

# **Chinese immigrant families' aspirations for children's bilingual learning in New Zealand's social spaces**

## **Abstract**

This paper highlights the complex relations between public and private spaces with regard to young children's bilingual learning, and the importance of developing a pedagogy that allows for the interaction of learning across the two spaces. It uses findings from a qualitative study to illustrate nuanced (mis)alignments between dominant language discourses in New Zealand early childhood education and Chinese immigrant families' aspirations regarding the languages they want their children to learn and use. The study involved analysing a range of institutional documents to identify early childhood education discourses promoted in New Zealand. Alongside this, individual interviews were conducted with a group of Chinese immigrant parents to investigate their involvement in children's early childhood education. Families' aspirations, experiences and practices regarding children's bilingual learning were frequently mentioned during the interviews, and these are valuable knowledge for teachers. This paper presents findings related to these dual language learning expectations. It uses theoretical constructs of social spaces to interpret the findings and their implications for a responsive pedagogy that embraces bi/multilingualism.

**Keywords:** Bilingual acquisition; early bilingual learning; Chinese immigrants; early childhood education; social spaces

## **Introduction and contexts of the study**

Contemporary research has established a range of benefits associated with bilingual learning, such as its positive relation with children's cognitive performance (Baker 2007, 2011; Cummins 2001, 2009). Bilingual learning is particularly important for immigrant children who have to navigate between their home language and the dominant language of the host country. It promotes immigrant children's development of a healthy identity and the ability to maintain family ties (Law 2015; Mu and Dooley 2015). Some studies have specifically examined bilingual learning and development of Chinese immigrant children in English-speaking host countries (Guo 2010; Hu, Torr, and Whiteman, 2014a, 2014b; Law 2015; Mu and Dooley 2015; Wu 2009). These studies mainly reported the challenges experienced and strategies used by Chinese immigrant families in supporting their children's bilingual development. This paper not only contributes to this existing pool of literature but, unlike the aforementioned studies, it uses social spaces theorising to interpret findings from a qualitative study, highlighting tensions between private and public spaces and illustrating new understandings of these challenges, experiences and strategies.

New Zealand has a large population of immigrants, and it is now home to more than 200 ethnic groups and 160 different languages (Royal Society of New Zealand 2013). The most recent census indicates that immigrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) are the second-

largest immigrant group (Statistics New Zealand 2013) and, according to statistics provided by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (MoE), the enrolment of ‘Asian’<sup>1</sup> children, including Chinese children, in early childhood education (ECE) services has increased greatly over the last decade (MoE 2014). These children are likely to be bilingual or even multilingual learners. Early childhood education in New Zealand caters for children from birth to school entry (usually five years of age). It is a mandatory requirement for all licensed ECE centres to implement the national curriculum document, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō nga mokopuna o Aotearoa/The New Zealand early childhood education curriculum. Te Whāriki* (literally translated as ‘the woven mat’) recognises that there are diverse immigrants living in New Zealand, that different cultures have different parenting practices, and it expects teachers to consider aspirations of diverse families and work in partnership with them (MoE 2017). The importance of embracing children’s home languages in ECE settings is also promoted in *Te Whāriki* (MoE 2017).

A national study found that, within the ECE centres that participated, there were 71 different spoken languages used and 67.1% of the centres reported ‘working with children from non-English speaking backgrounds’ (Shuker and Cherrington 2016, 177). A range of ‘typical strategies’, such as ‘asking parents for specific vocabulary from the child’s home language’, were used by teachers ‘to support children who spoke little or no English’ (Shuker and Cherrington 2016, 178). In an earlier paper, the same researchers reported that ECE teachers were still largely monolingual and monocultural, reflecting the dominant status of the English language and ‘Pākehā/European’ cultural practices in New Zealand (Cherrington and Shuker 2012). This paper argues that monolingual and monocultural ‘Pākehā/European’ teachers may be unaware of Chinese immigrant parents’ aspirations, and hence they are not working in partnership with these families and are not implementing a linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy.

The study reported in this paper was part of a larger research project that investigated the involvement of a group of Chinese immigrant parents in their children’s ECE in New Zealand, and the factors that influenced their involvement (Chan 2014). A process of documentary analysis was utilised to examine a range of institutional ECE documents. It identified discourses that were promoted and expected to be enacted in New Zealand ECE. Alongside this, two phases of individual interviews with ten Chinese immigrant parents from the PRC were conducted where parents shared their perceptions of children’s ECE in New Zealand. During these interviews, parents often emphasised their aspirations and experiences regarding

their children's bilingual learning. Some of these interview findings do not align with the language discourses promoted in the institutional documents examined. Both sets of data, collected from interviews and documents, will be analysed together in the findings section. The findings presented in this paper provide important insights for teachers who wish to develop a linguistically responsive pedagogy. In the upcoming sections, previous studies investigating Chinese immigrant parents' aspirations for children's bilingual learning will be examined first before the conceptualisation and research methods of the study are explained. Findings from documents and interviews will then be presented and analysed together. The implications of these findings and a range of pedagogical recommendations in relation to supporting bilingual children follow.

### **Chinese immigrant parents' aspirations for children's bilingual learning**

Previous New Zealand and international studies which involved Chinese immigrant families in English-speaking countries stated that these parents expected their children to be bilingual in Chinese and English (Francis, Archer, and Mau 2010; Guo 2010; Hu, Torr, and Whiteman 2014a, 2014b; Law 2015; B. Wu 2009). These studies further identified various reasons explaining parents' desire for their children to maintain Chinese language and literacy ability. A British study, for example, found that nationalistic pride and positive ethnic identity were reasons used by Chinese immigrant parents to justify the importance of maintaining their children's Chinese language and literacy ability, an ability that is 'conflated with an essential Chineseness' (Francis, Archer, and Mau 2010, 112). Pragmatic reasons included that Chinese language ability opens up career opportunities for Chinese immigrant children in the future (Francis, Archer, and Mau 2010), and it enables immigrant children to maintain family ties, facilitating conversation with family members who do not speak English (Hu, Torr, and Whiteman 2014a; Law 2015). Many Chinese immigrant parents also believe in active parental support and involvement, especially in out-of-school activities, including taking their children to Chinese language schools (J. Wu and Singh 2004; Zhou and Kim 2006). Enrolling their children in these schools reflects Chinese immigrant parents' commitment in supporting and maintaining their children's Chinese language and literacy ability, despite growing up in English-speaking host countries.

One study (Hu, Torr, and Whiteman 2014a) that involved Chinese families living in Australia, shows that parents' determination to maintain children's home language is often challenged by the parents' own perceptions, for example, the perceived importance of acquiring English language and literacy skills in early childhood; parents' uncertainty as to whether home

language retention will affect English learning; and their concerns that children may not have good enough English to understand teachers' instructions in ECE and later in primary school settings. As a result, these parents did not want their children to use Chinese, but to use only English, in ECE settings. Other studies that involved diverse immigrants in various English-speaking countries yielded largely similar results (De Gioia 2013; Obeng 2007). These immigrant parents, including Chinese immigrants, identified English language acquisition as the most important learning outcome for their children in ECE settings to ensure that they are better prepared for primary schooling and academic success. These immigrant parents believed 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 in ECE environments. A preference for their children to learn and practise English, and to not use Chinese in ECE settings has the potential to contribute towards the loss of home language, and 'many families do not realise the loss until it is too late' (Law 2015, 736).

Previous studies also found that teachers often do not know or agree with this preference on the part of immigrant parents and have varied positions on children's use of home language and English in ECE settings (De Gioia 2013; Obeng 2007). These teachers may not recognise the need to explore families' actual aspirations and preferences (Hu, Torr, and Whiteman 2014b). Law (2015) argues that teachers should have the professional knowledge and pedagogy to support children's bilingual learning by working closely with families to understand their aspirations and to share with them research-informed knowledge regarding bilingual learning and education. The literature reviewed in this section highlights that Chinese immigrant families' aspirations are often shaped by their perceived expectations of each social space.

### **Theorising social spaces**

Social spaces theorising is used in this paper to highlight connections between private and public spaces. Bourdieu (1989, 16) defines 'space' as 'the system of relations', and considers the world to be structured by social spaces and that each space has its own social and cultural meanings. Yet, all spaces are possibly interrelated and interdependent, facilitating the exchange and transformation of ideas and practices (Georgiou 2006; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Private spaces are usually within the home and are for private familial activities, in contrast to public spaces 'where the intimate gets challenged by social rules and regulations' (Georgiou 2006, 6). The two kinds of spaces are far from distinct because what happens within the private is strongly shaped by the social meanings of public spaces, often filtered through institutions, the media and communication technologies (Georgiou 2006). Within this paper, home and ECE

settings were the main private and public spaces, respectively, in which the participants and their children were involved.

The activities and experiences of immigrants are embedded in multi-layered social spaces, and a range of border-crossing activities and cultural exchanges happen across spaces. Due to language and cultural differences, some immigrants are likely to receive messages that contradict their beliefs and practices, and to experience possible disorientation when navigating and negotiating across public and private spaces, during which there is a constant time-space exchange of cultures, discourses and practices (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Nonetheless, immigrants are also active agents in creating new strategies to cope with social and structural constraints (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). This paper reports on strategies employed by the participants in helping their children's bilingual acquisition as they participated daily within both private and public social spaces, and examines how these strategies were shaped by their perceived expectations of each space.

### **Research method**

The findings reported in this paper were gathered from a larger project that explored the involvement of a group of Chinese immigrant parents in their children's ECE in New Zealand (Chan 2014). The project's research design was approved by the ethics committees of the institutions involved, including the ECE centres and the university to which the author was affiliated during the time of the study. The approved data collection procedures were adhered to. A process of documentary analysis and individual interviews generated two data sources from the public and private spaces respectively, and their relations were analysed. The document analysis involved an examination of a range of national publications, mainly by the New Zealand MoE and evaluative reports by the New Zealand Education Review Office<sup>2</sup> (ERO). These publications set out the Ministry's and ERO's aspirations for ECE, providing guidelines for curriculum and assessment implementation and evaluation. They are explored in various teacher-education courses, and used by teachers to inform practices and by ERO to evaluate the quality of ECE centres' programmes and performance. During the project, publicly available documents published within the last two decades were examined. The purpose of analysing these documents was to identify and investigate institutional ECE discourses. Only documents that highlight children's bilingual learning are reported in this paper.

Ten immigrant mothers from the PRC, recruited from three English-medium ECE centres in Auckland that their children attended, participated in two phases of individual interviews. The first interview phase mainly provided opportunities to ask standard questions to get to know

the participants, such as their backgrounds and involvement in their children's ECE. The second phase took place after the initial findings were analysed, and hence each participant was asked slightly different questions that were specific to each individual's experiences. These targeted and individualised questions, such as 'last time you told me ..., could you please elaborate ...', generated in-depth data and provided opportunities to ask for clarifications to ensure that the findings were as authentic as possible. The participants and I shared similar ethnic and linguistic backgrounds which has inevitably influenced aspects of this study. The interviews were conducted by me in their preferred languages, Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese) and/or English. Seven participants had been in New Zealand for more than ten years, and six of them had New Zealand tertiary qualifications. Only three participants reported that they had insufficient English to communicate with teachers. Most of the interviews involved using a mix of Chinese and English. The participants were encouraged to talk about their experience in, and perspectives of, their children's ECE in New Zealand. The topic of bilingual learning was discussed often during the interviews.

When the two sets of data, gathered from interviews and documents, were analysed together, it became clear that there were both alignments and misalignments between institutional and parental aspirations. These (mis)alignments formed some of the key themes for analysis in the study. For the purpose of this paper, only the (mis)alignments that are related to bilingual learning will be presented and interpreted in light of social spaces theory, in order to illustrate the complex relations between public and private social spaces. It is important to acknowledge that this study did not include the voices of teachers.

### **Findings and discussion: (Mis)alignments between Chinese immigrants' parental aspirations and institutional discourses**

#### ***Private spaces***

Findings from the interviews showed that the participants were committed to supporting and maintaining their children's Chinese language ability. However, some parents expressed concerns that their children had begun to display a lack of interest in learning Chinese language and literacy. The participants, therefore, employed a repertoire of strategies in private spaces to realise this commitment, which is aligned with the home language discourse promoted in New Zealand institutional documents. Findings presented here also highlight interrelations between private and public social spaces.

### *Chinese language and literacy ability*

All the participants emphasised that they expected their children to retain the ability to communicate in Chinese. A utilitarian rationale (supported by various functional reasons) was offered by the participants, but none mentioned that children needed to be able to use Chinese language because of their Chinese heritage. This differs from the findings of a British study which claimed that Chinese immigrant parents in Britain used nationalistic pride to justify the importance of maintaining children's Chinese language and literacy ability (Francis, Archer, and Mau 2010). Instead, all participants highlighted the need to stay connected with Chinese-speaking families. Their children were expected to speak in Chinese with extended family members in China, not only face-to-face during family reunions but also via telecommunication. The participants also believed that, since their children might have to return to China to visit, to study, to work or to live, it was important for their children to be able to communicate in Chinese.

One participant, Sonia<sup>3</sup>, brought up another 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 and Bedford 2012, 96). Sonia's aspiration was obviously shaped by her perception of career opportunities available in public spaces. These pragmatic reasons corroborate findings from previous studies (Hu, Torr, and Whiteman 2014a; Law, 2015).

### *Language concerns, compromises and active strategies*

All the participants expressed some concerns regarding their children's ability to communicate in Chinese. This was because, although they all spoke Chinese with their children in private spaces and their children still mostly responded to them in Chinese, some siblings were already communicating with each other in English. Two participants 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 tell them stories in Chinese.

Sonia: He [her son] seems to be more interested in learning 唐诗/Tang shi<sup>4</sup> when he was little. The older he is, the less interested he becomes.

Sonia was also concerned that her son, John, became more interested in watching English language cartoons than Chinese DVDs, and he refused to engage in reciting Chinese poems or to practise Chinese writing. All families in this study had resources in private spaces to expose children to Chinese language, such as Chinese story books, CDs and DVDs, and connection to Chinese television channels. They believed that, since exposure to Chinese language in New Zealand public spaces was minimal, they needed to provide the exposure themselves in private domains to ensure that their children's Chinese language ability was retained. The relationship between private and public spaces is evidenced.

Most participants were flexible with their children's choice of language in private spaces because their children had picked up many English language terminologies and the parents realised that sometimes their children simply had to use English in order to express themselves.

Jan: Sometimes, they don't understand all the things we say to them in Chinese, including some vocabulary.

Although all the participants expected their children to be able to communicate in spoken Chinese, either Mandarin or Cantonese, only some insisted on an ability to read Chinese. Additionally, two participants preferred not to teach their children pinyin<sup>5</sup> too early because they perceived that their children might become confused while also learning the spelling and pronunciation of English words. Most participants further believed that being able to read was more important than the ability to write, compromising on their expectation of full Chinese literacy.

Ella: This [writing] can't be forced upon them. If they can only speak in Chinese, but can't write, just let it be at this stage... They may become interested in learning how to write Chinese in the future.

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 notices and signs.

Writing Chinese characters is a complex task that involves the simultaneous application of various cognitive and sensorimotor skills, such as fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness and concentration. Much exercise and drilling is needed before a child can

master the skills, memorise and reproduce the characters which, within Chinese societies, is a process that normally happens before formal schooling begins (Wang et al. 2008). The participants seemed to have relaxed or pragmatic expectations regarding their children's Chinese writing ability.

All but two families planned to send their children back to China for a year or two between eight and ten years of age, in order to improve their children's Chinese language and literacy abilities. They claimed that this is a common arrangement for many Chinese immigrant families; so customary that none commented on any possible negative impacts of this practice, such as the disruption to schooling and friendships. The participants felt that New Zealand did not provide a conducive and authentic Chinese learning environment. Hence, they had to explore 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 [New Zealand], you learn it only once a week [at Chinese language school]. It's tiring for parents to take their children to [Chinese] classes, and the children struggled to learn [Chinese]. Most importantly, the outcome is not good.

The participants preferred to send their children back to China to experience a more robust Chinese language learning environment. Overall, they were active agents in utilising their knowledge of Chinese and New Zealand educational practices to adapt and adopt strategies to support their children's bilingual acquisition.

#### *Alignment between parental aspirations and institutional discourses*

When the participants' narratives were analysed in light of *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand ECE curriculum, it seemed that the curriculum document aligned with parental aspirations in relation to recognising the importance of home languages. *Te Whāriki* states that it promotes and protects 'the languages and symbols of children's own and other cultures' (MoE 2017, 41), and that teachers 'respect and encourage children's home language' (45). The importance of incorporating children's home languages in ECE centres, such as by encouraging parents and their children to speak their home languages in the settings, is further emphasised in other institutional documents (ECE Taskforce 2011; ERO 2011a; MoE 2004a, 2004b). The ERO reports (2010a, 2010b, 2011b) of the three ECE centres where the participants were recruited also recognise this importance. One report states that the centre displays 'languages and scripts

other than English' (ERO 2011b, 7). Another centre was commended by ERO on the teachers' efforts to 'support the use of first languages' (ERO 2010b, 5).

An alignment between parental desires and institutional discourses, however, is not so straightforward. This is because the notion of including home languages in ECE settings was not a concern of the participants who preferred to confine home language maintenance to private spaces. The participants also actively engaged their children in English literacy exercises at home because of their perception of the importance of English in New Zealand public spaces. Consequently, they were eager for their children to acquire English language and literacy skills, particularly from ECE settings.

### ***Public spaces***

As the participants and their children navigated and negotiated across private and public spaces, where different cultural and linguistic repertoires and expectations were embedded in each space, the participants employed a range of strategies to support their children's bilingual acquisition. The previous section has already discussed the strategies they used in private spaces. This section concentrates on examining their desire for their children to acquire good English language skills from public spaces.

### ***The significance of English***

All the participants in this study considered acquiring English language and literacy skills as the most important aspect of learning in ECE centres. This is similar to findings from previous studies (De Gioia 2013; Obeng 2007) in which immigrant parents, including Chinese immigrant families, identified English language acquisition as the most important learning for their children in education settings. The participants believed that a lack of English language impacted on their children's ability to develop friendships with non-Chinese-speaking children.

Katie: Without English, my children cannot make friends.

Mei: He [her son] only looks for Mandarin-speaking children to play with.

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<sup>6</sup> children.

Being unable to communicate in English was also thought to constrain their children's ability to understand teachers' instructions, thereby impacting negatively on overall learning as well as transition to primary schooling. This specific concern is affirmed in the *New Zealand Curriculum* for primary and secondary schools which states that 'as language is central to

learning and English is the medium for most learning ... the importance of literacy in English cannot be overstated' (MoE 2007, 16).

Katie: If their English is not good, they learn everything slower, and their comprehension is not as good ... [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: I want to give her [daughter] a good foundation [in English], so she finds it easy in primary.

Furthermore, when two participants became concerned that their children's lack of English might be problematic at primary school, they also enrolled their children in private Montessori kindergartens to strengthen their English and prepare them better for primary schooling. Teachers, however, may be unaware of these concerns. According to the participants, teachers' decisions regarding English language and literacy discourses enacted in ECE centres did not align with their parental aspirations, and this is to be discussed in the next section.

#### *Misalignment between parental aspirations and institutional discourses*

Two main misalignments emerged from the findings. First, since the participants were eager for their children to acquire English language and literacy skills before starting primary schooling, they particularly wanted ECE teachers to provide their children with more English language and literacy experiences. However, they reported that their request for additional English support was often declined by ECE teachers. One participant, Nan, said the teachers told her that it was not their responsibility to provide extra English language and literacy support for children who used English as an Additional Language (EAL). Furthermore, while the evaluation reports of the three individual ECE centres from where the participants were recruited are very positive with regard to how literacy was promoted (ERO 2010a, 2010b, 2011b), none of these reports makes reference to how children with EAL were supported in their English acquisition or whether their parents' aspirations, in relation to writing and reading expectations, were considered by teachers.

Second, findings in this study showed that, although the use of home languages in ECE settings is promoted in *Te Whāriki* (MoE 2017) and institutional documents (ECE Taskforce 2011; ERO 2011a), the participants did not support this idea. One participant, Katie, initially sent her son to an ECE centre with Chinese-English-speaking bilingual teachers, thinking that this

would support his bilingual education. Yet, she later withdrew him because she believed that he was becoming confused over English and Chinese, and was not having enough exposure to English. Another participant, Mei, was also sceptical of the benefit of having Chinese-English-speaking bilingual teachers in ECE settings.

Mei: I don't mind [having Chinese-speaking teachers] as long as the teachers speak to them [the children] in English. He [her son] will learn much slower if the teachers speaks to them [the children] in Chinese.

The participants seemed to prioritise their children's learning of English over Chinese even though they expressed concerns regarding their children's deterioration in relation to Mandarin/Cantonese and their lack of interest in Chinese stories, poems and writing, as shown in earlier narratives. These findings are similar to those reported in Hu, Torr, and Whiteman (2014b), in which the Chinese parents also did not want their children to use Chinese language in ECE settings. Overall, the findings from this study have significant pedagogical implications.

### **Implications and pedagogical recommendations**

Findings from this study indicated that the participants were determined to support their children to become bilingual (in English and Chinese) and that the importance of maintaining heritage languages and acquiring English language competence is recognised in the New Zealand institutional documents analysed. However, there were complex (mis)alignments in certain areas. This section examines the implications of these findings and provides some pedagogical recommendations. Since *Te Whāriki* is underpinned by sociocultural theories and provides a non-prescriptive framework for each ECE setting 'to weave a local curriculum that reflects its own distinctive character and values' (MoE 2017, 7), this paper offers broad recommendations. Teachers can develop specific strategies that are responsive to the needs of their own ECE community. A recent New Zealand study has highlighted a range of context-specific strategies that teachers used to embrace diverse heritage languages in various ECE settings, demonstrating that with a thoughtful pedagogy, teachers can create an inclusive language environment that fosters children's bi/multilingual acquisition (Podmore et al. 2016). The participants aspired for their children to develop and maintain Chinese language and literacy ability, but they did not expect ECE teachers to help them fulfil this aspiration. This therefore did not align with the discourses promoted in New Zealand public spaces where teachers are expected to encourage the use of children's heritage languages in ECE settings.

The participants preferred to utilise their own resources and arrangements, such as sending their children back to China to study Chinese language, to achieve this goal. While the effects of these strategies cannot be assessed without longitudinal findings, the narratives have revealed some emerging concerns, such as that some children began communicating with siblings in English and were losing interest in heritage stories. These signals, however, seemed to be overpowered by parents' perception of the importance of English in New Zealand public spaces. The participants were eager for their children to develop English language ability in ECE settings because they believed that a lack of English would impact negatively on their children's social development and their transition into an English-dominant primary schooling system. As emphasised in the *New Zealand Curriculum*, 'Success in English is fundamental to success across the curriculum' (MoE 2007, 18), the participants' concerns are therefore understandable. As such, it is important for teachers to provide children with EAL 'explicit access to literacy pathways in English' (Jones-Diaz and Harvey 2007, 208), so that they can have equitable opportunities to participate in all activities in ECE settings.

Furthermore, the participants' aspirations, concerns and practices in relation to supporting their children's bilingual learning were clearly shaped by their perception of the importance of English in the public spaces of ECE and primary school settings, illustrating the interrelationship between private and public spaces. Hence it is important for teachers to explain to EAL families that there is no need to pressurise their children to be fluent in English at a very young age (Jones-Diaz and Harvey 2007), nor that they need to prioritise the development of their children's English proficiency over the retention of heritage language ability. As cautioned by Jones-Diaz and Harvey, 'for children attending English-only educational settings from infancy, home language loss can be inevitable ... where learning English occurs at the expense of the home language' (2007, 204). Previous studies suggest that children with EAL should be encouraged to use home languages not only at home but also in ECE settings (Jones-Diaz 2014; Podmore et al. 2016).

Within ECE settings, pedagogies can be used to include diverse heritage languages. Ross (2007, 63) emphasises that teachers 'who are interested enough to find out about the languages of the community within which they work, and involved enough to learn something of how those languages are both spoken and written, are better able to create an inclusive language curriculum'. Research suggests that teachers need to intentionally design activities that capitalise on children's home languages and to create a print-rich environment where labelling, signs and resources represent diverse languages, including English, to support dual language

learning (Magruder et al. 2013). When resources and daily activities that involve diverse children's home languages are plentiful, this 'normalises' multilingualism and assures families that their languages have a place in public spaces; otherwise, children simply have to conform to an English-only or English-dominant environment in order to be socially accepted. This conforming attitude is likely to heighten the possibility of losing their heritage languages.

It is acknowledged that the earlier suggestions to embrace and promote home languages in ECE settings do not align with the participants' aspirations. Yet, a range of previous research has illustrated the benefits of bilingual learning (Baker 2007, 2011; Cummins 2001, 2009; Law 2015; Mu and Dooley 2015) and the negative impacts of prioritising the development of young children's English proficiency over the retention of their heritage language ability (Adair 2011; Jones-Diaz and Harvey 2007). Teachers should share this knowledge with families, to explain to them through parent-teacher meetings and regular newsletters for example, the rationale behind embracing children's home languages in ECE centres. Parent-teacher partnership is beneficial to children's learning (Chan and Ritchie 2016), and conversations and partnerships with parents are key principles in bilingual education (Cummins 2001; Shuker and Cherrington 2016). Parent-teacher dialogue provides opportunities to align aspirations and expectations across social spaces by empowering parents to share their desires regarding their children's language learning, and allowing teachers to explain the risk of losing home languages and research-informed pedagogies to families, and to also review and transform pedagogy (Law, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

Findings from this study have highlighted complex (mis)alignments between dominant bilingual education discourses in New Zealand and Chinese immigrants' parental aspirations regarding their children's bilingual learning. The importance of recognising home languages and supporting children with EAL to acquire English language skills have been established in New Zealand institutional documents. Nonetheless, while the Chinese immigrant participants were determined to support their children to become bilingual, they continued to prioritise their children's learning of English due to their perceived importance of English in New Zealand public spaces. This prioritising runs the risk of losing their home language. The connection between public and private spaces is complex and need not be unidirectional. Parenting strategies used in private spaces should not be dictated by the expectations of public spaces. Instead the connection can be multi-directional. Pedagogy should be responsive to families' aspirations while at the same time informed by research. Teachers can support families to make

research-informed decisions, such as emphasising the benefits associated with bilingual learning, and the risk of prioritising the learning of English over the retention of home languages. Finally, an awareness of the relations between public and private spaces, and the benefits of bi/multilingual education for children, families and New Zealand is critical for a language-inclusive pedagogy.

## References

- Adair, J. K. 2011. "Confirming Chanclas: What Early Childhood Teacher Educators can Learn from Immigrant Preschool Teachers." *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* 32: 55–71. doi: 10.1080/10901027.2010.547652.
- Baker, C. 2007. *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism*. 3rd ed. North York, Ontario: Multilingual Matters.
- Baker, C. 2011. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 5th ed. North York, Ontario: Multilingual Matters.
- Bourdieu, P. 1989. "Social Space and Symbolic Power." *Sociological Theory* 7 (1): 14–25.
- Chan, A. 2014. "The Politics of Identity, Belonging and Exclusion: Chinese Immigrant Parents' Involvement in New Zealand Early Childhood Education." PhD diss., Massey University, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Chan, A., and J. Ritchie. 2016. "Parents, Participation, Partnership: Problematising New Zealand Early Childhood Education." *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 17 (3): 289-303. doi: 10.1177/1463949116660954.
- Cherrington, S., and M. J. Shuker. 2012. "Diversity Amongst New Zealand Early Childhood Education." *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work* 9 (2): 76–94.
- Cummins, J. 2001. *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Cummins, J. 2009, June. "Multilingualism in the English-Language Classroom: Pedagogical Considerations." *TESOL Quarterly* 43 (2): 317–321.
- De Gioia, K. 2013. "Cultural Negotiation: Moving Beyond a Cycle of Misunderstanding in Early Childhood Settings." *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 11 (2): 108–122. doi:10.1177/1476718X12466202.
- ECE Taskforce. 2011. *An Agenda for Amazing Children: Final Report of the ECE Taskforce*. <http://www.taskforce.ece.govt.nz/>.
- Education Review Office. 2010a. *Lion Early Childhood Centre<sup>7</sup> Education Review*. Wellington, New Zealand: Education Review Office. <http://www.ero.govt.nz/Early-Childhood-School-Reports/Early-Childhood-Reports/>.
- Education Review Office. 2010b. *Monkey Early Childhood Centre Education Review*. Wellington, New Zealand: Education Review Office. <http://www.ero.govt.nz/Early-Childhood-School-Reports/Early-Childhood-Reports/>.

- Education Review Office. 2011a, November. *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice*. Wellington, New Zealand: Crown Copyright.
- Education Review Office. 2011b. *Elephant Early Childhood Centre Education Review*. Wellington, New Zealand: Education Review Office. <http://www.ero.govt.nz/Early-Childhood-School-Reports/Early-Childhood-Reports/>.
- Francis, B., L. Archer, and A. Mau. 2010. "Parents' and Teachers' Constructions of the Purposes of Chinese Complementary Schooling: 'Culture', Identity and Power." *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 13 (1): 101–117. doi:10.1080/13613320903550089.
- Georgiou, M. 2006. *Diaspora, Identity and the Media: Diasporic Transnationalism and Mediated Spatialities*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Guo, K. L. 2010. "Chinese Immigrant Children in New Zealand Early Childhood Centres." PhD diss., Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.
- Hu, J., J. Torr, and P. Whiteman. 2014a. "Australian Chinese Parents' Language Attitudes and Practices Relating to Their Children's Bilingual Development Prior to School." *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 12 (2): 139–153. doi:10.1177/1476718X13515429.
- Hu, J., J. Torr, and P. Whiteman. 2014b. "Parents Don't Want Their Children to Speak Their Home Language': How do Educators Negotiate Partnerships with Chinese Parents Regarding their Children's Use of Home Language and English in Early Childhood Settings?" *Early Years* 34 (3): 255–270. doi: 10.1080/09575146.2014.927419
- Jones-Diaz, C. 2014. "Languages and Literacies in Childhood Bilingualism: Building on Cultural and Linguistic Capital in Early Childhood Education." In *Diverse Literacies in Early Childhood: A Social Justice Approach*, edited by L. Arthur, J. Ashton, and B. Beecher, 106–125. Camberwell, Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Jones-Diaz, C., and N. Harvey. 2007. "Other Words, Other Worlds: Bilingual Identities and Literacy." In *Literacies in Childhood: Changing Views Challenging Practice*, edited by L. Makin, C. Jones-Diaz, and C. McLachlan, 203–216. 2nd ed. Sydney, NSW: MacLennan & Petty, Elsevier.
- Law, S. 2015. "Children Learning Chinese as a Home Language in an English-Dominant Society." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 18 (6): 735–748. doi:10.1080/13670050.2014.946399.
- Levitt, P., and B. N. Jaworsky. 2007. "Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33: 129–156. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131816.
- Magruder, E. S., W. W. Hapslip, L. M. Espinosa, and C. Matera. 2013. "Many Languages, One Teacher: Supporting Language and Literacy Development for Preschool Dual Language Learners." *Young Children* 2 (3): 8–15.
- Ministry of Education. 2004a. *An Introduction to Kei tua o te pa/He Whakamōhiotanga ki kei tua o te Pae. Kei Tua o te Pae/Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

- Ministry of Education. 2004b. *Sociocultural Assessment/He Aromatawai Ahurea Papōri. Kei tua o te Pae/Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. 2007. *The New Zealand Curriculum: For English-Medium Teaching and Learning in Years 1–13*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. 2014. *Annual Early Childhood Education (ECE) Census Summary Report 2014*. <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/early-childhood-education/annual-ece-summary-reports>.
- Ministry of Education. 2017. *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa/Early Childhood Curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.
- Mu, G. M., and K. Dooley. 2015. “Coming Into an Inheritance: Family Support and Chinese Heritage Language Learning.” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 18 (4): 501–515. doi:10.1080/13670050.2014.928258.
- Obeng, C. S. 2007. “Immigrant Families and Childcare Preferences: Do Immigrants’ Cultures Influence Their Childcare Decisions?” *Early Childhood Education Journal* 34 (4): 259–264.
- Podmore, V. N., H. Hedges, P. J. Keegan, and N. Harvey, eds. 2016. *Teachers Voyaging in Plurilingual Seas: Young Children Learning Through More Than One Language*. Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER Press.
- Ross, M. 2007. “Bilinguality and Learning in the Early Years.” In *Bilinguality and Literacy: Principles and Practice*, edited by M. Datta, 50–68. London, England: Continuum.
- Royal Society of New Zealand/Te Aparangi. 2013. *Languages in Aotearoa New Zealand*. <http://www.royalsociety.org.nz/expert-advice/information-papers/yr2013/languages-in-aotearoa-new-zealand/>.
- Shuker, M. J., and S. Cherrington. 2016. “Diversity in New Zealand Early Childhood Education: Challenges and Opportunities.” *International Journal of Early Years Education* 24 (2) 172–187. doi:10.1080/09669760.2016.1155148.
- Spoonley, P., and R. Bedford. 2012. *Welcome to Our World? Immigration and the Reshaping of New Zealand*. Auckland, New Zealand: Dunmore Publishing.
- Statistics New Zealand. 2013. *2013 Census Totals by Topic*. <http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/data-tables/total-by-topic.aspx>
- Wang, J., J. Elicker, M. McMullen, and S. Mao. 2008. “Chinese and American Preschool Teachers’ Beliefs about Early Childhood Curriculum.” *Early Child Development and Care* 178 (3) 227–249. doi:10.1080/03004430600722671.
- Wu, B. 2009. “Whose Culture has Capital?: Chinese Skilled Migrant Mothers Raising their Children in New Zealand.” EdD Diss., AUT University Auckland, New Zealand.
- Wu, J., and M. Singh. 2004. ““Wishing for Dragon Children’: Ironies and Contradictions in China’s Education reform and the Chinese Diaspora’s Disappointments with Australian Education.” *The Australian Educational Researcher* 31 (2): 29–44.

Zhou, M., and S. S. Kim. 2006, Spring. "Community Forces, Social Capital, and Educational Achievement: The Case of Supplementary Education in the Chinese and Korean Immigrant Communities." *Harvard Educational Review* 76 (1): 1–29.

---

<sup>1</sup> While this is a collective descriptor used by the Ministry, it collapses important cultural and linguistic differences. The use of inverted commas in this paper signals the author's uneasiness with specific terms/phrases.

<sup>2</sup> ERO is a New Zealand government agency that reviews, evaluates and reports on the performance of schools and ECE services. It also publishes national evaluative reports on a wide range of educational issues.

<sup>3</sup> Aliases are used for all the names appearing in this manuscript.

<sup>4</sup> 唐诗/Tang shi – ancient Chinese poems from the Tang Dynasty.

<sup>5</sup> A Romanised approach to learning the Mandarin pronunciation of Chinese characters.

<sup>6</sup> 洋人/yang ren – literally, this means westerners. It is widely and broadly used by Chinese to describe any 'white' people of European descent.

<sup>7</sup> Aliases are used for all ECE centres.