wishing for dragon children) is an old Chinese saying. It

describes the belief that Chinese parents expect their children to make a great effort “to learn as much as possible in order to succeed and stand out from their fellows in society” (Wu & Singh, 2004, p.30). Confucianism places great emphasis on education (de Bary, 2007), and educational achievement is considered by many Chinese as imperative to achieving good virtues, and future career and economic success (Chan, 2004; Naftali, 2010a; Salili, 1996). The academic success of children brings pride, and in the future, wealth to the family; parents will be seen as having performed their duties well and to have achieved their parental goal (Wu & Singh, 2004). Chinese immigrants living overseas further believe that education brings about upward social mobility (Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; Lee, 1996; Li, 2001; Woodrow & Sham, 2001; Wu & Singh, 2004).

Lareau (2011) claims it is a common belief in some countries that a university degree provides access to a good job. The participants’ responses regarding university qualifications were definite.

Anita: I believe that they must finish their university qualifications. One can have options only if they have knowledge.

Nan: Going to university is a must, but they should be allowed to choose their own career.

Lian: Absolutely, at least university level.

Sonia: Chinese children, in general, are expected to go to university... it depends on their interests in the future, whether it’s in the arts or science stream.



Vicky: Yes, at least university. I haven't thought that far.

In general, most participants attributed their aspirations for their children's high academic achievements to: the importance of 'face' to Chinese, the competitiveness of the education system back home, family influence, and their minority and transnational beliefs. Each of these factors is examined below.

**\*脸子/Lian zi (face) and competition**

"A discourse of good face and converse shame" (Francis et al, 2010, p. 112) has a key role in traditional Chinese parenting. Previous studies have highlighted that in order to protect the 'face' of the family, some Chinese parents use harsh comments to shame and embarrass their children so as to compel them to work harder to improve (Guo, 2010; Li, 2009; Luo et al, 2013; Salili, 1996; Zhang, 2012). The data of this present study does not indicate whether the participants employed any shaming strategies. However, they often used the discourse of \*脸子/lian zi to justify parenting practices.

Ella: I know a friend who likes to "show-off" when she socialises with her friends. She keeps telling the others how good her son is, how great her daughter is in class. If other people respond and acknowledge how good her children are, she of course will be happy.

Mei: To be honest, whether my children will be able to get into University of Auckland, I don't mind, but if they do, we have a proud face. Chinese loves to have \*脸子/lian zi. This has been hundreds years.

Nan: Nowadays, we Chinese parents no longer expect our children to make a lot of money in order to give us security when we are old. We

simply want our children to be the “top”, “outstanding” in order to make us proud, and give us “face”.

Conversely, when parents feel embarrassed about their children, they lose face. It seems that the participants were very concerned about how they were perceived by others.

Nan: We [Chinese] are very careful with what we say. We like to think deeply before saying what we think. We don't want people to think less of ourselves or create some kind of a joke ... Chinese parents are afraid that their children make them lose face. They want their children to bring them face. If my children cry when they are out, I feel embarrassed, and think perhaps the others will wonder how I teach them. It's about “face”. I discuss this with my husband all the time.

Mei also felt that it would look bad for her if her children could not use Chinese to communicate with extended family members in China. The discourse of face within Chinese communities is highly related to their deep-rooted traditional Confucian belief in \*孝/xiao which was discussed earlier. Chinese children are socialised at a young age, through the concept of \*管/guǎn and \*教训/jiao xun towards \*孝/xiao in order to honour their parents and give them face (Pearson & Rao, 2003; Rao et al, 2003). The discourses of \*孝/xiao, \*管/guǎn, \*教训/jiao xun and \*脸子/lian zi are intertwined. Even though the participants did not directly relate children's academic success to \*孝/xiao, they were concerned about their face. Children's success brings face and honour to parents which is a way of children's demonstrating \*孝/xiao; on the contrary,

children's poor performance dishonours the parents, makes them lose face, and fails to observe \*孝/xiao.

Just as face is a critical consideration in Chinese parenting, competition is also stressed in China and Hong Kong, a practice that was experienced by the participants during their own schooling. The idea of face and competition are closely related. Chinese parents like to compare children's achievements. They want their children to compete and outperform their peers to bring them face.

Jan: I think Chinese parents compare too much. This gives so much pressure to both the parents and children. So often Chinese parents ask each other, "hey, what grade is your child at with playing piano?" or "what level is your child's mathematics?" Why do they need to know, it's none of their business. Just let the children learn at their own pace ... I am not saying I don't like Chinese. I just don't agree when Chinese parents get together and compare their children too much. Perhaps I am one of them, to be honest. I tried to reflect about this regularly, and think perhaps this is not quite right, and this is not good for the children ...

Katie: They [Chinese parents] compete and they drive each other, and push their children to do better.

Vicky: Like the son of my sister [in China]. He is the only child, and he must go to a private junior high school. This is because he must be able to get into a good junior high school to get into a good high school, in order to get into university. That means from primary school on, he has to prepare well in order to get into a private junior high. So this is competition, and the goal is very clear.

Interestingly, Sonia seems to think that only parents in China compare their children.

Sonia: They [Chinese parents in New Zealand] talk, but they don't compare, not like what they do in China. Chinese parents here [in New Zealand] simply talk about what "programme" their children are doing, but they don't purposely compare.

Moreover, as discussed previously, parenting practices are shaped by the life experiences of individual parents (Li, 2001, 2004). Almost all participants and their spouses had tertiary qualifications and had experienced a competitive education in China. These participants had high educational aspirations for their children.

Jan: Our generation has to go to university already, my children must go then.

Katie: Everyone from our family, including my husband's family, all have university qualifications. My husband has a MBA from the United States, and my family all have a bachelor qualification. There is no reason that they finish with only a secondary school qualification.

Vicky: My sister's family is the same. All my extended families are the same. We expect our children to be ahead ... Even when I was in China, I was the same. I expect myself to do better than the others, and I expect the same of my children too.

Katie and Vicky observed that many \*洋人/yang ren children at kindergartens were able to write the alphabet and their names. They, therefore, believed that

\*洋人/yang ren parents in New Zealand also expected their children to engage in numeracy and literacy exercises at home. Katie and Vicky were worried that if their children were not well prepared for primary schooling, they would be left behind. Hence, all of them engaged in numeracy and literacy work with their children at home to ensure they had a head start. For example, Katie believed that competition is not only encouraged in Chinese families, but also in \*洋人/yang ren families. Therefore her children must remain competitive to outperform both their Chinese and \*洋人/yang ren peers.

Katie: I think even \*洋人/yang ren compare their children, like how children are doing in class, their reading level ... I think they compare their children too. They are not that relaxed. I feel that \*洋人/yang ren are also very concerned about their children's education. Take a look at those private mathematics tuition classes. There are many \*洋人/yang ren in those classes. Many of their children go to ballet class as well. I don't think \*洋人/yang ren parents are like what we think – that they allow their children to play all the time. I feel that they also have high expectations of their children. So I think expectations of all parents are very similar, we all want our children to be at the “top”.

As illustrated in the beginning of this chapter, some participants believed that their children are in a disadvantaged position, and this belief motivated them to constantly remind their children to excel and outperform their local peers in order to fight against racial discrimination.

Anita: I think there is bound to be some discrimination, not only to Chinese. Our children just need to make sure that they have a good education standard and are good at what they do.

Lastly, a few participants expressed their dilemmas in parenting. On the one hand, they wanted their children to be happy and not to have too much pressure; on the other hand, they were worried that their children would be influenced by the relaxed learning environment in New Zealand and would become self-contented and less competitive. Anita shared her concerns.

Anita: I don't know if my children may go back to Hong Kong or China to work when they are older; they may not be here forever. So it's important they learn as much as possible, and are ahead of the others ... I feel that children who have moved to New Zealand become lazier, including my son. He is much lazier than he was in Hong Kong. He won't do any work if we don't growl at him or remind him. Yet, the amount of work that children need to do in Hong Kong is excessive.

Immigrant parents often compare ECE practices of host and home country (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007) and display ambivalent attitudes as they search for 'in-betweenness' (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008). The participants' narratives demonstrate a sense of predicament in parenting. As they navigated and negotiated across many social-cultural spaces, they adopted a repertoire of parenting strategies and education discourses to meet the needs of each space.

## **Conclusion**

Identity and a sense of belonging are closely related (Hall, 1996, 2000; Goldberg & Solomos, 2002). This chapter has examined the identity of the participants and how being transnationals, Chinese, and immigrants in New Zealand contributed towards a lack of participation and sense of belonging in

their children's ECE centres, as well as the wider New Zealand society. The participants' identities also impacted significantly on their parenting strategies, which reflected levels of fluidity and compromise.

Due to many pragmatic reasons and decisiveness in retaining Chinese identity, the participants worked hard to ensure that their children maintained Chinese linguistic ability and that they continued to practise certain Chinese values and virtues. While they made much effort in private social spaces to fulfil these aspirations and to sustain 'Chineseness' in the families, they had no expectations of the kindergarten teachers to be involved in this journey. They were aware that their parenting practices exercised in private spaces differed from certain ECE discourses promoted in public spaces, and this disparity posed challenges to them. They had to make many compromises of their expectations, adapt and establish a repertoire of strategies in order to meet the needs as well as to get the most out of each space. Since the participants were not a homogeneous group, the strategies adopted were diverse, although their responses indicated their prime concerns of convenience and practicality.

More importantly, while parental involvement, a sense of belonging and community are the dominant and espoused New Zealand ECE discourses, findings collected from individual interviews indicate that they were alien concepts to some participants. Some were even bemused by these notions. This study argues that their choice of non-involvement in kindergartens was mainly shaped by a mismatch between dominant New Zealand ECE discourses and the values and beliefs of being Chinese transnational immigrant parents in an English-speaking country. The participants' responses highlight the discrepancy between parental and teacher expectations, the importance of not

assuming existence of shared parent-teacher understandings, and the need for parent-teacher dialogues. The findings align with the documents reviewed, in which catering for cultural and linguistic diversity remains an area for improvement within ECE settings.

Whereas the previous chapter established the need to dissociate from the notion of 'tiger mothers', this chapter has attributed the high parental aspirations of the participants to fulfilling their transnational needs, to compensating for their perceived minority disadvantages (Li, 2001, 2004), to their previous experiences of a highly competitive education environment, and to their concerns with face. When their high aspirations were not satisfied in public spaces, they exercised agency to actively construct a range of spatial strategies to provide the best learning environment and experiences for their children. The next chapter reports an analysis of these transcultural spatial strategies.



# 8. A repertoire of transcultural spatial strategies

## Introduction

The previous chapter has established that the participants' parenting practices were influenced by their identities, as transnationals, and being both Chinese and immigrants in New Zealand. They were determined to retain, to whatever extent was possible, Chinese heritage in their families, but had to make many compromises and adaptations to develop pragmatic strategies to fulfil this desire. Hence, the participants' parental aspirations and expectations differed from the dominant ECE discourses prevalent in New Zealand, including the kindergarten teachers' practices. This chapter focuses on analysing the participants' perceptions and perspectives of the kindergartens' operation and teaching practices, critiquing the unequal power relations between discourses practised in public and private social spaces, and examining parenting strategies that have emerged as a result of ongoing navigation and negotiation across social-cultural spaces.

The chapter begins by analysing how the participants' previous encounters with ECE teachers shaped their perceptions and consequently their expectations of the kindergarten teachers. The findings reveal asymmetrical power relations between New Zealand dominant ECE discourses and the participants' familial funds of knowledge, thus creating a sense of disempowerment and helplessness in the participants. A range of learning experiences provided at the kindergartens was evaluated by the participants,

including the provision of play, English literacy, and art and craft experiences. The participants also commented on the role of the kindergartens in supporting children's independence and social competence and in preparing children for school. Institutional discourses established from the documentary review and the participants' evaluation of these learning experiences are cross-examined to highlight a tension between teaching practices and parental expectations.

Thereafter, the chapter revisits the participants' transnational identity and how it impacted on their parenting strategies. The participants constantly engaged in transnational comparison between ECE practices in New Zealand and their homeland. Furthermore, as they navigated and negotiated between private and public spaces, each with differing cultural expectations, they realised the need to adapt and therefore their parenting practices were non-static. However, traditional Chinese practices that were perceived to be valuable and beneficial to their children's learning and development were less likely to be relinquished. Many third spaces (Bhabha, 1996) emerged as the participants exercised their agency to adjust their parental expectations and to embrace new practices. The end of this chapter highlights the participants' active agency in establishing a mixed repertoire of transnational and transcultural spatial strategies to fulfil the needs of their identities.

## **Parental perceptions and basic expectations: Hope is the first step on the road to disappointment**

As mentioned earlier, the 'quality' of kindergartens was hardly mentioned by the participants when justifying their choice of ECE service for their children. It is, therefore, worthwhile exploring their actual perceptions of the kindergartens

in further depth. Most participants responded positively when first asked about their opinions of the kindergarten that their children were attending. Most of them, in particular, found the kindergarten teachers to be friendly and approachable. Their responses, however, became less positive and affirming when the questions involved teaching and learning. The participants typically set low expectations of kindergartens to help them feel more satisfied and contented with them. A common Chinese saying, 希望越大, 失望越大/xi wang yue da, shi wang yue da, which means the higher the expectation, the more disappointment one experiences, can be used to describe the participants' coping strategy. This demonstrates a sense of the participants' powerlessness and helplessness, which is a common experience of Chinese immigrants in English-speaking host countries due to their immigrant minority status (Guo, 2010; Li, 2001).

Jan: As long as they [her children] are happy, it's okay. I don't have much expectation of my children when they were at the kindergarten. I had a very low expectation [of the kindergarten], I did not expect them [kindergarten teachers] to teach a lot, provide excellent education, or get children to do writing, to recognise some words ... I never have these expectations of the kindergarten. Since my expectation is low, I am easily satisfied ...

Jean: Well, because they don't learn much at "kindy", there aren't any concerns. I therefore also feel that there is no need to request the teachers to teach anything in particular.

Katie: They [New Zealand ECE teachers] are not like the teachers in China who have high expectations of children and want to discuss with parents about children's learning levels/abilities. In here, as long as the children are happy, parents are happy, and teachers are happy too. That's it. That's why as long as my son is happy there, it's okay already.

Nan: I don't expect her [Nan's daughter] to learn a lot at this "kindy" (laugh). Children are here to play only. It's fine as long as children are happy ... Absolutely - they won't teach our children! It seems that the purpose of public kindergartens is to offer a place and resources for children to play ... I am satisfied because my "expectation" is very "low"... Children are exposed to many things and teachers give children lots of different experiences, but these experiences do not help children with writing.

Vicky: I think this is because in general, the parents are "satisfied" and they feel that their children are very "happy". In terms of extending children's academic skills, parents don't think these are "compulsory" as long as children are "happy"... Expectation of the "kindy" is very basic. We don't expect children to learn much.

On the surface, it seems that happiness was a key concern of the participants and they thus lowered their academic expectations of the kindergartens. These responses from the participants are surprising, considering a MoE research report that claims that "most parents prefer a service that has an educational focus" (Robertson et al, 2007, p.1). Perhaps the participants' emphasis on their children's happiness is in line with the recent

education reform and development in China, which expects kindergarten teachers to provide children with a 'happy childhood' (Beijing, 2010). Some studies further claim that parents from urban China are more receptive to this newly emerged focus on happiness (Chen & Li, 2012; Naftali, 2010b; Pearson, 2011; Rao et al, 2009). Since the participants mainly came from urban China, they would have been informed of this attitude to children's happiness. In addition, cultural exposure in New Zealand would also have contributed to their new focus of happiness. For example, Nan seemed to particularly aspire to the 'Kiwi' lifestyle which she perceived as happy and relaxed. It is also possible that since the participants did not expect that much 'learning' would take place at the kindergartens, they instead focused on their children's 'happiness' as an alternative expectation.

Whilst the participants seemed not to expect any formal learning to occur at the kindergartens, they engaged their children in a range of numeracy and literacy work at home, as discussed previously. Furthermore, the children of Jan and Nan were enrolled in a private Montessori kindergarten on top of the public kindergarten that they were attending because they believed that Montessori kindergartens provided their children with more literacy and numeracy learning opportunities than public kindergartens, and thus better prepared their children for primary schooling.

Their perceptions of Montessori kindergartens aligned with the ERO report which states that literacy and numeracy are strongly featured in Montessori education programmes (ERO, 2007a). This indicates that Jan and Nan were aware of the characteristics of the different ECE services and were concerned about their children's academic learning. They just did not expect much learning

to happen in the public AKA kindergartens and/or did not recognise the child-centred and discovery-based approach of learning (Ritchie, 2001, 2012) that was occurring or promoted in the kindergartens.

Jan: My belief is if you want your child to learn seriously, you should send them to private preschool. If you send your child to “kindy”, you just have to let them play.

Nan: But it’s different with private childcare centres. The one that we went to have fewer children, “small size”. The teachers had more opportunity to provide individual attention, more 1 on 1, just like the Montessori kindergarten that Jenny [her daughter] goes to in the afternoon. In [public] kindergartens, teachers just aim at supervising children, “keep an eye on children”, to prevent accidents. They can’t provide individual attention to children. “Small size” has its own “advantages”, they can teach more ... No, I won’t “rely on” the teachers. Many Chinese parents send their children to private childcare centres. It’s because they think private centres teach a lot more.

The perception of a low teacher-child ratio was used often by the participants to justify their minimal expectations of kindergarten teachers. To these Chinese parents, the main role of kindergarten teachers was simply to supervise and ensure the safety of their children.

Ella: I can understand their difficulty. How can they manage? They have so many children.

Nan: The two teachers have to look after so many children. I don’t think they can manage. I can teach the basics at home.

Lian: Public kindergartens are different from private childcare centres. They have many children but only a few teachers.

The participants' perception of a low teacher-child ratio in kindergartens was confirmed by the Ministry of Education's (2014b) 2012 statistics, the year when the interviews took place. The statistics show that the teacher-to-child ratio of kindergarten is significantly lower than that of education and care service. Kindergartens that offer morning and afternoon sessions, such as the Lion and Elephant Kindergarten, have a prescribed teacher-child ratio of 1:13 whereas the lowest ratio of any education and care service is 1:7.

The above narratives indicate that the participants believed their children did not do enough 'work' at kindergartens due to structural limitations, such as low teacher-child ratio, which could not be changed. Since these parents could not see much 'learning' happening at the kindergartens, they accepted that they could not rely on the kindergarten teachers to impart the knowledge and skills they felt their children required. Instead, they had to find their own ways to remedy this situation, such as enrolling their children in two different ECE services simultaneously and engaging children in numeracy and literacy work at home, as previously related in the participants' individual stories.

These findings concerning the participants' perceptions of kindergartens support previous claims about how Chinese immigrant parents organised a lot of out-of-kindergarten/school 'serious learning' for their children because they were dissatisfied with the low academic expectations of teachers in Australia (Wu & Singh, 2004) and New Zealand (Guo, 2010). Research involving immigrant families, including Chinese immigrants, further indicates that these

parents tend not to share their concerns with teachers; instead they simply find ways to work with their children in their own way at home in order to make up for the perceived lack of learning at kindergartens/schools (De Gioia, 2013; Guo, 2005, 2010; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Lahman & Park, 2004; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004). Nevertheless, when asked about their perception of kindergarten teachers, all participants responded positively.

## **Parental perceptions: Kindergarten teachers**

The participants described the teachers as nice, caring, friendly, positive, encouraging, patient, flexible and relaxed. These descriptions of teachers are similar to the comments made by Chinese participants in another New Zealand study (Mitchell et al, 2006). In general, all participants were satisfied with the teachers, but not with regard to teaching. They trusted that the teachers were very capable of looking after the children and ensuring their safety. For example, Mei said:

Mei: I think the teachers are okay. In my opinion, as long as there is no big problem, everything is okay ... As long as there is no serious bleeding or major falls ... They are very responsible already in supervising children, in ensuring that there is no accident.

None of the participants, however, mentioned anything related to teaching or commented about how teachers taught. It seems that they did not recognise the informal and responsive teaching and learning engaged by ECE teachers, and did not expect to see any teaching happening at kindergartens. Hence, they chose to focus on the social attributes of teachers and the previously described low expectation ideology continues to apply.



Vicky: Within the kindergarten, you can say that I trust the teachers, but you can also say that I don't have much expectation.

Mei: You see they [kindergarten teachers] have so many children that they need to care for. How can you expect so much from them?

Due to their low academic expectations of the kindergartens and perceptions of its low teacher-child ratio, most participants were particularly appreciative of the 'extra' work that teachers did for the non-English speaking families. For example, one teacher made an effort to learn some simple oral Chinese in order to facilitate communication and others initiated the provision of translated versions of the newsletters for those families who required them. Nevertheless, the participants felt that the communication with busy kindergarten teachers was minimal, much less than with teachers in private ECE centres who had fewer children to attend to.

While Mei felt that some teachers "talked to \*洋人/yang ren parents a lot more than to Asian parents", Jan found it easier to communicate with non-local teachers because they understood the needs of immigrant families more. Mei and Sonia, interestingly, discussed the discriminatory practices of teachers in China. While Sonia did not explain why she made such comments, Mei's elder child had experienced the kindergarten system in China.

Mei: In China, those parents who have better connection will have stronger communication with teachers. This means those who support the kindergarten, sponsor the kindergarten, know the teachers, give presents to teachers at various festivals, their children will be better looked after. In New Zealand, we don't have to worry about this.

Sonia: Many teachers in China like to ask about the background of parents. They talk to those parents with better background ... the teachers [in New Zealand] treat everyone the same, and more “friendly”.

Chinese traditionally consider teachers as authority figures who are the source of wisdom, and they normally “hold teachers in high regard and respect” (Woodrow & Sham, 2001, p. 384), and as explained in the literature review, traditional Chinese teachers are harsh with students and implement regimented teaching practices (Hsueh & Barton, 2005). While the discourse of 管/guǎn is frequently applied in literature that examines Chinese parenting (Chao, 1994; Guo, 2006; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Sun & Rao, 2012; Rao et al, 2003), this Confucian concept, which means “to govern, control and monitor” can also be used to explain the role of Chinese teachers (Hadley, 2003, p. 195). As such, Chinese teachers are expected to be very strict and serious with students as reflected in an old Chinese saying, 教不严, 师之惰/jiao bu yan, shi zhi duo, which means teaching without strict discipline is the teacher’s laziness (Cheng, 2001). Participants’ appreciation of the social attributes of kindergarten teachers being warm, friendly, approachable and relaxed seems to reflect their acculturative and shifting expectations of teachers.

Once again, the notion of in-betweenness was often mentioned by the participants. Quite often, they compared the practices of teachers in China and New Zealand using binary discourses and examples. For instance, the teachers in China were too strict whereas New Zealand teachers were too relaxed, and “somewhere in between” would be good, according to Sonia. Sonia was looking for new forms of teaching from somewhere in between the Chinese and New Zealand practices because she was not satisfied with either way. Practices

newly emerged from these in-between spaces may represent neither culture (Bhabha, 1996). The participants seemed to be searching for in-between teaching and learning practices and displayed ambivalent attitudes towards them (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008). The participants' attitudes towards New Zealand ECE, public kindergartens and kindergarten teachers were shaped by their previous encounters and experiences.

### **Lessons learnt from the past**

When the participants justified their perceptions of teaching practices, they also often revealed a sense of helplessness. For example, comments like “this is the New Zealand education style” and “this is how the \*洋人/yang ren children learn” were used often by the participants to rationalise teaching practices in the kindergartens and therefore they believed there was nothing they could do to change the situation. Their sense of helplessness might have developed from their previous encounters with ECE teachers and local parents. Since most of the participants' children had already attended other ECE services before enrolling in the current kindergartens, many seemed to be familiar with the routines and activities of ECE centres in New Zealand. They had been told informally by teachers and sometimes local parents about the dominant New Zealand ECE discourses and teaching practices, such as the important role of ‘free play’.

Ella: This kindergarten does not organise anything, they simply let the children choose freely what they want to do ... The teachers won't tell my daughter not to play, but to go and sit down and do some work.

Sonia: But they [the teachers] said this is the education style here, “free play”. I asked the teachers once at another childcare centre, and they said it’s “free play”, and there’s no need to teach anything in particular.

Vicky: They focus on “free play”, so the teachers don’t believe they have to give a lot of directions to children. But I do feel that if they can arrange a bit more “academic” activities for the children, that will be even better.

Within New Zealand ECE, play and exploration are highly valued in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), and endorsed by other official documents (ERO, 2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2011c; see also documentary review). Play and exploration align with the notion of free play, a form of play that encourages children to explore and make autonomous decisions. ‘Learning through free play’ has thus become a dominant discourse in New Zealand ECE context. It enjoys a privileged position, and other means of learning, such as the teacher-directed and structured approaches to learning that the participants were familiar with, are less likely to be embraced by the kindergarten teachers.

When the participants shared their concerns with the teachers about a lack of formal learning, particularly the limited reading and writing practices, they were often ‘assured’ by the teachers that their children were doing fine, there was nothing to worry about, and therefore there was nothing parents had to do or could do to support their children.

Sonia: I feel that very often when I asked the teachers, their responses were always, “good”, “he’s doing well” ... [laugh]. They seldom tell us which areas Jess [her son] is not good at. When I raised my concerns about Jess not reading and writing, the teachers told me, “he will get

there". It was the same in the previous centre. Every time I asked the teachers, they would say, "he's doing well" ... They [the teachers] told me children will learn when they start primary school.

Nan: In this kindergarten, teachers will tell you children "learn very quickly" and don't have to worry. But we know so well that if my children don't know English, they will find it very tough and be very upset in the first six months.

These findings corroborate that of Liao (2007) whose study involved Chinese immigrant parents with children in their first year of primary schooling. These parents found the over-positive school reports problematic. Previous studies highlight that Chinese parents who practise a traditional authoritarian parenting approach consider praising children and being positive as inappropriate ways to socialise children. Instead, they believe that adults should be critical of children's misbehaviour, underperformance or underachievement by using harsh and negative comments to shame and embarrass the children in order to motivate them to improve and to help them build character (Guo, 2010; Li, 2009; Luo et al, 2013; Salili, 1996; Zhang, 2012).

The participants were anxious to develop their children's competitiveness and wanted them to stand out against their peers, as discussed in the last chapter. They wanted the teachers to help them identify their children's weaknesses so that they could help them improve. Giving parents positive and broad comments, such as the child "is doing well" and "will get there" (Sonia) and children "learn very quickly" (Nan), did not provide much assurance for

these parents. Instead, they learnt that they could not rely on the teachers to advise them regarding how to support their children's learning.

### **Disempowering experiences**

Some of the participants' encounters with ECE teachers had been far from positive. They felt disempowered from expressing their perspectives of children's early learning and eventually learnt to keep their opinions to themselves. Studies which involved Asian (including Chinese) immigrant families indicate that these families believe there is no value in sharing their disagreement with teachers (De Gioia, 2013; Guo, 2005, 2010; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Lahman & Park, 2004; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004). When Ella reminded her daughter to draw a picture according to the teacher's instructions, the teacher told Ella that children should be allowed to use their imagination and draw whatever they wanted and did not need to follow anyone's instructions. Ella was very "surprised" with the teacher's comment and she told me, "So I kept quiet. I told her [the teacher] I have nothing to say".

When Jan felt her son never had a turn at the "show and tell" activity at the kindergarten because he was too shy to volunteer, she shared her concern with the teachers, but was told that children should not be pressurised to volunteer. Nan had a similar experience from another kindergarten. According to Nan, several Asian (including Chinese) parents requested that the teachers encourage their non-English speaking children to participate in news-sharing because their children were not confident enough in expressing themselves, but they were told by the teachers, via an information sheet for parents, that "self-determination is more important than sharing the news". Therefore children

should be allowed to decide whether they wanted to contribute or not; and parents and teachers should not intervene. Nan also said,

Nan: One Chinese parent pointed out that since her child does not speak good English, he/she cannot tell news. She asked the teachers if they can practise with her child first before he/she shares the news with the group at mat-time. But the teachers said children learn English best when they play at the kindergarten, meaning the teachers don't believe in the needs of having "one-on-one" coaching. They also said if parents want their children to learn English, there are many community centres that offer English classes. This means the teachers will not pay special attention to teach Chinese children English. My son was four when he first started this kindergarten. I told the teachers he did not know any English at all, hoping that they would teach him some English, and of course they didn't, so now I don't have this expectation any more.

The participants developed a sense of feeling disempowered as a result of the teachers' actions. These negative experiences of the participants reflect power asymmetries between immigrant parents and teachers within ECE settings (Ali, 2008; Tobin et al, 2007). Education is a means of socialising children and their families (Farquhar, 2010), and teachers' practices are organised and structured by discourses, mainly institutional discourses (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). Yet, in supporting institutional expectations and dominant discourses, the teachers are silencing certain parental aspirations, negating and subjugating parents' desires as undesirable, rather than as something to negotiate and consider (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010; Tobin et al, 2007). This is despite the fact that including families' aspirations and

expectations into the ECE programme is promoted in *Te Whāriki* and other official documents (MoE, 1996; ERO, 2006, 2011a; see also documentary review).

The stratification and unequal social relationships often subordinate parental practices under professional knowledge (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000; Li, 2010), and research shows that immigrants' parenting practices when measured against local 'norms' are further subsumed because they were often perceived negatively by teachers as 'deficient' (Ali, 2008; Arzubiaga et al, 2009; Reiff et al, 2000). Dominant discourses constitute and legitimise a body of knowledge that exercises power over all the others (Hall, 2007). They are promoted, enacted and reproduced via education policies and curricula, and are often used by teachers to normalise teaching practices and marginalise the cultures that are different from the 'norms' (Banks, 2004; Davis, 2009; Giroux, 2001; May & Sleeter, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007 Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

Sharing of power between immigrant parents and teachers is a prerequisite of genuine parent-teacher partnership and both parties need to feel comfortable to exchange knowledge and be open to change (Farquhar, 2010; Gonzalez, 2009; Meléndez, 2005; Tobin et al, 2007). The complexity of immigrant experiences, their parental aspirations, and cultural and language repertoires are useful and important socio-cultural contextual knowledge required by teachers so that they understand the learning needs of immigrant children (Arzubiaga et al, 2009; Meléndez, 2005). Parenting practices of diverse immigrants are funds of knowledge that can be invited and included into the current institutional knowledge; rather than as deficit practices that need to be



rectified (Arzubiaga et al, 2009; González, 2005; González et al, 2005). When ECE teachers include the funds of knowledge that belong to home and community, children find learning more relevant, contextualised, familiar and meaningful (González et al, 2005). On the other hand, when families are expected to conform to the institutions' expectations, and familial and community funds of knowledge are not recognised, the asymmetrical power relation between parents and teachers is further perpetuated (González, 2005; Mitchell et al, 2006).

When the participants consistently learnt from experiences that their knowledge and values were subordinated to those of the teachers or to mainstream practices, they felt disempowered and eventually lost the motivation to make further suggestions and requests. This has become one of the factors that contributed towards impeding the development of their sense of belonging to the kindergartens and discouraging them from becoming active members of the kindergarten community. This result is consistent with the findings in Wu (2009) in which the Chinese immigrant parents claimed that since their suggestions would hardly bring any positive change to the ECE centres, their communication with teachers was minimal.

Anita: I know all kindergartens here are the same. There is no point to make this suggestion. This is their system ... just let them [the children] play.

Ella: Like this "kindy", it has its own routines. The teachers won't be happy if I raise this idea. They won't accept my idea. Unless all parents agree and together we ask the teachers to consider this idea, then it's

possible. But it's impossible for me to raise this ... I may have this "idea", but the local parents may think that children will start writing at five anyway, why do we have to force them to learn before five? That's how they think, that's why I won't raise this idea.

Vicky: I feel that writing is not emphasised at kindergarten ... If there are opportunities in the future, I may suggest this to the teachers. But I actually don't know if they will accept my suggestion or not as I feel that no kindergarten does writing ... I don't think I will initiate this request.

Finally, it is important to note that the participants usually provided indifferent responses if they did not want to share their negative perspectives explicitly. Responses such as 就这样吧/jiu zhe yang ba, 还可以吧/hai ke yi ba, 还好吧/hai hao ba, 可以啦/ke yi la, 一般吧/yi ban ba (all mean there is not much to say, it is average and nothing special) were used frequently when they were invited to make comments on the kindergartens and kindergarten teachers. Due to the sensitivity of certain topics, there are things that Chinese interviewees feel reluctant to talk about (Liu, 2009). It is possible that the participants did not want to share their discontent or be seen to be complaining about the teachers. While the indifferent responses were brief, the subtext of answers reflected a certain level of disappointment as well as implicitly hinting their preferences not to engage discussion in the topics. Nonetheless, although some of their responses were far from positive, the participants were able to recognise the benefits for their children from attending the kindergartens.

## What do children get out of attending kindergartens?

### Play

Most participants expressed an awareness of phrases, such as ‘free play’ and ‘learning through play’, and they used them (in English) to justify the absence of teacher-directed activities and academic learning in kindergartens. However, it is questionable whether their understanding of ‘free play’ and ‘learning through play’ is congruent with that of *Te Whāriki* and the teachers’ beliefs. This is because play is defined and interpreted differently across different cultures (Cheng, 2001; Mellor, 2000; O’Gorman & Ailwood, 2012; Rhedding-Jones & Otterstad, 2011; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2001; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010).

Since most of the participants’ children had attended ECE centres prior to public kindergartens, all were aware of the dominant role of play in New Zealand ECE because they had been ‘told’ by teachers and some local parents from various types of ECE services about the importance of play. Most participants, therefore, did not challenge the privileged discourse of play. As seen in the narratives below, the participants did not express their personal perspectives on play, but they seemed to believe that since play is a dominant practice in New Zealand, they have to accept it.

Jean: The teacher at the crèche explained to me that children learn a lot through playing in the sandpit and with water. So I thought okay, just let them play with water then [laugh].

Anita: [Laugh] Well, there must be something good with play, at least it’s better than asking children to sit still every day for a couple of hours.

Nan: This is the philosophy of public kindergartens. They believe in “learning through play”.

Ella: They [free play and learning through play] are okay because when I was at Playcentre, all the mothers and everyone said the same thing.

Sonia: According to the teachers, when we allow children to have “free play”, they will eventually find out about or develop their interests.

Although the value of play for children’s learning and development is widely recognised in many ‘western’ countries, including New Zealand (Dockett & Flear, 2002; Frost, 2010; Hill, 2006; Klien et al, 2004; Oliver & Klugman, 2002; Van Hoorn et al, 1999; White & Rockel, 2008), the notion of learning through play has only emerged in China and Hong Kong in the last two decades (Cheng, 2001; Rao & Li, 2009; Yim et al, 2010). It is possible that this understanding of play was an alien concept to the participants before they came to New Zealand.

With the support of *Te Whāriki*, play is endorsed as the preferred mode of learning for children in New Zealand ECE (MoE, 1996). However, no participant actually identified any specific learning outcome associated with play even though they mentioned the phrases “learn through play” and “free play” often. This is in contrast to the findings of a recent New Zealand ECE study that involved local families whose ethnicities are not specified, from a range of ECE services (White et al, 2009). The local parent participants in this study were able to articulate the benefits of play for children’s learning and development. Parents who had themselves experienced a play-focussed ECE are more likely to endorse using play as a learning medium (Rhedding-Jones & Otterstad,

2011; White et al, 2009). When the participants themselves had not experienced a play-oriented childhood before coming to New Zealand, the extent to which their definition and understanding of play aligned with those of the teachers and local parents needs to be considered. Their earlier responses indicate that they might have used the common phrases concerning play, such as 'learning through play' and 'free play', because that was what they had heard used by teachers and local parents.

*Te Whāriki* promotes spontaneous play and exploration as desirable means of learning for children in ECE settings (MoE, 1996), and the two discourses are also emphasised in the assessment of children's learning (MoE, 2004a). In terms of provision for play and exploration, such as setting up the learning environment with challenging resources to support children's independent investigation, AKA and the three kindergartens involved in this study were highly commended by ERO (ERO, 2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2011c; see also documentary review). With the support of a child-oriented free play curriculum and endorsement from ERO, play is normalised.

The recent education reforms in China and Hong Kong have begun to recognise the importance of play in ECE, and therefore increasing numbers of Chinese parents are being exposed to the emerging ideas of play, and some are gradually agreeing to the value of play in relation to children's learning (Cheng, 2001; Rao & Li, 2009; Yim et al, 2010). However, play can be interpreted and acted out differently across cultures (Cheng, 2001; Mellor, 2000; O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2001; White et al, 2009).

Within Chinese contexts, two Chinese words illustrate the discourse of play. “They are 玩/wan [play] and 游戏/youxi [play with rules and games]. 玩/Wan is the equivalent of free-choice play, whereas the term 游戏/youxi denotes the existence of rules which should be followed” (Rao & Li 2009, pp. 100-101). The word, 玩/wan, may seem to align well with the idea of free play that is promoted in New Zealand. However, a common saying in the \*三字经/*San Zi Jing*, 勤有功, 戏无益/qin you gong, xi wu yi, which is translated as diligence has its reward; play has no value, reflects the negative connotation of play in Chinese societies. Children in China nowadays are still expected to recite the texts of the \*三字经/*San Zi Jing*, and many participants in this study only ceased having this expectation after coming to New Zealand because of the lack of a favourable learning environment for Chinese language and cultures, so the participants would be familiar with this old saying. Those who agreed with the saying would, therefore, be sceptical of the value of play.

Previous studies suggest that it is common for some parents to position work and play as binaries (Keating, Fabian, Jordan, Mavers & Roberts, 2010; O’Gorman & Ailwood, 2012; Rhedding-Jones & Otterstad, 2011). The Chinese saying, 勤有功, 戏无益/qin you gong, xi wu yi, introduced in the previous paragraph clearly positions work and play as binaries. As such, it is difficult for most Chinese parents to associate any learning with play. Furthermore, accepting the dominant discourse of play in New Zealand ECE does not mean the participants agreed with this play ideology. Research indicates that diverse immigrant parents in various English speaking countries would prefer their children to have less play and more structured academic learning in ECE centres (Adair & Tobin, 2008; Chan, 2006; Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; Guo, 2004;

Obeng, 2007; Tobin et al, 2007). As reflected in the participants' responses quoted earlier, they believed that play was a dominant practice in kindergartens, something that was unchangeable and non-negotiable. Consequently, they could only expect that their children would play when they were at the kindergartens. Those parents, like Jan and Nan, who would like their children to experience more formal learning opportunities, sent them to Montessori kindergartens in addition to public kindergartens because they wanted to ensure that their children learnt the necessary numeracy and literacy skills before starting primary school.

In addition, not only do the majority of parents in China and Hong Kong still support formal learning more than play, but those who have only just begun to value play prefer teacher-directed and structured play, not free play (Cheng, 2001; Rao & Li, 2009; Yim et al, 2010). These parents emphasise learning and academic goals associated with play, but not the leisure derived from play (Rao & Li, 2009; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2001). Since their attitudes towards play are not congruent with those of ECE teachers in New Zealand who emphasise autonomy, choices, freedom and enjoyment as the important elements of free play (White et al, 2009), it is difficult for Chinese parents to fully support free and autonomous play-based learning experiences (Rao & Li, 2009; Yim et al, 2010). Parents like Mei admitted that even though she might aspire to the benefits of free play, she still pushed her children to learn at home.

Mei: I like the way they [\*洋人/yang ren] let children learn while they are playing. We are unable to do this.

Mei's response reflects the tension experienced by Chinese parents who begin to encounter play as a medium of learning for their children.

Moreover, Chinese immigrant parents like Katie and those in Wu (2011) were sceptical about the strength of free play alone which, according to their perception, does not involve any intentional teaching and teachers' intervention in extending children's learning and development.

Katie: I think they do learn something [from play], but if you don't teach children and just let them play, they won't learn much ... you should teach children while they are playing.

No participant mentioned the involvement of teachers in supporting or extending children's play mainly because they did not report having observed any of this taking place. It is possible that the teachers were applying a constructivist Piagetian approach of teaching and learning, which expects teachers to provide a resource-rich environment for children to engage in autonomous play and exploration (Piaget, 1952, 1962). Yet, the participants did not have the habitus to recognise teachers' non-interventionist approach as teaching and children's self-initiated play as learning. On the other hand, neither was a socio-constructivist Vygotskian pedagogy (Vygotsky, 1966) which encourages adults to scaffold children's learning during play reported as having been observed by the participants. While both theoretical frames of Piaget and Vygotsky underpin *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), it seems that the kindergarten teachers might have applied only the Piagetian approach when the participants were present at the kindergartens.



Considering the participants spent limited time at the kindergartens, their reported observations were snapshots of teaching practices only. Teachers might very well have enacted a socio-cultural play-based pedagogy when the participants were not at the kindergartens. The low teacher-child ratio, which was used often by the participants to justify their low expectations of kindergartens, could also have been a possible factor in constraining the teachers' ability to engage and scaffold children during their play experiences. Nonetheless, only one kindergarten in this study, the Monkey Kindergarten, was commended by ERO in terms of teachers' involvement and engagement in children's play and exploratory activities (ERO, 2010b; see also documentary review).

Literature has highlighted the importance of promoting open dialogue between ECE teachers and parents to explore a wide spectrum of play (Keating et al, 2010; Rhedding-Jones & Otterstad, 2011), and it is appropriate for ECE teachers to initiate this dialogue with Chinese immigrant parents to exchange personal and professional philosophies of play. This is because no matter how much Chinese immigrant parents disagree with the teachers' practices, it is unlikely that they would express their discontent to teachers or believe their opinion was capable of changing anything; instead they would deploy different strategies to resolve the issues by themselves (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2010, Wu, 2011).

While it is crucial for teachers to consider and integrate families' funds of knowledge into their practices (González, 2005; González, Moll & Amanti, 2005), this study argues that it is equally valuable for immigrant parents to learn about the teachers' funds of knowledge with regard to the value of play as

espoused in *Te Whāriki*. Parents are likely to feel disappointed when the notion of play dominates the programmes of ECE services. If the value of play-based and child-centred experiences was explained comprehensively by the teachers, this might serve to empower parents to make informed interpretations and decisions concerning their children's play. The following section extends discussion of the importance of parent-teacher communication for understanding parental aspirations in terms of children's English linguistic ability.

### **English: The importance of linguistic capital**

As the participants and their children navigated and negotiated between private and the public spaces, each embedded with different cultural and linguistic repertoires and expectations, the participants employed a range of spatial strategies (Waters, 2005) to support their children to excel in English and at the same time, to maintain their Chinese linguistic ability. The previous chapter has already discussed the participants' expectations and strategies for maintaining home language in the private spaces. This section concentrates on examining their determination for their children to acquire good English language skills.

All participants in this study considered acquiring linguistic ability in English as the most important aspect of learning at kindergartens. This corroborates findings from previous studies in which immigrant parents, including Chinese immigrant families, identify English language acquisition as the most important learning for their children in ECE settings and the first year of primary schooling (De Gioia, 2013; Liao, 2007; Obeng, 2007). These immigrant parents believe

that they were unable to provide children with a favourable home environment for English learning, and they preferred their children to learn English from native speakers (De Gioia, 2013; Obeng, 2007).

The participants believed that English linguistic capital impacted on children's ability to develop friendships with all non-Chinese-speaking children, to communicate with teachers at the kindergartens, and to practise social skills.

Katie: Without English, my children cannot make friends.

Mei: He [her son] only looks for Mandarin-speaking children to play with. There weren't that many Chinese children at the "kindy" last year, but there are a few more this year. So he has a few more friends. It's the language problem. He is actually quite friendly.

Lian: Many Chinese children play together in a group and speak in Chinese. But my two boys both speak English, so they can play with \*洋人/yang ren children.

Most crucially, for the participants, a lack of English language was thought to constrain the children's ability to understand teachers' explanations and instructions, and this would impact negatively on their overall learning and transition to primary school. The participants' concerns are affirmed in the report by The Royal Society of New Zealand (2103, p. 6) which highlights that "English support for non-English speakers is crucial" because "if a child is unable to comprehend instructions in English, learning across the curriculum can suffer markedly".

Ella: Many Chinese parents think it's okay for their young children not to know English at "kindy". It seems like they are very relaxed about this. But once their children start primary, they become very concerned if their children's English is not catching-up. Only then they send their children to English classes.

Katie: If their English is not good, they learn everything slower, and their comprehension is not as good. That's why they have to work harder. I feel that if language is not a problem, they should be able to learn just like the \*洋人/yang ren ... [without English], they won't be able to understand what the teachers say, and I will be very worried.

Lian: How will a child be able to learn without English when he/she starts primary? How can the child communicate with the teachers?

Nan: Children want to be able to express themselves. Just like myself, I feel really bad if I struggle to "express my ideas exactly". I don't want others to misunderstand myself. I don't want my daughter to have similar experience. That's why I want to give her a good foundation, so she finds it "easy" in primary.

Vicky: I hope her English becomes her mother tongue when she starts primary and it is as good as the "Kiwi" children. But of course, she can't forget her Chinese.

It was also for the same reason that Mei was sceptical of the benefit of having a Chinese-speaking kindergarten teacher.

Mei: I don't mind as long as the teachers speak to them in English. He will learn much slower if the teachers speak to them in Chinese.

The narratives reflect a power imbalance between the social status of the two languages, English and Chinese, in New Zealand. Although all participants were determined to maintain their children's linguistic ability in Chinese, they were prepared to relax this expectation in order to focus on giving children more opportunity to improve their English language ability. For example, Katie sent her son to a private bilingual ECE centre, hoping that he could learn both Chinese and English at the same time. When she found her son did not have enough exposure to English at the centre, she withdrew him and enrolled him in the English-speaking only public kindergarten immediately because within New Zealand, the linguistic ability of English has a higher capital than Chinese.

Furthermore, private and public spaces are interconnected (Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). The demand of English language within public spaces, such as the kindergartens, strongly influences parental practices within private spaces, and this is why the participants were heavily involved in engaging their children in English literacy exercises at home, as noted previously. In addition, English has become a highly valued international language as a result of globalisation (Kwan, 2007; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Competency and proficiency in English is considered in many countries, including non-English speaking societies, as a form of capital (Kwan, 2007). The participants' earlier responses demonstrate that they were aware of the importance of English linguistic capital in New Zealand.

Although the participants paid more attention to their children's linguistic ability in English more than Chinese, most were aware that their emphasis on children's English and relaxed attitude in making a conscious effort to validate the importance of maintaining the home language might separate children from their cultural identity and impact negatively on their ability to become truly bilingual and bicultural (Adair, 2011; Arzubiaga et al, 2009). Consequently, these participants not only tried their best to continue using Mandarin/Cantonese with their children in private spaces, they also planned to send their children back to China to reconnect with Chinese language and cultures, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Since the participants were eager for their children to acquire English linguistic skills before starting primary schooling, they particularly wanted kindergarten teachers to engage children in more activities that improved children's English ability.

Katie: I believe that children's English improve more by listening to stories.

Nan: Although I may not want my child to learn any specific thing, I would like him to listen to more stories and listen more often to teachers, even though he may not be able to remember ...

When Nan and Jan were concerned how their children's English might become problematic at primary school, they decided to also enrol their children in private Montessori kindergartens to prepare them better for this transition. It must have been disappointing for parents, like Nan and Jan, when their request for additional English language support to be provided for their children was

declined by kindergarten teachers, as highlighted previously. Findings from a previous study indicate that very often, teachers do not realise that parents' strong desire for their children to learn English outweighs their wish to sustain their home language (De Gioia, 2013).

The ERO reports of the AKA and the three individual kindergartens are very positive about how literacy is promoted, with many reading and writing opportunities provided (ERO, 2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2011c; see also documentary review). Yet, none of these ERO reports mentions how children with non-English speaking backgrounds were supported in their English linguistic acquisition, and whether their parents' aspirations, such as their writing and reading expectations were considered. In a 2004 national overview report, ERO identified many ECE centres as not meeting the required criterion of "provision for children from NESB [Non-English Speaking Background]" (ERO, 2004, p. 11; see also documentary review), which includes providing extra resources to actively assist them to learn English.

These findings from the documents seem to align with the comments of some participants that the kindergarten teachers did not believe it was their responsibility to provide extra support for children with non-English speaking backgrounds in order to help them improve their English-speaking ability. Without the teachers' support, the participants therefore had to exercise agency to employ a range of strategies in private spaces to ensure that their children's English language was strengthened in preparation for their primary schooling.

## **Preparation for primary school**

The participants believed that the structure and practices of kindergartens resembled those of primary schools, and thus kindergartens were better than other ECE services in preparing children for the next stage of education. Parents, like Ella and Vicky, who were recruited from the kindergarten that operated under a full-day model were particularly satisfied with its running hours.

Vicky: Most important is to learn “structure” [from the kindergarten] so children are able to “follow” the structure and settle into primary school easily ... I feel that the hour of this kindergarten is very similar to that of a primary school, both finish at 3pm ... Kindergarten is clearly more similar to school.

Ella: I let her [her daughter] attend full day, five days a week. This is to let her get used to the hours at primary, so she knows that she has to go to “school” Monday to Friday.

Sophia: It [attending kindergarten] lays a foundation for primary schooling. At least children recognise the alphabet.

Lian: It [attending kindergarten] makes it easier for them in primary school.

Transition to school is a main goal of ECE in China and in Hong Kong (Chan & Chan, 2002; Wong & Pang, 2002). The participants in this study, who had prior knowledge and experience of ECE in their home country, considered the key role of kindergartens as preparing children for primary schooling. Ensuring



a smooth transition to school for children is also highlighted in both the New Zealand ECE and school curriculum. *Te Whāriki* includes an entire section that draws connection between its strands (MoE, 1996) and the essential skills and learning areas of the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (MoE, 1993). The revised *New Zealand Curriculum* (MoE, 2007a) further explains how the strands of *Te Whāriki* are aligned with its key competencies. Nonetheless, transition to school is hardly mentioned in other key documents examined (see documentary review). As an area that is minimally reviewed by ERO and not emphasised in institutional documents, except the two official curricula, it is easy for the importance of transition to school to be overlooked. Transition to school is also an area identified as needing a comprehensive review in the *ECE Taskforce Overview* (ECE Taskforce, 2011; see also documentary review).

The 2006 AKA ERO report provides no description of how AKA kindergartens in general support children's transition to school (ERO, 2006), although the ERO reports of Elephant and Lion Kindergarten indicate that the teachers made some attempts to make connection to the local primary schools (2010a, 2011c; see also documentary review). None of the philosophy statements of the three kindergartens mentions their commitment to providing smooth experiences of transition to school for children, and none of their ERO evaluation reports mentions how teachers prepared children with the scholastic abilities, such as literacy and numeracy skills, required in primary schools. It seems that the participants and the kindergarten teachers did not share the same degree of concerns regarding getting children ready for school.

## **Independence and social competence**

Almost all participants in this study mentioned the importance of children's development of independence and social competence in kindergartens, which involves social skills and prosocial behaviour (Porter, 2008). The participants' concerns about their children's independence reflect a transformation of parental expectations that no longer aspire and strictly conform to the traditional Confucian and collective-based Chinese education, which focus on knowledge and interdependence (Chang & Wong, 1998; Nie, 2007; Wu, 2011). Instead, their expectations aligned with the recent ECE reforms in China and Hong Kong. These reforms aim at supporting children to be independent and assertive learners (Chen & Li, 2012; Cheng, 2006; Liu & Feng, 2005; Wong & Pang, 2002; Yim et al, 2010; Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009). The participants' emphasis on social competence was probably due to their concern with children's happiness, as highlighted previously, because without the social skills to develop friendships, their children would be unhappy.

Nan and Lian, for example, believed that at their children's age, social skills and learning to be independent were more important than academic skills.

Nan: I feel that "social" skill is very important, even more important than academic skill, at this stage.

Lian: I am not worried that he can't write his name, but I am worried that he doesn't know how to make friends and not being independent. Maybe my thinking is different from the other parents? [laugh]

In terms of the importance of independence, the participants mainly considered kindergartens as a better place than home to provide opportunities for children to establish and practise self-regulating skills.

Mei: I expect my children to learn to become independent from “kindy”, particularly to prepare them for primary school. I want him to learn independence from 9-3 during “kindy” time. My child cannot learn this from home. How can I let him stay home with me and not pay him any attention? In “kindy”, he can make his own decision in terms of what he wants to do.

Mei further compared the teaching practices between kindergarten teachers in China and in New Zealand.

Mei: Teachers [in New Zealand] put a lot of effort in making the children independent, like when they were making bread, they will get the children to do it themselves. This kind of activity will never happen in China because it’s considered to be unclean and messy ... I would also like him to learn something that he can’t learn from home ...

Some parents further related independence to the ways children think. They believed that the free play nature of kindergartens gave children the freedom to decide what they wanted to do. Subsequently, children would learn to make independent decisions and develop their own ways of thinking. While the participants were sceptical about the value of free play for their children’s formal learning, it seems that they were able to see some ‘side-benefits’ of the child-directed experiences offered at kindergartens.

Jean: In New Zealand, children are encouraged to be creative, to have their own independent thinking.

In general, the participants' emphasis on independence was unexpected because traditional Chinese parenting stresses collectivism and children are socialised to rely on others rather than to be independent individuals (Chan, 2006; Lee, 1996; Salili, 1996; Yang et al, 2006).

Social interaction and independence are promoted in contemporary ECE in China and they are considered to be key aspects of social competence (Wong & Pang, 2002). Since Chinese immigrant children may lack the language and cultural capital to socialise with other children, their social competence development relies on the teachers' effort in including them in group activities and creating opportunities for them to interact with other children.

### **Art and craft**

All participants commended the extensive opportunities for children to engage in art and craft activities in kindergartens. The term 动手能力/dong shou neng li (the skills and ability in art and craft) was used often by the participants. They felt that, when compared with \*洋人/yang ren children, Chinese children in general were weaker in this area because 动手能力/dong shou neng li is not promoted in education in China. At the same time, since all the participants completed their schooling in China, they believed that they were also not strong at art and craft, and therefore were unable to support their children to develop these skills. As such, they recognised that kindergartens provided an ideal environment for their children to practise these skills, a process that also involves creativity and imagination.

Mei: I like how this kindergarten asks children to use a lot of 动手能力/dong shou neng li. This helps children to develop their imagination ... Yes, we have lots of toys at home, more than they have here at the “kindy”, but we do not have much craft work at home, like glueing and playdough ... we don’t let them play with these at home.

Jean: They did a lot of art and craft activities there [at the kindergarten]. Perhaps boys particularly like this. Every day, he [her son] makes planes, guns ... This is what he got the most out of “kindy”.

Jan: Although some Chinese children are also very creative, but to be honest, I think many Chinese parents do not have strong foundation in this area.

The participants would have experienced art and craft lessons that were significantly different in China from those offered in New Zealand. Whereas creativity and expressiveness are encouraged in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) and therefore in New Zealand ECE, traditionally and conventionally, teachers in China believe that children should perfect their craftsmanship before allowing them to express their creativity (Freeman, 1998). This is consistent with the description provided by Vicky, one of the participants. Vicky sent her daughter to private art lessons with a Chinese art teacher who gave children pictures to copy and colour. Vicky found this copying exercise beneficial for her daughter’s writing skills but she mentioned nothing about the importance of creativity which involves encouraging children to express freely their ideas and imagination.

Art and crafts learning experiences provided in Chinese kindergartens are mainly teacher-prescribed and controlled (Freeman, 1998). Teachers’ active

regulation and intervention during their previous learning experiences of art might have discouraged the participants' interest in art; yet made them appreciate the freedom their children were given to express their imagination through art and craft activities in kindergartens. Those participants, such as Jan, who felt that Chinese, in general, were not strong at creativity, were eager for their children to cultivate this attribute in New Zealand kindergartens.

### **Diverse learning experiences**

On the whole, the participants were satisfied with the wide range of indoor and outdoor activities organised by the teachers and the ample resources available at the kindergartens. Since the kindergartens support a free play approach, children were able to choose to participate in their favourite activities, and most participants said their children were happy at the kindergartens.

Jean: At the kindergarten, they have very good arrangement, with at least 8-10 different activities available at each time.

Nan: I feel that being active and have a wide exposure to different activities are important.

Vicky: The kindergarten has a lot of toys and space. Children have lots of opportunity to have activities.

The participants further believed that due to the free play philosophy of New Zealand kindergartens, children would not be forced to engage in any activities in which they were not interested.

Ella: The teachers do read to children, but only if they are interested. They don't force children to do anything, and I think this is good.

Katie: The teachers only teach those children who display an interest in writing. But boys usually just run around.

Sonia: I think the teachers did [teach writing] as well, but they do not “push” him.

However, most participants admitted that they would like kindergarten teachers to organise some writing activities for children.

Anita: Of course it’s [to teach] the basic skills, like “abc”. This is probably because we are from Hong Kong. Children of her age in Hong Kong are writing “abc” already. I think the kindergartens here should be doing the same.

Sonia: I have hardly seen them do any writing.

Vicky: In terms of writing, I think teachers can understand that parents would like their children, before they turn five, to be able to write at least their own names and number 1-10.

Mei said her children picked up some positive personal hygiene habits from the kindergarten. Perhaps this is because “an emphasis on hygiene and the formation of good habits” is considered as an important role of ECE teachers in China (Rao & Li, 2009, p. 112).

Mei: The teachers told children to cover up their mouths with their arms when they cough. Nathan [her son] told everyone at home who coughed to do the same [Mei pretended to be coughing loudly and fiercely] ... He picks up some good habits, like the way they cough, the way they put

away the dishes and tidy up after eating. He picks up these habits quite well.

On the whole, although the participants were not satisfied with some of the practices at the kindergartens, such as the lack of writing activities, they understood that there were certain learning experiences that they could not provide for their children in their private spaces. For example, those participants with limited English linguistic ability had to rely on the kindergarten teachers to support their children to develop their English-speaking skills. On the other hand, when the participants perceived that their children did not have enough experience with writing practice in the public space of kindergartens, they engaged their children in writing activities in the private space of home. Just like the Chinese immigrant parent participants in Guo (2010) and Wu (2011), the participants in this study were also active agents in deploying a range of strategies across different social-cultural spaces to cope with resources and structural constraints (González, 2005; Levitt, 2007) in order to maximise the learning and achievement of their children.

As it was discussed previously, the participants in this current study felt a lack of confidence in raising their concerns with teachers and convincing teachers to consider alternative practices, and they also did not have a sense of belonging in the kindergartens. However, they were well aware that their children, if they were to grow up in New Zealand, needed to learn its cultures from kindergartens and schools in the future. This finding corroborates that of Pacini-Ketchabaw (2007) whose study shows that immigrant parents in Canada do not have a sense of belonging in ECE centres and their host country, and since they do not want their children to repeat their negative experiences, they



utilise ECE centres to help their children develop cultural citizenship and a sense of belonging in Canada. Finally, since the participants were brought up in Chinese social and cultural contexts, they often used the practices of their home country as a point of reference when evaluating New Zealand parenting, teaching and learning approaches. Their practices and perspectives reflect their transnational immigrant identity and their needs to navigate and negotiate across a range of social-cultural spaces.

## **Transnational perspectives of ECE**

It has already been established in the last chapter that the participants were transnationals involved in various forms of border-crossing activities, including maintaining close connections with friends and family members in their home country. Engagement in transnational activities provided them with opportunities to be informed about current ECE practices in China and Hong Kong. Their personal preschool experiences of the participants might be outdated, but they still communicated with friends and siblings in China whose children were currently attending kindergartens, and some of their own children had kindergarten experiences in China as well. Their emotional connections with their homeland were particularly evident when they frequently compared parenting and education practices between China/Hong Kong and New Zealand, demonstrating their transnational perspectives of ECE. These transnational experiences enabled them to have up-to-date knowledge of ECE practices in their home and host country, and exposed them to diverse learning expectations and teaching styles.

Anita: They [kindergarten teachers in Hong Kong] just have higher expectations of children's behaviour. They won't allow children to run around in classrooms, and not sitting down. They expect children to follow disciplines ... They tell children what they need to do each day, what kind of art work, what to glue, where to glue it ... In Hong Kong, children do not just play ...

Ella: When I went back to China in 2009, I noticed that my good friends' children who were of Catherine's [her daughter] age knew so much more, like 1-100, and additions ... yet Catherine knew nothing. I was very concerned.

Jean: This [New Zealand education] is unlike the education in China where you develop strong foundation but your breadth of knowledge is limited. The children learn many different things here [in New Zealand]. Since they [children in New Zealand] do not have much homework to do, they have sufficient time to pursue their interests or do something that is creative ... This is so different from the Chinese way of learning and teaching.

Katie: The ECE centres in China taught a lot more than the centres here [in New Zealand]. The "communication" between parents and teachers are also a lot more than here. The teachers in China give homework every day. They text the parents to let them know and remind them about the homework ... In here, it seems that parents participate a lot in the centres, they spend a lot of time at the "kindy"... Whereas in China, you

send your child to childcare and then you leave. We have different beliefs. It's the same with primary schools ...

Nan: My elder son attended kindergarten there [in China] when he was two and half years old until four. Kindergartens in China teach a lot of things, and it's teacher-oriented; whereas it's child-oriented in here [New Zealand].

Vicky: Kindergartens in China teach a lot when compared to New Zealand where children mainly play in kindergartens ... there are a lot more assessments in China; whereas it's just opposite here, there is no assessment.

Their perceptions of ECE of both countries, New Zealand and China/Hong Kong, however, might not always reflect the actual teaching practices. For example, when Vicky claimed there was no assessment in New Zealand kindergartens, she was obviously unaware of the use of learning stories as a form of assessment in kindergartens. Furthermore, the participants' frequent comparison of practices seemed to have created binary and compartmentalised practices in relation to either country. This is particularly noticeable when they claimed that it is not necessary to explain or share their personal beliefs with teachers since 'Kiwi' or \*洋人/yang ren did not understand and the practices between Chinese and 'Kiwi' are different. Much literature has highlighted the danger and limitation of homogenising any cultural group and creating opposing binaries between minority and majority, east and west, them and us (Arzubiaga et al, 2009; Ni Laoire et al, 2010; Nie, 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007). Perceived differences and imagined binaries between Chinese and \*洋人/yang

ren might have deterred Chinese immigrant parents from engaging in cross-cultural dialogue with local teachers and parents and developing a sense of efficacy and belonging in the kindergartens. Misunderstandings between teachers' practices and parents' perceptions highlight the importance of parent-teacher dialogue in supporting Chinese immigrant families to clarify and overcome these perceived differences.

Transnational perspectives with regard to parenting and ECE were not uncommon amongst immigrant parents; yet their constant referral to practices in the home country might potentially be interpreted as a refusal to integrate (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007). This thesis argues that although the participants constantly engaged in transnational comparison of ECE practices during the interviews, most of the time, their comparisons were neither intended to identify which practice was better nor an indication of their refusal to integrate. Instead, they mainly used the practices in China/Hong Kong as terms of reference, to highlight cultural differences, their frustrations and powerlessness. When cultural practices are not positioned by the participants as binaries but considered as complimentary, transnational ECE perspectives assisted the participants to identify and employ newly emerged parenting strategies that meet the needs of different social-cultural spaces.

The participants were aware that most practices in China were not applicable in or comparable to New Zealand, as discussed in the last chapter. Some were particularly critical of certain traditional Chinese beliefs and ways of learning and teaching, such as the excessive amount of homework, and they challenged the value of these expectations.

Katie: I had lots of pressure [when I was back in China]. I felt that how could our children here learn so little whereas the children in China have to learn so much. My child plays with sand and brings sand home every day; whereas their cousin in China brings work home every day ... When I was in China, I thought I must do this and that with my children when I went back to New Zealand. Yet, once we are back here, when everyone else is so relaxed, I relax as well.

Lian: In China, young children are expected to memorise two to three hundreds \*唐诗/Tang shi, but when they grow up, they forget them all ... I can hardly remember a few.

Vicky: Within Chinese immigrant families, we, on the one hand, pay more attention to traditional Chinese virtues; on the other hand, we also consider the “Kiwi” virtues, such as respect the children and encourage them to be independent.

Jean: Look at myself, I was educated in China. Education in China is very strong. They give children a strong foundation and a lot of homework, but the pressure was very high, and you have no time to look after your personal interests... I don't think there is much meaning to compare ... Our traditional ways of learning are very different from the “Kiwi” ways of learning. I think it will be good if we can find a balance.

Anita: There is nothing I can do. In Hong Kong, we worry that their English is not good enough; whereas in here, we worry about their maths and Chinese. The only thing that we can do is to give them work at home and teach them ourselves at home.

While some participants yearned for ‘in-between’ (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008, Bhabha, 1996) practices of both countries, as discussed earlier in this chapter, others believed that they had to create this space themselves by working with their children out of the kindergarten. This thesis, therefore, argues that the participants were not authoritarian or demanding parents who organised an overloaded range of out-of-kindergarten activities for their children. Instead, they fit into the category of “purposeful innovators” who extended their “cultural repertoire” by mixing and matching their old and new capital in order to “get ahead” (Levitt, 2001, p.57).

Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand, including the participants of the current study, apply a mix of parenting strategies to support their children to acquire the cultural and language capital that is valued in New Zealand while at the same time maintaining their Chinese heritage (Guo, 2010; Wu, 2011). The participants’ children were also frequently engaged in transcultural or transnational activities, experiencing a combination of cultural expectations from teachers in public spaces and family members in private spaces. It is likely that immigrant families will continue to apply their transnational ECE perspectives, adapting culturally, and developing a repertoire of transcultural spatial strategies to meet the needs of their families.

### **Cultural adaptation: Active and strategic transcultural spatial strategies**

Different countries promote and endorse different ECE discourses. Since the participants had decided to remain in New Zealand, at least until their children finished university qualifications, they were aware of the need to adapt and

adopt certain discourses of the host country. For example, all participants understood that New Zealand did not provide the same learning environment as China, and that what works in China may not necessarily be applicable in New Zealand. Hence, they adjusted their parenting practices and adapted to the education expectations of New Zealand. These twin processes give rise to third spaces (Bhabha, 1996) of cultural practices, in which new hybridised parenting (Sanagavarapu, 2010) emerge that do not represent any specific cultural group. The “hundred languages of parents” were used by Tobin et al (2007, p. 34) to describe the diverse and fluid parental expectations of immigrants. The narratives below show how much the participants felt they have changed after coming to New Zealand.

Katie: We also do not have the right environment, unlike in China where all parents push their children to study. In here, everyone is so relaxed, so I do not have this drive.

Ella: It's the education here, and you have to accept it. There is no reason to expect the Chinese education style here, unless you go back to China.

Nan: When she was little, I gave her a book to read every day and expected her to recognise some words. Now I don't do this anymore. This is the way children in China learn ... I now feel that with children, character building is more important than knowing “abcd” ... In China, we believe that children need to help us fulfil our dreams and do something great to bring pride to the family and ancestor. I don't agree with this. I

prefer my children to do something that they really want ... I didn't think like this in the past, I have changed a lot.

Lian: Our lives here are completely different from China. The cultures are different. There isn't much need to compare. We should adapt to the lifestyle here. That's why it doesn't matter and I won't compare.

As discussed in the previous section, while some participants, such as Jan and Lian, challenged the usefulness of expecting children to memorise and recite \*唐诗/Tang shi and \*三字经/*San Zi Jing*, others were pessimistic with the likelihood of maintaining Chinese language and cultures in their children's generation.

Ella: You can't expect children who grow up here and go to "kindy" where they use only English can maintain a "perfect" spoken Chinese. I know many Chinese families here who have insisted using Chinese at home. But once their children start primary, they even talk to their Chinese friends in English at school. I feel that their Chinese will gradually deteriorate.

Sonia: ... they [her children] live here and gradually they will "lose their [Chinese] cultures".

Immigrant parents in general are prepared to accommodate and adapt to the cultures of the host countries (Tobin et al, 2007). It seems that the participants were also psychologically prepared to accept that children growing up in New Zealand would inevitably lose a certain degree of their Chinese linguistic ability and their understanding of 'Chinese' cultures. They understood that their home language and cultures do not enjoy the same status with the dominant English



language and New Zealand mainstream cultures. Their preparedness to accept and adapt to the 'Kiwi' cultures extends beyond education expectations. Some participants seemed to particularly embrace the benefits of having a 'Kiwi' lifestyle.

Ella: Children here [in New Zealand] are more independent and their way of thinking is more mature. I have seen many teenagers [in New Zealand] who started working at the age of 17, 18. I don't think it's hard on them; instead I think this is a form of training which is good for the child. I will do the same to my children in the future ... like the "Kiwi" teenagers, they can have a part-time job while studying, not necessarily only focus on studying and have top academic results.

Nan: Me and my husband have been telling our children that they need to be independent, and we don't expect them to look after us. They can act like \*洋人/yang ren – come back or give us a ring at Christmas time. I would welcome them if they come home to visit, but I won't ask them to look after me ... This will only be a burden for the children ... I find that many "Kiwis" are very happy ... Their lifestyle is so relaxing. They go for vacations at different places ...

Jan: But you look at the "Kiwi" families. They take their whole family away every holiday. This is their tradition. We only recently changed our attitude. That's why I think there are things that we should change a bit.

Embracing the cultural practices of the host country involves making adjustments to certain traditional practices of the homeland. However, some cultural practices are more resistant to change than others because of their

perceived value to immigrant parents (Cheah & Leung, 2011). For example, in terms of children's education, the academic success of many Chinese immigrant children in English-speaking countries reinforces their parents' pride in their 'Chinese-specific' learning styles. These parents attribute these specific styles to academic success, and believe that certain traditional Chinese ways of learning, such as teacher-directed and structured learning, are worth maintaining despite the fact that their children are expected to acquire knowledge in a different manner, such as through exploration and discovery, in public spaces (Feliciano, 2006).

Immigrant parents are active agents in deciding what their childrearing practices are. As they navigate and negotiate between private and public spaces embedded with different cultural expectations, their parenting practices are transformed by learning and adopting new practices from public spaces, balanced with relinquishing private familial expectations that were impractical and unsustainable. Practices in private spaces are strongly shaped by institutional demands in public spaces (Georgiou, 2006). Immigrant parents are willing to change their traditional cultural practices if they perceive the new practice learnt from the public space is "positive and beneficial to their children and family members" (Yamamoto & Li, 2012, p. 5). Some parents, like Anita and Lian, were prepared to give up beliefs and practices that clashed with those of the kindergarten teachers. They would adopt the teachers' advice and suggestions or tell their children to follow the teachers' instructions.

Anita: ... for my son, sometimes he said what we told him was different from what the teachers said. In this situation, I tell him to trust the teachers, not us. I think, in general, they should listen to the teachers

more than their parents because teachers have many years of teaching experience. If there is a big difference between what we know and what the teachers said, we may talk to the teachers to find out who may be wrong. I will not tell my son not to trust his teacher.

Lian: The teachers told me not to force him [her son]. Just let him write anything that he's interested in. That's why I don't force him to write.

Chinese teachers are accorded with authority and respect (Woodrow & Sham, 2001). It is likely that Anita and Lian considered teachers as experts and believed that suggestions given by teachers were useful and valuable for their children's learning in New Zealand.

It is common for immigrants to experience cultural dilemmas and acculturative stress, such as the pressure to maintain their traditional practices and home languages as well as to integrate and adapt novel practices of the host countries (Meléndez, 2005; Sanagavarapu, 2010). For example, while Lian expressed her concerns about the Chinese linguistic ability of their children, Anita and Mei experienced an on-going tension between whether to allow children to have a relaxed attitude towards education or to insist that their children go through a regimented Chinese style of learning. Sometimes, previous negative experiences may force immigrant parents to give up certain cultural expectations that are different from the dominant practices, and they may experience a loss of parenting self-efficacy and lack confidence in the effectiveness of their parenting (Ali, 2008).

Nevertheless, instead of subsuming their beliefs and practices, the participants of the current study exercised agency in determining which home

cultures to retain or to discard, which practices of the host country to adopt, and which new strategies to employ, in order to cope with structural restrictions and expectations (Ali, 2008; Willis, 1977). Consequently, they have developed a repertoire of transcultural, sometimes transnational, spatial strategies. For example, when they recognised that New Zealand does not provide a desirable Chinese learning environment for their children, they planned to send them to China to learn Chinese language in a more effective manner. The participants were confident in their parenting practices and believed that they were acting in the best interests of their children.

As ECE centres in New Zealand are enrolling increasing numbers of 'Asian' immigrant families (Education Counts, 2013), it is timely for teachers to investigate diverse parental aspirations and expectations, and to develop responsive, inclusive and transformative pedagogy that facilitates the emergence of third spaces which include and cater for diverse ECE perspectives of immigrant parents. Pedagogical recommendations are suggested in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has described and analysed the participants' perceptions of the kindergarten teachers and the learning experiences offered at the kindergartens. Although the participants commented positively about the teachers' social attributes, their responses were less affirmative when evaluating the teaching and learning that happened at the kindergartens. They appeared to have learnt from their previous encounters with ECE teachers not to have certain expectations of kindergarten teachers. They displayed a sense

of helplessness when teachers were not prepared to consider including familial funds of knowledge. They had learnt to adjust and develop realistic expectations in order to avoid disappointment and had shifted their attention from children's learning to children's happiness at the kindergartens. Dominant New Zealand discourses as well as structural and resource constraints of the kindergartens were also used by the participants to justify their limited expectations of teachers.

An evaluation of varied learning experiences offered at the kindergartens further provides insight into the participants' perceptions of their children's learning in a public space. While the participants commented positively on their children's experiences of art and craft, and their development of independence and social competence at the kindergartens, they were doubtful about the learning value associated with free play. The participants considered children's acquisition of English linguistic ability and readiness for primary school as two important roles of the kindergartens; yet their beliefs did not necessarily align with the institutional expectations as indicated in the range of official documents reviewed.

The transnational Chinese immigrant identity of the participants gave rise to a cultural repertoire. The participants expressed transnational perspectives of ECE, but they often essentialised, binarised and compared New Zealand and Chinese practices. Previous disempowering experiences discouraged them from sharing their concerns with kindergarten teachers, from expecting any changes in teaching practices, and from participating in ECE settings. The participants were also pessimistic about the possibilities for their children to maintain the home language and cultures in New Zealand, and they recognised

the need to adapt culturally. As a result of ongoing navigation and negotiation across social-cultural spaces, the participants actively exercised their agency to deploy a mixed repertoire of transcultural spatial parenting strategies to meet the needs of their transnational Chinese immigrant identity and the expectations of each social space.

## 9. Conclusion

The aims of this study were to investigate Chinese immigrant parents' participation in their children's ECE in New Zealand and the factors that influenced this involvement. Focusing on the participants' sense of identity and the dominant ECE discourses prevalent in New Zealand, this thesis has highlighted the tension between the participants' parental aspirations and teachers' expectations. This study has found that the participants' involvement in the kindergartens was passive and minimal, and identified a subtle and implicit form of cultural silencing and exclusion that requires addressing. Overt discriminatory acts and comments are easy to identify, whereas more subtle forms of exclusion require awareness and conscious proactive intentionality in order to notice and remedy. If an ECE setting represents a microcosm of New Zealand society, this form of implicit non-inclusive practice has major implications for wider institutional engagement.

It is important to support immigrants to develop a sense of belonging in the host country as a means of encouraging participation and fostering social cohesion (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010; Spoonley et al, 2005), and parental participation in ECE settings is one way to promote the development of this sense of belonging (Hartzell & Zlotoff, 2004; Ward, 2009). In addition, parent-teacher partnerships are crucial because they enhance children's learning and development (Billman et al, 2005; De Gioia, 2013; Mitchell et al, 2006; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010; Stonehouse & Gonzalez-Mena, 2004). The stories collected in this study provided insights into the involvement of Chinese immigrant parents

in their children's ECE. This concluding chapter reviews the findings and identifies the intertwining factors that have shaped the participants' involvement in their children's ECE in New Zealand. It ends by providing recommendations for pedagogy, policy considerations and future research.

## **Summary**

The value of parental involvement in their children's ECE is widely recognised in many English-speaking countries, including New Zealand (Billman et al, 2005; Blanc et al, 2004; Grey & Horgan, 2003; Hartzell & Zlotoff, 2004; Keesing Styles, 2000; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Ward, 2009). Chinese immigrant parents' participation in New Zealand ECE settings, however, is limited and their aspirations regarding their children's learning do not align with the dominant ECE discourses of the host country (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2004, 2010; Wu, 2011; Zhang, 2012).

This study adopted a life story methodological approach (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Miller, 2000; Plummer, 2001) to investigate the participatory experiences of ten Chinese immigrant parents in their children's ECE in New Zealand. It used a process of documentary analysis (Fitzgerald, 2007) and two phases of individual interviews to collect textual and narrative data. A range of theories and concepts was employed to inform decisions concerning the research process, as well as to interpret meaning from the data.

The stories collected and analysed provide a theoretical understanding of Chinese immigrant parents' involvement in New Zealand ECE and contribute to the relatively small body of literature in this specific area. Drawing upon identity theorising (Hall, 1992, 1996, 2000; Davis, 2009; Goldberg & Solomos, 2002),



this thesis has connected the participants' identities as transnational Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand with their sense of non-belonging and limited participation in the public space of New Zealand kindergartens. Notions of social space (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989; Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007), third space and in-between space (Bhabha, 1994) have been utilised to illuminate the participants' ongoing spatial navigations and negotiations. As the participants exercised agency and coping strategies to deploy their own resources to support their children's learning in private spaces in order to compensate for the perceived limited learning opportunities offered in the kindergartens, new parenting practices emerged, which were fluid and hybrid.

When the narrative data was analysed against textual findings, using critical discourse analysis (Clarke, 2005; Locke, 2004; Rogers, 2004; Woodside-Jiron, 2004), the unequal positioning of discourses was revealed. Concepts from critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) have been applied to highlight the politics of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989), and the power and hierarchy of discourses in silencing PRC participants' knowledge and parental aspirations, and consequentially discouraging their involvement in the public space of New Zealand ECE settings.

This thesis argues that immigrants have transformed the demographic make-up of New Zealand, making parenting practices in this country increasingly diverse and fluid. Pedagogies can no longer remain static and be enacted with a sense of certainty. It is important for ECE teachers to embrace the notions of hybridity, fluidity and third space (Bhabha, 1994). Based upon the findings, this thesis offers a range of pedagogical recommendations. It

suggests using critical multiculturalism (Banks, 2004, 2006a; May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010) and the notion of funds of knowledge (González, 2005) to underpin a transformative education framework (Banks, 2009, 2010) that embraces new knowledge and pedagogy, and caters for diverse approaches of parenting, learning and teaching in an equitable manner. Such a framework also aligns with the aspirations of *Te Whariki* (MoE, 1996). These recommendations and their wider contributions are discussed in the next section.

## **Key findings**

### ***Inconsistent and/or contradictory narratives***

The narratives from the interviews reflect the nature of qualitative life story investigation which is value-laden, contextualised and individualised (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Scott & Usher, 1999; Trawick-Smith, 2003). During the interviews, each participant engaged in a continual process of meaning-making as she recounted, re-told and re-evaluated each event (Cortazzi, 2001; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). The narratives are the outcome of each participant's subjective interpretations of the accounts expressed in ways she preferred to remember them, at the time of the interviews (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Goodley et al, 2004; Plummer, 2001; Reed-Danahay, 2001; Stivers, 2009; Wolcott, 2010). As such, the detailed and extensive narratives presented in this thesis contain inconsistencies and contradictions, not only between the participants' narratives but also within the narratives of each participant.

The criteria used by the participants to select identities for themselves and their children provide relevant examples that illustrate such inconsistencies and

contradictions. Phenotypical criteria were used consistently across the participants when they selected their own identity. However, when it came to their children's identity, criteria such as cultural and linguistic characteristics, birthplace and other rationales were applied in an irregular, sometimes confusing and contradictory manner by individual participants. These contradictions were also evident when surveying the full body of data from all participants. This thesis presents many examples where inconsistent and/or contrasting logic was used by the participants to justify their beliefs and actions, suggesting that there is a tension between their espoused values and actual practices, mainly due to the constraints of resources and habitus that inhibited their ability to fulfil certain aspirations.

In terms of methodological contributions, this study demonstrates that inconsistency and/or the contradiction of narratives are features of life story inquiry, and that this approach is suitable for an investigation that examines immigrants' perceptions and practices, which are fluid, dynamic and ambivalent (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008). It also affirms that challenging the 'truthfulness' of life story narratives is not a relevant or valid approach (Wolcott, 2005, 2010). Each participant has a unique experience of migration; yet, they also shared certain commonalities. The emphasis is to acknowledge the uniqueness and variance of the participants' stories. Finally, data inconsistency and/or contradiction align with some of the theoretical underpinnings, such as the non-essentialist approach and the notion of fluidity, applied in this study. Within ECE research, qualitative inquiry is well established (Hedges, 2002), but a life story methodological approach and critical discourse analysis are not often utilised. The research process described in this thesis provides ideas for future

(ECE) studies. The findings of this study are summarised and organised into the following three themes.

***High parental aspirations and contrasting involvement in public and private spaces***

This thesis has established that the participants have high aspirations for their children's learning and achievement. Although the academic success of Chinese immigrant children is often attributed to immigrants' desire to use children's education for upward social mobility (Hibel, 2009, Li, 2001; Wu & Singh, 2004), none of the participants made this connection in their responses. This thesis, therefore, has applied the interrelated Confucian notions of \*脸子 /lian zi (face) and \*孝/xiao (filial piety) to analyse the participants' high parental aspirations in a culture-specific manner.

The participants engaged their children in a process of "concerted cultivation" (Lareau, 2011, p. 2). They were heavily involved in their children's learning activities in private spaces, whereas their participation in the kindergartens, a public space, was passive and minimal. As a study involved with cultural investigation, it is easy to attribute cultural and language differences as the key barriers resulting in discouraging the participants' involvement in New Zealand ECE settings. This study, however, has gone beyond merely examining language barriers because English linguistic ability was not the key issue with regard to the participants' limited engagement in the kindergartens.

Perceived cultural barriers were an explicit element in deterring the participants from being actively involved in their children's ECE settings. Most

participants had been in New Zealand for more than ten years and had developed certain perceptions of dominant New Zealand practices. Findings suggest that they were prepared to adjust, adapt and transform their parenting practices. Yet, they all claimed that due to cultural differences, they preferred to develop friendships mainly with other Chinese. They often essentialised New Zealand and Chinese cultures, positioned them as binaries, and thereby using cultural differences to justify and legitimise their parenting practices, including their limited engagement in the public space of kindergartens.

### ***The politics of in/exclusion: Identities, habitus and discourses***

Drawing upon identity theory, this thesis has connected the participants' transnational Chinese immigrant identities with their sense of displacement and disempowerment, even though notions of sense of belonging, empowerment, catering for diversity, and inclusive practices are emphasised and promoted in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) and other New Zealand institutional documents (ERO, 2004, 2010c, 2011a; MoE, 2004b). Most participants had resided in New Zealand for more than a decade, but they all identified themselves as Chinese and remained closely connected with their homeland. They had no intention of claiming to be New Zealanders due to commitment to what they described as their proud Chinese heritage and perceived constraints of their visible phenotypical features.

Identifying themselves as Chinese provided the participants with a sense of security in the imagined (Chinese) community (Anderson, 1991) where individuals shared similar understandings of social meanings and rules (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1989; Georgiou, 2006). Yet, by doing so, they

constructed a boundary with other communities. During the interviews, the participants often used 'we' and 'they' to position Chinese and \*洋人/yang ren in binary opposition, as if proclaiming that there was a predetermined and immovable barrier which inhibited them from participating in the kindergarten community. Maintaining their Chinese identity also demonstrated the participants' desire to uphold Chinese cultures and language in private spaces. Being different from the dominant social-cultural group in New Zealand in terms of identity, habitus and cultural backgrounds, the participants struggled to develop a rapport with the teachers and, as a result, experienced a sense of displacement in the kindergartens.

All the participants commented positively on the teachers' friendliness and effort in showcasing Chinese artefacts and traditions. They believed that the purpose of sharing their cultures at the kindergartens was to help non-Chinese children and adults to develop a positive understanding of Chinese cultures. This orientation reflects the aspirations of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), and the narratives suggest that the kindergarten teachers made an effort to enact this goal of the curriculum. However, the participants saw no connection between the two *Te Whāriki*-espoused aspects: catering for cultural diversity and fostering a sense of belonging. Furthermore, many of them did not agree with certain dominant ECE discourses promoted in *Te Whāriki*, such as the emphases on belonging, parent-teacher partnership and parental involvement in ECE settings. They did not see the need to be involved and have a sense of belonging in the kindergarten communities.

Critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) highlights the power and hierarchy of discourses in

subordinating and excluding certain knowledge, and critical discourse analysis (Clarke, 2005; Locke, 2004; Rogers, 2004; Woodside-Jiron, 2004) was used in this study to evaluate a range of parenting, teaching and learning discourses. Narratives collected in this inquiry indicate that some participants felt that their aspirations were dismissed and negated by teachers in the public space of kindergartens. Consequently, they believed that their ideas did not matter in this arena, and kept their concerns and opinions to themselves. This thesis argues that the politics of in/exclusion, in terms of the participants' identity choices and the hierarchy of habitus and discourses, have disempowered and discouraged the participants from being actively involved in the New Zealand ECE settings.

The participants did recognise that their children's learning would be enhanced if they relinquished certain Chinese traditions and adopted new knowledge acquired from public spaces. Sometimes, they used newly learnt discourses, such as 'free play', to explain the lack of structured learning at the kindergartens. They also said they lowered their expectations of the teachers to avoid disappointment. This, however, turned into a source of motivation for the participants to exercise agency in deploying a number of strategies in private spaces, where they were in control, in order to compensate for the perceived inadequacy of learning offered in these settings. For example, engaging their children in literacy and numeracy exercises at home was one such strategy. This has, however, perpetuated a contrast in involvement between the two spaces. The participants continued to engage actively in their children's learning in private spaces, but to participate passively and minimally in public spaces.

***Adaptation: A repertoire of fluid and strategic transcultural spatial practices***

The narratives indicate that as the participants continued to navigate and negotiate across a range of social-cultural spaces, they developed a mix of transnational and transcultural spatial practices to meet the expectations of each space. They recognised that children acquired and developed certain skills, knowledge and dispositions, such as the ability to speak English, social competence and creativity, at a kindergarten setting better than they would do at home. They also accepted the importance of children acquiring cultural citizenship (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007) via the kindergartens and reminded them to follow the teachers' instructions, even if these instructions conflicted with their familial funds of knowledge.

The narratives also reveal that the participants had a limited social and support network for childcare arrangement options. They adopted certain practices as a matter of practical convenience. These 'convenient' strategies were applied to many aspects of the participants' lives, such as arrangements for childcare, schooling and extra-curricular activities. They were chosen because they aligned conveniently with other familial routines and activities. The criterion of convenience, however, was not the participants' default principle of parenting. Instead, they often felt torn between options for their practices. Their parenting strategies were the combined outcomes of aspirations and pragmatic and/or realistic considerations.

The participants were active agents in deciding on their fluid parenting practices. One participant used the phrase 边缘人/bian yuan ren (a person on the edge) to describe Chinese immigrants who are positioned on the edge of the



New Zealand and Chinese cultures. This thesis builds upon this powerful analogy and the notion of “purposeful innovators” (Levitt, 2001, p. 57) to argue that Chinese immigrant parents utilise a mixed repertoire of transnational and transcultural spatial strategies to meet their parenting needs. Although the participants recognised the need to conform to and adopt certain practices of the host country, they exercised agency to mix and match the expertise available in each social space in order to maximise their children’s learning as they saw it. As a result, their funds of knowledge expanded and their parenting strategies continued to remain fluid and strategic.

## **Contributions of the thesis**

This study has made a strong connection between the identities of the participants and their involvement in their children’s ECE in New Zealand. None of the previous New Zealand studies with a broadly similar focus (Guo, 2010; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012) had made this link. The determination of the participants with regard to maintaining their Chinese identity and cultural heritage is thought-provoking, and this determination has given rise to several issues. For example, due to their perceived minority disadvantages (Li, 2001, 2004) and concern with regard to racial discrimination and prejudice, the participants were eager for their children to stand out academically from their New Zealand peers. They also wanted to keep their children’s future life options open by supporting them to maintain their Chinese linguistic ability because these children may return to China/Hong Kong, to study, to work or to live. Maintaining certain traditional Chinese parental expectations had contributed to a sense of disempowerment and cultural disconnectedness when their

aspirations were not being recognised in the kindergartens. Their perceived binary positioning of 'Chinese' and 'Kiwi' cultural practices further discouraged them from sharing their parental aspirations with teachers.

Most monolingual and monocultural ECE teachers in New Zealand are unlikely to have considered these issues in very much depth. These challenges experienced by the participants may very well be shared by other non-dominant cultural groups. The findings of this study, once disseminated, have the potential to raise intercultural awareness, to motivate ECE teachers to engage in dialogue with families, and to create more culturally responsive communities across both the ECE sector and the wider New Zealand society. Based on the findings of this study, this thesis argues that it is important for teachers to facilitate the emergence of third spaces in ECE settings, and to embrace fluid and hybrid cultural practices to meet the diverse needs of families.

## **Pedagogical recommendations: Critical multicultural education**

It is acknowledged that this study had neither included the teachers' voices nor observation of teaching practices. The stories as told were largely one-sided, based on the participants' perceptions and "subjective reality" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 239). Nonetheless, the participants' narratives suggest that the teachers might have selectively implemented certain discourses promoted in *Te Whāriki*, such as those of 'free play' and exploration being the dominant learning medium for children. Other aspirations of *Te Whāriki*, such as empowerment, which is one of the four principles of the curriculum, might have possibly received less attention. By upholding certain institutional values and

practices but not realising and understanding the participants' parental aspirations, the teachers unintentionally reinforced the participants' essentialised perception that their parenting beliefs and the teachers' practices were in binary opposition, and that their funds of knowledge had no place in the kindergartens. The following sections provide a range of pedagogical suggestions that are informed by critical multiculturalism and the findings of this inquiry.

### **Engaging in critical reflections**

While it is a common understanding that teachers practise theories, it is also necessary for them to theorise their practices by reflecting upon how their practices are underpinned by certain discourses and theories. Applying a one-size-fits-all curriculum or pedagogical approach in a learning environment with diverse children and families is profoundly inequitable because not everyone has the same habitus, and education discourses are not universally applicable (Banks, 2006a; May, 1999; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010).

This study has found that even if the participants did not have difficulty communicating in English, they still did not have the habitus to understand certain discourses practised in the kindergartens, such as using play as a learning medium. On the other hand, a teacher-oriented and structured learning approach, with which the participants were familiar, is not promoted in *Te Whāriki* and other institutional documents, and hence does not share equivalent status with the dominant discourse of 'free play'. In order to implement a fair and just critical multicultural education, it is important for teachers to critically reflect upon the constraints of habitus and the hierarchical positioning of

institutional discourses and families' practices, and to be alert for the possibility of cultural silencing and exclusion.

### **Reconceptualising discourses and avoiding essentialism**

An awareness of the politics of curriculum, knowledge and discourses is crucial for ECE teachers. This awareness and its enactment can be supported with an intertwining process of learning, unlearning and relearning (Wink, 2005). A national curriculum promotes collective identities and ideologies, and certain discourses advocated in the curriculum become legitimised knowledge, which subsumes the 'other' discourses not endorsed institutionally. To illustrate, although *Te Whāriki* does recognise and embrace diverse childrearing practices, it has transmitted, constructed and/or perpetuated many dominant discourses, such as child-centred play and exploration being the main pedagogical focus, the importance of children and families having a sense of belonging in ECE centres, and the need for teachers to foster parent-teacher partnerships.

These discourses are further reinforced by institutions, such as ERO, and have become the taken-for-granted espoused practices. This thesis suggests that teachers who are committed to equitable pedagogy need to unlearn these institutional discourses, to learn how to adopt diverse perspectives in meaning-making, and to relearn new meanings of these discourses. It embraces the notions of hybridity and third spaces, and views practices as fluid, reforming and transforming across time and spaces. Essentialist notions and language, such as 'tiger mothers' or authoritarian parenting, have been critiqued in order to contest and revise assumptions and to explore new possibilities.

As ECE settings in New Zealand have become increasingly multi-ethnic and parenting practices and expectations progressively diverse, dominant ECE discourses require constant reconceptualisation in order to cater for the needs of diverse families and their fluid practices as they adjust to different cultural and institutional settings. Take the notion of cultural diversity as an example. Teachers responded to this aspiration of *Te Whāriki* by inviting the Chinese participants to share their cultural traditions, foods and artefacts in the kindergartens. ERO's commendations would have further institutionalised the belief that cultural celebrations are an appropriate enactment of catering for cultural diversity.

However, the participants suggested an alternative emphasis to support cultural diversity – by providing opportunities for non-Chinese families to develop a positive understanding of Chinese cultures. These learning opportunities help to reduce prejudice and foster a cohesive community that encourages Chinese families to feel respected, thereby motivating them to participate in the kindergarten community. Curriculum and pedagogies that aim to support Chinese families to develop a sense of belonging in ECE centres need to be implemented cautiously and sensitively in order to avoid the promotion of essentialised beliefs by teachers, institutions and ECE communities, and the perpetuation of ethnic boundaries and exclusion. More importantly, focusing on cultural celebrations ignores cultural differences regarding learning and teaching, which were the primary concerns of most participants.

## **Facilitating parent-teacher dialogue, supporting third spaces and transforming pedagogy**

When language is not a barrier, parent-teacher dialogue has the potential to reconceptualise discourses. Within the public space of ECE, the participants considered teachers to be the 'experts' and were prepared to follow the teachers' advice. As such, it is appropriate for teachers to initiate and engage in respectful, reciprocal and responsive skilled dialogue (Barrera & Corso, 2003) with diverse immigrant parents about their childrearing beliefs, so that diverse voices are heard, third spaces emerged and parental aspirations are recognised and included in pedagogy.

As an example, findings in this study suggest that most participants were unenthusiastic with the suggestion that Chinese-speaking teachers could support them to develop a sense of belonging in the ECE centres and their children to maintain Chinese cultures and languages. Without parent-teacher dialogue, the participants' indifference and aspirations in terms of prioritising English language acquisition over Chinese linguistic ability may not be explicit to teachers. Although *Te Whāriki* states that "adults should respect and encourage children's home language" (MoE, 1996, p. 73), this thesis recommends that ECE teachers consider consulting representatives from the Chinese community with regard to the implementation of this specific *Te Whāriki's* expectation.

*Te Whāriki* also suggests teachers should encourage diverse families and communities to share their cultural stories and symbols in ECE centres and to recognise their funds of knowledge (MoE, 1996). Children's learning experiences as practised in private spaces are invisible to teachers, but they

reflect valuable familial knowledge that should be considered and included in ECE settings. Families with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds should be encouraged to engage with teachers in collaborative decision-making regarding institutional matters and policies to transform and enrich programme planning and pedagogy. Extra resources and support are also necessary for those who are disadvantaged in the first place in order to give them a fair start, such as by having an ESOL (English as a Second Language) support person to help non-English speaking children to develop English linguistic ability.

ECE teacher-educators also play a crucial role in this transformation process and in enhancing student-teachers' social awareness. This thesis suggests that Banks' (2010) five dimensions of multicultural education: integration of diverse cultural knowledge, critical analysis of knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy and empowerment, as already explained in Chapter Three, provide a useful framework for a transformative curriculum. It further recommends that student-teachers need to be equipped with the theoretical knowledge and pedagogical skills of critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) in order to support them to recognise the hierarchy of social positioning and discourses, and the politics of cultural differences and curriculum, before developing culturally responsive pedagogies for working with diverse families. Diverse immigrant communities have significantly transformed the demographic make-up of New Zealand. Educational approaches that are transformative and embrace diverse funds of knowledge in a non-hierarchical manner are critical in terms of providing equitable and inclusive education settings.

## **Application beyond the current study**

Although the participants in this study were Chinese immigrants and Chinese epistemologies were frequently used to interpret the narratives, key concepts of critical multiculturalism, such as the politics and hierarchy of discourses and knowledge, are applicable to understanding the challenges experienced by those cultural groups that do not understand or practise dominant discourses. Given the bicultural nature of New Zealand, critical biculturalism is particularly relevant to providing a pedagogical framework that meets the needs of Māori whānau (families). This study, therefore, has not only advocated for Chinese immigrant families, it has also highlighted the need to transform and develop inclusive pedagogies and policies, thus responding to the current wider demographic transformation of New Zealand.

## **Policy implications and future research**

A number of matters arising from this study are worthy of further consideration. The enrolment of 'Asian' children has increased significantly in the past ten years (Education Counts, 2013), and immigrants from the PRC are the second largest immigrant group in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). It is timely for institutions to develop, in consultation with representatives from the Chinese immigrant communities, policies that aim at supporting this specific group of families in ECE settings. Below are some suggested policies that range from the national tier to individual ECE centres.

Due to possible language barriers, a Chinese speaker who provides support for translation in ECE centres is critical. Having Chinese ECE teachers is the most ideal situation, but this may not always be possible. Statistics provided by



Education Counts (2013, p. 14) show that qualified 'Asian' ECE teachers only "make up 11.4% of all ECE teaching staff" in New Zealand. Over 70% of ECE teachers are 'European/Pākehā', and not all Asian teachers belong to the Chinese ethnic group. These statistics highlight the need for national policies that allow ECE centres to apply to MoE for resources, such as Chinese-speaking teacher-aides or support people, or for funding so that those centres with significant enrolment of Chinese children can employ these support persons.

Since most ECE teachers in New Zealand are monolingual and monocultural (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012), government funding should be available to support those teachers who are motivated to undertake professional development related to working with diverse cultural groups of families. Chinese language and culture courses, for example, will facilitate ECE teachers to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese cultures, and thus integrate them into the curriculum beyond a tokenistic level. When integration is genuine and meaningful, all children and families enrolled in the ECE centres become respectful and positive towards each other's cultural heritages. It is also appropriate for institutions, such as MoE and ERO, to develop national guidelines for ECE teachers to work with a wider range of different cultural groups of families. The document, *Partnership with Whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services* (ERO, 2012), for instance, provides a blueprint for the future development of such guidelines, which should be informed by findings from research that involves participants with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

At centre level, ECE teachers should develop policies on the use of home languages in their centres in consultation with Chinese families, to ensure that the policies respect and reflect the families' language choices. During the consultation, teachers need to respond sensitively if parents express that they want their children to only communicate in English in the ECE centre. It is the teachers' responsibility to support parents to make informed decisions by explaining the consequences of forbidding children to use home languages in ECE centres, the importance for children to retain their heritage language(s), and the benefits of bilingualism for children's learning and development.

A further recommendation arising from this thesis is that each ECE centre should develop an orientation programme for all newly enrolled families. With the presence of language support persons, this would provide an opportunity for teachers to explain and rationalise their pedagogies and expectations, so that all parents are better informed about the value of practices they are unfamiliar with, such as the purposes of children's portfolios. It is the ERO's role to review these policies and to ensure they are implemented in a culturally respectful manner. To be able to do this, ERO reviewers would need to be equipped with adequate culture-specific knowledge and theoretical tools through professional development and research.

As the participants' stories continue to evolve and unfold, it would be particularly relevant to extend the current study with follow-up research that involves the same group of participants. Similar questions could be asked in five years' time to gauge any change in perceptions and attitudes. Will the participants have an increased sense of belonging to their children's primary schools and to New Zealand? Will there be a change of their self-identity? Will

they still practice the same strategies to help them navigate and negotiate across social-cultural spaces in New Zealand? How effective do they find the strategies in helping them realise their parental aspirations, such as for maintaining children's Chinese cultural and linguistic ability? Have they developed new strategies? Future 'similar' research might also consider interviewing Chinese immigrant fathers, because Chinese males and females assume significantly different roles within the family and society. Narratives from a male sample group would possibly yield different results from this current study which, due to the circumstances of the participants, involved only female participants. Since this study has also carried out an analysis of official documents related to ECE in New Zealand, it would be appropriate to review relevant documents in five years' time to evaluate whether institutions, such as the MoE and ERO, have new directions for ECE teachers in terms of parental involvement in ECE settings and catering for diverse families.

## **Final thoughts**

Throughout the study, the Chinese immigrant participants were generous with their stories and demonstrated that they were eager to share their parental aspirations. They were committed to and highly involved in their children's education, but ECE teachers need to display an open-minded and inclusive disposition, so that parents feel motivated, confident and comfortable to share their concerns and funds of knowledge; otherwise they will continue to be minimally involved in ECE centres. It requires collaborative commitment from government agencies, teacher-educators, ECE teachers, and centres' owners and management to transform policies, curriculum and pedagogies, aimed at ensuring that Chinese immigrant families are respected for being Chinese, and

supporting them to develop a sense of belonging and to becoming active members of a cohesive New Zealand ECE community.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - Glossary

The Chinese words and their Mandarin pinyin below, arranged in alphabetical order, appear often in the thesis but they do not have a straightforward English equivalence. Pinyin uses Roman alphabet to transcribe the sounds of Chinese characters, and it is a system used mainly in the PRC to help with the learning of Mandarin.

管/guǎn – govern, control and monitor

教训/jiao xun – within this thesis and the literature reviewed, this term means teach, instruct and train. It is acknowledged that sometimes a punitive connotation is implied in this term.

脸子/lian zi – literally, this means face. Within the thesis, it refers to how children make their parents proud by achieving and performing well

三字经/*San Zi Jing* – this is a text comprises of many ancient three characters Chinese sayings that reflect key values of Confucianism.

唐诗/Tang shi – ancient Chinese poems from the Tang Dynasty

孝/xiao – filial piety

洋人/yang ren – literally, this means westerners. It is widely and broadly used by Chinese to describe any ‘white’ people with European descent

The following acronyms appear often in the thesis:

AKA – Auckland Kindergarten Association

ERO – Education Review Office

MoE – Ministry of Education

NESB – Non-English Speaking Background

PRC – People’s Republic of China

Finally,

Kiwi – this is a colloquial term to describe a New Zealander. However, just like the word 洋人/yang ren, it is often broadly used by the participants to refer to any ‘white’ people with European descent. In fact, the two terms were used interchangeably by the participants.

## **Appendix 2 – Letter for the AKA**

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

### **Covering Letter and Permission for Access for the Purposes of Research**

To the Research Access and Ethics Committee (RAEC) of the Auckland Kindergarten Association (AKA):

I am an early childhood teacher education lecturer at the Unitec Institute of Technology. I am also currently enrolled in a doctorate degree, PhD in Sociology, at Massey University, and my doctorate study involves conducting a life story research project. Further details of my background are provided in the AKA Research Ethics and Access Agreement.

I am applying for ethics approval from the RAEC of the AKA. Please find enclosed in this application package:

- A set of Research Ethics and Access Agreement and its relevant documents
- A set of Human Ethics Application of Massey University and its relevant documents (Please note that this research project has already received approval from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee and a copy of the letter of approval is enclosed)

#### **Title of the research:**

Immigrant parents from the People's Republic of China (PRC): An exploration of their involvement in New Zealand early childhood education

#### **The aims of this research include:**

- To investigate the nature and extent of participation of PRC immigrant parents in their children's early childhood education in New Zealand
- To identify the factors that impact on their participation

#### **I am writing to request access to:**

- two or three kindergartens of the AKA to recruit research participants
- six to eight immigrant parents from the People's Republic of China (PRC) with children enrolled in the kindergartens to invite them to participate in my research project
- some of the documentation of the AKA

#### **Further details of the above requests are explained below:**

I am requesting your permission to have access to two or three kindergartens in order to invite PRC parents from these kindergartens to participate in this research. It would be much appreciated if the AKA can support the identification of two or three possible kindergartens which are located in communities with a high population of PRC residents and would be appropriate for my project. If the AKA is willing to extend to me

their approval to proceed with my research within the kindergartens, information sheets for parent participants and head teachers regarding this research project will be either email, post or hand delivered to the kindergartens to inform the teachers about the details of this research.

I will arrange to meet with the kindergarten teachers in person to further explain the details of the research, to invite them to suggest possible participants, and to work with them to identify the most appropriate way to meet with the relevant families. It would be appreciated if the teachers are willing to introduce myself to the potential participants during the kindergarten's drop off and pick up time. Information sheets in both English (Appendix 1) and Chinese (the participants' first language – Appendix 3) will be given to the potential families and I will also verbally explain the details of the research in either Mandarin or Cantonese, according to whichever is the appropriate native spoken language of each family. I am hoping to invite a total of six to eight PRC immigrant parents who arrived in New Zealand since 2006 to participate in this study. All written and verbal information regarding this project will be provided in both English and Chinese in order to ensure that the participants are thoroughly informed.

This research project involves individual and focus group interviews, and I would be most grateful if these interviews can take place on the kindergarten premises while the participants' children are attending their normal session time if this is considered appropriate and convenient by the AKA and by the teachers of the kindergartens concerned. This is to provide a familiar environment for the participants to engage in dialogues with me. Efforts will be made to ensure that the normal daily programme will not be disrupted. Further details of this project are also explained in the Information Sheet for Parent Participant (Appendix 1) and the Information Sheet for Head Teacher (Appendix 2).

I am also hoping that I will be permitted to examine some of the relevant documents of the AKA at the kindergarten, such as the philosophy and policies that are related to parental involvement in the kindergartens and families with diverse language and cultural backgrounds. No document will be taken away from the kindergarten and confidentiality about the kindergarten's identity will be maintained in any report about this study.

Finally, I would like to seek your permission to publish findings from this project in academic journals or to present them in academic conferences in order to share them with a wide group of readers and audiences. Findings generated from this project will be able to inform early childhood teachers and teacher-educators, enhancing provision for immigrant families and their children.

Should you require further information regarding this project, you may contact me at 09-8154321 ext 8251 or 021-1874512, or my research supervisor, Professor Paul Spoonley at 09-4418171 ext 9171 or 021-422881, and Associate Professor Jenny Ritchie at 09-8154321 ext 8317.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,

Angel CHAN



## **Appendix 3 – Information Sheet (Teacher)**

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

### **Immigrant parents from the People’s Republic of China: An exploration of their involvement in New Zealand early childhood education**

#### **Information Sheet for Kindergarten Head Teacher**

#### **Project Researcher: Angel CHAN**

I am an early childhood teacher education lecturer at the Unitec Institute of Technology. I am also currently enrolled in a doctorate degree, PhD in Sociology, at Massey University, and my doctorate study involves conducting a life story research project. I have previously completed a case study that involved interviewing parents with Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) to examine their experiences in an Auckland early childhood centre. Although it was a small scale study, it generated some interesting findings that are worthy of further investigation, and I am extending this inquiry into my doctoral research project. Further details of the study are also explained in the information sheet for parent participant.

#### **Project Description**

This project will investigate how immigrant parents from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) participate in New Zealand early childhood settings.

*The aims of this research include:*

- To investigate the nature and extent of participation of PRC immigrant parents in their children’s early childhood education in New Zealand
- To identify the factors that impact on their participation

#### **Project Procedures**

This project involves the participation of PRC immigrant parents in:

- An individual interview
- A focus group interview (small group interview) that involves the participants recruited from the kindergarten

I am requesting your permission to have access to the kindergarten to invite PRC parents to participate in this research. It is anticipated that each interview will take approximately two hours. I am hoping the individual and focus group interviews will take place on the kindergarten premises while the participants’ children are attending their normal session time if this is considered appropriate and convenient to you. This is to provide a familiar environment for the participants to engage in dialogues with the researcher. Efforts will be made to ensure that the normal daily programme will not be disrupted. I will be the sole interviewer and facilitator in both occasions. Further interviews at the kindergarten may be needed but I will endeavour to consult you first before making any arrangement with the participants.

I am also requesting permission to examine some relevant documents such as the philosophy and policies that are related to parental involvement in the kindergarten and families with diverse language and cultural backgrounds. No documents will be taken away from the kindergarten and confidentiality regarding the kindergarten's identity will be maintained in any report about this study.

Finally, I would like to seek your permission to publish findings from this project in academic journals or to present them in academic conferences in order to share them with a wide group of readers and audiences. Findings generated from this project will be able to inform early childhood teachers, like yourself, and teacher-educators, enhancing provision for immigrant families and their children.

### **Your Involvement in this Project and Participant Recruitment**

This project will require six to eight immigrant parents from the PRC who arrived in New Zealand since 2006 to participate in this study. I am hoping that you can help with the identification of suitable parents, and it would be appreciated if you are willing to introduce me, the researcher, to the potential participants during the kindergarten's drop off and pick up time. Full information sheets in both English and Chinese will be given to the potential families and details of the research will also be explained verbally in the native spoken language of each family in order to ensure that the potential participants are thoroughly informed. The researcher will invite the potential participants to take away the information sheets and have a thorough read at their own time before deciding upon their involvement in this project. It will be emphasised strongly that participation is voluntary and absolutely no pressure will be placed on them to accept the invitation.

### **Confidentiality**

The name of the kindergarten will not appear in the research report. Pseudonyms will be used instead. Any information collected from the kindergarten's documents will strictly be for the purposes of this study.

### **Participants' Rights**

Participation is voluntary and absolutely no pressure will be placed on possible parents to accept invitation. The identity of the participants will be completely anonymous as will the identity of the kindergarten.

### **Project Contacts**

If at any time you have questions about the project, please contact the researcher, Angel Chan, and/or the researcher's supervisors. The following are their contact details:

Details of researcher:

Angel CHAN  
Department of Education  
Building 112  
Unitec Institute of Technology  
Carrington Road  
Mt Albert, Auckland  
09-8154321 ext 8251 / 021-1874512  
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Details of primary supervisor:

Professor Paul Spoonley  
Regional Director (Auckland)  
Research Director  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Massey University  
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09-4418171 ext 9171 / 021- 422881  
p.spoonley@massey.ac.nz

Details of secondary supervisor:

Associate Professor Jenny Ritchie  
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Building 112  
Unitec Institute of Technology  
Carrington Road  
Mt Albert, Auckland  
09-8154321ext 8317  
jritchie@unitec.ac.nz

## **Appendix 4 – Information Sheet (Parent)**

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

### **Immigrant parents from the People’s Republic of China: An exploration of their involvement in New Zealand early childhood education**

#### **Information Sheet for Parent Participant**

**Project Researcher: Angel CHAN**

I am an early childhood teacher education lecturer at the Unitec Institute of Technology. I am also currently enrolled in a doctorate degree, PhD in Sociology, at Massey University, and my doctorate study involves conducting a life story research project. I am an immigrant from Hong Kong who came to New Zealand over 10 years ago. This information sheet is to invite your participation in this research project.

#### **Project Description and Invitation**

This project will investigate how immigrant parents from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) participate in New Zealand early childhood settings.

*The aims of this research include:*

- To investigate the nature and extent of participation of PRC immigrant parents in their children’s early childhood education in New Zealand
- To identify the factors that impact on their participation

As an immigrant parent from the PRC, you are invited to participate in this research project and to share your experiences of involvement in your child’s early childhood education. If you agree to participate, you will be involved in:

- An individual interview (approximately two hours)
- A focus group interview (small group interview) with another two to three participants like yourself who are also immigrant parents from the PRC (approximately two hours)

#### **Participant Identification and Recruitment**

This project requires six to eight immigrant parents from the PRC who arrived in New Zealand since 2006, and your child’s teachers suggested you as a potential participant. As this project requires participants to share in-depth experiences of being immigrant parents in their children’s kindergartens, only a small number of participants are required. Chinese is my native language, so there will be no language barrier between us. I recognise that you may feel uncomfortable sharing your personal experiences. With this in mind, I will endeavour to make our research interview feel more like a conversation.

## **Project Procedures**

It is anticipated that each interview will take approximately two hours at the kindergarten that your child attends or a place that you nominate, on a day that is convenient to you. I will be the sole interviewer and facilitator in both occasions. The main questions that will be asked at the interviews include: some background about your own experiences of childhood and education in the PRC, your experiences in your child's kindergarten, and your perceptions and perspectives of your child's early childhood education. Further interviews may be needed to clarify initial responses collected.

Your responses in the interviews will be recorded electronically, transcribed into English by myself, and into Chinese by a Chinese transcriber. I will provide you with both versions (English and Chinese) of the transcription to ensure that you are happy with the content and you have the right to edit the transcripts. Please also understand that not the entire transcribed document will be used; instead only various extracts from the transcription will appear in the final report. I will make arrangements with you so that you can check the interpretations I have made of the material I use from your transcripts, in order to ensure that you are happy with how the extracts are integrated before they are published in the report.

I am also seeking your permission to publish findings from this project in academic journals or to present them in academic conferences in order to share them with a wide group of readers and audiences. Findings generated from this project will be able to inform early childhood teachers and teacher-educators, enhancing provision for immigrant families and their children.

## **Data Management**

Your consent form and the data collected will be stored by my research supervisor, Professor Paul Spoonley, from Massey University in a secure facility for five years after the completion of the project. They will then be destroyed. The audio record will be destroyed at the end of the project, or they can be returned to you at your request. At the conclusion of this project, you will be provided with a summary of the findings.

## **Confidentiality**

Your participation in this study will not be mentioned, both your name and the name of the kindergarten will not appear in the research report. Pseudonyms will be used instead. Any information collected will strictly be for the purposes of this study. No information from this project will be used for any subsequent studies without your consent.

## **Participant's Rights**

Participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to accept this invitation. Your identity as a participant will be completely anonymous as will the identity of the kindergarten. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time before the draft of the report is written;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;
- ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

## **Project Contacts**

If at any time you have questions about the project, please contact the researcher, Angel Chan, and/or the researcher's supervisors. The following are their contact details:

### Details of researcher:

Angel CHAN  
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### Details of primary supervisor:

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Research Director  
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## **Committee Approval Statement:**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Northern, Application MUHECN 10/071. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathurst, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09-4140800 x 9570, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz)

**Thank you for participating in this project. Your contributions are greatly valued and appreciated.**

## **Appendix 5 – Consent Form (Teacher)**

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

### **Immigrant parents from the People’s Republic of China: An exploration of their involvement in New Zealand early childhood education**

#### **CONSENT FORM – KINDERGARTEN HEAD TEACHER**

**This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Letter of Permission for Access, the Information Sheet for Parent Participant and the Information Sheet for Kindergarten Head Teacher. I have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

On behalf of the kindergarten, we confirm that we are happy to support and participate in this project as outlined in the letter.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name printed:**

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 6 – Consent Form (Parent)**

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

### **Immigrant parents from the People’s Republic of China: An exploration of their involvement in New Zealand early childhood education**

#### **CONSENT FORM – PARENT PARTICIPANT**

#### **INDIVIDUAL & FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW**

**This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the individual and focus group interviews being sound recorded.

I wish/do not wish to have the recordings of my individual interviews returned to me.

I prefer to read the English/Chinese version of the transcript.

I agree to keep the identity of all participants confidential.

I agree not to disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name – printed:**

\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 7 – Translated Information Sheet (Parent)

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

### 新西兰中国移民研究：父母在幼儿教育的参与 受访人所需资料 研究员：Angel Chan

本人在多年前从香港移民新西兰，在本地从事教学及研究工作，现任 Unitec Institute of Technology 幼儿教育讲师，并在 Massey University 修读社会学博士课程。本研究是课程的一部份，现诚邀阁下参加本研究并接受访问，作分析用途。

#### 研究简介

本学术研究主要是探讨中国移民父母在新西兰幼儿教育的参与。

目标：

- 探讨来自中国的父母在新西兰幼儿教育的参与经验。
- 探讨影响中国父母参与新西兰幼儿教育的因素。
- 现诚邀阁下参与此项研究，分享个人经验并提供资料，以作分析及研究之用。

#### 受访人须知

本研究只邀请来自中国的父母接受访问，受访人必须在 2006 年或以後移居新西兰，并由受访人的子女的幼儿园老师推荐参加。专访的重点在於汇集个人参与幼儿教育的经验，受访人数定为六至八人。本人来自香港，懂中文，不会有语言及沟通上的障碍。本人亦明白到分享个人经验不是一件容易的事，因此，所有访问将会在轻松的气氛下以閒谈的形式进行。

#### 研究步骤

本研究要求阁下：

- 参加最少一次閒谈式的个人访问。
- 参加最少一次小组访问，人数约为二至叁人，参加者均为来自中国的父母。

个人访问将会安排在阁下的子女所就读的幼儿园举行，或由受访人自行决定地点，每次访问估计需时约两小时。本人将会亲自主持所有个人访问及小组访问，主要问题包括：

- 受访人在中国国内的教育及幼儿教育经验；
- 受访人及其子女所就读幼儿园的经历；
- 受访人对其子女的幼儿教育的理念及观点。

如有必要，本人会安排额外的个人访问以确定前一次访问的资料。每次访问记录的录音都会由本人做一份英文档案，亦会由专人把录音转载成为一份中文档案。两个版本完成後都会呈交阁下审阅，内容亦可以酌情修改，确保内容与阁下的原

意一致。并非所有档案的内容均会被纳入研究的总结。在研究结果报告完成之前，本人会亲自讲解有关被采用的资料，确保诠释正确无误。

本人亦希望阁下同意将本研究结果刊登在学术刊物或在学术会议中发表，让更多读者及观众分享。幼儿教育教师及师范导师亦可以利用本研究结果改善对移民家庭及儿童的支援。

### **资料处理**

所有受访人同意书及访问记录档案均由本人及本人的主导师，现任职於 Massey University 的 Professor Paul Spoonley 收藏及管理，并保存五年，然後全部予以销毁。所有录音记录及其档案都会在研究结果报告完成之後立即销毁，录音记录可按要求发还受访人。在研究结果报告完成之後，阁下亦可获得副本乙份。

### **保密**

所有受访人，其子女及其子女就读的幼儿园均予以保密。所有姓名及名称均以虚构或随机名字代替。所有透过个人及小组访问搜集的有关资料，祇会供本研究专用。任何资料如果未获得阁下的书面同意，绝对不会作其他用途。

### **受访人的权利**

所有受访人都是完全自愿参与本研究。阁下及阁下的子女及其所属幼儿园的名字都会保密。如果阁下愿意参与本研究，你拥有下列的权利：

- 在参与期间，查询任何有关本研究的资料；
- 选择不回答个别问题；
- 在研究结果报告初稿完成之前，随时退出本研究；
- 确保受访人的身份保密，并自愿参与本研究；
- 在个人及小组访问过程中，随时要求停止录音；
- 在研究结果报告完成之後，获发本研究结果报告乙份。

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**核准声明**

此项研究已获得 Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Northern)核准, Application MUHECN 10/071 。如有任何疑问, 请联络:

Dr Ralph Bathurst  
Chair  
Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern  
09-4140800 ext 9570  
humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

**衷心感谢阁下的参与, 及提供宝贵的资料。**

## Appendix 8 – Translated Consent Form (Parent)

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

### 新西兰中国移民研究：父母在幼儿教育的参与 受访人同意书

个人及小组访问

〈此同意书会保留五年〉

本人已经阅读过「受访人所需资料」，研究员亦已详细讲解其内容。本人对所有问题的回覆都感到满意，并明白可以在日後提出其他相关问题。

本人同意 / 不同意在接受访问时录音。

本人希望 / 不希望保留有关录音记录。

本人选择阅读英文/中文版本的录音记录。

本人同意将所有受访人及其子女身份保密。

本人同意不会公开小组专访内容。

本人同意，按「受访人所需资料」的有关内容，参与此项研究。

受访人签署：\_\_\_\_\_ 日期：\_\_\_\_\_

姓名：\_\_\_\_\_ (中文) \_\_\_\_\_ (英文)

## Appendix 9 – Interview Schedule (First Phase)

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

### Individual Interview

The questions that I ask will enable me to understand:

- the background of your family
- your experiences of being involved in your child's kindergarten
- the factors that impact on your involvement in your child's kindergarten
- your expectations of your child's learning and development in early childhood

Please note that the following are guiding questions only. They are used to prompt myself, the researcher, during the interview which will be conducted in a relaxing conversational manner, not in a rigid question and answer format. You can decide how much information you would like to share.

#### *Background information*

- When and why did you come to New Zealand?
- Whose idea to immigrate to New Zealand?
- How many family members are here in New Zealand and in China?
- What is your first language? What other languages do you speak or understand?
- What language(s) do you use with your child at home and at the kindergarten?
- Please tell me something about your education level or qualifications.
- Please tell me something about the occupations of yourself and your spouse before and after coming to New Zealand.
- How would you describe your ethnic identity in New Zealand and in China? What are the reasons for choosing that identity?
- Does your family have any plan in terms of remaining in New Zealand?

#### *Your involvement in your child's kindergarten*

- How long has your child been attending this kindergarten? Why did you choose it?
- Are you aware of the range of early childhood services available in New Zealand?
- How often does your child attend this kindergarten?
- Are you aware of the 'usual' and 'normal' practices and routines of this kindergarten?
- How often do you stay with your child in the kindergarten?
- What do you normally do when you stay?
- How do you normally feel? What do staff and other parents do to make you feel welcome and comfortable? What could they have done more?
- Do you feel your culture is reflected and respected in the kindergarten? Why and how?

- Would you like to become more involved in this kindergarten? In what ways? Why and/or why not?

*Your child's learning in the kindergarten:*

- In which activity does your child participate the most at the centre? Which is his/her favourite activity at the centre? At home?
- Are you happy with your child's learning in the kindergarten? Why and/or why not?
- What do you think your child learns in the kindergarten?
- How does the kindergarten support your child's learning and development?
- What would you like your child to learn beyond what they are learning in the kindergarten? How would you resolve this concern?
- What are the things that your child learns from home (or out of the kindergarten) that is not offered or supported in the kindergarten?
- Are there any issues that may make learning difficult for your child?
- What changes from the kindergarten and teachers would you like to see in relation to your child's learning?
- Compared to early childhood teachers in People Republic of China, what are your thoughts and feelings about New Zealand early childhood teachers and early childhood education?

*Communication with teachers:*

- What is your primary means of communicating with your child's teachers?
- Are you aware of the range of communication channels (eg. newsletter, notices, parent-teacher meetings) that the kindergarten normally use?
- Which method(s) of communication do you prefer when finding out about your child at the kindergarten? Why?
- Do you think that it is helpful to communicate with the teachers in order for your child to adjust to and do well in the centre?
- How often are your child's learning issues discussed with the teachers?
- Please tell me some of your positive and/or negative experiences when communicating with teachers. What are the possible reasons contributing to the experiences?
- Do you want more communication with the teachers and how do you think this could be most effectively achieved?
- To what extent do you think the teachers are aware of your cultural background, and expectations about your child's learning and development?
- Have you ever had different or conflicting ideas from your child's teachers regarding your parenting style, and expectations of your child's behavior and learning? How did you respond? How did you feel? How were they resolved?

*Your hopes and expectations for your child's education*

- Have you thought about which school(s) to send your child for his/her primary and secondary education? What are the reasons of your choice(s)?
- How far would you like your child to go in gaining formal qualifications?
- Can you think of any obstacles that may hinder your child's academic achievement?

- Some Chinese immigrant parents send their young children to private tutorials to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Do you do the same? Why and/or why not?
- How important do you think early childhood education is to your child's current and future academic achievement?
- What are your expectations of your child's current learning? Are your expectations of your child the same as the general expectations of children in China? Why and/or why not? Has your parenting style and parental expectations changed after moving to New Zealand? Why and/or why not?

Thank you very much for your participation in this interview. Are there any other issues that you would like to talk about?

# Appendix 10 – Translated Interview Schedule (First Phase)

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

## 个人访问问题（第一阶段）

下列问题会让本研究员了解：

- 您的家庭背景；
- 您在您子女的幼儿园的经历；
- 影响您参与您子女的幼儿园活动的多种原因，及
- 您对您子女在幼儿教育学习及发展的期望。

下列问题纯粹作引导用途，用来在访问期间提醒本人。我会保持小组访问在轻松气氛下交谈，而非一般拘谨问答模式。受访人可以自行选定内容分享。

### 背景资料

- 您在何时及为何移民新西兰？
- 是谁决定移民新西兰呢？
- 您共有多少家人在新西兰及在中国呢？
- 您的母语是什麽？您还会说其他语言吗？
- 您和您的子女在家裏及在幼儿园裏用什麽语言交谈？
- 请介绍一下您的学历及资格。
- 请介绍一下您和你的配偶在中国及在本地的职业。
- 您怎样形容您在中国及在新西兰的种族身份？请解释一下原因。
- 您和您的家人有计划长期居留在新西兰吗？

### 您在您子女的幼儿园的参与

- 您的子女在现在的幼儿园读了多久？当初为何会选择它？
- 您知道本地幼儿教育及各种服务吗？
- 您的子女每週上幼儿园几次？
- 您知道您子女的幼儿园的日常运作及常规吗？
- 您通常每日会在您子女的幼儿园逗留多久？
- 在您的逗留期间，您通常会做些什麽？
- 在您的逗留期间，您的感觉怎样？老师们及其他父母会做些什麽事情令您感到受欢迎及舒适呢？他们怎样才可以做得更好？
- 您觉得中国文化在幼儿园受到尊重吗？请解释一下原因及怎样受到或不受到尊重。
- 您希望可以多参加幼儿园的活动吗？在那一方面呢？无论是与否，请解释一下。



### **您的子女在幼儿园的学习**

- 那些活动您的子女参加得最多？他 / 她在幼儿园最喜爱什麼活动？他 / 她在家裏最喜爱什麼活动？
- 满意您的子女在幼儿园的学习吗？无论是与否，请解释一下。
- 您认为您的子女在幼儿园学了些什麼？
- 幼儿园怎样支援您子女的学习和发展？
- 除了您子女在现在的幼儿园所学的之外，您还期望他 / 她多学些什麼？您如何达到这期望？
- 什麼是您子女在家裏学会的(或从幼儿园外学会) 而在幼儿园未有教授的？
- 您的子女在学习上有什么困难？
- 就您子女的学习而言，您期望您子女的幼儿园及老师们在日後有那些改善？
- 与中国的幼儿教育及教师比较，对新西兰幼儿教育及教师的感受怎样？

### **与老师们的沟通**

- 您和您子女的老师的主要沟通方法是什麼？
- 您知道幼儿园常用的沟通方法(例如：期刊、通告、家长及老师会议) 吗？
- 当您需要查询有关您子女时，您会选择那一种沟通方法？请解释一下。
- 您认为与老师沟通会对子女在幼儿园的适应及学习有帮助吗？
- 每隔多久您会与老师讨论子女的学习问题？
- 请您分享一些与老师沟通时的良好或 / 及不良经历。是什麼原因导致以上的经历？
- 您希望与老师多沟通吗？您认为怎样才可以成功呢？
- 您认为老师了解您的文化背景并明白您对子女学习及发展的期望吗？
- 您曾否在子女的行为及学习上，与老师有不同或衝突的意见？您当时怎样反应呢？您当时感觉怎样？後来怎样解决？

### **您对您子女的教育期望**

- 您可曾计划日後将子女送进某小或中学继续学业？您会怎样选择学校呢？
- 您希望您的子女日後会升学至那一个程度？
- 您认为您的子女在学业上会遇到什麼障碍？
- 有些中国父母会安排年幼子女上私人补习课以提高语文及数学水平。您也会一样做吗？无论是与否，请解释一下。
- 您认为幼儿教育对您子女现在和日後的学业有多重要？
- 您对您子女现在的学习有什麼期望？您对您子女的期望与在中国的父母对其子女的期望一致吗？无论是与否，请解释一下。自从您移居新西兰之後，您有改变你管教子女的方式吗？无论是与否，请解释一下。

**非常感谢您的参与。您还有其他问题要提出吗？**

## Appendix 11 – Interview Schedule (Second Phase)

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

### Individual Interview (Second Phase)

From the information I gathered so far, in general, it seems that Chinese parents are highly involved in their children's early years learning and development, yet their participation in the kindergartens is quite minimal. The purpose of this second interview is to explore more in-depth the factors that impact on your involvement in your child's early childhood education.

Just like the first interview, the following are guiding questions only. You can decide on how much information you would like to share.

#### *Your involvement in your child's early learning and development*

- What kind of childcare support do you receive from extended family members and friends?
- Have you ever utilised non-institutional childcare support from non-family members, such as neighbours, nannies or baby-sitters? Why or why not?
- How does the level of support impact on your involvement in your child's learning and development, and in the kindergarten?
- Does your child have many friends in the kindergarten? If not, what are the possible barriers that discourage your child from developing friendships in the kindergarten?
- How do you feel about expanding your social network (with Chinese and/or non-Chinese) via your child's group of friends?
- What are some of the most important skills, both academic and non-academic, that you would like your child to develop at kindergarten age? Please explain why you consider these skills as important to your child.
- Are there any particular learning styles that are not considered as "conventional" Chinese ways of learning, you would like your child to develop? Why? How will this be achievable?
- Are there any particular learning styles that are normally considered as "conventional" Chinese ways of learning, you would like your child to develop? Why? How will this be achievable?
- Why do you think so many Chinese parents work with their children's literacy and numeracy skills outside kindergarten? Do you think non-Chinese parents do the same?
- What is your view in terms of maintaining your child's competitiveness?
- Do you think it is important for your child to retain Chinese language and culture, and traditional Chinese virtues while growing up in New Zealand? Why or why not?

#### *Your involvement in your child's kindergarten*

- Did your child attend another type of childcare service before enrolling in the current kindergarten? What are the reasons for withdrawing your child?
- What are the reasons for choosing kindergarten rather than another type of childcare service?

- How do you find the kindergarten teachers when compared to the teachers from other childcare services?
- In your opinion, what are the qualities of a good kindergarten teacher?
- How do you perceive teachers who organise a lot of activities/tasks for children?
- Have you heard of “learning through play” and “free play”? What’s your understanding and opinion of these two modes of learning?
- Do you feel that the teachers should share with you more about your child’s learning and development? Why or why not?
- How do you find the information provided in your child’s portfolio?
- How would you describe your involvement in the kindergarten? Would you like to increase your participation and in what ways?
- Do you think you would increase your participation if the kindergarten has a Chinese-speaking teacher and/or mentions more about Chinese cultures? Why or why not?
- The idea of parent-teacher partnership is highly valued in New Zealand. What is your opinion of this?
- How do the followings impact on your participation in the kindergarten?
  - language
  - different expectations between Chinese parents and New Zealand teachers/parents
  - the level of trust in the teachers

*The interrelationship of your identity, citizenship and involvement in the kindergarten*

- You described yourself as Chinese rather than New Zealander in the last interview. Is this identity important to you? What are the reasons for identifying yourself as Chinese?
- What are the reasons for selecting your current citizenship?
- Do you think your choice of identity and citizenship impacts on your involvement in the kindergarten? Please explain.

## Appendix 12 – Translated Interview Schedule (Second Phase)

(Presented on Massey University Letterhead)

### 个人访问问题（第二阶段）

据搜集所得的资料显示，总体而言，华人家长在孩子们的早期学习和发展有很大的参与，但是参加幼儿园的活动却很少。第二阶段的会面主要是深入探讨影响您参与孩子的幼儿教育因素。

跟以前的会面一样，下列问题只供参考而已。能提供的资料数量由您自己决定。您在孩子们的早期学习和发展的参与

- 您的家人及朋友们对您照顾孩子有多少支援？
- 您有没有试过让其他非家人，譬如邻居，保姆等替您照顾孩子。为什么？为什么没有？
- 您得到多少照顾孩子的支援对您孩子们的早期学习和发展及幼儿园活动的参与有多大的影响？
- 您的孩子在幼儿园有很多朋友吗？如果没有，是什么原因妨碍您的孩子在幼儿园结交朋友？
- 您有想过透过您孩子的幼儿园来拓展您个人的社交网？（华人或者非华人）吗？
- 有哪些重要技能，包括学术及非学术的，您希望您的孩子在幼儿园能有所培养？请解释一下为什么哪些技能对孩子的孩子是重要的。
- 您希望培养您的孩子哪些“非传统中国式”的学习方式？为什么？要怎样才能达到目标？
- 您认为为什么有那么多华人家长在课余教他们的孩子们语文和数学？您认为洋人也会这样做吗？
- 您对保持您的孩子的竞争力有什么看法？
- 您认为您在新西兰长大的孩子保全中国语言和文化，及传统中国美德重要吗？为什么？为什么不重要？

您在孩子们的幼儿园活动参与

- 您的孩子在上这所幼儿园之前，有参加过其他的幼儿托管服务吗？是什么原因离开呢？
- 是什么原因选择幼儿园而不选不同的幼儿托管服务呢？
- 您认为出色的幼儿园老师应该具备哪些条件呢？
- 您怎么看哪些安排很多活动给孩子们的老师呢？
- 您有听说过“从游戏中学习”和“free play”吗？您对这两种学习方法有多瞭解及有什么意见？
- 您认为老师们应该和您多谈论您孩子的学习和发展吗？为什么要？为什么不要？
- 您对您的孩子的学习记录资料（portfolio）有什么意见？
- 您怎样形容您在幼儿园的参与？您会在未来多参与吗？怎样多参与呢？

- 如果幼儿园有一位会说中文的老师或者多谈中国文化，您会考虑多参与幼儿园的活动吗？为什么会？为什么不会？
- 在新西兰，家长跟老师的伙伴关系是极受推崇的。您的意见怎样？
- 下列因素会怎样影响您参与幼儿园的活动：
  - 语言
  - 华人家长和新西兰老师/家长的不同期望
  - 对老师们的信任程度

您的个人身份，公民资格和参与幼儿园活动的相互关系

- 在前一次会面中，您形容自己是中国人，不是新西兰人。这个身份重要吗？是什么原因您坚持自己中国人的身份？
- 是什么原因您选择您现在的公民身份？
- 您认为您选择的身份及公民身份会影响您在幼儿园的参与吗？请解释一下。

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