CHINESE IMMIGRANT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHERS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

ASPIRATIONS, PATHWAYS, TRANSITIONS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Research has shown that rich and detailed understandings of immigrant teachers' lives can contribute to equity and quality in early childhood education (ECE) (Durden et al., 2015; Robertson, 2012; Sleeter & Milner, 2011). This study focused on the personal, institutional and professional experiences of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand, with an aim at understanding how their aspirations, pathways, transitions and career development in the ECE field have brought complexity and richness to the fluid ECE context in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This study adopted a qualitative research design using narrative inquiry in a multiple-case study context. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and focus group discussions, and a thematic analysis approach was used to examine the highly descriptive data through emergent, recurrent and dominant themes. Various aspects of participants' experiences were elicited, such as changes in their expectations, transition in time and space, their reflections on policies and working conditions, and their personal and professional identities. To construct the complexity of the interaction, continuity and situation in their narratives, the three-dimensional (*Interaction*, *Continuity* and *Situation*) narrative inquiry space approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was adopted to re-story each narrative, and Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, *capital* and *field* and his reconversion theory were drawn on to interpret meanings.

Findings of the current study highlighted that there are both personal agency and external structural factors that influence Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' aspirations. In the investigation of their pathways for immigration, there are mainly two different options: to join their family already in New Zealand, and to immigrate as skilled workers under the Skilled Migrant Category (SMC) scheme. In the understanding of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' transitional and professional experiences, there were three significant strategies identified in the findings: obtaining necessary qualifications from New Zealand institutes, building and deploying ethnic and social capital, and making use of new technologies.

Participants also reported four transitional challenges: the changing requirements of English language competency, the need for culturally diverse initial teaching education programs and induction and mentoring programs, a complex matrix of social space for immigrant teachers to navigate, and the power structures in the ECE field.

Finally, the current study has positioned Chinese immigrant ECE teachers as agential rather than compliant passive subjects in their immigration, learning and working experiences. They all showed their willingness and openness toward new learning which defines ECE professionalism as a constantly evolving process. They said being self-reflective and authentic was vital for immigrant teachers to manage their multiple positions and to develop their own voices in their identity construction. Their confidence in teaching and working in the ECE field increased along with their positive sense of self as an immigrant ECE teacher in the new land, which again drove commitment, self-discovery and growth and career satisfaction.

The study has contributed to our current understanding of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers in New Zealand and made several theoretical and empirical contributions to the field of immigrant ECE teacher research. It is argued that we should understand immigrant ECE teachers and ourselves in a holistic manner: inward and outward, personal and social, through different times and places. Supporting immigrant ECE teachers with better policies and culturally responsive practices is essential for future reform and action initiatives, which in turn contribute to the education equity and quality in New Zealand's ECE section. Implications, limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research are also offered.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This purpose of this study is to provide insights into Chinese immigrant early childhood education (ECE) teachers' aspirations, pathways, transitions and career development in the New Zealand fluid early childhood context. Within the scope of this study, the Chinese immigrant ECE teachers are defined as people who were born in Greater China (i.e., including the Mainland, Taiwan, Macao and Hong Kong), who later immigrated to New Zealand and gained their residence, and became ECE teachers in various New Zealand ECE service providers. Immigration is a term broadly defined as "the movement of people from one country to another, who declare an intention to reside in the latter" (Jary & Jary, 1991, p. 397), and Chinese immigrants in this study are defined as the first-generation immigrants with Chinese ancestry and culture.

This study is situated in the context of a changing policy landscape in New Zealand and the fluctuating trends of globalization and migration. It is motivated by the desire to bring attention to immigrant ECE teachers' dynamics and improve support for immigrant teachers, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the comprehensive equity and quality in the early education field of New Zealand. As Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) pointed out, immigrant teachers' transitional process is fraught with tension which "undoubtedly affects all aspects of their life and teaching" (p. 388). Arndt (2015) used the term "subject-in-process" to describe immigrant teachers in New Zealand's entangled bi- and multicultural, globalized yet uniquely local early childhood landscape. She questioned the homogenous simplicity of what is often promoted as rich and beautiful diversity by emphasizing the ever on-going and evolving construction of the immigrant teacher identity and professional development (PD). This present study of immigrant ECE teachers' life stories captures the complexities of who teachers are, what they know and believe, how they learn to teach, and how they carry out their practices in diverse contexts.

This chapter begins with the research context in which the study was located. It then discusses the rationale for the current study and the research gap it seeks to fill, and the researcher's role. It concludes with the research questions and provides an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Research Context

The research context constitutes the political, social and cultural aspects of immigration and education which create opportunities and constraints for immigrant ECE teachers' experiences. When Chinese immigrant ECE teachers choose to come and work in New Zealand, they are subject to the power relations in national and international contexts, such as New Zealand's immigration policies, teachers' education and qualifications requirements, ECE policies and the national ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017), the dominant best practices and PD opportunities, etc. At the same time, they bring with them a set of original beliefs, knowledge, values, and skills which will guide their decision making and shape their behaviors. Hence, providing an overarching description of the research contexts is essential for understanding immigrant ECE teachers' experiences in real life.

This section begins with a brief introduction of the historical and background of Chinese immigrants in New Zealand. It highlights the fact that immigration follows increasingly more complex patterns along with the growing interdependence of economies regionally and globally. The role of policy changes also plays an influential part in immigration trends and experiences. The second part of this section aims to depict the multicultural, complex and fluid features in New Zealand's ECE field, within which the present study is located. The last section outlines the current situation of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers in New Zealand and the necessity to understand this particular professional group.

1.1.1 The Historical Background

Chinese have embraced New Zealand as their new home for over 175 years since the first recorded ethnic Chinese immigrant arrived New Zealand during the 1860's gold-rush era.

New Zealand immigration policies and the demographics of Chinese immigrants have changed dramatically since then. Earlier Chinese settlers were considered as labor workers and unwelcomed threats, facing political barriers and unfair treatment, such as the "Poll Tax" aimed specifically at Chinese migrants and the anti-immigrant concerns of "Asianisation" in the 1990s. From the late 1990s to the 2000s, skilled migrants from Mainland China became the new significant demographic group of Chinese immigrants. Since 2000, New Zealand immigration policies have changed dramatically and influenced the life of immigrants in many ways, especially in terms of their pathways of immigration to New Zealand and the strategies they use to navigate through changing contexts. One of the most significant innovations in immigration policy in New Zealand in the last 2 decades (2000–2020) is the facilitating pathways to residence via temporary work and study. This innovation would allow potential migrants stay onshore with related local experiences and needed skills. International students have been treated as prospective skilled migrants to ensure adequate workforce supply in New Zealand in the last 2 decades (MBIE, 2014).

Meanwhile, China's opening and reform policies after 1980s and its growing economy during the last 30 years have enabled Chinese people's financial ability to migrate. In the study by Friesen and Ip (1997), they found that most Chinese immigrants who came to New Zealand after 1986 were well educated and had specialized skills and financial capital, which allowed many of them to be able to meet the entry criteria as skilled or business migrants. Unlike the early Chinese migrants to New Zealand, since 2000, economic opportunities are no longer the primary reason for many Chinese to immigrate to New Zealand. Rather, they are often motivated by noneconomic reasons, such as a better lifestyle, an advanced education system, the great natural environment, and a safe and liberal society (Liu, 2011; Liu & Lu, 2015).

The historical background has three implications for the current study. First, the demographics and overall social image of Chinese immigrants have changed along with the changes to New Zealand immigration policies and how they are perceived by the host

society. That serves as a reference base to understand why Chinese immigrants make decisions to immigrate to New Zealand, how they perceive their own identity, how they position themselves in the host society, and how they define success and failure in their immigration journey. Second, this current study is against the backdrop of policy changes in immigration and ECE during the last 2 decades, which provided a spectrum of changing social spaces for Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' life journeys in New Zealand. It contextualizes the new change of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers as skilled migrants against the background of economic and social transformation in both China and New Zealand. Third, Chinese immigrants' views of history and society differ markedly from the indigenous Māori people and the majority Pākehā (European), as do their attitudes toward education and family. The way they interact with children and families from multicultural backgrounds, including the first-generation Chinese immigrants like themselves and the 1.5-generation (migrate before or during their early teenage years) Chinese immigrant children, is worth investigating. The appreciation of multiculturalism within the bicultural paradigm of New Zealand's social, cultural and historical contexts is also in commitment of the Treaty of Waitangi. A better understanding of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' role in the ECE field in New Zealand would enrich our understanding of Chinese immigrants' values and cultures in New Zealand.

1.1.2 The Sociocultural Context

New Zealand has a reputation for high-quality ECE and has a long history of recruiting immigrant teachers. The enrollment of children from multicultural backgrounds in ECE centres has increased significantly since 2000 (Stats NZ, 2018; MoE, 2020). New Zealand depends on skilled migrants, who fulfill about 30% of annual employment vacancies (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014). Many skilled migrants work as teaching professionals in New Zealand education system (Education Counts, 2013, 2015, 2020). According to the 2018 Census (see Table 1.1), New Zealand has a very culturally diverse population of 5.1 million made up of different ethnicities, and the ethnic diversity is even more obvious in the biggest city Auckland.

Table 1.1

Ethnic Groups for People in New Zealand and the Auckland Region, 2006–18 Censuses

	Auckland region			New Zealand		
Ethnic group	2006 (%)	2013 (%)	2018 (%)	2006 (%)	2013 (%)	2018 (%)
European	56.5	59.3	53.5	67.6	74.0	70.2
Māori	11.1	10.7	11.5	14.6	14.9	16.5
Pacific peoples	14.4	14.6	15.5	6.9	7.4	8.1
Asian	18.9	23.1	28.2	9.2	11.8	15.1
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	1.5	1.9	2.3	0.9	1.2	1.5
Other ethnicity	8.1	1.2	1.1	11.2	1.7	1.2

Source: Stats NZ (2018)

As of 2018 Census, 247,770 people identified themselves as being part of the Chinese ethnic group, making up 5.3% of New Zealand's population. In terms of population distribution, 69.1% of Chinese New Zealanders live in the Auckland region, 18.9% live in the North Island outside the Auckland region, and 11.9% live in the South Island. The demographic and cultural features of the Chinese ethnic group have given rise to the growing attention on their participation and needs in New Zealand education system.

On the other hand, although the majority of overseas teachers working in New Zealand schools come from countries with strong language, cultural and educational similarities to New Zealand such as the UK, Australia, Canada and South Africa (Miller, 2008), more recently New Zealand immigrant teachers have also come from India, Fiji, as well as non-English-speaking-background (NESB) countries like China and Southeast Asia (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012; Education Counts, 2020). In this sociocultural context, biculturalism and multiculturalism have become important features of New Zealand's education system, which is also quite evident in ECE centres and their interpretation of *Te Whāriki* (Mitchell et al., 2015). As a result, the need has grown for research on immigration and settlement issues associated with ECE immigrant teachers and an investigation of their professional beliefs and practices.

1.1.3 Chinese Immigrant ECE Teachers in New Zealand

ECE teachers with Chinese immigration backgrounds are active agents who influence children in ECE centres, children's parents in communities, and their local colleagues in many ways. The MoE has placed ECE teachers in a position to influence the quality and outcomes in ECE (Meade et al., 2012; MoE, 2009, 2017), and New Zealand was unique in its official funding scheme to ECE centres with 100% qualified teachers until early 2011. In the last 2 decades, as a result of related ECE workforce policies and incentives to increase access to qualified teachers, New Zealand ECE centres have accepted an increasing number of immigrant teachers, and faculties of education have enrolled many international teacher candidates (Immigration New Zealand, 2013, 2017; Shuker & Cherrington, 2016), among whom, Chinese immigrant ECE teachers have formed a powerful part. In practice, they are also active agents in determining the quality of New Zealand's early education.

Statistics from the Education Counts (2020) also show that there are around 5,433 Asian teaching staff in the ECE field and about 1500 of them are of Chinese ethnicity. They form a powerful part of the professional workforce and practice as active "weavers" of New Zealand's ECE "mat." The education philosophies and pedagogical practices of these Chinese immigrant ECE teachers are important to the overall quality of New Zealand's early education. Research on this particular professional group will provide insights into immigrant teacher recruiting, education and PD programs.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

The rationale for researching Chinese immigrant ECE teachers in New Zealand is as follows:

Drawing on critical race theory (Milner, 2008), the host country and the dominant knowledge systems can be quite inclusive or exclusive of the diversity of immigrant teachers' backgrounds, knowledge and skills. The debate about homogenization and heterogenization persists among the policies, discourses and practices governing

international teacher mobility and the experiences of immigrant teachers. Understanding the changing experiences of immigrant ECE teachers will allow researchers and policy makers to address the diversity feature in education with a meaningful social relations framework through dialogue and social relationships (Park, 2005). The present study aims at depicting Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' mobility in changing social and cultural contexts. It investigated the whole complexity of habitus and capital these Chinese immigrant ECE teachers bring to the field of New Zealand ECE, to understand how they are subject to continuity and change in their aspirations, pathways, transitions and PD.

Moreover, teachers, as caregivers and educators, are considered by Hughes and Kwok (2007) as children's second parents who care for them, set role models for children's disposition forming, and act as the source of acquisition and learning in their primary habitus. Therefore, an in-depth study of qualified immigrant ECE teachers' educational beliefs, their professional practices and pathways will be very beneficial in addressing the quality and equity issues in New Zealand's ECE field. The quality of the teacher–child relationship is an essential determinant of children's behavioral, sociocultural and academic functioning (Gregoriadis & Grammatikopoulos, 2014). Early education has been demonstrated to significantly influence students' mental and physical health, intellectual and cognitive development, personal achievement and even employment in their adulthood (Campbell et al., 2014). The Competent Child Project (Wylie & Thompson, 2003), introduced by the New Zealand government, collects information on the effect of ECE on children's development. The results from this project show that the quality of ECE is largely determined by qualified staff, abundant funding, and robust community support. Among these factors, qualified staff and teachers are essential agents to utilize the funding and connect communities.

Finally, despite the importance of understanding and responding to diverse immigrant teacher groups, other than a few ethnic-specific studies of immigrant teachers in elementary/primary, secondary school contexts (Bense, 2016; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Han,

2004; Myles et al., 2006; Okamura & Miller, 2010; Reid, 2005; Vohra, 2005), there is a shortfall in research of immigrant early childhood teachers' cultural identity and their professional practices, and in particular their cultural Otherness (Arndt, 2017). Therefore, the present study highlights the changing subjects of these teachers and their roles/values in New Zealand's ECE contexts. Investigating their stories and experiences will provide new insights into New Zealand's ECE in a diverse and mobile world, which is also a window into the increasing intersect between professional mobility and education.

1.3 Researcher's Role

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), it is important for narrative researchers to "articulate a relationship between one's personal interests and sense of significance and larger social concerns expressed in the works of others" (p. 122). Therefore, it is meaningful to explain my choice of the topic in the current study and my role in conducting this research. Throughout the whole research process, I functioned as both an insider and outsider. As a Chinese immigrant myself, I am an insider with the ability to see the world from the participants' cultural perspective. I was familiar with the background, the programs they took and how their professional identity interacted with their personal identity in real contexts. This familiarity enabled me to elicit and understand the participants' stories in a profound level. As a researcher with an objective stand, I am an outsider of their work place.I only got to know them during the sampling stage and established a friendly relationship with them through data collection and validation. This allowed me to foster open discussions about several aspects of their experiences and to adopt a critical stance on social realities through critical analysis and interpretation of narrative data. I am also ready to acknowledge the dynamics of subjectivity and power between me as the researcher and the researched participants (Riley et al., 2003), and take cautious approaches in the co-construction of the participants' lived reality. Such approaches will be further introduced and discussed in the research methodology chapter.

My research interest in Chinese immigrant ECE teachers is distilled by my investigation into the quality of New Zealand's ECE and teachers' role in it. Inspired by research discourses of the renowned quality of New Zealand's ECE, I was interested in finding out the indicators and factors determining New Zealand's ECE quality. From my reading and research of ECE quality discourse, the quality of teachers/caregivers is the key factor in ECE quality (Baker-Henningham, 2013; Gregoriadis & Grammatikopoulos, 2014; Meade et al., 2012). I am interested to investigate how these Chinese immigrant ECE teachers navigate the wider social structures as determined by policies and powers. Given the fact that the social and cultural backgrounds of these Chinese immigrant teachers are quite different from New Zealand, the host country, and they have a set of indigenous beliefs about children and childhood and practices in early education, I draw on the perspective that "teachers are researchers and knowledge workers who reflect on the current understanding of their own practice" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 51).

I am curious to understand their journeys to becoming an ECE teacher in New Zealand, their real-life experiences and reflections, and their transitions and contributions to the quality of early education in New Zealand. When immigrant teachers from NESBs enter the dominant Anglo-Celtic (Western) teaching population, are their journeys also following the discourse of multiculturalism and diversity? What motivates immigrant teachers to make such a big decision to move to a foreign country with so many uncertainties and risks? What are their hopes, aspirations, dreams and expectations before they come? And what is the reality? Are the experiences of immigrant teachers positive and delightful with their dreams fulfilled, or negative and bitter with barriers and prejudices? How do they go through all the immigration application, qualification recognition, and job-hunting processes? Are they valued by the government, school, students and communities as they deserve? What do they feel and face in local schools, classrooms and communities? What kind of stories do they convey to their fellow teachers back home or in other countries about their immigrant teacher experiences? What will be their future plans – stay or leave? These questions are worth probing.

In other words, the path of immigrant teachers is a never-ending journey of becoming. This image is poetically portrayed in an ode to all migrants of the world by Hutchison (2015, p. vii):

> You, who kissed distant lands
> And left less to the imagination;
> You, the irony of being:
> While strangers in new lands
> Impoverished for want of the familiar
> You could not afford, but to march forward
> And so became soldiers of the intrepid.
> As strangers in new lands,
> You were pressed, stretched, and tempered more
> And by such treatments
> You became refined
> Like fine gold:
> You become more.

1.4 Research Gap and Research Questions

The current study was designed to fill in the above-mentioned research gap by examining the lived experiences of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers and the effect of these experiences on their professional practices and development. The purpose of the study was to provide insights into the fluid diversity of New Zealand's ECE workforce and the dynamics of immigrant ECE teachers. It also brought understandings of culturally diverse initial teacher education (ITE) and PD programs for practitioners, and advocated for supportive policies and social space for cultural-minority educators and student teachers. Specific research questions are as follows:

1. What are Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' aspirations and pathways from moving to and working in New Zealand?

2. What are the strategies and activities adapted by Chinese immigrant ECE teachers to navigate their life and career transition in New Zealand?
3. What are the challenges, needs and reflections of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' career development?
4. How would Chinese immigrant ECE teachers position themselves in New Zealand's early education field?

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is composed of seven chapters. In Chapter 1, I discuss the research context and the rationale for the current study, present research questions, and provide an overview of the structure of the thesis. Chapter 2 provides a literature review on studies of immigrant teachers, New Zealand's immigration policies, and the ECE contexts in New Zealand and China. At the end of Chapter 2, the research gaps in the existing literature are expanded upon. Chapter 3 delineates the conceptual and theoretical framework which guides the design of the research and the interpretation of the collected data. In Chapter 4, the design of the study is described in detail: the rationale for adopting the qualitative research method to answer the research questions and the design of multiple case studies, the data-collection procedures, and the processes of data analyses. In Chapter 5, I report the results and findings from the semistructured interviews and focus group discussion in light of the conceptual and theoretical framework. In Chapter 6, these findings are synthesized for an in-depth discussion. Chapter 7 summarizes research findings as a whole and outlines the theoretical and pedagogical implications. It also discusses limitations and suggestions for future research.

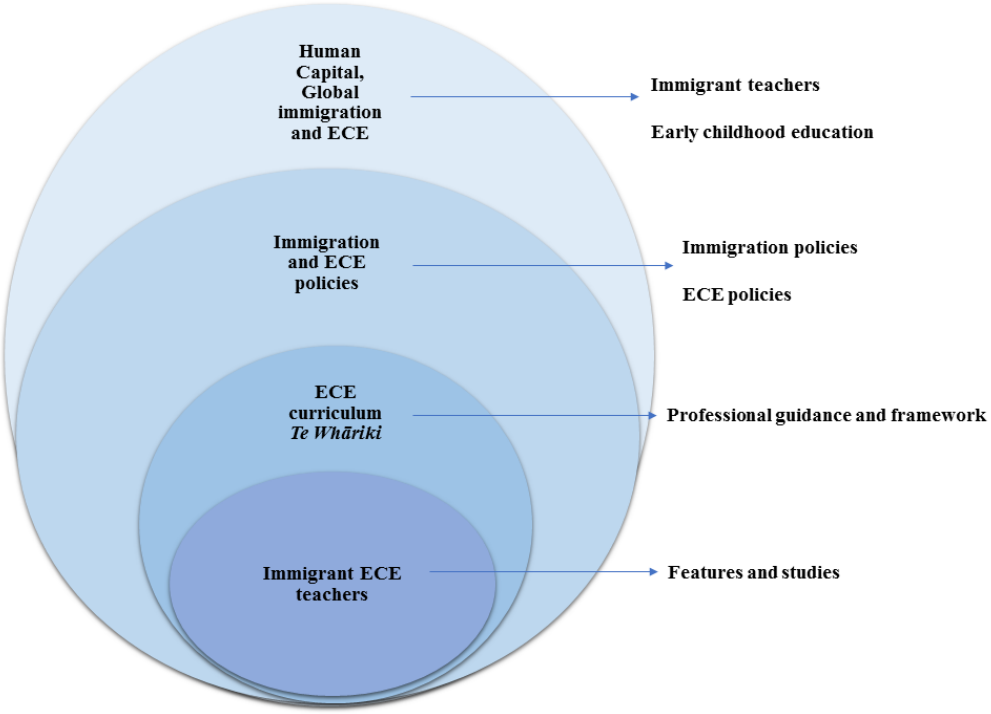
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a thorough review of the existing literature in the field of immigrant ECE teachers. Inspired by Vygotsky's sociocultural theories and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, I will conduct this literature review from the macroglobal environment to the microindividual contexts of immigrant ECE teachers in New Zealand. This review comprises studies on four topics (Figure 2.1): human capital theory (HCT) and its relation to global immigrant teachers and ECE, New Zealand's immigration and ECE policies, New Zealand's early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* and professional framework, and features and studies of immigrant teachers. The perspectives of this literature review are applied to offer a comprehensive background for the present study and help to identify the research gap.

Figure 2.1

Four Topics of the Literature Review: From Macro to Micro



2.1 Human Capital Theory, Global Immigration, and ECE

2.1.1 Human Capital Theory

Human capital is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the skills the labor force possesses and is regarded as a resource or asset." The concept of human capital derived from Adam Smith's economic model of human resource capitalism which encompasses the notion that there are both private and public investments in people (e.g., education, professional training, health) and that these investments increase individuals' productivity in a workplace and benefits in life (Falk, 2000). The fundamental argument of HCT is that investing in education and related professional training leads to increased lifetime earnings for those with more years of education, access to better job opportunities with higher pay, reduced risks of being unemployed; and speedier promotion prospects (Wahrenburg & Weldi, 2007). Over the past few decades, HCT has been one of the key theories linking human beings and their skills to the productivity and income distribution in a society.

At a private level, HCT asserts that individuals consciously choose to invest in themselves through various activities (Woodhall, 1987). Usually, this is through education and training, but can also be done through internal and external migration (Sabharwal, 2013). At the public level, it is widely recognized throughout the world that "the wealth of nations is highly dependent on the extensiveness of the knowledge and skills of its people" (Collins & Reid, 2012, p. 93). Policymakers and politicians believe that the government's investment in education and workforce training and retention would lead to economic growth through increased productivity, social stability and healthier population. Therefore, governments in developing and developed countries have all adopted some form of HCT in their emphasis on the continuous need for updating and retaining the workforce and in their decisions on the extent to which social structures, education and university systems, and the workplace should be prepared to meet the projected demand from employers and the professions (Eide & Showalter, 2010; Marginson, 2019).

Although it prevails, HCT has also been criticized at different points in time. One of the criticisms is that HCT evades contextual factors with an assumption of a homogeneous work force (Zweimüller and Winter-Ebmer, 2000). Other criticisms are that HCT is difficult to test, quality of education/training is not considered and those who take investment decisions cannot calculate its possible rates of return (Jenson, 2010). Moreover, HCT has been criticized for creating tensions between the consideration of education as *social welfare and public good* and as *social investment and market goods* (Burman, 2020; Delaune, 2017). Finally, HCT might be conceived as a "quasiconcept" due to the ways in which human capital ideas can be claimed by multiple groups and read in differing ways (Jenson, 2010; Lister, 2004).

Therefore, a full understanding of the influence and consequences of governments applying HCT requires a clear recognition that such various interventions exist within a specific context. Within Aotearoa New Zealand, I chose immigrant ECE teachers and ECE as two examples in which HCT has dominant influences.

2.1.2 Human Capital Theory and Immigrant Teachers

Fundamentally, migration is an integral aspect of the human race from its origins to the present. Long in history, different records show that people move to survive, in search of food, to seek adventures and pursue dreams, toward opportunities for better life or escaping from danger and death. Lewin et al. (2011) listed various reasons for immigrants to choose to move to other countries: economic hardships or poverty in their homeland, better living conditions, safety, better education opportunities for their children, to join family or relatives, business and work opportunities and so on. This movement has never ceased but has been following increasingly more complex patterns through history along with the political, social and economic changes at the time of the immigrant's departure from the sending country and their arrival at the host country. The realization of their aspirations is restricted by a complex matrix of factors: the available capitals and resources, the policies and social space in the host country, and the changing social and cultural contexts.

Modern global immigration has been driven by neoliberal forces, which centre immigrants as human capital (Apple, 2005; Robertson, 2012) and investment in global economic competition (Ball & Junemann, 2012; Maguire & Falcous, 2010). Many previous studies used years of schooling, labor market experience and proficiency of language as the standard measures of human capital (Byoun, 2013), which are tangible but not complete. While teachers are in demand globally, they are "attuned to movement and flow" (Ball & Junemann, 2012, p. 143) because their intellectual and cultural capital is "tested" -- judged, penalized and rewarded -- in new ways. These views constructed human beings, their skills and vocational training, as human capital, able to be traded by individuals acting as entrepreneurs of themselves in the employment market. Since their skills and training are private goods rather than public ones, enterprising traders could maximize their value and seek the best options in their employment market.

The above literature of HCT and immigrant teachers often focuses on labor market outcomes, such as their employment status and human capital earnings. It proposes three categories of immigrant teachers' labor market outcomes: overemployed (i.e., have surplus employment placement compared to the reference level, such as native English speakers obtain teaching positions and high salaries in nonnative English-speaking countries), underemployed (i.e., have measured employment deficiency compared with the reference level, such as a Chinese chemistry professor works as a house painter in Canada), and correctly matched (i.e., have equivalent employment placement and salary, such as a British high-school math teacher works in New Zealand high schools also as a math teacher). The reasons underpinning these employment outcomes for immigrant teachers are generally summarized as the disparities in school systems, educational qualifications and professional credentials, language competence, and related working experiences, which all constrain the transferability of human capital and skills from the original country to the host country.

However, the whole process of immigrant teachers' social movement and experiences is more complex than occupational status and income. If immigrant teachers are deemed valuable education resources and students are considered the best investment for a nation's future (Connell, 2011; Reid, 2005), it is very necessary to investigate both the private investment and activities made by these immigrant teachers and the public investment and policies made by the government in order to understand how to realize the potential of immigrant teachers and of education as a whole.

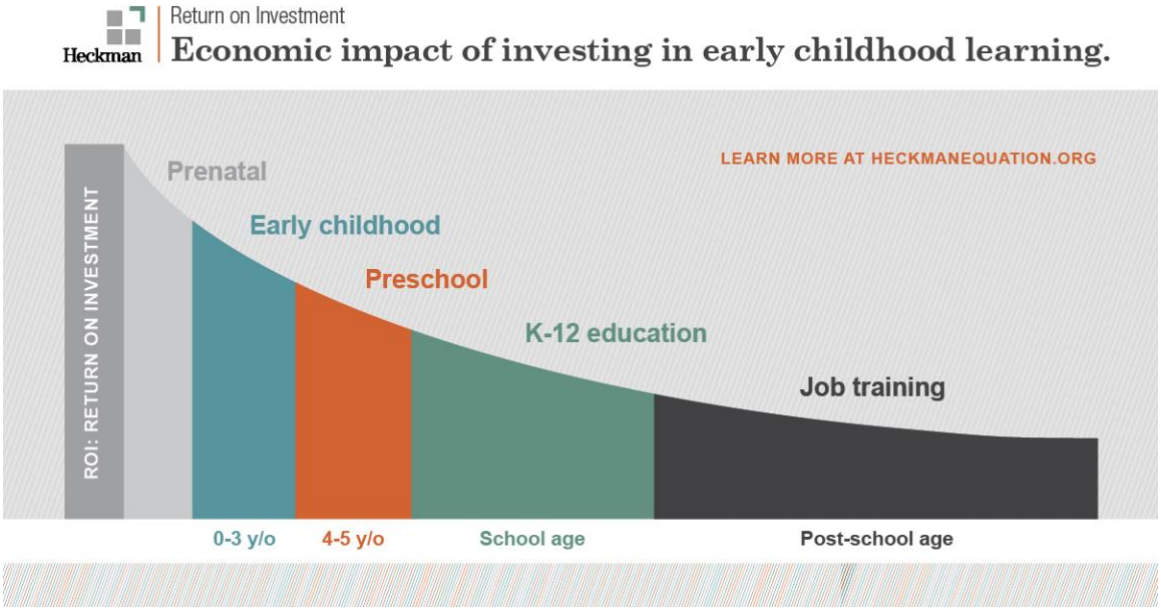
2.1.3 Human Capital Theory and ECE

HCT discourse has penetrated ECE with ideas that state and family investments in ECE will be cost effective and will pay long-term economic dividends (Cunha & Heckman, 2007; Gordon & Browne, 2013) because early experiences have a significant influence on children's later development. ECE has been shown as an effective method to help disadvantaged children in low- and middle-income countries to realize their developmental potential (Baker-Henningham, 2013).

As shown in Figure 2.2, Heckman (2011) argued that economists should take account of ECE as a good investment for states seeking efficient ways of growing national wealth and competency. Margaret Stuart (2013) cites Heckman's (2000) ideas on *Policies to Foster Human Capital* to discuss HCT and ECE in New Zealand by referring to examples by some super agencies such as the World Bank (2005, 2006, 2011, 2015, 2017), OECD (2004, 2006, 2014), New Zealand Treasury, 2000, 2001), the fifth Labour government's education policy: *Pathways to the Future: Nga Huarahi Arataki. A Ten Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education: 2002–2012 (SPECE)*, and the New Zealand National government's Early Childhood Taskforce (2011).

Figure 2.2

Heckman's Curve Showing Best Education Investments Period Over Life Trajectory



Source: Heckmanequation.org

In recent decades, many OECD countries have adopted the notion of "social investment" to reframe traditional approaches to social welfare in governing ECE provision. Social investment is viewed as a means through which social structures can be set up as preparation rather than reparation, to "invest" in capabilities across the life span and to "respond to the new risks of a competitive knowledge economy" (Hemerijck, 2015, p. 242). Social investment strategies and policies focus on employment rather than welfare and promote public expenditure on skills and education throughout the life course, starting with ECE. Such strategies and policies are future oriented and premised on the assumption that the right types of public expenditure will generate social and economic returns.

With a focus in New Zealand, ECE was given new financial priority during the implementation of the strategic plan in 2002 and the government fiscal expenditure on ECE increased almost fourfold (MoE, 2011). It is stated clearly in the MoE (2011) document that

> public expenditure on ECE represents a significant investment from government to help children grow to reach their full potential in education, in the labor market, and in wider society. Healthy and productive lives also benefit society and contribute to the future of the country. (p. 47)

As shown in the study of New Zealand ECE policies and practices (May and Mitchell, 2009; May, 2014; Mitchell, 2019), New Zealand's ECE policy directions have been largely driven by global economic agendas. The following section will review related literature and evidence.

2.2 New Zealand's Policies of Immigration and ECE

2.2.1 New Zealand's Immigration Policies

New Zealand's skilled migration policy has evolved markedly along with the changing demands of the workforce and economy (Henderson, 2004). The policy changes in 1998 were designed to make "New Zealand a more attractive destination for migrants from non-English-speaking countries with skills and capital" (Bedford & Ho, 1998, p. 127). Immigrants are considered as human capital with their skills and vocational training. Such a purpose has been manifested since the introduction of the SMC in 2003, by the New Zealand government, which addresses priority migration needs based on a revised points system and shifts immigration policy from "the passive acceptance of residence applications to the active selection of skilled migrants" (Bedford & Ho, 2010, p.89). Measures of such capital are shaped by policy constructions of host countries' historical constraints, national economic interests, and protectionist professional policies. They together weave a matrix of immigration policies, incentives and restrictions in response to intensifying international competition for "talent."

Facilitating pathways to residence via temporary work and study used to be an important component of New Zealand's immigration policy during the 2000s. Bonus points have been introduced for master's or doctoral degrees, and since 2006 foreign tuition fees have been waived for doctoral students. On course completion, international students have been

encouraged to stay via the study to work and to residence pathway (Bedford et al., 2010; Heald, 2007; Lewin et al., 2011). According to figures from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2018), 32% of full-fee paying international students were granted residence in New Zealand 5 years after the end of their student visa, and 6% of them were holding a work visa.

The 1990s and 2000s saw significant change in the New Zealand ECE sector with an increasing need for a professional and qualified teacher workforce (Dalli & Stephenson, 2010; May, 2001). There has been a surge in the demand for qualified early childhood teachers and childcare workers since then, which saw Early Childhood Educator/Preschool Teacher/Child Care Worker listed in the Long-Term Skill Shortage List and the Immediate Skill Shortage List in the later 2000s (Immigration New Zealand, 2010), which encouraged a big increase in New Zealand's ITE programs from various tertiary education providers and opened a pathway for many international students who were majoring in education or ECE to settle in New Zealand after finishing their study.

2.2.2 New Zealand ECE Policies

During the past two decades, New Zealand governments and the Ministry of Education have developed various policies and distributed financial supports to improve the enrollment and quality of ECE centres. One prominent example was the *Strategic Plan* in 2002 with three 10-year goals: "to increase participation in early childhood services; to improve the quality of ECE by increasing access to qualified teachers" (Manning et al., 2017) and to improve sector collaboration. The equity funding system was introduced in 2002. Again, in 2007, the Labour-led government introduced 20-hours free ECE per week for 3- and 4-year-old children. In 2009, the National-led government renamed the policy as "20-hours ECE" and allowed services to charge an optional fee for specific items over and above the hourly government-funded rate. Under the advent of neoliberal forces both in policies and markets, the number of ECE services in New Zealand has increased significantly durin the past two decades (Table 2.1). Since the revised ECE regulations and

licensing criteria came into effect in 2008 (NZ Government, 2008), the service type, management structures and license types of ECE services have seen considerable changes, with particular growth in full-day teacher-led services and home-based services (MoE, 2018c). These services have diverse ownership and governance structures in response to changing social contexts and government funding schemes and have shown a marked private ownership pattern over community-based services. According to statistics from the ECE census (MoE, 2019), 54% of the total education and care centres were private in 2000 and 69% of the total in 2018. Collectively, these changes in funding, management structures and license criteria have caused an inevitable tension between the regulatory practices for the ECE sector and the educational aspirations and goals set in *Te Whāriki* (McLachlan et al., 2018).

Table 2.1

Number of Licensed and Certificated Services in 2000 and 2018

Type of service		2000	2018
Licensed services	Education and care	1476	2584
	Casual education and care	45	8
	Home-based	180	434
	Hospital-based		22
	Kindergarten	600	654
	Kōhanga Reo	583	453
	Playcentre	517	407
	Total licensed services	3401	4562
Certificated services	Playgroups	773	908
Total of all service types		4174	5470

Source: MoE (2019)

However, debates about New Zealand government policies in the ECE sector have never ceased, and there have been policy shifts around government funding and ECE teacher

qualifications since 1987 (May, 2001; Farquhar & Gibbons, 2010; Gibbons et al., 2018; Meade et al., 2012). The New Zealand government found it financially challenging to meet the earlier funding promises to equip teacher-led ECE centres with 100% qualified teachers, therefore, the "80%+" qualified teachers target was set after 2011. This resulted in no higher levels of funding to centres once they reached the revised target of 80% fully qualified staff (Gibbons et al., 2018; Meade et al., 2012). Moreover, the government report *A Vision for the Teaching Profession* (MoE, 2010) excluded early childhood teacher education from the broader teacher qualification pathways in the MoE's vision for the future of teaching. In 2017, the new Labour government proposed new immigration policies on international students' post-study work rights, encouraging international students to study for Degree-Level 7 or above qualifications.

In terms of ECE teachers' qualifications and registration, related requirements and policies from both the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Council have changed dramatically during the last two decades, including English language requirements, recognized qualifications and initial teacher training courses, registration and certification policies, Code of Professional Responsibility, and practical issues (Teaching Council, 2017, 2021). As required in Schedule 3 of the Education and Training Act 2020, the requirements for teacher registration policy (Teaching Council, 2021) set out detailed requirements for Kaiako Whai Rēhitanga | Teacher Registration, practicing certificates, and Tūranga Whakaako Whai-herenga | Limited Authority to Teach (LAT). To enter the early childhood teaching profession in New Zealand, applicants first need to apply for and be granted Kaiako Whai Rēhitanga | Teacher Registration and then get the practising certificate. Requirements to become a registered ECE teacher include: an approved New Zealand Initial Teacher Education (ITE) qualification (level 7 or above) or an equivalent satisfactorily trained to teach overseas qualifications, commitment to the Code of Professional Responsibility | Ngā Tikanga Matatika, satisfactory New Zealand Police vet, character and fitness checking, language competency in English and/or te reo Māori.

The current government promises to inject more money into ECE, especially to support Playcentres, Kōhanga Reo and priority learners, and has developed a new *Early Learning Action Plan 2019–2029—He Taonga te Tamaiti, Every Child a Taonga* (MoE, 2019). The Labor government also planned to give extra funding incentives to centres with 100% qualified teachers, regulate all teacher-led centres to employ at least 80% qualified teachers and developed an ECE teacher supply strategy with the wider education workforce strategy. These policy changes and shifts have aroused many debates in the ECE teaching profession in terms of teacher qualification and ITE, salaries and conditions across different types of services, career opportunities, job satisfaction, ECE teachers' retention and social status, and so on.

2.2.3 Implications

New Zealand's policies on immigration and ECE will change the distribution of capital in society. Current policies of immigration and ECE have four implications for the current study.

Firstly, the steady increase of immigrants has made New Zealand's population very diverse in ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and a fairly large proportion of them are Chinese. Such a demographic change has added another ethnicity diversity to the wider bicultural social framework of New Zealand, which requires the government to respond to changing social contexts, cultural and educational aspirations and employment patterns. Secondly, favorable immigration policies for international students and the surge in need for ECE teachers are attractive options for international graduates and other immigrants who may not have previously considered a career in ECE. The driver for some immigrants and international graduates to work in ECE may vary from an initial passion for ECE, to its usefulness for gaining employment and permanent residency. Thirdly, the life and career experiences of immigrants are very much subject to changes in, and the power of, related immigration and education policies, given the fact that the current Labour government has different visions and political proposals for immigration and education issues from former

governments. Immigrant ECE teachers search for their pathways, opportunities and values within the boundaries of ECE fields. This is also in line with the discussion of capital, field and social space in Bourdieu's (1984) reconversion theory. Last, the influx of immigrant ECE teachers to the New Zealand early education context has brought more multicultural complexities to educational policies (Tesar & Arndt, 2017). They come to New Zealand with different cultural, social, and economic capitals. Their experiences, voices, otherness and identities are valuable to contemporary early childhood studies.

2.3 New Zealand's ECE Curriculum: *Te Whāriki*

Apart from the broad policies of immigration and ECE, New Zealand's bicultural national ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996, 2017) serves as the framework of education practices in ECE contexts. It was developed in the early 1990s as a testimony to the partnership, protection and participation of Māori and Western aspects (MoE, 1996); a new version of *Te Whāriki* was updated in 2017 (MoE, 2017). The concept of "culturally competent care" and the notion of "embracing diversity" have been illustrated explicitly in *Te Whāriki*, which underpins practices in every ECE centre across New Zealand. Sociocultural theories have an immense influence on *Te Whāriki*, and the creation and implementation of *Te Whāriki* in New Zealand's ECE centres demonstrate how individuals, community, societal structure, and cultural norms are interrelated and influence each other (May, 2012).

New Zealand's ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) advocates and promotes the interaction and connections between children and people, places and things within their environment. The name, *Te Whāriki,* means a woven mat, a metaphor denoting its inclusiveness and suggesting that this is an education mat for *all* to stand on and prosper. *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) explicitly states four principles: empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships; and five strands: wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration. The wellbeing strand states that children should have "a sense of personal worth and cultural identity and the ability to

make choices" (MoE, 2017, p. 27). The belonging strand states that "children are more likely to feel at home if they regularly see their own culture, language and world views valued in the ECE setting" (MoE, 2017, p. 31) and that children should be encouraged to develop "an ability to connect their learning in the ECE setting with experiences at home and in familiar cultural communities and a sense of themselves as global citizens" (MoE, 2017, p. 32). The contribution strand declares that children should have the "confidence that their family background is viewed positively in the ECE setting, and have the confidence to stand up for themselves and others against biased ideas and discriminatory behavior" (MoE, 2017, p. 37). The communication strand asserts that children should have the opportunity to "experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures" (MoE, 2017, p. 16) and they should have "confidence that their first language is valued and increasing ability in the use of at least one language" (MoE, 2017, p. 42). Such references to cultural diversity and inclusiveness can also be found in both the statements of goals, evidence of learning and development and examples of practices.

However, Tesar (2015) pointed out that "hegemonizing and globalizing practices, regulation and deregulation, have permeated the landscape of ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand" (p. 108), and Chan (2011) pointed out that "early childhood centres are becoming increasingly multi-ethnic" (p. 34). New Zealand is no longer made up predominantly of Pākehā (Anglo-Europeans) and Māori as it once was. The statements of cultural diversity and inclusiveness in *Te Whāriki* are given new interpretations and implications in response to changing social contexts, cultural and educational aspirations from different ethnic groups, parental values, family and community patterns. Moreover, many New Zealand early childhood scholars have long lamented the rising dominance of neoliberal forces in ECE and the pervasive discourse of neoliberalism in *Te Whāriki* and the ECE Action Plans (Alexander, 2016; Ang, 2010; Duhn, 2006; Farquhar, 2015; Westbrook & White, 2020). The tensions and competing powers among socialism, Māori indigenous people, neoliberalism and poststructuralism can be found in both New Zealand ECE policy discourses and daily practices in various ECE service providers. What adds more to the

complexity is the divergence between the child-centered, thematic and experiential *Te Whāriki* curriculum and the centrally controlled, subject-based and achievement-oriented primary compulsory schooling curriculum (MoE, 2017), which influences transition programs and young learners' transitional experiences in ECE services.

In summary, New Zealand's ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki* is built on a high level of trust in educational professionals at the local level. Immigrant ECE teachers are supposed to fully understand *Te Whāriki* and follow its guidance in their daily teaching practice. They are working in various ECE centres all over New Zealand, making pedagogical decisions every day, connecting and influencing children and their families and the wider communities, and determining the real accountability of *Te Whāriki*. Chinese immigrant ECE teachers are an important part of the whole ECE professional group. Their understanding of and confusion about *Te Whāriki*, their interpretation of it, and their pedagogical practices and needs should be given more academic and political attention. That is also what this present study is focusing on.

2.4 Studies of Immigrant Teachers

In the field of immigration and education, different policies and practices provide different social space, inclusive or exclusive, for immigrant teachers to fulfill their potential and make the best use of their capital. Social space, according to Bourdieu (1984), is central to the ways in which reconversion takes place, and social space comprises social conditions (such as migration policies and labor market), lifestyle (like leisure activities, spoken language), and habitus (the lived reality). When immigrant from one country to another country, immigrants' experiences are situated in different social spaces, which is also true to the participants of this current study.

Issues confronted by immigrant professionals have been significant research subjects for school education and education quality throughout the world (Dewar & Visser, 2000; Fee, 2011; Miller, 2008). The international literature reveals that immigrant teachers often share similar experiences of struggles, discrimination, unequal rights and unexpected challenges

when they migrate (Miller, 2008; Reid, 2005; Reid et al., 2014). Immigrant teachers often face a myriad of challenges in various contexts and fields, including feelings of loneliness and uncertainty (Arndt, 2014), bureaucratic red tape and processes (Reid et al., 2014), student behavioral problems (Collins & Reid, 2012), discrimination and othering (Arndt, 2015; Nayar, 2009; Schmidt, 2010), a gap between pedagogical training and cultural knowledge (Adair et al., 2012) and cultural adjustment difficulties (Bedford et al., 2002). The present study investigates Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' experiences in the changing social space from China to New Zealand, and can provide new insights in New Zealand's ECE professional mobility and education.

2.4.1 Challenges and Obstacles Confronted by Immigrant Teachers

2.4.1.1 Subject to Policy Changes. Research studies (Gong et al., 2017; Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Schmidt, 2010) have shown that discrimination has become a widespread issue while government systems and society have failed to provide enough social space for immigrant teachers. Schmidt (2010) examined the experiences of immigrant teachers through the lens of policy (Schmidt, 2010; Schmidt & Block, 2010), arguing that immigrant teachers are subject to policy discourse and changes. A variety of themes were considered, covering certification (Cho, 2010; Kelly & Cui, 2010), teacher education (Chassells, 2010; Faez, 2016), workplace issues (Pollock, 2010), and employment and ethnocultural equity policies (Schmidt, Young & Mandzuk, 2010).

During the migration process, the power structure is very unbalanced between immigrant teachers, the New Zealand government and Immigration New Zealand. The New Zealand government has the dominant power of nominating, accrediting and selecting their "wanted" immigrants based on the immigration policies they make. The negotiation power of immigrant teachers is determined by their ability to meet these immigration criteria, ranging from financial status, premigration English language requirements, qualification accreditation, work experiences, and work in an area of absolute skills shortage or in an identified future-growth area. Hyde (2017) stated that all immigration policy is

discriminatory because it seeks to exclude some and include others. This is supported by studies by Butcher et al. (2015) who defined discrimination by asserting that it is an act or policy which advantages or disadvantages groups or individuals.

As discussed previously, the New Zealand government and Immigration New Zealand play a significant role in determining the boundaries of who is eligible to study and work in New Zealand, while organizations such as the MoE, Teachers Council and tertiary institutions have their roles to play in determining who is eligible or otherwise to study and work in the field of ECE. These policies all have particular relevance to the life trajectory of immigrant ECE teachers in this study.

2.4.1.2 Qualification Recognition and Professionalism. Another persistent theme in immigration research is that some immigrants do not get their professional qualifications recognized in the host countries (Reid et al., 2014). Evidence from Beynon et al.'s (2004) research suggests that the process of immigrant teachers' qualification recognition often encounters difficulties. In the same vein, Andersson and Guo (2009) found that globally mobile professionals, such as teachers, could suffer from social exclusion and disadvantage caused by the problematic recognition of their overseas qualifications. This leads to inequity in immigrants' employment opportunities and benefits.

At the professional level, Robertson (2012) noted a shift from 2000 onwards to a focus on policies of accountability and standards through discourses of the "quality teacher" which have gained symbolic control of teacher policy and practice worldwide. The consequences for teachers, especially immigrant teachers, are significant because of the ways and discourses in which this quality teacher or "ideal teacher type" is defined. Reid et al. (2014) warned that the tests of immigrant teachers' professional knowledge and employability in another country (especially in Australia, the UK, North America and New Zealand) appear to be biased against and even to block the value of immigrant teachers. The dominant discourse of the "quality/ideal" teacher image and "teaching practices may mistake the age of globalization for the age of English hegemony" (p. 119). Moreover, some White

dominant cultures even deem the diversification of the teaching profession as a threat to White, Western, Christian educational cultures and as a threat to corrupt the English monolingual system. In the critical multicultural and early childhood discourse, diversity is often posited as a "problem" that can be "managed" and overcome by implementing appropriate strategies and practices (Chan, 2011; May & Sleeter, 2010; Walsh, 2007).

The discourse of NESB immigrants as problems, and their incompatibility, was taken up by Birrell et al. (2001). Santoro (1999) found that Chinese-born and educated student teachers in secondary schools in Victoria (Australia) experienced difficulty because of ethnic and racialized assumptions about teaching practices. Heald (2007) examined both the cultural adaptation challenges and substantial language barrier faced by Chinese immigrant teachers. He concluded that Chinese language is very different from English in its written and spoken components, making it very difficult for these teachers to acquire a higher level of English language competency, sufficient to teach, than simply for functional daily conversations. However, when communicating with immigrant children and families who share the same ethnic background, immigrant teachers can be very supportive and effective.

2.4.1.3 English Language Proficiency Requirements. English language proficiency is another crucial factor for immigrants to achieve successful settling outcomes at all skill levels in New Zealand. It is required by the Teaching Council (2021) that all teachers should demonstrate a high standard of English or te reo Māori language competency in speaking, reading, writing and listening. For immigrant ECE teachers who do not use English as their first language, they are required to provide evidence of one of the following to meet the English language competency requirements: New Zealand University Entrance via NCEA as defined by NZQA, NZ tertiary entrance (this preceded University Entrance), International Baccalaureate full diploma in English medium (24 points minimum), Cambridge International Examinations (minimum 120 points on the UCAS Tariff plus meeting the CIE literacy requirements), New Zealand Qualifications

Framework (NZQF) qualification at or above level 7, Cambridge CELTA, Trinity College CerTESOL, Cambridge English Exams (minimum of 185), International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Academic (overall mark 7.0 in one test), International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR) (overall mark 4 in one test), Person Test of English (PTE) Academic (overall mark 64 in one test), Trinity ISE III (3) (pass with Merit in one test), LanguageCert C2 Mastery IESOL (no less than 25/50 in one test), LanguageCert C1 Expert IESOL (no less than 35/50 in one test), TOEFL Internet-based test (IBT) (overall mark 98 in one test). Meanwhile, although te reo Māori language competency is also listed as meeting the language competency requirements, almost all immigrant teachers still choose to take English language exams or training to meet the registration requirements mainly because English is the dominant language used in the education field in New Zealand (Chan, 2011).

Spoonley et al.'s (2007) research has indicated that there appears to be an element of racial intolerance for those migrants who cannot speak English. It has been suggested that English language tests are discriminatory (Butcher et al., 2015; Huang & Singh, 2014; Cui & Kelly, 2013) because they favor immigrants from traditional source countries such as UK and Ireland who are also English native speakers, while the requirement of an average IELTS level of Band 7 is rather difficult for immigrants coming from non-English-speaking countries.

Immigration policy requirements for English ability have changed frequently over time and have been part of a bigger picture to influence the flow of immigrants particularly from non-English-speaking countries. In New Zealand, an increased English language requirement policy has been implemented since 1996 after Winston Peter's comments about the "Asian Invasion" in 1994 (Spoonley & Trlin, 2004, p. 22). Subsequent to this, the high English language requirement has made it more difficult for applicants from non-English-speaking countries to immigrate and work in New Zealand (Heald, 2007). Currently, most New Zealand tertiary institutes offering a diploma or degree in ECE require

an average IELTS level of Band 7 as a part of the entry criteria for international students (Teaching Council, 2017). In their pathways toward ECE teaching positions, some immigrants have reported difficulties in gaining adequate English competency to obtain employment opportunities and career promotion opportunities (Adair et al., 2012; Butcher et al., 2015; Collins & Reid, 2012; E. Ho, 2010; Kritz, 2015).

2.4.1.4 Institutional Discrimination. Immigrant teachers are sometimes confronted with discriminatory attitudes in schools and educational faculties (Schmidt, 2010). The pervasiveness of systemic discrimination is, "the unequal treatment resulting from 'neutral' institutional practices that continue the effect of past discrimination" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 12). This statement echoes Bourdieu's symbolic violence and his field theory.

Reid (2005) has investigated issues of racism confronted by immigrant teachers in Australia at both institutional and personal levels. Research in Australia has shown that prior teaching experience is often devalued when immigrant teachers join Australian schools (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007). Institutionally, the individual diversity and complexity of immigrant teachers have been silenced and ignored and they are seen as "empty vessels" in many ways. Their backgrounds, knowledge and skills are not valued adequately and are even denied in the dominant education and school systems. At a personal level, immigrant teachers report implicit and explicit forms of exclusion from formal and informal social interactions and mainstream professional interactions. In Tharmaseelan's (2008) study of migrants' adjustment to their careers, an immigrant's transition behavior in the new environment was defined as the state of individuals' adjustment to the new work environment with respect to their previous experiences and expertise.

While some studies suggest mentoring and provide some suggestions of "sharing ideals" (Sleeter & Milner, 2011, p. 327), this is not the same as a two-way knowledge exchange such as that suggested in the work of Singh and Huang and others (Singh & Huang, 2013; Sleeter & Milner, 2011) on teacher education in Australia. The main purpose of mentoring

is to “bring them into” or equip these immigrant teachers with the sociocultural knowledge of the system they are entering. Ward (2010) also indicated that while New Zealanders claim to value and accept cultural diversity, they also prefer that immigrants integrate and acculturate to New Zealand society. This leads to another consideration of the sociocultural surroundings for immigrant teachers: are the dominant knowledge systems coming to be more inclusive or exclusive of the diversity of immigrant teachers’ backgrounds, knowledge and skills? On the other hand, Janusch’s (2015) study explored the professional acculturation of immigrant teachers in Israel, North America and Australia, and the findings showed that personal traits such as self-confidence and resilience, language proficiency, social network and support from colleagues and friends are instrumental for successful settlement and PD.

In summary, immigrant teachers may encounter various obstacles and challenges when they move to a new country and enter a new education system, depending on the political and economic context dynamics and the sociocultural dimensions of their work. The review of the changing landscape in New Zealand’s immigration policy and ECE provides a broader picture of the social space for immigrant ECE teachers in New Zealand.

2.4.2 Values and Contributions of Immigrant Teachers

In the literature examining the identities of ethnically and/or linguistically different teachers, there has been a focus on the positive relationship between immigrant teachers and their ethnically diverse students (Santoro, 2007). Benseman and Sutton (2012) stressed the need for an awareness of the wide variety of opinions teachers hold regarding literacy which will have been affected by their background, culture and education.

Some studies have shown that it is important to support children from linguistic and culturally diverse backgrounds to get enough language support and emotional inclusion (Chan, 2016; Guo, 2006). Howard’s (2010) case study showed that a diverse teaching force has a wider impact because multiethnic teachers are more engaged in culturally relevant

pedagogy, more willing to embrace multicultural education, and more sensitive and tolerant toward immigrant students' subtle emotional needs.

Research evidence reveals that meaningful connections between home and ECEC services enhance children's cognitive and social development as well as their development of a positive self-image (e.g., Hedges & Lee, 2010; Rekalidou & Panitsides, 2015; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). Ideally, if children, teachers and families share holistic learning experiences, the whole learning and living environments will extend value to each party and make contributions to life (Mitchell et al., 2019). Rivalland and Nuttall (2010) emphasized the critical role that ECE educators can have on children's awareness of diversity and difference through the "discourses that they make available to children and those that they silence, through their daily practices, pedagogies and curricula" (p. 416). Gunn (2002) asserted that there is an expectation by the New Zealand government that ECE services will "actively contribute to countering racism" (p. 27). In this section, I argue that Chinese immigrant ECE teachers with bilingual and rich cultural capital can contribute to early childhood centres by facilitating inclusiveness and smooth transitions from home to centre for Chinese immigrant children and families; by bridging the culture and communication gap between parents and centre staff, and fostering trust and partnerships with parents and teachers; and by becoming language and identity models for young children.

Similarly, De Lair and Erwin (2000) asserted that educators need to address the "constructs of race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and sexual orientation openly and actively" (p. 154), whether working directly with young children in ECE settings or in teacher education programs. New Zealand's ECE teachers come from diverse ethnic, language, cultural, economic, and religious groups, and from diverse political and sexual orientations, and that diversity may influence their pedagogical decision making (van Schaik et al., 2014). Some cultures, like Chinese culture, Confucius eastern cultures in Singapore and Japan, support an authoritarian environment wherein the students remain quiet and respectful without challenging teachers or interrupting the teacher to ask questions. Educators need to be able

to debate and discuss professional knowledge and beliefs from these perspectives, ITE and on-going PD (Bhopal & Rhamie, 2014).

2.4.3 Features and Studies of Chinese Immigrant ECE Teachers

Chinese immigrant ECE teachers move from China to New Zealand with a set of indigenous beliefs and practices of caring for children. Such differences will provide a backdrop to the discussion of Chinese immigrant ECEC teachers' transitional experiences in New Zealand. With the increasing number of Chinese immigrants to New Zealand, the question of how to weave the mat of early childhood education and care together with these immigrant teachers for the best of child and teacher to grow and flourish is becoming more and more important.

Ideally, indigenous and local ways of knowing, doing, and being can be integrated and incorporated into the whole New Zealand schooling system, starting from the ECE sector to higher education, to nurture the potential of young learners. The ECE context in China in which these Chinese immigrant ECE teachers have grown up can be useful for further analysis and comparison, especially when we consider the transition process and related adaptations made by these immigrant teachers. Some researchers (Guo, 2006; D. Y. Ho, 2006; Zhu & Zhang, 2008) refer to the current early childhood practices in China as a hybrid of three cultures: traditional Confucian values, Communist ideologies, and Western curricular influences. The traditional Confucian values underpin the expectations of both the family and school that children should be respectful, faithful, compassionate and intellectual. Within Confucian values, children are deemed family property with little attention given to their individuality and capacity. They are subject to the authority of their parents (especially the father) and the government.

Two deeply held Confucian values permeate education in China, whether in early childhood centres or universities: filial piety and the maintenance of harmonious social relationships (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). Filial piety reflects the hierarchical nature of family relationships with the expectation that children obey their parents in all matters and honor

the family through personal efforts (Guo, 2006; D. Y. Ho, 1994; Huntsinger et al., 2000). Apart from the filial piety symbolizes more within family circles, the maintenance of harmonious social relationships extends the expectations of children to be respectful and obedient in a wider social context. Children are expected to have good manners and behave with respect and politeness, and to control their impulses and emotions (Huntsinger et al., 2000). As a result, those who have been brought up in a Confucian society often avoid conflicts with others and couch their intentions behind politeness (Zhai & Gao, 2008; Oetzel et al., 2001; Zhan & Wan, 2016). Children tend to be viewed as passive, dependent individuals who need to be filled with knowledge. The role of teachers, who are seen as the authority and respected without challenge, is to impart knowledge to children. Therefore, classrooms in China feature teacher-directed activities, memorization and repeated practice within the given curriculum (D. Y. Ho, 1994). Children in ECE centres, from 3 years old, are expected by their family and teachers to obey the school rules and follow the routines.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, communist ideologies have evolved from Marxism to different versions of China-specific communist ideologies which have changed with the change of top leaders of China's Communist Party and national presidents, namely, the ideologies of Chairman Mao, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zeming, Hu Jingtao, and Xi Jingping. Although the details and policies of each leadership period are different, the core of communism in China still embodies working for the collective wellbeing. Thus, practices within Chinese classrooms are often facilitated by labor assignments and daily duties, whole-class instruction, teacher's authority, and emphasis on content knowledge and memorization as well as the importance of sacrificing individual benefits for the collective wellbeing of the whole class or school. Consequently, there is little space given to children in the ECE centres/kindergartens, and their voices, capacities, individual needs and traits have gained little attention.

Under the prevailing influence of globalization and education exchanges, Western philosophies and practices are becoming more and more popular in China's ECE context.

Acceptance and support from the central government finally reached the point that the State Education Commission (1989) introduced such Western philosophies and practices in 1989 through the issuing of national guidelines known as the "Regulations on Work in Kindergartens." Since the 1980s, the charm of these Western ECE philosophies and practices has relied on the fact that they respect children as active participants who are born with unique agency and abilities. Parents, teachers and even the policymakers in China have been very much impressed and swept up by these fresh and new ideologies and welcomed them as the "remedy" to cure the problems in China's ECE settings and as the "shield" to prevent the new generation of children from undergoing similar sufferings and struggles which their parents or grandparents experienced in their early years (Li et al., 2012).

In 2010, the MoE of PRC published the *National Outline for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development* (2010–2020) which set the vision and priorities for education in China including ECE. The *National Outline* reflects a focus on holistic development (mental wellbeing, physical health, morality cultivation, happiness and art), student-oriented approaches and so on (MoE of PRC, 2010). In a highly competitive academic culture, academic preparation and literacy teaching in kindergartens are deemed the first step to a future successful academic career (Luo & Arndt, 2010). That is why, in reality, the goals set by the *National Outline* differ from the expectations from parents and teachers, where the curriculum is becoming more play-based and parents and teachers still expect academic preparation (C. W. Ho, 2008; Hu & Li, 2012). Research studies (e.g., Fees et al., 2014; Yang & Li, 2018) on Chinese kindergarten teachers' perceptions of educational philosophies and practices have shown that there are curriculum innovations in Chinese kindergartens to balance child-centred and teacher-directed pedagogies and hybridize Eastern and Western curricula.

It is evident that social changes may bring a number of transitions as well as lack of consensus regarding the meaning of "childhood" and how ECE "ought" to be in China.

Although each culture possesses a unique developmental niche, nurturing children's potential and development are universal goals shared by many cultures in the world (Kirylo & Nauman, 2010). The manner in which ECE teachers work toward these goals reflects different culture habitus. Consequently, Chinese immigrant ECE teachers have developed their own educational experiences and expectations in ECE. Coming and working in New Zealand places them in an entirely new and unfamiliar context. One of the study objectives is to understand the struggles and transitions and needs along their professional journey as a teacher in diverse ECE centres all over New Zealand.

2.4.4 Studies on New Zealand's Immigrant Teachers and Research Gap

The experiences of immigrant teachers in New Zealand have been documented by studies by Dewar and Visser (2000) which revealed that these immigrant teachers work mainly in poorer urban areas, in low decile schools (a school's decile rating indicates the extent to which the school's students live in low socioeconomic or poorer communities; the lower the school's decile is, the more funding it receives from the New Zealand government) where education resources are limited, Māori students are the majority, and the staff turnover is high. Firkin et al. (2004) examined the experiences of overseas-trained professionals, including teachers, in New Zealand. They found a number of reasons for the difficult situations immigrant professionals often experience: personal, cultural, and economic, together with systems and society. They concluded that accent ("poor English" was often cited), lack of local knowledge or local experience, negative cultural ascriptions, a lack of recognition of qualifications by professional or gate-keeping bodies, and no social networks contributed to this outcome. Their work echoes the findings of the Australian and Canadian examples discussed above, in a number of ways.

Despite the importance of understanding and responding to the diverse immigrant teacher groups, other than a few ethnic-specific studies of immigrant teachers in elementary/primary, secondary school contexts (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Han, 2004; E. Ho, 2006; Myles et al., 2006; Okamura & Miller, 2010; Reid, 2005; Vohra, 2005), there is no

comprehensive, focused study of Chinese immigrant teachers as an ethnic professional group in New Zealand's preschool and ECE contexts. When Chinese immigrant ECE teachers, as an important and growing professional group, are examined in New Zealand's unique ECE context, their aspirations, experiences, transitions and career development needs call for academic and political attention.

Therefore, the present study, responding to the extant gaps above, is aiming at (1) better understanding the personal, institutional and structural processes of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers in New Zealand; (2) raising a number of implications for more inclusive and supportive induction programs for immigrant teachers, including comprehensive orientation, bicultural and multicultural ITE programs and training, on-going mentoring support, targeted PD programs and so on; (3) exploring how the society, government agencies and ECE power sectors coordinate to create new possibilities to empower and facilitate social justice and equity and to enhance social and cultural connectedness within ECE centres. This study will provide an original and important contribution to the current literature in immigrant ECE teachers study with meaningful and significant implication for immigrant ECE teachers' recruitment, training and PD.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of this study, I turn to Pierre Bourdieu, a French social philosopher whose work provides a set of relational conceptual tools—*habitus*, *capital* and *field*—to investigate the lives of immigrant ECE teachers in the context of the broader social structures. A theoretical framework provides a particular lens or perspective through which a topic is examined (Yin, 2014). In this chapter, I will discuss how Bourdieu's conceptual tools and reconversion theory helped expand current perceptions in research on immigrant ECE teachers and explore the potential of adopting a Bourdieuan perspective to make sense of and interpret teachers' realities.

3.1 Interconnection Among Habitus, Capital and Field

In *Distinction* Bourdieu (1984) mapped out a formula to elaborate the interconnection between the three key concepts:

> Habitus × Capital + Field = Practice. (p. 101)

Bourdieu (1990) argued that habitus and capital are practiced with the specific logic of a certain field, and these three concepts cannot be analyzed separately. Bourdieu himself used these terms differently in his various writings over time, and there is debate over the meaning of these terms. Nevertheless, Bourdieu's concept has inspired a wide range of empirical work. Many scholars have attested to the importance of Bourdieu's concept tools in both sociology and education (Nash, 1990; Rawolle & Lingard, 2008, 2013), utilizing varying definitions and methods over the past several decades, with increasing citations and references to Bourdieu's work (Lamont, 2012; Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007; Serre & Wagner, 2015; Stokes & McLevey, 2016).

This set of conceptual tools—habitus, capital and field—will be used in this current study to help investigate the rich experiences of immigrant teachers in a relational way. In other words, the changing fields (immigration policies and occupation circles) are integrated with

the changes of habitus (lived reality) and capital of immigrant teachers. The current study explores how evidence of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' habitus and capital affect their practices in New Zealand's immigration and ECE fields, and how they are positioned in different fields. The three conceptual tools assist in better understanding how these Chinese immigrant ECE teachers themselves practice, struggle with and solve various transitional and practical challenges through strategically using their habitus and capital. More specifically, these concepts help to interpret evidence relating to the research questions in terms of the aspirations of these Chinese immigrant ECE teachers who come to New Zealand and work as ECE teachers, the problems and obstacles they face with regard to their qualifications and recognition process, job opportunities and work experiences, personal and professional identities and their positions in New Zealand society and in the ECE field.

3.2 Habitus

Habitus often refers to systems of "durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72); and "schemes of perception and discrimination embodied as dispositions reflecting the entire history of the group and acquired through the formative experiences of childhood" (Nash, 1999, p. 177). In a sense "the habitus contains the 'genetic information,' which both allows and disposes successive generations to reproduce the world they inherit from their parents' generation" (Crossley, 2003, p. 43). Bourdieu (2000) later emphasised the malleability of habitus, stating that "habitus change constantly as a function of new experiences" (p. 161). The interaction between policy (field of practice) and the lived reality (habitus) of the Chinese immigrant ECE teachers may be framed as an example of the production and reproduction of social classes and inequality.

Bourdieu (1989) claimed that choice making is a reflection of taste and taste is often cultivated from a person's early years and mapped on a person's social status. The habitus is the underlying structure of social life that becomes ingrained into how we physically move or talk in the world, how our behaviors are conditioned by objective possibilities,

and how the social world becomes objectified into a range of probabilities and expectations that make us more likely to choose certain actions rather than others, as demonstrated by the choices made by the six participants in the current study.

The history and social class of one's family has a powerful impact on one's habitus and behaviors. Where we live, how we grow up, our culture and social rules privilege certain values or virtues over others. Education preference, for instance, can be seen as a way to distinguish a person's family background. In China, one can often distinguish a student's family background and social status from the schools and education programs that they select. Given the fact of the very large population and quite unbalanced economic development in China, only a small proportion of students, who come from wealthy families, have access to certain education resources, such as choosing a major out of their personal interest not because they have to make a living with it, or learning art or history, or going abroad to study. Of course, such preferences and realization of their preference are based on the manageable capitals occupied by these well-off families, but families from different social classes have different perspectives on their children's education, specifically in terms of its value and function.

A key aspect of the concept of habitus is that it is collective, and it modifies past experiences with present ones, as well as with a probable future. Habituses are permeable and responsive to what is going on around them (Reay, 2004). Bourdieu (1984) further suggested that many professions maintain an underlying set of criteria, beyond formal credentials, which regulate access to each profession. The actualization of the habitus depends on the social location or field. Bourdieu (1990) argued that habitus is the basis of the tacit generation of strategies that enable agents to deal with various unpredictable or constantly changing situations in a field with the capitals they have. This is because habitus:

> structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences, which are modified by the new experiences within the limits defined by their power of selection, brings about a unique integration, dominated by the

> earliest experiences, of the experiences statistically common to members of the same class. (p. 60)

In the present study, immigrant teachers share a distinct kind of habitus. When they migrate from China to New Zealand and go through all these social changes to work as ECE teachers in New Zealand, their habitus is continuously re-structured as an on-going process with pliable layers.

At the same time, young children's primary habitus is influenced and shaped by caregivers, including these immigrant teachers, who form the social habitus within which young children are located. With the growing number of young children going to New Zealand's ECE centres and the longer hours they spend in centres with their teachers, ECE teachers and children are shaping and reshaping each other's habitus through their daily interactions (Silva, 2016). Moreover, the habitus of local New Zealand ECE teachers is also responsive to immigrant teachers' presence, and they together pose new challenges to the dominant discourse of best practices and PD programs.

3.3 Capital

According to Bourdieu (1990), capital refers to an individual's power or capacity to influence others and have control over their own future. The concept of Bourdieu capital consists of four different types: economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. In the context of the present study, the pathways, transitional experiences and career development of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers largely depend on their accumulation and distribution of capital.

Economic capital is often directly convertible into money and other forms of property rights (e.g., houses and properties, material wealth, resources). Economic capital is traditionally considered as the fundamental drive for almost all kinds of social movements and changes. It can serve as the financial base for immigrant teachers to migrate to a new place or serve as a practical driver for immigrant teachers to find a job in a particular field and make a living.

Cultural capital consists primarily of what is perceived as legitimate knowledge and behavior and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications (e.g., knowledge, education, skills, attitudes, expectations, tastes, etc.). Cultural capital has particular currency in the field of education, comprising embodied (dispositions, sets of meaning and modes of thinking), objectified (access to cultural goods such as art and literature) and institutionalized (educational or academic qualifications) forms, which are given recognition by those already dominant within a particular field. Take immigrant teachers' cultural capital as an example, their linguistic proficiency in the dominant (bourgeois) group's language and educational qualifications must be examined and tested by host countries (Serre & Wagner, 2015). In this present study, Bourdieu's forms of cultural capital will provide a useful framework for the analysis of the narratives of the Chinese immigrant ECE teachers. This framework may help to account for aspects of the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in their communities of practice.

Social capital represents the prestige and influence gained through relationships and connections with powerful others (e.g., group memberships, networks of relationships). It is very influential in immigrant teachers' aspirations to move, and transitions, from one field to another (Hugo, 2003). Put simply, international human capital movements depend on the personal social networks of individuals being realized. For those with better social connections in the West or in certain fields, migration becomes more possible as they have access to more information and support. Immigrants with closer relationships with local powerful individuals are more likely to get references for job opportunities and other amenities (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Okamura & Miller, 2010).

Symbolic capital represents the status and honor (e.g., prestige or recognition) which is associated with the acquisition of one or more forms of capital once they have been perceived and recognized as legitimate by others. In effect, symbolic capital is the legitimization of other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1990; Schmidt & Block, 2010).

According to Bourdieu (1991), capital is power "which defines the chances of profit in a given field" (p. 230). Central to the concept of capital is its exchange value and its capacity to be converted from economic capital into both social and cultural capital. In migration studies, Bourdieu's theorizing of forms of capital has been useful for exploring the role of capital, assets and resources in social mobility and stratification (Heckman & Mosso, 2014; Savage et al., 2005). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) emphasized the importance of the composition of an individual's overall capital, made up of cultural, economic and social capital. This is further mediated by individuals' "position-taking" (p. 99), that is, how they strategize to employ their capital. The structure and volume of capital must be contextualized with an individual's "social trajectory" (p. 99) of gaining and valorizing capital. This is particularly relevant for understanding migrants' uses of capital, as the geographic and temporal trajectories and dimensions of constituting and mobilizing capital are key to understanding how immigrant teachers make use of them and maneuver in different social contexts. We can best understand immigrant teachers' social exchanges and experiences through examining their on-going struggles over a range of resources and capitals.

3.4 Field

In explaining the nature of social class and inequality, Bourdieu (1991) used the concept of field to understand networks of relationships between individuals and the social context. In a sense, fields are like a kind of game with players, stakes and "trump cards" (p. 230). With various forms of capital flows and the unequal distribution of capital, fields are sites of struggle and in a constant state of flux (Bourdieu, 1985, 1986). Thus, a field can be understood as a series of contexts, which constitute a structured hierarchy and legitimize certain activities, processes, policies and discourses (Webb et al., 2002). Moreover, the fields or contexts of government, education, economics and employment have their own sets of rules, codes of conduct, and forms of authority as well, which again will influence the interactions between individual agents and given contexts (Bourdieu, 1990a).

Bourdieu's relational understanding of the organization of the society is presented through his field theory, where the position of an agent (individuals, immigrants) in a field can only be understood in relation to other positions in that field. When placing themselves and objects within a field, individual agents follow an ordering of relations that is structural and objective (Schmidt & Block, 2010; Singh & Huang, 2013). The interactions between New Zealand authorities (immigration and education) and Chinese immigrant ECE teachers can be conceptualized in terms of the relationship between field, capital and habitus. The field structure "might be the hierarchy of methods within the educational discourse, the legitimate procedures and language used to represent them. Habitus would be present in participants, their present and past experience, and the schemes of thought" (Grenfell, 2009, p. 30). The habitus is expected to accord with the demands of the field. Meanwhile, Chinese immigrant ECE teachers who are entering the early education field must acquire a certain amount of capital and must abide by the policies, rules and regulations set by New Zealand's immigration and educational policies as discussed in Chapter 2.

3.5 Bourdieu's Reconversion Theory

Bourdieu's (1984) reconversion theory is used in the current study to investigate New Zealand's national conditions and social space shaping immigrant teachers' work and life in New Zealand. The basic idea of Bourdieu's theory of reconversion, which he also termed as the strategies of reconversions, was to analyze how agents (individuals or groups) in a certain field acquire, convert and reconvert different kinds of capital into investment in the future and upgrading social positions, with the purpose of navigating and making new pathways in the social space. Social space, according to Bourdieu, is central to the ways in which reconversion takes place, and social space comprises social conditions (such as migration policies and labor market), lifestyle (like leisure activities, spoken language), and habitus (the necessities and facilities of a condition and position). Moreover, a field is a social space with:

> a set of objective power relations that impose themselves on all who enter the field and that are irreducible to the intentions of the individual agents or even to the direct interactions among the agents. (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 724)

In the theory of reconversion, the convertibility of different forms of capital is the basis for the strategies aimed at the reproduction of capital and the position in social space. Capital is only convertible to another kind of capital in certain conditions, which means that different types of capital are effective in relation to a particular field and they exist with their own independent logic and contexts. The value of cultural capital, for instance, can only exist in particular situations, and cannot be converted directly to either economic capital or social capital. One example is that a Chinese immigrant teacher's qualifications, which represent cultural capital in China, cannot be transformed quite so easily into the same level of economic capital outside China.

When discussing immigrant teachers' transition and adaptation, Bourdieu's reconversion theory is used to investigate a variety of themes covering certification and qualification verifying, teacher education and professional support, workplace issues, and employment and ethnocultural equity policies. Questions are asked to depict the social space for immigrant teachers' transition and growth, their feelings and reflections, gains and losses. It is important to provide enough social space to utilize immigrant teachers' skills, knowledge and experiences efficiently so that they may contribute to quality education and the overall wellbeing in New Zealand.

3.6 Summary

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are illustrated through the dynamic relation between Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field, which is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

Theoretical Framework Based on Bourdieu's Theories

While Bourdieu's work has been criticized for being overly deterministic and painting an overly consensual picture of the social order (Crossley, 2003), I argue that his conceptual tools—habitus, capital and field—and his reconversion theory can help us bring into discussion the "undiscussed" and expose the critical impetus for change expressed by immigrant teachers. Immigrant ECE teachers are subject to New Zealand's immigration policies, ECE context, teacher education and qualifications, dominant best practices and PD needs and requirements, etc. The education authorities conduct qualification recognition procedures to ensure immigrant teachers meet the requisite habitus within the New Zealand ECE field. The qualifications and knowledge of some teachers may be devalued if they refuse to coordinate their habitus with the legitimate regulations of authorities.

Given the relationships between field and habitus, it can be anticipated that the New Zealand education authorities and the Chinese immigrant teachers are agents who practice

in New Zealand's early education field, each with their different habitus. And the dispositions of their habitus lead them to choose "forms of conduct that are most likely to succeed in light of their resources and past experience" (Swartz, 2013, p. 106). Bourdieu (1990) argued that "agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us'" (p. 64). All the agents in the field, therefore, can be expected to follow their habitus to find the most efficient strategies in order to gain or maintain favorable positions. Bourdieu's reconversion theory helps to explain how agents utilize their habitus and capitals to practice in the field.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter starts with a justification for choosing this qualitative research approach. I will then describe the research design which includes the sampling strategy for the multiple case study; the instruments and procedures for collecting qualitative data; the quality issues of trustworthiness, dependability and generalizability; and how data were analyzed. This chapter concludes with ethical considerations of this study.

4.1 Rationale for Using the Qualitative Research Approach

This study is a qualitative research using narrative inquiry in a multiple-case study context. The rationale for using the qualitative approach is based on three factors: the purpose of the current study, the researcher's social constructivist worldview, and the strategies of inquiry.

The purpose of this current study is to understand Chinese immigrant early childhood teachers' lives and experiences within an array of historical, political, social and cultural contexts in China and New Zealand. As Bhattacharya (2017) stated, "qualitative research attempts to systematically inquire about the in-depth nature of human experiences within the context in which the experience occurs" (p. 3). Unlike the quantitative research approach, which seeks objective truths through numeric data and statistical techniques, the qualitative method is oriented to an exploration and detailed description of the central phenomenon to be studied. According to Chase (2011), narrative inquiry "revolves around an interest in life experiences and narrated by those who live them" (p. 421). It is very appropriate for using narrative inquiry approaches to investigate a socially mediated phenomenon, in this study the lived experiences of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers, because narrative inquiry approaches have the capacity to reveal the complexity of human experience through the stories they tell (Bleakley, 2000; Schwandt, 2014) and to understand

how people understand and give meaning to their lived experiences within social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Secondly, it is widely acknowledged that researchers' philosophical worldviews underpin their methodological decisions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Meier & Stremmel, 2010) and any research project reflects the researchers' understanding of knowledge and meaning making. As the researcher, my worldview falls within constructivist and poststructuralist paradigms, which emphasize the construction of meaning and knowledge in social contexts, with a belief that "meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam, 2002, p. 3). I therefore understand meaning as being co-constructed between participants and the outer world in different sociopolitical positionings and interactions. The study is therefore designed to allow each participant Chinese immigrant ECE teacher to tell his/her own personal stories, illustrating how each immigrant teacher interprets their immigration and professional trajectory.

Finally, in terms of strategies of inquiry, the present study adopted a multiple-case study approach because I intended to obtain highly descriptive, different but complementary data to best understand the researched phenomena from a small sample of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Relationships and processes within complex social settings tend to be interconnected and interrelated, and case studies work well in providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in particular instances. Multiple-case study is an in-depth and holistic description and analysis of categorically bounded systems through collection of multiple sources of information (Merriam & Tisdall, 2009). It is best suited for examining complex social realities with rich data and deeper understandings through the eyes of a small number of participants (Yin, 2014). Such an approach is chosen as most appropriate for this study because it affords the possibility to provide in-depth, detailed and individual meanings for Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' personal stories. That allows me to identify, reveal and explain the outstanding and unique features of their experiences (Hatch, 2007; Yin, 2014). Results developed from multiple-

case studies are more credible and compelling than those from a single case. I was able to explore differences/similarities within and between cases, with each participant representing a case in my design (Yin, 2003). This helps to minimize any researcher bias in the interpretation of results in order to meet the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability of findings (Yin, 2014). Semistructured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data.

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Participant Sampling

The participants in this study are exploratory samples chosen through nonprobability approaches (Denscombe, 2014). Participants comprise Chinese immigrant ECE teachers who are bounded by the well-defined selection criteria for the purpose of comparison and contrast within and across different layers of participants. The selection of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers is based on four basic criteria: (1) must have been born and raised in China for at least 3 years before coming to New Zealand, (2) must have immigrated to New Zealand since 1998, (3) must be a fully registered ECE teacher and legally allowed to work as an ECE teacher in New Zealand, (4) must be a nonnative English speaker. I chose these criteria because I wanted to study the experiences and perceptions of first-generation Chinese immigrant ECE teachers who had immigrated to New Zealand in the last 2 decades and to explore how they had interacted with the changing sociopolitical contexts in New Zealand. I wanted to discuss what made them decide to immigrate to New Zealand, what challenges they encountered and what strategies they used to handle such challenges, and how they perceived their own identity and position in the host country.

I listed these criteria clearly in my recruitment of research participants advertisement (see Appendix A). I began the selection process through connections, recommendations, references, and advertising on digital media like Facebook, WeChat, and school newsletters. Initially, I expected to recruit participants from the wider population of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers who were born in Greater China (i.e., including the Mainland, Taiwan,

Macao and Hong Kong). I didn't specify the notion of "China" or "Chinese" in the recruitment advertisement because I didn't want to arouse any disputes or uncomfortable feelings from my potential participants. I assumed that teachers who were interested in my study would respond to me if they considered themselves Chinese immigrants. I deliberately approached Chinese ECE teachers all over New Zealand through the New Zealand Early Childhood Education Association, the Chinese Association of Early Childhood Education, and through connections from several big ECE providers (such as Best Start, Evolve, Educare, JustKidz and Fantail) to share the participants recruitment poster and include it in newsletters to teachers.

After the recruiting period, I had a pool of 28 voluntary participants who indicated their willingness to participate in case studies. Initial contact was made through the approved email (see Appendix B) to provide details about the expected time commitment and nature of involvement in both the interviews and focus group discussions (see Appendix C: Participation Information Sheet for the interview and the focus group discussion). After this, I had a pool of 24 voluntary participants who understood their involvement in both the interviews and focus group discussion.

Finally, I adopted two sampling strategies, typical case sampling and maximal variation sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), to draw six teachers out of the pool of 24 voluntary participants to enable cross-case analysis. Specifically, typical cases refers to the different categories of ECE services in which participants worked. Maximal variation sampling strategy refers to the diversity of characteristics or traits of individual participants which were identified by the researcher to display different dimensions of the researched phenomenon so as to develop multiple perspectives to address the complexity of the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). An effort was made to maintain as much diversity as possible in the sample in terms of year of coming to New Zealand, qualifications, years of working in ECE field and position types. Eventually, six teachers were selected. Table 4.1 shows an overview of the six participants' characteristics.

Table 4.1

Participants' Profiles

Participant's name (pseudonym)	Gender	Year of immigrating to New Zealand	Qualifications	ECE working experience	Position type
Maggie	Female	2002	International trade (u) accounting (gd)	4 years	Parent-educator
Rina	Female	2007	Chinese literature (u, m) ECE (gd)	7 years	Head teacher
Carol	Female	2008	ECE (u)	6 years	Room teacher
Jane	Female	2010	Computer science (u) ECE (u)	5 years	Head teacher, manager
Zoe	Female	2013	Finance business (u, m) ECE (gd)	4 years	Head teacher
Gloria	Female	2014	ECE (u, m)	3 years	Room teacher

Note: u–undergraduate, gd–graduate diploma, m–master's degree

All six participants are Chinese immigrant ECE teachers, nonnative speakers of English, who immigrated to New Zealand after 1998, are registered with the New Zealand Teaching Council as ECE educators and work in different positions at different ECE service providers. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of participants' information. Consent forms (see Appendix D) were sent to participants and signed by them before data were collected.

4.2.2 Data-Collection Instruments

There are two types of data-collection instruments used in this study: a semistructured individual interview (see Appendix E) and a focus group discussion (see Appendix F). Semistructured interviews were conducted individually before the focus group discussion and served as the primary data-collection tool. The reason for this arrangement is that if

narrative is elevated to "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1), then it makes sense to argue that the stories we tell are such because they reflect *the stories we are* (McAdams, 2001). The participants interpreted and made sense of their personal experiences in individual interviews, and then they were encouraged to reflect on the alternative and multiple realities shared between groups and cultures during the focus group discussion session. As Morgan (2006) put it:

> [Focus group members] share their experiences and thoughts, while also comparing their own contributions to what others have said. This process of sharing and comparing is especially useful for hearing and understanding a range of responses on a research topic. The best focus groups thus not only provide data on *what* the participants think but also *why* they think the way they do. (p. 121)

Although focus group discussions are sometimes seen as synonymous with interviews or as "group interviews" (Parker & Tritter, 2006) in their similar purpose to study people's perceptions and ideas, they are two distinctive methods. Evidence on the role of the researcher and the relationship with the participants shows the fundamental difference between the two approaches (Bennett et al., 2017; Smithson, 2000). In interviews, the researcher adopts the role of an "investigator" who asks questions, engages in dialogue with one individual at a time, and constructs meaning together with the interviewee. In contrast, in the focus group discussion, the researcher's role changes into a "moderator" or "facilitator" who moderates the group discussion between the group participants and not between the researcher and the participants. Group dynamics and discussions as well as nonverbal interactions are the primary benefits of focus groups. Within the premise of this current study, semistructured interviews were used as the primary data-collection tool while the focus group discussions were used to collect group narratives and generate supplementary data for interviews.

4.2.2.1 Semistructured Individual Interviews. The interview schedule (see Appendix E) consisted of four demographic questions and 10 open-ended questions with the intention to provide participants opportunities to fully share their experiences and tell

their stories. The rationale for eliciting teacher knowledge and experiences in story form has been established by many previous studies (e.g., Bruner, 1990, 2020; Borg, 2003, 2015; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 1996, 2000; Clandinin, 2019).

When designing the interview schedule, I discussed all potential questions with my supervisors and defined the key questions that were likely to yield as much information about the researched phenomenon as possible. I formulated these questions in a natural, sensitive and understandable manner (Brenner, 2012) to address the aims and objectives of my research. I also prepared a list of possible follow-up questions as prompts to provoke more thoughts and reflections from the participants (such as "Can you tell me a bit more about that?") This enabled me to maintain focus while allowing interviewees and me, the interviewer, to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail during the interview. The flexibility of the semistructured-interview approach also allowed for the discovery and elaboration of information that was important to participants but might not have previously been thought of as pertinent by the researcher. A topic related to Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' use of social media and new technology as a significant strategy in their transitional experiences, for example, emerged from semistructured interviews, which was not previously prepared in the question schedule.

The overarching focus of the interview was Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' personal life journey and their reflections. The participants were interviewed individually and interviews were audio-recorded. All interviews were conducted in participants' first language, Chinese, in order to eliminate any barrier or confusion created by using English as a foreign or second language.

4.2.2.2 Focus Group Discussion. Focus group discussion is also frequently used as a qualitative data-collection approach to seek to capture the way in which meaning is negotiated and co-produced in the group context (Smithson, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998). A focus group is defined broadly as a small gathering of individuals who have a common interest or characteristics. Previous research (e.g., Johnson, 1996; Parker & Tritter, 2006;

Morgan, 2002) has shown that focus group discussion can provide insights into how people think collectively or differently when they share their ideas, experiences and attitudes about a topic in the group. While participants interpreted and made sense of their personal experiences in individual interviews, they were encouraged to reflect on the alternative and multiple realities shared between groups and cultures during the focus group discussion session. As Morgan (2002) put it:

> [Focus group members] share their experiences and thoughts, while also comparing their own contributions to what others have said. This process of sharing and comparing is especially useful for hearing and understanding a range of responses on a research topic. The best focus groups thus not only provide data on *what* the participants think but also *why* they think the way they do. (p. 142)

During focus group discussion, participants influence and are influenced, which encourages participants to make connections to various concepts and produce new ideas or reflections that may not occur during individual interviews. A topic related to different types of ECE service providers New Zealand, for example, provoked intense and rich discussion among group participants while such a topic was less explored in individual interviews.

The focus group discussion schedule consisted of five parts (see Appendix F): the introduction and warm up, ground rules, guiding questions, probes for discussion and a concluding question. All questions were prepared through thorough discussions with my supervisors and followed the two principles suggested by Stewart and Shamdasani (2007, 2014): (1) questions should move from general to more specific questions; (2) question order should be relative to the importance of issues in the research agenda. Moreover, reflections on the data from individual interviews helped me to shape the facilitating questions in the focus group discussion process, and I simultaneously paid attention to focus on what the data were saying and why. I gave due consideration to the impact of group mix in my participant sampling strategies. I assembled the same group of participants

as for the individual interviews. The language used in the focus group discussion was also Chinese. Discussions were audio-recorded and nonverbal interactions were observed and noted.

4.2.3 Data-Collection Procedure

Data collection was designed to occur over two phases: individual semistructured interviews with each participant and the focus group discussion. The logistics and schedule of data-collection procedure are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

The Logistics and Schedule of Data-Collection Procedures

	Task sequence	Time allocated
1.	Design and develop questions in the interview schedule	4–6 weeks
2.	Design and develop the focus group discussion schedule	4–6 weeks
3.	Prepare participant recruitment advertisement, emails, participant information sheets, consent forms	3–4 weeks
4.	Obtain ethical approval from the university	4 weeks
5.	Identify participants and develop participant contact list	4–6 weeks
6.	Communicate with participants, answer questions, build trust and good rapport, and give assurance about ethical principles	4 weeks
7.	Identify and verify the best time and place for interviews with participants, create an interview timetable	2 weeks
8.	Visit and interview participants one by one	6 weeks (1 interview/week)
9.	Send interview transcripts and analytic categories to individual participant for member checking, make changes based on individual teachers' feedback and clarifications	12–14 weeks
10.	Identify and reserve the best time and venue for the focus group discussion	2 weeks
11.	Invite participants to focus group discussion, prepare venue	2 weeks
12.	Facilitate the focus group discussion	1 day
13.	Send minutes and transcripts of focus group discussions to participants for member checking and validation, make changes based on group feedback and clarifications	12–14 weeks

The whole data-collection procedure took many months of work to complete. All these tasks were conducted one after another in a formative and ethical way to collect data.

During the whole data-collection procedure, many strategies were taken to achieve the credibility and reliability of data collected. Before interviews and the focus group discussion took place, I informed all participants through emails, phone calls and messages about the study details, answered any questions they had about their expected involvement, and gave assurance about all related ethical principles which were also fundamental aspects of the informed-consent process. This gave participants some idea of what to expect from the interview and the focus group discussion and increased the likelihood of openness in sharing. Conscious efforts were made to build rapport and trust with the participants. Also, I tried my best to conduct interviews and the focus group discussion at times and locations that were most suitable for them. Each individual interview took about 1 hour, and the focus group discussion took about 2.5 hours. Interviews and the focus group discussion were all conducted in Mandarin preferred by participants to generate rich data and deeper reflection. Data were translated into English in the data analysis and discussion part. Questions were thoroughly explored and discussed. Field notes were taken during the interviews and focus group discussion to add richness of meaning to their responses.

4.2.4 Data Analysis

In data analysis, the thematic analysis approach was chosen because it offered a systematic approach to "identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning/themes across a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). In this study, the highly descriptive data collected were expected to produce emergent, recurrent and dominant themes through the thematic analysis. These themes could be discussed and used to answer my research questions and to uncover the deep layers of meaning the participants had around their lived experiences of becoming and being immigrant ECE teachers in various social, cultural and political contexts.

The data-analysis steps in this study adapted a process categorized by Creswell and Clark (2017) and involved the five stages shown in Table 4.3. One point I want to emphasize clearly about my data analysis is that it was not a linear procedure which followed one step

after another. Rather, it was a continuous and interactive procedure in which data reduction, data display and verification were interwoven in parallel form (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña2014). Preliminary data analysis began as soon as I entered the field and the analysis of qualitative data continued throughout the process of data collection, presentation and validation.

Table 4.3

The Five Main Stages of Data Analysis

Stage	Actions
1. Data preparation	Transcribe and translate interview and group discussion texts Add notes to the data Write memos in research diary Catalog the text
2. Rewrite and retell the narrative stories and discussions	Construct narrative texts from transcribed data and field texts Send stories and discussion transcript to relevant participants for comments and validation Collaborate with participants in the narrative report
3. Coding procedure	Prepare data and load to software NVivo Code individual stories and group codes into categories Conduct cross-story analysis and identify emerging themes and concepts Collect different and contradicting views Identify meanings and contexts in data
4. Presentation and display of the data	Write interpretations of the findings Discuss points with quotes and models Identify the positions and meanings against different time and social contexts
5. Validation of the data	Member validation Data and method triangulation Comparison with alternative explanations

Source: Adapted from Creswell and Clark (2017, p. 129, Table 7.1)

For the data-preparation stage, I started the transcription of interviews into its original language, Chinese, immediately after each interview while my memory was still fresh and clear, and finished the interview transcription within 4 weeks after each interview. The interview transcript was then translated into English. Both the Chinese and English

transcriptions were sent to the relevant participant for member checking. Changes were made accordingly based on individual teachers' feedback and clarifications. I also started the transcription of focus group discussion immediately after the focus group discussion, but it took much longer to represent the oral data to written text because the dialogical patterns were more complex and nonverbal actions (such as pauses, silence, tones of speaking and facial expressions, etc.) were added as notes to data. It took me more than 8 weeks to prepare the transcript and minutes of the focus group discussion in both Chinese and English, after which I sent them for member checking. During the whole data-preparation stage, I listened to each audio-recorded interview and focus group discussion more than 30 times, and read and reread transcripts to ensure I was thoroughly intimate with the data, which was also an important step recommended by Braun and Clarke (2012). In doing so, I was trying to make sure I had captured the meaning of what they were trying to say during the interviews and focus group discussion.

For the rewriting and retelling narratives stage, I chose Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space approach: interaction (personal and social); continuity (past, present, future) and situation (place) as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

The Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space Approach

Interaction		Continuity			Situation
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Place
Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions	Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view	Look backward to remembered stories and experiences from earlier times	Look at current stories and experiences relating to actions of an event	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Look at context, time and place situation in a physical landscape or in a setting bounded by characters' intentions, purposes and different points of view

Such an approach matches my constructivist and poststructuralist research paradigms. As discussed in Section 4.1 Rationale for Using the Qualitative Research Approach, I understand meaning as being co-constructed between participants and the outer world in an on-going manner through different sociopolitical positionings and interactions. I collaborated with participants closely to decrease the potential gap between the narrative told and the narrative reported. I also drew on larger social, cultural and political contexts to depict how the power relations in different fields regulated individual agents and influenced their experiences and meaning-making process. The larger contexts covered multiple New Zealand policy fields, such as the Immigration Act 2009, *Te Whāriki*, and MoE documents relating to ECE and immigrant teachers. In doing so, I tried to link their stories with the underlying power structure in society to understand the meanings embodied in the data, and to debunk and unveil the truth behind the stories.

For the coding procedure, I conducted both inductive and deductive coding processes to benefit from the reviewed literature (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and allow for emergence of new themes. The initial deductive coding involved reading through the stories and highlighting segments relevant to immigrant ECE teachers' experiences based on key issues identified in the literature (e.g., challenges and obstacles, language barriers, qualification recognition, contributions, etc.). The inductive coding process involved coding individual stories and grouping codes into categories and themes. More inductive nodes emerged as analysis continued. I also conducted cross-story analysis and identified common themes and concepts in the segments. As a result, I clustered themes and concepts through the use of a thematic map and managed to mark and link relevant quotes in the data.

Finally, in the presentation and display stage, only the most prevalent themes were interpreted and discussed in this thesis. The findings chapter includes a detailed narrative report of each case with specific themes derived from the story. Each narrative report was reconstructed using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry

space approach. The discussion chapter includes the most relevant and coherent common themes in the multiple cases and in the focus group discussion. Implications are also discussed with relevance to contexts and situations.

4.2.5 Quality Issues

In order to address "trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in qualitative research, I structured the study to enhance the following four aspects of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

For credibility issues, I followed suggestions from Lincoln and Guba (1985) and did several things in my research process. First, my research was designed and conducted to ensure a prolonged engagement with the participants. The whole data-collection period lasted for over 8 months, which led to the completeness of data collection among samples and allowed good rapport and trust to develop between me and the participants. Second, conscious actions were taken to build confidence in the truth of findings. I utilized field-based audio-recording and note taking. I sent copies of interview transcripts to the relevant participant and sent the focus group discussion transcripts to all participants for validation. Feedback and further reflections from participants were gathered throughout each step of data collection and analysis to ensure that their meaning reflected their intention. Finally, the analysis process outlined in this chapter involved participants' contribution and audits from the beginning to the final analysis. All elicited and discussed themes were supported with quotes and references (Guest et al., 2012).

For transferability issues, I used purposive sampling and provided a thick description of the setting and the phenomena under study. This can facilitate the transferability of analysis by other researchers, but it is not within the task scope of this study to provide such an index of transferability.

For dependability issues, a lot of effort was taken and described in the data-collection and data-analysis parts, with the purpose of achieving reliability among the instruments, data and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Having a dependable auditor (Lincoln & Guba,

1985) to examine both the process and the product for consistency is also an important measure to enhance the dependability of a qualitative research. The researcher's supervisor was qualified for the role as an auditor because he was engaged in the process of my research design, data collection and analysis. The research design, data-collection instruments and data-collection procedures were discussed thoroughly with the auditor and were deemed acceptable. The data analysis, findings and interpretations were also examined by the auditor.

For confirmability issues, I mainly relied on the audit trail, which was parallel with the steps of involving my supervisor as auditor for the dependability audit. I also adopted "practicing reflexivity" (Guba, 1981, p. 87) to reveal my own assumptions to avoid the effects of investigator bias. I documented my personal reactions and beliefs about the data with reference to literature and findings by other authors. Moreover, the interpretations in the study were undergirded by extensive quotations from the data.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

I proceeded with this study with an open mind without any preconceived notions. I considered relational ethics, asked open-ended questions, used field notes and journals to chronicle and describe my remarks and observations. Ethics approval from the University of Auckland's Human Participants Ethics Committee for this study was obtained prior to reaching out to target participants and collecting data. Participant information sheets (PIS) and consent forms explained the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw themselves and relevant data. PIS also outlined the purpose and procedures of this study to ensure that participants understand the nature of this research, their involvement and time commitment in the study. Due to the small number of participants involved and the group mix of the focus group discussion, I was unable to guarantee that individual participants would not be eventually identified (Bryman, 2008; Yin, 2017). To reduce the likelihood of being identified, I used pseudonyms throughout my thesis, and I

also removed any identifying detail when describing the participants, their workplace or the community within which it sits (see Appendices A–F).

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This chapter consists of narrative accounts from six case studies about Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' lived experiences. I joined the themes by representing them in the style of narratives and stories. In order to most accurately convey the participants' meaning and to achieve logical connections between ideas, each narrative was re-storied using the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space approach: interaction, continuity and situation.

In the process of telling and retelling stories with this approach, my participants and I moved inward and outward, backward and forward through time, from the personal to the social, shifting situation and place. Various aspects of their experiences were elicited such as changes in their expectations, transition in time and space, their reflections on policies and working conditions, and their personal and professional identities. Their stories revealed their growth, tensions, self-efficacy, and needs in the journey of becoming part of the community of early childhood teachers in New Zealand. In this representation of their stories, our knowledge and understanding of our experiences were woven alongside each other to present "adequate" and "authentic" narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Quotes of participants' original words are presented in the findings because their voice was central to the telling and the richness of detail in participants' quotations conveyed identity more powerful than any interpretation from the researcher (Lemley & Mitchell, 2012).

5.1 Zoe's Interview

5.1.1 Introduction

Zoe started to introduce herself by telling me where she came from and her education background before coming to New Zealand. Then, Zoe shared her reasons for coming to New Zealand to work and live, which was a combination of personal preference and constraints from real life. After finishing her Graduate Diploma study in ECE, Zoe became an ECE teacher in 2014 and has been working in different centres since then. Her career

development experiences showed a spectrum of ECE services in New Zealand, and her understanding of being an immigrant Chinese ECE teacher was well expressed in her words.

5.1.2 Zoe's Background

Zoe introduced herself in the traditional Māori way, with a *pepeha*, which was quite unique for the interviews. She was born in Changsha, an inner city in Hunan province. Her mountain is Mt. Yue-Lu and her river is Liu-Yang River, both of which are located in Hunan province with rich cultural attachments. There are many folktales and songs of Mt. Yue-Lu and Liu-Yang River showing the close connections between the people and places that are important to Zoe. Her parents still live and work in Changsha, while Zoe and her husband live in Auckland with their 1-year-old son, Jason.

Pepeha was not the way Zoe introduced herself before she came to New Zealand and became more attached to her local communities and culture. In the past, Zoe would mainly introduce her education background, work experiences and personal interests. Hometown used to mean little to her although she would start her introduction by saying "I come from Changsha…" Zoe fell in love with the pepeha way of introducing herself almost immediately after understanding the reason and meaning of doing so. "It's all about relationships, you know," remarked Zoe, "relationships with places, people and things. And that makes me feel safe." Zoe further explained that this way of thinking "everyone and everything is connected in this common world" provided a sound base for her to work and live happily in New Zealand.

Zoe is the only child in her family. She grew up in Changsha, finished her primary and secondary education in local schools, and then went to Beijing to read for a bachelor's degree. It is a great pride for a Chinese family if their child can manage to be admitted to a university in Beijing. One reason is because most of the best universities and education resources are located in Beijing, and the other reason is the political image of Beijing in people's mind. For Zoe, 4 years of university life in Beijing had opened her horizons and unleashed her potential to reach out to a larger world. She was not satisfied with getting

only a bachelor's degree because that would not make her competitive in finding her dream job. So, she continued to pursue master's study in London after her graduation. Her family could financially support her to do so, for which Zoe was very grateful. Zoe didn't share much about her life in London. She just concluded by saying that "I was hoping to get a better job in Beijing with a master's degree from a UK university, but the reality was not what I expected." With a master's degree in finance and marketing, Zoe didn't follow the career pathway to work in banks or financial companies. Instead, she worked as an English language teacher from 2008 to 2013, first in private language centres and then in a private international school in Beijing. Zoe quit her job and came to New Zealand in 2013.

5.1.3 Zoe's Reasons to Come to New Zealand

Zoe visited New Zealand as a tourist in 2010, and she was completely enchanted by the beauty and culture of this wonderland. Talking about her first impression of New Zealand, Zoe cheerfully chose words such as "breath-taking, idyllic, pure and simple." Zoe described that trip as a "heart-to-soul journey" because after being so stressed and lost in Beijing's busy city life, her experiences on that trip had made her very relaxed and close to nature. She said that she could "still remember the smell of the wind and grass" when she first stepped on Mt. Eden in 2010 and the taste of a flat white "is still the same as I tasted it 10 years ago in the village."

However, Zoe didn't decide to move to New Zealand immediately after her trip in 2010. She went back to Beijing to work and live until 2013 when the air pollution problem became very serious in Beijing and she and her partner couldn't bear with it anymore. She got sick quite often and became allergic to smog, which made her life in Beijing miserable. At that time, Zoe and her partner were planning to immigrate to another country where the natural environment was clean and healthy, and the social environment was open and welcoming to new immigrants. Their first choice was Canada, with New Zealand as their back-up choice. They planned to study for a local degree or professional qualification as a bridging pathway to merge into the society. While Zoe succeeded in applying for admission

to a Canadian higher institute, Zoe's partner failed in Canada but got an offer from a New Zealand institute. Zoe recalled that they were facing a choice of which country to go and one of them had to give up their preference to follow the other. "It was not a difficult choice to make because we hadn't been to Canada and we knew nothing about that country. But I'd been to New Zealand before, and I liked it." Zoe gave up her offer to Canada and chose to come to New Zealand with her partner.

5.1.4 Zoe's Education in New Zealand

Moving to New Zealand and settling down is not an easy thing, especially when Zoe found that her day-to-day life was quite different from her tourism experiences. After arriving in Auckland, Zoe firstly wanted to find job to teach English because she had plenty of working experience in this field. However, the job market for nonnative English-speaking new immigrants had many barriers to Zoe finding a teaching job. She checked the requirements in job description advertisements and decided to take a Cambridge CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) course in Auckland. She took a full-time intensive course of 4 weeks and passed both the teaching practice and written assignments.

The CELTA course didn't actually pave the way for Zoe to find an English teaching job in Auckland but made her become extremely interested in education philosophies and theories. Zoe explained that,

> *Although I had worked as a teacher for more than 5 years in Beijing, I had never received any systematic training in teaching and education studies. After leaving my former comfort zone and entering a real English-speaking country, I felt an urge to understand more about how students learn and how teachers should support. The Western way of teaching and learning is very different from what I learnt and taught before.*

Another important observation Zoe made was clearly stated as follows:

I used to teach in a private international school and my students are mainly Year 2 to Year 4. What I've found out that if a student can have good habits in learning and thinking, he or she can do very well in every subject or things they want to achieve. But if they haven't formed good habits or personalities, there is little we teachers can do when they are in Year 3 or Year 4. I didn't have children then, but I want to understand how they form different habits in different contexts.

Zoe had many conversations with her classmates and teachers in the CELTA course, and they all provided supportive suggestions to her. Zoe started to consider pursuing a local degree in primary teaching or ECE. However, she didn't move from the CELTA course to another tertiary degree course. Instead, her first step was to volunteer in a local ECE centre to gain some firsthand experience and see how she got along with children. With her friends' recommendation and help, Zoe was lucky enough to volunteer in a small centre on the city fringe for about 2 months. It was Zoe's first time to work with young children under 5 years old in a foreign country, and she strongly felt that New Zealand early childhood centres "are beyond her former understanding of kindergartens." She further reported:

Although it was a small centre with about 50 children, they all come from various social and economic backgrounds. We even have a 3-year-old boy with special needs in that centre. This is something that never happened in my home country because in China children with disabilities or special needs normally stay at home or go to special schools. It blew my mind when I observed how the staff respect and support every child and how children connect and grow together. You know, in a natural and humane way. At that time, I kept on comparing that ECE centre with some high-end expensive kindergartens in Beijing. By expensive, I mean they charge more than RMB150,000 fees annually in the early 2000s. Maybe it's more expensive now, but I still think the care and education children receive from my first volunteer centre are far better than these "expensive" ones. I mean, you can't judge the quality of early childcare by its fees or physical conditions like buildings and

equipment. During my volunteering time, I felt that I was capable to become an ECE teacher because I really enjoyed my time with children.

Therefore, after volunteering in that centre, Zoe took a Graduate Diploma in ECE from the New Zealand Tertiary College (NZTC). It was a 1-year full-time study with many practicum opportunities in ECE centres. Zoe had a lot of expectations and dreams when she studied to become an early childhood teacher, but she strongly feels that "this 1-year initial teacher's training program is not enough for someone to become a qualified ECE teacher" as there is a lot more to "learn from other teachers and from children in real working conditions." Zoe thought that "the value of this type of graduate diploma program is to provide me with a key to enter the ECE working field, and from then on the real learning and professional growing start." Another advantage of the graduate diploma program is that "it raises the entry standard of new early childhood student teachers because you at least have to have a bachelor's degree before you can get enrolled into this 1-year GD program." People like Zoe, who have already obtained a bachelor's or a master's degree in some other major, will have to take this GD program in order to become qualified teachers. That, in some way, has a positive effect in ensuring the quality of ECE workforce because "at least they are smart people, and they are capable and willing to learn."

Zoe also shared that there was a teaching qualification transfer system at the NZTC. She heard that some teachers with registered teaching qualifications in China and enough teaching experience had succeeded to transfer into a New Zealand teaching qualification, but she didn't know how that worked. For Zoe, becoming a qualified ECE teacher in New Zealand meant that "there is a lot to learn and to understand because you need to shake off your old assumptions of early childhood education and children." She further commented that "an innate drive for lifelong learning and education is essential for a qualified ECE teacher because the more you work with children, the more you need to learn." Things have changed over time with respect to children's individual features and the situation of New Zealand's ECE services.

5.1.5 Zoe's Career as an ECE Teacher

Since Zoe's graduation in 2014, she has been worked in three different ECE centres. In her first centre, Zoe grew from a newly qualified teacher into a mature and professional teacher. She worked with mixed-age children from 3 months to 5 years old. The first 2 years in this centre was full of challenges and opportunities. It was from there that Zoe started to form her own ECE understandings and practices. Zoe said:

> *It's very important to really understand what is child-led and play-based interactions in ECE centres. When I was volunteering, my observation was comparatively superficial because I felt the kids were just playing freely and aimlessly. However, after receiving the graduation diploma training in ECE and learning all related childhood studies, I started to learn how to make learning visible through learning stories, and how to support each child with proper scaffolding resources based on my understanding of their needs. It is a huge progress for me, and I feel more confident and focused on in real working conditions and I have learned a lot from other teachers.*

The leadership structure in Zoe's first centre was quite distributive. Every staff member in that centre had the opportunity to lead the planning and to express their needs. It was not easy for Zoe to lead the planning at the very beginning of her career, but she felt the manager and her team teachers "were very tolerant and supportive," which gave her much motivation to do more study and improve herself even after work. Zoe commented:

> *I think I am very lucky because I always meet great people in my life. They don't judge me, and I feel being respected and valued. That means a lot to me to keep on working and growing in ECE circle. I know many ECE teachers get hurt emotionally in their workplace and they quit their job easily when face adversities. After all, the payment and working conditions in ECE centres are not even as good as a salesperson.*

After working in the first centre for about 3 years, Zoe had an opportunity to work as a team leader in a big ECE company which has many branches. She considered that a good way to gain some management experiences and skills and accepted that offer. In her second centre which is quite large with a license for 150 children, Zoe had very different experiences:

> *It's more like working in big business companies instead of in educational early childhood service centres. I felt a lot of pressure from the higher leadership team in terms of the budget, children's enrollment, student–teacher ratio and so on. The company's top leadership and area managers make policies and decisions, and I had to implement them no matter whether I liked it or not. The whole thing was very corporate. They pay too much attention to the profit margin and use many relievers to save the cost. That was bad because these relievers come and leave unsteadily, and they barely know these children. The relationship and trust between teachers and children cannot be nurtured in that way. Then how can we call this "quality education and care for children"?*

In becoming aware of and understanding the limitations and problems in some big private centres, Zoe was better able to articulate her values and act accordingly. There had certainly been struggling times when Zoe tried to behave in ways that met the expectations of others, rather than in ways that she valued and believed. As the team leader, she tried very hard to balance the business requirements from the company and the wellbeing of staff and children:

> *I make compromises all the time, and I know clearly that I can't always do things the way I would like to do…I have to pull myself back and remember, this is not the way I want it to be…and when teachers cannot have their noncontact hours due to the shortage of qualified teachers to cover the ratio, I was sad and frustrated…you know, it's the company's policy problem, not these teachers' fault, and they are great people and I honor them.*

Working in such a centre enriched Zoe's professionalism and self-discovery. She didn't leave this centre until she was pregnant and on maternity leave. Zoe stated very clearly that, for her, working as a team leader in this big, branched centre was

> *not an ideal centre, but I grew a lot in my leadership and management skills. You don't blame different contexts for constraining you from behaving as who you are. From the conflicts between the role expectations and my own practices, I got a lot of support and encouragement from my team teachers, and we all grew stronger in our goodwill for children and community. That's the best part of my work there.*

Zoe took 1-year maternity leave after resigning from the second centre. She hadn't started working when we finished the interview but found a new job in a third centre when we met for the focus group discussion. In between, she worked as a reliever in different centres. Such information will be further reported in the following chapter.

5.1.6 Zoe's Reflections on ECE Services in New Zealand

During the interview, Zoe gave me the impression of being very independent and critical. She shared many reflections and comments on New Zealand's ECE services which I found very interesting.

Zoe started by highly praising *Te Whariki* as "open and compatible with various philosophies and practices." For Zoe, *Te Whariki* can be used as the overarching guidance for all different kinds of centres, no matter whether they are Montessori inspired or Reggio led. She had visited many centres around New Zealand and found that "you can link almost everything you use and teach in your centre to *Te Whariki*, and each centre can interpret these principles and strands in their local way." In the meantime, she also pointed out that "the quality and educational results can also vary a lot depending on each centre's context." We didn't talk about *Te Whariki* for long because Zoe just used *Te Whariki* in a non-descriptive and democratic framework. In terms of a national curriculum for ECE, "*Te Whariki* is unique and world leading," Zoe concluded.

One of her comments on ECE providers is that the government should support qualified teachers to establish new small ECE centres rather than support big ECE companies to expand their branches, especially in some remote and underdeveloped regions. Zoe doesn't like the privatization of New Zealand's ECE services which "has made the education and care for children become a kind of money-making business." She further explained her opinions:

> *You know, there is a phrase in New Zealand to call some big private centres "children's factory" because of the poor quality they provide. The resources are limited and not updated in time. They use too many relievers instead of fully employed staff to meet the ratio requirement and to save costs. I understand the reason why some qualified teachers only choose to work as relievers, but if you use too many relievers, the mobility of the teaching team is too high, and children cannot build up authentic relationships with them. You will find children in these centres are less calm, and they cry and shout more often.*

This is not to say all private centres are like this. According to Zoe's accounts, if some big ECE provider companies pay too much attention to controlling budgets and making profits to meet their annual report in the market, the fundamental value of running the centre will be in contradiction with the quality of the services they provide. Moreover, it's even harder for such centres to establish a good centre culture to attract good teachers to work there and keep their staff. That is a vicious circle. When it comes to smaller family centres owned and run by ECE-qualified teachers, things can be comparatively better mainly because

> *these ECE-qualified teachers really have the heart for children and the community. I know many such teachers who establish their own centres mainly because they want to realize their genuine ideals of childcare philosophies and practices. Consequently, the centre culture and management are much better than these corporate ones.*

Zoe also shared her understanding of good centre culture and management:

the most basic thing is that staff's noncontact hours should be guaranteed. You can't expect ECE teachers work totally selflessly and take too much extra work back home or after working hours. For instance, it's alright to plan and celebrate cultures in special occasions or holidays such as Mother's Day or Father's Day or Christmas and so on, but you shouldn't ask teachers to take too much burden to prepare various activities for marketing purposes.

A culture of learning is very crucial in a centre. Some owners are also centre managers. They present and work with certain ideologies and philosophies. They are role models for on-going learning and can provide centre staff many external opportunities to learn and grow. I know some teachers have worked in the same centre for more than 30 years but still have the passion for childcare and the motivation to learn. You will feel proud for being part of their team.

Most of us have natural love and care for children, and it's also the reason to keep us in this profession. The society should treat teaching in early childhood centres as a highly professional career, not just as a "baby-sitter" or "nanny." You have to satisfy the internal drive of the teaching staff in order to keep them in your centre.

It would appear from Zoe's comment that the centres teachers work in, the management structure, and the collegial relationships they have, can have a significant impact on teachers' professionalism and wellbeing. If teachers are not supported and cared for, then teachers will feel disempowered and misplaced, and their ability to care will be lost.

5.1.7 Zoe's Image of Being a Teacher and Her Personal Identity

Another highlight of Zoe's interview was her perception of her identity as an ECE teacher. It is generally acknowledged that there is a "gap" between an immigrant teacher's understanding of children and the host culture's view of children, and thus confusion and conflicts may occur during the teaching process. However, Zoe believed that such a gap existed in every teacher's knowledge and PD no matter whether they were immigrant teachers or native local teachers.

> *I did have some confusions about play-based learning and child-led teaching. So did my local Kiwi classmates and colleagues. Such confusions mainly come from our mindset and the way we were educated when we were little. I used to have a Kiwi colleague in her early 20s who felt teacher-led teaching in preschools was more productive. She came from a family of educators. Her parents and siblings were all primary school teachers. She actually experienced the same confusion as I did.*

As a Chinese immigrant ECE teacher, when the topic of "culture" was mentioned, Zoe strongly believed that the most significant contribution from Chinese culture is our positive attitudes to learning and education:

> *We Chinese people have always valued the importance of learning and education all through our history. This is rooted in our culture. I am quite sure that other immigrant teachers, who are able to come to New Zealand to study and work, come from a similar family background like I do. It might also be relevant to the one-child policy of China. Most of us are the only child of our family, and we got a lot of attention when we were young. We have consistent need for self-improvement. You can see that most of our Chinese immigrant teachers are active lifelong learners, which I personally believe is a very good image of us.*

Some other cultural elements, such as Chinese language, festival symbols and food, also form the diversity in a centre. Zoe loved to share these cultural elements in a natural and caring way. Especially for Chinese language, Zoe would greet children in Mandarin "*Ni Hao*" or thank them with "*Xiexie*." Such natural learning moments happen every day with other cultures too, like French, Japanese and so on, and, needless to say, Māori culture as well. Zoe clearly stated that a "multilingual environment is very beneficial for preschool children's cognitive and social development," not only because they can articulate several words or phrases in Mandarin, but more importantly because children will be more open-

minded if they are exposed to a multicultural place. “They are more willing to embrace differences and show respect each other.” Zoe added in her observation,

> *For me, being there as a teacher itself is part of the education. I am there, and that’s a natural part of their life. Children will feel I am a nice person and they like me. We build up relationship together and they know they can trust me although I look different from them.*

At that moment of our interview, I took a note that it would be interesting to investigate how young children’s identity and their world outlook could be influenced by immigrant teachers or caregivers from diverse backgrounds. It would be even more interesting if there could be a longitudinal study to follow up these children until they are in their 30s or 40s.

In her interaction with Chinese immigrant parents and caregivers, Zoe found that she could understand and handle some subtle situations better and quicker.

> *Most Chinese immigrant parents care a lot about water play in wintertime, dirty play, bare feet, food nutrition and other health and safety issues. I totally understand why. I accept their concerns and feelings with empathy, then I can explain our practices and reasons to them. Most of the time they feel secure and cooperate with us very well.*

> *You see, sometimes we need to settle the parents first before settle the children. For example, in some Chinese immigrant families, grandparents are the main caregivers, and they have the power to decide a lot of things in the family, while the father has the least power. It is hard for my Kiwi colleagues to understand this kind of family structure or the influence from grandparents. Then I can explain to them the culture behind this and strategies to communicate.*

At the end of this interview, Zoe expressed her hope that there will be an organization to advocate for the welfare and wellbeing for early childhood teachers. “NZEI [New Zealand Education Institute] supports primary school teachers in a good way, not for ECE teachers. Many immigrant ECE teachers even don’t know the existence of this organization. If we

have an organization specifically support ECE teachers, that would be great," Zoe concluded.

5.2 Gloria's Interview

5.2.1 Introduction

Gloria has been working as an ECE teacher for over 4 years. She came to New Zealand as an international student and went to Christchurch for language school courses. Then she took a postgraduate diploma program at the University of Auckland. After obtaining the qualification, Gloria found a full-time job in a daycare centre based in Auckland and worked there for 4 years. During the time of our interview, Gloria was studying for her master's degree in leadership in ECE at the University of Auckland and working as a part-time ECE teacher in a centre. She shared her experiences of finding her direction and working as an ECE teacher in New Zealand. Her reflections on the image of children, ECE teachers' role, the relationship between children, parents and teachers, ECE policies, and her career plan are well presented in this interview.

5.2.2 Why New Zealand?

Gloria came to New Zealand from Beijing when she was nearly 22. She came here alone as an international student to study English language pathway courses in Christchurch. Growing up in a big extended family, Gloria had brothers, sisters and cousins to play with. The close relationship among family members gave Gloria a strong sense of belonging and security in her childhood. When introducing her family, Gloria's voice sounds cheerful and her face shines with smiles, and she proudly claims that "even though I don't see them often when I stay in New Zealand, I still feel very connected to them. We share our life moments online almost every day. I don't feel guilty for leaving them."

Before coming to New Zealand, Gloria had already obtained a bachelor's degree in business from a university in Beijing. She didn't know what she really wanted to do after graduation, but it was clear to her that she didn't want to find a job in a commercial company. There is no such a thing as a "gap year" in China. You either continue to read for

a master's degree or go to work. At that time, it was a trend for many of her friends and classmates to go abroad to explore new opportunities. The underpinning reason for that trend is a complex mix of economic and social factors, such as money, time, social connections and other resources. Gloria and her parents visited several admission agencies to discuss the possibility for Gloria to go abroad. The first decision they had to make was which major to study. Since Gloria was not that interested or good at her business major, she was not ready to go on with business studies. Gloria's father suggested that "Maybe in the future, you can work as a teacher. I always admire teachers a lot and it is quite suitable for a female to work as a teacher. You will be highly respected and have many holidays. And when you have your own children, you can give them good family education." Gloria also recalled that "I used to look after my younger siblings and cousins in my family. Deep in my heart, I deem children as the most precious in a family. I love being with them. So, I thought working as a teacher will be great." Therefore, they decided she would read for a major which would pave Gloria's way to becoming a teacher in the future.

Based on Gloria's interest and situation, the admission agent suggested she go to New Zealand to study for a postgraduate diploma in teaching. It was actually the first time for Gloria and her family to really get to know New Zealand because their initial destination was the United States. The agent gave reasons for her recommendation: "It only takes 1 year to finish the postgraduate diploma program in New Zealand if you study full time, which is both time-wise and cost-wise if you take tuition fees, accommodation and other daily expenses into consideration. The early childhood curriculum in New Zealand is world leading, and you will have a clear pathway from obtaining qualification to full registration. With that qualification, you are eligible to teach either in kindergartens or primary school in New Zealand. Besides, New Zealand is the only country which gives a post-study work visa to international students who study at Level 5 and above. And that will provide you with better job-hunting opportunities after your graduation. Even if you don't want to stay in New Zealand to work and live, you can also come back Beijing to teach because this ECE qualification is accredited by both New Zealand and China." That is quite a

convincing promotion of the Graduate Diploma program in teaching in New Zealand. Gloria and her family took the agent's suggestion and signed a consultancy services contract with the agent's company. They decided to apply for the Graduate Diploma in Teaching program in New Zealand.

However, the application process was not as easy as they thought because the English language-proficiency requirement was quite high for international non-English-speaking applicants. Gloria took several IELTS exams in Beijing but still couldn't meet the standard. "Ah, it was a nightmare to recall these IELTS examination days. It was so hard to get a 7, and I never managed to get a 7 in the writing part. I finally gave up in trying to pass IELTS in Beijing as it was too time-consuming and stressful." Instead, the agent helped Gloria to get an offer from an English language school in Christchurch. She came to New Zealand to read language courses first and have a taste of Kiwi life before making any further decisions. In 2013, Gloria came to Christchurch alone with a desire to become a teacher and uncertainty about the future.

5.2.3 From Volunteer to ECE Student Teacher

During her stay in Christchurch, Gloria made the best of her time in both her English language study and gaining local experience. She wanted to know how ECE worked in New Zealand and tried to test her own interest in this field. In her spare time, Gloria found a volunteer role in a Montessori centre near her place. She went there twice a week and stayed 4 hours each time. It was her first time in a centre working with children. In retrospect, Gloria commented:

> *I was quite lost at the beginning and didn't know what to do at first. Montessori centres are quite unique in their own way and they have specific routines and practices. I knew nothing about that, but other teachers were very nice. They never blamed me for doing something improperly. Most of my time in the centre, I played with children when they came to me, read stories to them, or just observed how other teachers organized their daily routines and interacted with children. I had no*

theoretical or pedagogical knowledge of early childhood education at that time, but one thing emerged for sure from that volunteer experience was that I really enjoy working with children and want to learn more.

Therefore, after finishing the English language course in Christchurch and fulfilling the admission requirement, Gloria came to the University of Auckland to read for her Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (ECE). Her interest in gaining practical experience didn't change even when she moved to a new place in Auckland. Apart from attending lectures and finishing learning tasks at the university, Gloria managed to work as a volunteer in a church-based kindergarten. Children at that kindergarten are from 3 years to 5 years old. Gloria noticed that "the centre has a transition to school program every afternoon for children who are turning 5, and they have literacy and numeracy activities too." She went there three times a week and stayed for half of the day, depending on her timetable and her discussion with the centre manager. She wanted to volunteer in that kindergarten on a stable timetable because "each of us, me, other teachers, kids and manager, will know whom we will work with and what to expect each week." She was really committed to that role and her colleagues gave her a lot of support. Although it was not required by her Graduate Diploma program at the university, Gloria started to write her own reflections after work with encouragement from the centre manager. Gloria recalled:

I still remember the words she told me when I was working there. She said to me "Gloria, you are going to be a great teacher because you have the heart for children, and you work hard." That means a lot to me you know, they treated me as a team member, one of them, not just an easy-come-easy-go volunteer. The manager even helped me to edit my reflection and discussed some parts with me. I had many aha moments through learning by doing and was feeling more confident.

Gloria had a better understanding of children and her image of children started to change:

Children here are very capable and independent, which is very much different from what I expected. I thought a 3-year-old kid may need adults to help them with putting up their clothes and shoes, or they might still need adults to feed them. That

is pretty much what I saw in Beijing. But here in this kindergarten, each child is quite independent and capable in eating, sleeping, playing and working with others. Sometimes the teacher may ask some questions which sound quite scientific or difficult, but children love to answer them with imagination and their own ideas. There are no right or wrong or fixed answers, and I just love to see how eager and active they are in whatever they choose to do. They are so free and happy. That's what childhood is supposed to be like.

With the progress of her graduate diploma study, it was time for Gloria to take practicums arranged by the faculty and she stopped volunteering in that church-based kindergarten. She went to three different centres in Auckland: two daycare centres in big companies, one AKA (Auckland Kindergarten Association) kindergarten. For Gloria, it was the first time for her working with under-2 infants in daycare centres, and it was a good opportunity for her to compare private daycare centres and AKA kindergartens. She commented:

Each centre is different even though they may belong to the same brand or company. They all have their own philosophy and daily routines… Working 8 hours in a daycare centre is very tiring. I can hardly hear myself think after work. Working conditions in AKA kindergartens are comparatively better, and you can have more noncontact hours to reflect, discuss and plan.

Working with under-2 infants involves a lot of care and emotional security. The wellbeing and care for under-2 infants and toddlers are more than just babysitting. You need strong and committed teachers to plan and deliver quality education to young children.

From these practicums, I learned three things: one is that I prefer to work with under 2s. I feel so peaceful and cheerful when I am with them. Their lovely eyes and faces literally brighten up my heart... The second thing is that I start to connect what I learn in university with what I practice and observe in the centre. I start to look at things in a different light and that affects what I say to the children. The

> *third thing is that getting a job in an AKA kindergarten is very difficult for a new graduate student. The working conditions in AKA kindergartens are better than the private ones I practiced in mainly because the working hours are shorter and the workload is reasonable. They don't expect you to take paperwork or documentation back home after work. I feel less stressed in AKA kindergartens and my spirits are brighter. That for sure influences my morale and how I work with children and other staff.*

Gloria also acknowledged that English language proficiency had limited her choices in a certain way because "I can't compete with those English native speakers in the job market no matter how much I try." Although she met the postgraduate diploma enrollment requirements of English, Gloria found that working English in real contexts was more complex and subtle. She admitted that "this is another reason why I prefer to work with under 2s because I don't need to talk to them that much compared with to those super active over 2s." In order to increase her competitiveness in finding a job after graduation, Gloria worked very hard to get high scores in her course work. She wanted to "give the employer a good first impression of being hardworking and willing to learn." Gloria also thought highly of the 1-year full-time postgraduate diploma program:

> *We have amazing teachers who are very authentic and knowledgeable. They lead me into the field of early childhood education and tickle the fire in my heart to work for the best of children. I am still in contact with some of my teachers to share and discuss things in my work… I also build up a good network with my classmates. Peer support is very important. We work in small groups for reading tasks and assignments. We also share job opportunities and interview strategies. Many of us are becoming lifelong friends, which is the best bonus of taking this GD program.*

5.2.4 An Early Childhood Teacher Career

After graduation from the University of Auckland, Gloria succeeded in finding a full-time job in a small centre and worked there for 4 years. She has a clear idea of her work in an

early childhood centre. Deep down, she loves children and wants to create a safe and happy space for everyone in the centre.

> *For me I am fully motivated by my responsibilities and gratitude. By responsibilities, I mean I always put children first and try my best to spend loving and caring time with them when they are in our centre. You know, when parents send their children to our centre, it means a lot of trust in us and I want to live up to their trust. I feel I'm looking after the most precious part of the whole family. That's a lot of responsibility. I love working with my team to make our centre a happy and safe place where everyone enjoys their life together here. By gratitude, I mean I really appreciate the owner and centre manager offering me this job and helping me grow from provisionally registered to fully registered. I do learn a lot from my mentors and team members. They are great people.*

The centre Gloria was working in is a small one with a license for 35 children. It was a newly opened centre when Gloria joined the teaching team. When Gloria joined the teaching team, she chose to stay in the under-2 baby room. "I was lucky to stay in the baby room as I wish. And what was out of my expectation was that I could stay in the baby room for 4 years." Gloria sounded quite happy about her stable role in the baby room as she could have enough time and opportunities to develop her own understanding and philosophy in teaching under-2s.

> *I see that it's an on-going process that you kind of try and grow alongside children and parents and colleagues that might have different backgrounds and views, but with some similarities as well. Each baby is different, and it takes time and patience to get to know them and build the relationship with them and their family. Although I have stayed in the same room for 4 years, I'm not the same teacher every day and every year. I can see my own progress in professional development and personal growth. You never stop learning when you work with other people…*

Gloria drew a timeline of her 4 years working full time in this centre. For the first year, she called it "a year of uncertainty" because she was new to that centre and tried to understand things and people around her. The centre was opened just a few months before Gloria joined them. It took time for the local community and parents to get to know their centre and took them about 8 months to have full enrollment of children. Meanwhile, the manager was trying to hire teachers and build up the teaching team along with the changing situation of children's enrollment. It was not easy. Sometimes they had to use relievers to cover the ratio. Gloria stated to work with two babies in her room with her mentor who was working both with under 2s and over 2s at that time. "She was a fully registered and experienced teacher. But she had to cover and lead in two different rooms at the beginning of our centre's opening," Gloria said. In an uncertain but necessary way, Gloria shared the leadership responsibilities in the baby room even at the beginning of her career. She was working very hard to understand these two babies' daily routine, set up resources, get used to her daily workload and communicate with their parents. She recalled that period of time with proud smiles in the interview.

> *It was challenging for a new teacher to start in that way, but I managed to survive and grow. I was feeling very tired and stressed, even lost from time to time. It was more than a job to look after babies as I really put my heart in caring for them. You know, a lot of trust from their parents and I want to prove to them that I am reliable and professional…I tried very hard and learned to find my feet in that centre.*

Gloria called her second year of working in the centre "a year of fast growing." The centre employed new teachers with the growth in children's enrollments. Gradually they formed a steady teaching team in the second year and Gloria could work with another two teachers with 15 babies. Her mentor came back to the same room and worked as the head teacher. She could work closely with her mentor and discuss her doubts and questions.

> *I finished the required 12 criteria listed by the Education Council in order to register as an ECE teacher. My mentor worked closely with me to set my weekly and monthly goals, review my reflections, and give feedback. For me, it's more than a mentoring*

and induction program. It's a team-building process and on-going learning, which is great!

Gloria was quite lucky to have this type of mentoring support. It was very influential for her daily practices which helped her settle in her new role smoothly. Gloria learned about the centre's health and safety policies in great detail and integrated her understanding with daily interaction with babies. It provided Gloria a sense of belonging and a culture of on-going learning, which was fundamental for her PD and career placement. She could review and discuss certain policies with her mentor and other team members whenever a certain circumstance arose. Gloria shared one story about the "open-door policy" in her centre:

> *In our centre, we have a policy to keep the door between our indoor area and outdoor area open all the time during our operation time which is 7am to 6pm. The indoor and outdoor flow is supposed to be open and free for children to choose, but I think we should not open the doors so early in winter time. New Zealand's winter is cold and wet, and children may catch a cold easily. That will lead to running nose, cough, ear infection or tummy upset, and children may get sick over and over again. It's actually freezing in the early morning when children are dropped off around 7.30am. I suggested keeping the door closed until later on when the sun warms up the outdoor area a little bit, say, around 9am, but my head teacher thought my suggestion was "disturbing" because Kiwi kids "love to be part of nature…should be free to run indoors and outdoors right through the year even in winter."*
>
> *At the same time, the indoor temperature standard by the Ministry of Education is only 16°C, for children as well as babies. I myself feel the centre is cold in wintertime. When children get sick, both the teachers and parents will be infected. What's worse is that neither we ECE teachers nor their parents have enough sick leave. We work sick a lot of the time, and that's not good for anyone.*

In regard to the above situation, the solution they finally worked out was to install another heat pump and increase the indoor temperature to 20°C in wintertime while the door was kept open during the operational time. Gloria also shared that she had encountered cultural differences in understanding why children would get sick.

> *I was trying to explain to my head teacher that children would get sick because of cold weather. You catch a cold because it "IS" cold. It's more of the Chinese medicine philosophy if the temperature balance between your body and the outside circumstances is broken. But my head teacher believed that children would get sick because of bacteria or viruses, not because of cold weather.*

Such a cultural difference also existed in parents' attitudes and expectations. Gloria observed that some parents would bring spare jackets and hats to the centre and asked teachers to help children put them on when playing outside in cold weather. Some other parents didn't care about the cold weather and even believed that such coldness would be good for kids' immune system. "Some parents just shrugged off such illnesses and kept on sending their sick kids to our centre as long as they didn't have a fever. I think it's unfair in a certain way to other healthy kids and our staff."

Gloria called the third year "a year of stability" because she was very familiar with centre policies and daily routines. Her ability to make learning visible with documentation and learning stories was highly praised by her team.

> *By the third year, I was very skillful in writing learning stories and could finish them in the allocated 2-hours noncontact time. That was a big progress compared with what I did in the first 2 years because I used to take paperwork back home after work to finish.*

Meanwhile, she could help with curriculum planning and centre evaluation paperwork. She became fully registered in the same year with evidence and folders prepared by herself. Gloria treated the centre as her second home because "I spent most of my time in the centre and the most important relationships I had in New Zealand are in the centre too, with kids and colleagues."

Then it came to the fourth year. There was a big change of the management team of the centre which caused the manager and two head teachers to leave Gloria's centre. The new manager took a profit-chasing position in running the centre, which aroused extra anxiety and burdens among the team. Gloria described the fourth year as a "changing point" mainly because a lot of things changed in the centre and she wanted to leave the centre and seek better opportunities.

> *The new manager wanted to minimize the cost by using unqualified relievers to cover the minimum ratio requirements instead of finding permanent teachers. She also put strict budgets on purchasing new resources, which is very disheartening when we plan for special events celebration in the centre with our community. She doesn't really understand the quality and importance of early childhood education. She treated the centre more of a profit-making business. But we as teachers are not in a position to criticize that.*

Gloria further explained that she had no prejudice against relievers, and she believed that many relievers were as good as qualified teachers. But speaking of teamwork in the room, having relievers come and go would mean extra workload for permanent teachers. It was not only about the teacher–children ratio when you are on floor, but more about each teacher's and reliever's understanding of children. "You can't support their learning and developing needs if you don't even know them or understand their way of asking for help," Gloria commented. Meanwhile, relievers were not required to do as much paperwork as permanent teachers did, which again increased the amount of paperwork for permanent teachers. "It was a vicious circle. When permanent teachers can't take this situation anymore, they choose to leave too. And when the turnover rate of a centre is high, it will become more and more difficult for the centre to hire permanent teachers because people talk and share what was happening in that centre."

At the end of Gloria's fourth year of working in that centre, she decided to leave that used-to-love-so-much second home and started to read for a master's degree in education back

at university. “I didn’t want to find a job in another centre at that time. I was more interested in understanding leadership in ECE. Every teacher can be a leader in some way, and I want to find out how to nurture a team with good leadership strategies and styles.” For Gloria, the fourth year was truly a “changing point” because her observations and experiences in this year actually inspired her interest in different leadership styles in ECE. This is a typical example of on-going growth of an early childhood teacher.

5.2.5 Teaching as Ethical and Professional

Another prominent part of Gloria’s interview was her understanding of teaching as ethical and professional. It’s interesting to see how she distinguished these two words deliberately in some cases. She considered a good teacher as incredibly responsible and very moral. Even when she made up her mind to pursue a postgraduate diploma in teaching, Gloria and her family all thought that teachers were “engineers of people’s soul” (literal translation of the Chinese phrase) who are highly respected and valued by the society. Such a belief was reflected many times when Gloria talked about her responsibilities in the baby room and her commitment to the wellbeing of children. Meanwhile, Gloria also pointed out that the social status of early childhood teachers is not as high as she expected, and the contribution of early teachers’ work has been undervalued.

Working ethically had several meanings for Gloria. She first used this word “ethical” when she described how she thought the 1:5 teacher–children ratio in baby rooms was “not ethical.” For Gloria, being ethical means that you put the wellbeing of both children and teachers at the heart. It was of serious concern to Gloria that by MoE regulations, some centres just have the minimum number of qualified teachers to meet the requirement instead of wanting to provide quality care to children.

> *Taking care of babies is a very demanding job. If you think it’s hard to picture, just think of how tiring it is when you look after your own baby at home. We each teacher have five babies in the centre. It’s quite demanding, physically and emotionally. And*

their needs vary a lot across the same room. Sometimes I wish I could have eight hands and 10 legs you know.

She suggested that the ratio of teachers to children should vary according to children's ages in baby rooms: 1:2 for 3–6 months, 1:3 for 7 months to 1 year, and 1:4 for 1–2 years. The rational underpinning her suggestion was that "if teachers are tired or in low spirits, they cannot give quality care and love to children no matter how much they want to."

Gloria and her colleagues also met some challenging situations when some parents insisted on asking teachers to give medicine (like cough-relief syrups bought from a pharmacy) to their child without a doctor's prescription. They had empathy for the parent's good intention when they told the teacher that they gave these medicines to their child at home anyway, but they also had to say "no" to this type of requirement as it was against the centre's regulations. Gloria reported that she felt very "frustrated" when parents left the medicine with her even when she explicitly explained the reason why she couldn't. "I take full responsibilities for what I do and what I say to children and their parents even behind the closed door, and I'm very careful." She also used one example of how they settled down new children and their parents.

> *In my role, I've witnessed many "first times" for our students' parents: their first time to be parents, first time to send their beloved child to daycare, and first time to enter the teacher–parent partnership. They feel worried or even guilty for sending their babies to daycare centres because they have to go back work. We teachers understand parents' anxiety and fear, and we try our best to settle both parents and their child during their pre-visits and transition sessions.*
>
> *We spend a lot of time talking with parents about their child's daily routine, preferred music and any other concerns parents may have. It doesn't mean we can meet all their expectations. For example, if parents say they hope we can cuddle their children all the time during the nap time, but we are open to discuss what we can and what we can't do with them. We don't make false promises to just make*

parents "feel" happy and secure. Most of the time, parents feel more secure if they know more of our policies and regulations.

Another ethical example Gloria gave was how she communicated with some parents whose children had behavior problems or special needs. It was quite thought provoking to hear Gloria's reflections on her communication with different parents. One thing stands out clearly is her empathy and respect for parents. She would share her understanding of their children's behaviors without judgment. Parents might have different perspectives on raising a child from teachers' understanding. Some children had rough play at home with their father or elder brothers, but they might hurt other children when playing together in the centre because they couldn't control their strength or excitement. Some parents tended to spoil their children without knowing the importance of setting up boundaries at an early age. Some parents didn't know how to redirect or model their kids when they bite or beat others just because they didn't now other better ways to express their ideas and feelings. However, when communicating with these parents, early childhood teachers need to be both professional and ethical.

Parents are not expecting to be given a lesson by their children's early childhood teacher about parenting skills. I always try to describe "facts" of what has happened instead of telling them my "opinions." Then I may ask questions to intrigue parents' reflections on these "facts." I feel that I shouldn't take a position of the professional person who-knows-all. I do my best even behind closed doors. But if parents ask for suggestions, I'd share our practices and strategic plans in the centre and recommend some readings. The subtlety of mutual trust and boundaries is very difficult to put in words, but we can feel it.

Gloria thought about her students all the time, no matter whether it was at work or after work. For example, she would pick up leaves, pinecones and other loose parts for the centre's art activities when she was hiking in the mountains; or she would buy some decoration materials for special events and holiday celebrations when she was shopping

for other things over the weekend. In Gloria's words, "putting your students at heart is an innate responsibility of a teacher." That is also why Gloria believed that being an early childhood teacher is an on-going learning and discovery journey. Although she had worked in the baby room of the same centre for 4 years, she still had the urge to understand a lot of things because "life is always changing, and we can't use the same way to deal with different things." The centre had a preference for some PD programs. As Gloria's centre is Reggio Emilia inspired, there were many opportunities for Gloria and her colleagues to attend PD workshops or seminars about Reggio. According to Gloria's understanding, it is easy for centres to claim that they are "Reggio inspired," but teachers have to consider lots of varieties and specifications in each centre to actualize these philosophies and claims. Gloria and her colleagues had a good teamwork in curriculum planning which integrated *Te Whariki* and Reggio-inspired practices into their daily practices. Personally, Gloria was also very interested in the Pikler philosophy (relationship-based respectful practices to infants and toddlers) because she was working with under 2s. She was in need of more support in the assessment of infants' and toddlers' learning.

> *When we prepared the learning environment for infants and toddlers, I was confused in assessing infants' and toddlers' learning, especially for making their learning visible in writing learning stories.*

Another point Gloria made was her perspective on unqualified teachers. She thought that some unqualified early childhood teachers in her centre were as professional as qualified and registered teachers. These unqualified teachers didn't get a recognized qualification in New Zealand's NZQA system and couldn't register in the Education Council system. But they were experienced in working with children, did the same job as other qualified teachers, shared same responsibilities and duties as well, although they were paid at a lower hourly rate. When talking about her former unqualified permanent colleagues, Gloria couldn't hold back her feelings and admiration.

> *They don't underperform because they are unqualified. Their intentions are very proactive and responsive. We share responsibilities as a team. Sometimes when we*

receive parents' complaints, they feel the same way as we do. I didn't know their salary when I was working with them because that's not something you talk about in the workplace. When they told me how much they were paid hourly when I left the centre, I was feeling very sad and unfair because they were really underpaid just because of a qualification. I think qualifications can't prove anything. These unqualified teachers are good role models of being ethical and professional even in unfavorable circumstances.

Gloria called her perspectives "reflective and critical," and she was particularly interested in finding out better ways to support every teacher and child in a centre. "I see no reason why we shouldn't create a nurturing place for everyone. If everyone is willing to contribute in their way, the whole team and centre will have a healthy and sustainable development." That is also why Gloria set off to pursue a master's study in leadership in ECE and tried to find out her future paths. "It's not easy," Gloria concluded, "but it's worth doing."

5.3 Carol's Interview

5.3.1 Introduction

Carol is an early childhood teacher who has been working in different centres in Auckland for more than 7 years. Her story of becoming an early childhood teacher in New Zealand is also a self-discovery journey and she comments "I've learnt and grown a lot so far." This narrative writing paints a complex and often difficult picture of Carol's experiences, and of what it took to find her way as an immigrant early childhood teacher in New Zealand.

Carol's experiences and reflections may be shared by all early childhood teachers regardless of whether they are immigrants or not. There are good times, bad times, confusing times, and times of thriving, laughing, and crying. All together, they represent the colorful picture of an immigrant early childhood teacher's journey. For Carol, it is an examined life. Every step moving forward involved efforts and tensions, and every choice she made was well thought out. It is important to note that, while Carol's narrative may sound pragmatic and critical when she talks about her change of major, the mentoring

structures and working conditions, in her conversation, Carol emphasized a love and care for the children, families and community and displayed an independent searching for professional growth and excellence.

5.3.2 Coming from Shanghai

Carol comes from a middle-class family in Shanghai. She came to New Zealand in 2007 when she was 16 and was enrolled in a high school in Wellington to study in Year 12 and Year 13.

Carol said that her parents had made the decision for her to come to New Zealand to study. They visited a friend's home and met the daughter of that family who had immigrated to New Zealand in 1998. During that visit, they shared a lot of the idyllic lifestyle in New Zealand and explored the possibilities for Carol to go abroad and study. It is quite common for well-off families in Shanghai to send their children abroad to pursue further education. One reason is that good-quality education resources are very restricted and uneven in China, even nowadays. The other reason is that parents believe that sending their children abroad will enrich their children's experiences and provide a better platform for their future education and career placement.

Carol simply thought it would be a great escape from the tedious high school life in Shanghai which was crammed with exams and competitions. It didn't matter which foreign country her parents would send her to as long as she could go abroad. Carol reported that "When my parents asked me whether I would want to go to New Zealand to study, I said '*yes'* without any hesitation. All I wanted was to avoid the university entrance examination in China. That's all I thought when I was 16." However, Carol understood her parents' decision better when she grew older. It was not as random as Carol's choice. They chose New Zealand mainly for two reasons:

> *It was easier and cheaper to send me to New Zealand to continue my study compared with sending me to other Western countries. You know, the tuition fees are cheaper, and the enrollment procedure was relatively simple and less*

competitive. Also, my parents thought that it was very helpful to have friends and relatives in Wellington because they could act as guardian roles while I was alone in a new foreign country. That made them feel safer.

Even today, Carol's family still agree that sending her to New Zealand was the "right" decision.

5.3.3 Education in New Zealand

After graduation from high school in Wellington, Carol was admitted to the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) for a Bachelor of Hospitality and Tourism in 2009. Her first-year study at AUT was featured with uncertainty. On the one hand, she didn't really like the hospitality and tourism major and found most of the courses boring. On the other hand, Carol was worried about her future career placement after graduation:

You see, I wanted to stay in New Zealand after my study and I was doing my calculation at that time: considering the immigration policies at that time, if I graduate from AUT with a bachelor's degree in hospitality, I would have to go to a restaurant or a hotel to work as a waitress or servant. I could only apply for residency until I had enough working experiences and could gain a manager position in the restaurant or hotel, which was quite difficult and competitive. I didn't think I could make it.

Her account of not wanting to work in restaurants or hotels after graduation is interesting: "as working in the hospitality industry gave me a feeling of inferiority, and my family and relatives in Shanghai would laugh at me if they knew I went abroad to study and spent so much money and time but ended up working as a *servant*." Carol became quite sentimental when she talked about how other people would think of her, and her tone when saying "servant" was sarcastic and disapproving, which was very much to my surprise. For Carol, studying a hospitality and tourism major meant that her future career placement would lead to a "downturn of her social status." She felt that she lacked interest in studying related courses in AUT, and she quit at the end of her first university year in 2009.

In the same year, Carol applied for Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) at NZTC. She was enrolled in 2010 and graduated in 2012. It was quite a big decision to make especially after she had spent that much money and time in her first year in AUT. Carol explained her reason "because that gave me a better opportunity to gain my residence visa after graduation. My goal was very clear."

While the English language requirement is always encountered as an obstacle for immigrant teachers to get registration in the early childhood field, Carol did not perceive that as a problem because of her high school study experiences in Wellington were certified as adequate to meet the English language proficiency requirement for ECE bachelor enrollment. Carol was happy about that because "It was easy, much easier and quicker than preparing for and taking IELTS exams…I know some friends took ages to get an overall score of Band 7 to register, and that is very hard."

During her study at NZTC, Carol had a lot of dreams and recognition of the realities. She found that learning to become a qualified early childhood teacher was very different from what she expected. She took most of her courses online and learnt a lot of theories. Carol remarked that the best part of her bachelor education was the relationship between her classmates and teachers. The theoretical learning itself meant nothing more than what was needed to finish required assignments and papers. A lot of the meaning of her theoretical study only came to light later when she reflected on her teaching against certain theories. There seemed to exist a gap between academic education/training in colleges and universities and the real situation in different ECE centres. Apart from academic or theoretical studies, Carol suggested that ECE educational colleges and universities should advocate emotional readiness and stress management skills for their students to "ensure that student teachers will have less struggle in the 'real job' settings at the beginning of their career." Carol admitted that she was too young at that time to know how to take care of children:

I was totally freaked out in my first practicum when I was put in a baby's room... I didn't know how to cuddle a baby in my entire life before that, and the noises and crying really drove me crazy... I even vomited when I saw poos in the diaper.

This kind of situation is not rare for many young ECE students who are in their 20s and have had no experience in looking after children.

As for practicums, Carol commented that the quality of practicums was often compromised by real working conditions (teacher–children ratio, philosophy, personality struggles, management, etc.) in different centres and the availability of your associate teacher. In one of her practicums, Carol was required to do all the cleaning up work in different rooms and the kitchen and she felt that she was treated "as a free labor worker who cleans up all the time with no interaction with children." During most of her practicums, she was left to her own devices to observe everything in her home centre and finish required paperwork. Carol also shared that you need strong social connections and good luck in finding your home centres when you are still a student teacher. These social connections may include your relationship with your supervisor and practicum placement manager, your centre manager and colleagues, the rapport with your associate teacher and mentors, the recommendations and references you may get if you know early childhood teachers in different centres.

Overall, Carol's education in New Zealand prepared her with accredited qualifications to work in early childhood centres. The initial motivation for Carol to study and work in ECE was its usefulness for gaining employment and residency. Favorable immigration policies and the surge in need for qualified ECE teachers are attractive options for international graduates and other immigrants who may not have previously considered a career in ECE. Carol made clear statement of doing her own calculation, evaluating costs and gains, and maneuvering in different social contexts.

5.3.4 From Student to Teacher

After graduating with a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) at NZTC in 2012, Carol found a job as an early childcare centre teacher in Auckland and has been working as an ECE teacher since then.

In New Zealand, one must hold registration and a current practicing certificate to be lawfully employed in schools, kindergartens and most teaching positions in ECE settings. Under the regulations from the Teaching Council, one must receive related qualifications from recognized New Zealand tertiary providers in order to gain provisional certification in teaching. It normally takes 2 to 3 years for a provisionally certificated ECE teacher to become fully certificated and registered if they meet all the induction and mentoring program and teaching position/time requirements. As for Carol, she was enrolled in a Level 7 Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) study at NZTC and was recognized as a provisional registered ECE teacher after graduation from NZTC.

Carol spent 4 years in her first centre, from March 2012 to May 2016. It was a small private centre with a license for 50 children: 10 under 2s, and forty 2- to 5-year-olds. She first worked with a mixed-age 2 to 5 group for 3 years, and 1 year with under 2 babies. The first year to work as a full-time ECE teacher was very much different from what she learnt or expected because "when you are on floor, your mind and body are too busy to follow the ideal way of observing, noticing and responding steps as you are taught in universities." The centre's philosophy was vague to Carol although it did have a philosophy statement on the centre's website and parents' information package. There was an obvious gap between the centre's philosophy statement and teachers' everyday practices. If the centre's teachers were asked to explain the meaning of its philosophy, they were not confident or consistent. Carol remarked that "It was *just* a centre. It's hard to say whether it's a Reggio or Montessori inspired centre."

As a newly graduated teacher, the first 2 years were challenging for Carol to handle all kinds of unexpected situations with little and limited support from her first workplace. "The

mentoring system was just a matter of form. I was pretty much on my own to learn everything," Carol reflected. Her mentor was too busy with children or other workloads to guide her through. In most cases, her mentor would recommend some reading materials and PD events to Carol, give reflection forms for Carol to fill in, and sign her name as the mentor, but they didn't really have in-depth discussion over these. However, the situation Carol had gone through was not uncommon among her peers. In assuming this mentoring role, Carol found the quality of a centre's mentoring structure is often compromised by real working conditions.

At the same time, Carol's most significant struggle was one of leadership versus teamwork. There was also a hierarchy structure in her first centre's management: the manager was at the top level of authority, and could hire and fire teachers and relievers, distribute funds and resources to different rooms, put teachers in different rooms as needed to fulfill ratio requirements from the MoE, deal with personality conflicts among teachers, and handle difficult parents and their complaints with tactics and so on. The second level of authority was the headteachers in each room. They could decide the teaching plan, teachers' rooster scheme, and children's routines. The interpersonal relationship within a centre is quite subtle and causes extra emotional stress among the staff team. In the first 2 years of working in her first centre, Carol felt her voice was "hardly heard" and she was not valued as much as she should be. Carol recalled one occasion with the headteacher in her room:

> *It was a raining winter morning. I wanted to help a new boy to put on his jumper before the outdoor play because his parents strongly required me to. But the headteacher stopped me and said the weather was okay and other children were all good with bare feet and no jumper. She also said I was too protective and shouldn't listen to parents without professional judgment. The next day the boy got a cold and his parents blamed me for "not taking good care" of him.*

Carol worked in her first centre for 4 years, and then she worked for 1 year in a second centre. After that, she worked as a registered reliever in many centres for about a year. Now

she is working with 3-4 years old students in the third centre. The major reason for her leaving was that she couldn't stand some centre policies anymore, especially

> *if your job today is changing nappies, you will have to stay in the nappy changing room all the time and change nappies for all babies. Instead of caring and intimate moments, it turns to be quite frustrating and nasty. Not good for any of us.*

She also argued that there was a big difference between her tertiary education and real working conditions: "While your lecturers and professors encourage you to bring the best out of children as ECE teachers, your employers expect you to face the realities of life and business."

5.3.5 Reflections on Professional Development

Looking back her own experiences, Carol reflected on how different centre philosophies, cultures, management styles impacted her PD.

In her first centre, Carol reported "the best thing I had learned was how to settle children when they are new to the centre and build trust with their family." The student turnover rate in her first centre was high, and teachers had to deal with new students all year round. She knew how to do mat time but was not confident in doing any planning when she left her first centre.

In the second centre, which was Reggio inspired, Carol worked with 4- to 5-year-old preschool children. The teacher team was quite unsteady, and the turnover of staff was high. The ratio was not good as the manager used too many unqualified teachers and relievers who couldn't commit to the centre. Therefore, it was hard to have consistency in teaching and teamwork. As for things she learned in her second centre, Carol reported that "I started to become interested in Reggio philosophy, but I only knew superficial elements of Reggio pedagogical practices, such as loose parts, natural resources and art. But I couldn't plan a project independently, and I was not confident to do so." She left this centre because of their management problems after 1 year working there.

After working full time in two different centres, Carol worked in different centres as a casual reliever from 2017 to 2018. The hourly pay for registered relievers was quite high and less paperwork was required. Carol felt happy because she could decide her own working hours and chose to work in centres she liked. During this year, Carol had the opportunity to work in about 30 different centres and experience various centre cultures. The most beneficial part of this year's working experiences was "I have a broader understanding of ECE services in Auckland because I compare them all the time when I go to different centres. I also find that I really love the Reggio approach and become more confident with it." Carol finally worked full time again in her dream centre which she found during her reliever time.

Now Carol was working as the head teacher in the room for 4- to 5-year-olds. Her current centre was quite close to her home, which meant she didn't need to waste too much time on commuting. The ratio of teachers to students was quite good in this centre given the worsening situation of ECE teacher shortages. Carol attributed this to the effective management team, "leadership is very important in the success of a centre and the stability of a professional team." She shared with me her growth in this centre and projects she has planned both independently and cooperatively with her colleagues, "I feel I'm valued in this centre by my leaders, my colleagues, children and their families, and the whole community when we run seasonal events in local community. Life is good, and work makes life better."

The most impressive part of Carol's recall of her working experiences in the first two centres was her uncertainty, struggle in professional growth, and lack of mentoring support. She kept mentioning that she was trying very hard to prove herself as a "good" ECE teacher. From our face-to-face communication, I could sense her anxiety, disappointment, loneliness and sorrow when she described the adversities. I could also tell the eagerness, excitement, sense of achievement and belonging when she described her gains. It was also noticeable that although it was not Carol's first choice to study and work in ECE, she had

been working in ECE centres over 7 years since her graduation. Carol summarized that her interest in working with children was the most important motivation for her to face the ups and downs in her career.

Carol rated the "management" of a centre as the most important factor in determining the quality and working conditions of a centre. If the tension between management and teachers is high, the atmosphere in the centre would be ruined, and teachers would be nervous or unhappy, which would then result in a high turnover of staff members and inconsistency in the centre's culture development and teaching quality. All these issues would consequently impede them from achieving the ECE principles and strands advocated in *Te Whariki*. Carol also called for better understanding and mutual respect between the management team and the teachers because "people and relationships are actually everything in ECE."

5.3.6 Look Into the Future

Reflecting on her past 7 years working experience as an immigrant teacher, Carol simply made two remarks. One was that if you don't like working with children, never ever think of taking an ECE teaching job for immigration purposes. You will hate your job, and that's devastating to yourself and everyone around you, the children, their family and your family, your colleagues and your leaders and so on. The other is that ECE teachers are far too underpaid and working conditions need to be improved.

What does the future hold for Carol? She expressed her plan to become the headteacher of the preschool room she works in. She had become more and more confident in pedagogical planning and paperwork, and she had got enough support from the centre manager. Her narrative ended with a big smile and a wish that "it will be great if I can start my own centre some day in the future."

5.4 Rina's Interview

5.4.1 Introduction

Rina moved to New Zealand in 2007 with her husband because he is a Kiwi. Before that, she was a professional staff at a Chinese university. She spent her first 3 years in New Zealand as a stay-at-home mum. Rina became interested in children's education because she was the main caregiver of her own two children. In 2012, she decided to read for a postgraduate diploma in ECE and started a new journey as a working mum. It was the love of children that inspired Rina to step into the ECE field. She had been working in the same centre for 7 years, since her graduation, at the time we met for the interview. During the interview, Rina shared her story of personal and professional growth here in New Zealand as an immigrant. Her understanding and perspectives on childhood education philosophies, centre cultures and leadership, the New Zealand ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki* and inclusive practices in centres are presented in this writing.

5.4.2 From a Mum to a "Mum"

Before moving to New Zealand with her husband in 2007, Rina had never imagined herself as a housewife and stay-at-home mum. She used to work at a Chinese university as an academic administrator, and she took much pride in her former position. One reason was that Chinese university employees had lifelong tenure when Rina was working there, which meant stability and job security. Another reason was that Rina was admired by her friends and family members for being able to work at the university. The competition to find a job at universities was very tough. Only the luckiest and the most capable candidates would win out, and Rina was one of them. When Rina talked about that part of her experience in our interview, I could sense her nostalgic memories of the good old days in her voice. However, Rina remarked that "It was just a boring job, a social image of me in some way. I love my career here as an ECE teacher. I know clearly what I do and why I do things every day. It's more real, rewarding and satisfying." For me, it was thought provoking when I noticed her deliberate choice of the different words "job" and "career" to describe her working experiences in China and New Zealand. Even in Mandarin, these two words

represent different levels of value the speaker puts on a certain role. Apparently, Rina valued her current role as an early childhood teacher a lot.

Rina met her Kiwi husband after her first marriage broke down with a daughter who was about 7 years old then. She had her second child born in New Zealand in 2007. She stayed home to look after her two children for 3 years since then. Because of that, she had a lot of close observations and reflections on the differences between caring for a child in China and caring for a child in New Zealand. Rina became very interested in childhood education and parenting skills. Her initial motivation was to have a better understanding of children's development and how to become a good mum in a New Zealand way.

> *Raising a child here in New Zealand is very different from in China. My daughter was born in China and cared by the extended family members, including her four grandparents and our relatives. She went to a local kindergarten when she turned 3, which is the normal age we send kids to kindergarten, but no younger than that. We moved to New Zealand when she was about 8. After having my son and looking after them at home, I used to compare their childhood experiences. My daughter had a totally different childhood from her younger brother here.*

In order to explore parenting supports in the local community, she visited the government organization Parenting Places and explored many online resources. Rina recalled that

> *I want to be the best mum I can. I learned many theories and skills from different channels, like reading, YouTube videos, community parenting workshops and so on. But I still felt that I didn't know how to cope with some of my children's behavior. My learning was not systematic nor comprehensive.*

In 2010, when Rina's son turned 3 years old, Rina sent him to a local kindergarten. When her children both went to school, Rina worked part time in a fast-food restaurant near her home. She could still pick up her children from school in the afternoon.

Rina didn't have any career plan at that time as she knew she couldn't find a good job if she couldn't speak English very well. She was also not confident to find her feet again in

New Zealand's professional world as she had no local qualifications or training. It was not until 2012 that Rina decided to read for a postgraduate diploma in ECE and become an ECE teacher.

> *I always have the urge to understand my children more as they grow up so quickly. But I didn't think of working as a teacher at first because my English was not good enough…A close friend of mine is an ECE teacher. She advised me to explore the possibility to become an ECE teacher as she had witnessed my attempts to nurture my children. She said that I have "the right heart" to work with children. Besides, the salary of ECE teachers was not bad 7 years ago, especially when I compared with my earnings in the part-time job in the fast-food restaurant.*

Thanks to Rina's friend's suggestion, Rina started to search for information about becoming an ECE teacher in New Zealand. She visited many local centres including her son's kindergarten and read job descriptions for ECE teachers. She wanted to understand what kind of life an ECE teacher would have. The more she understood the role, the more she liked it. Rina already had a bachelor's degree from China and it was accredited by NZQA. Although she had already had her permanent resident visa, she still had to have a local recognized qualification in ECE in order to work as a teacher.

> *Initially I was thinking of reading for a 3-year undergraduate degree in early childhood education at first. I feel teaching children is a divine job, and I should have a comprehensive study of children's education and get well prepared before I start to teach.*

However, her friend recommended the postgraduate diploma course to her and said to her "this is the quickest way to get the qualification." At first Rina was not convinced that 1-year study of ECE could prepare a qualified teacher with adequate knowledge and skills to work with children. But Rina had to juggle her study plan and her family responsibilities at the same time, and she didn't have enough time to take a 3-year undergraduate study in

ECE. Learning by doing seemed to be a more reasonable and feasible way. Finally, Rina enrolled in a postgraduate diploma in ECE at NZTC in 2012.

> *The best part of this program is that I could study online and work in assigned home centres in the same year. That suited me a lot because I could have a flexible timetable to look after my children and study.*

After graduation from NZTC in 2013, Rina found a full-time job in a centre and had worked in the same centre for 7 years since then. She shared that she had never stopped learning and updating her knowledge of childhood education. "I consider myself as a worthy teacher with real values. It's a lifelong learning for me as I always tell myself I am working with active lives all the time," Rina stated. She became not only a senior staff in her centre but also the "centre mum" of many children. Rina treated children in her room and centre as her own children and had established a good reputation among parents and colleagues. Many children called her "Lin mum/mama" (Lin is Rina's family name) in the centre because their parents or older siblings who used to attend Rina's centre taught them to call her that. Rina smiled happily when she shared this part with me during the interview. She told me that "this name 'Lin Mum/mama' has lots emotional attachment for me, and I feel loved and trusted by children and their parents." It was obvious from her account that Rina really enjoyed her work with children in the ECE centre.

5.4.3 Becoming Confident and Strong

In retrospect, Rina felt that her personal and professional growth was the most rewarding part of her journey. She became more and more confident in her life, and truly felt proud of being able to do something meaningful as an ECE teacher.

One reason was that Rina could use English to express herself fluently and clearly. The English language was no longer a barrier but a tool for Rina to connect with others. Working full-time in the centre, Rina got lots of practice in using real English. She felt relaxed when talking to babies and children, without fear of being judged by her "nonnative" pronunciation. She observed how children develop their language ability and learned from

them. Step by step and day by day, Rina could communicate with her colleagues and children's parents very well. "When I can express myself clearly, I feel that my connection with others is closer." For Rina, it was very important to engage in dialogue with herself and her colleagues. That helped to build genuine relationships between herself, colleagues, and children. She also shared how part of her personality was reshaped during this time.

> *I'm a gentle and introverted person. When I was in China, I seldom expressed my disagreement directly. But in New Zealand here, other people won't know what I need or think if I don't speak out. At first, I was timid to express my disagreement in workplace when I didn't want to follow other teachers blindly. Gradually, I learned to express myself gently and firmly, and received positive responses from my colleagues. I feel that I have done the right thing and can influence others in a positive way.*

In the first 2 years, Rina felt that she didn't have enough confidence and ability to make her voices heard by team leaders and managers. Even when she expressed her understanding of certain policies and practices in the centre, she felt that her opinions were not valued as much as she hoped, and she didn't know how to stand firmly with her own educational beliefs. When Rina shared her stories, what became apparent was how her personal growth (authenticity) and professionalism were intertwined in a complex way. As Rina gained experience and confidence over time, her professionalism developed rapidly, and her authenticity underpinned the whole on-going progress as an anchor.

> *I keep on asking myself some questions: what philosophy do I believe in? How can I use that philosophy to guide my daily practices? What can I do to weave my philosophy with my colleagues' philosophies in a mutual nurturing way? How can we as a team work together to support the learning and wellbeing of children? Am I teaching as a real me or acting as a performance to meet others' expectation? How can I talk to our centre manager to get the support our room needs?*

Such questions were not easy to answer, and Rina kept her mind open at work. Apart from writing learning stories and preparing other documentation work in the centre, Rina also recorded her reflections on childhood education and childcare services in her WeChat public account which reached out to more readers in much wider communities. She wrote about how she developed her own educational beliefs gradually with mistakes and learning moments, about some special activities her centre organized and the reasons behind them, about conflicts among children and parenting strategies, about collegial relationships and management issues. After several years of blogging, Rina had many readers and followers, which made her very proud as well:

> *My writing and sharing give me a feeling of having discourse power. I was encouraged to share more when I got positive feedback from others and when I was challenged by them too. My words and sharing have rationales and evidence behind them and I believe that can influence others in some way. That makes me very proud and leads me to a bigger platform.*

5.4.4 Developing Personal Education Philosophy and Curriculum

Rina's childhood education philosophy developed in a reciprocal and living way where she, her colleagues and children engaged alongside each other in an educational journey. When Rina claimed that "I'm Pikler inspired," she didn't mean she would follow the concept and practices of Pikler in a static or routine way. Rather, it was a living and forever fluid curriculum which embodied the life conditions of children and their families, herself as a teacher, her colleagues and the centre environment. In everyday encounters with children, Rina adapted her practices in light of Pikler and Reggio Emillia-inspired approaches to meet different needs of children. She considered *Te Whāriki* as the overarching guidance for all kinds of philosophies and practices in centres and could link every teaching/learning moment to it.

It took time and effort for Rina to form her own philosophy and curriculum. When she first worked as a full-time teacher in the centre, Rina started to work in the babies and infants'

room. It was challenging for Rina to reconceptualize the view of an infant and really understand the meaning of "care" in an early-years setting:

> *We were taught in the postgraduate diploma course that "children are capable, independent and confident learners," but when I look at those little hands and feet and bodies of these babies and infants it's hard to shake off the feeling of them being "vulnerable, innocent and cute, in need of protection." I had to learn how to understand them as they can't talk…I also struggled to change the adult-centric way of directing infants in what I believed good for their learning and growing. My view of children, especially of young babies experienced a revolutionary change.*

Luckily, Rina had a senior colleague in the same room who guided her through these confusing times. Her colleague was strongly Pikler inspired and shared Pikler's pedagogical view of "care" with Rina. She helped Rina to focus on those previously overlooked learning moments—such as the one-on-one times when she fed an infant, cuddled them at nap time, or talked to them while nappy changing. "That was stunning," Rina recalled, "and I had many aha and '*wow*' moments when I started to honor young babies' bodies and their innate agency." The good thing was nobody was forcing another to accept or follow their educational philosophy or practices. Senior and experienced teachers just demonstrated different options for new teachers and other colleagues to choose and find the common ground to work on. No matter how different their philosophies and understandings were, Rina and her colleagues could create a curriculum that integrated each teacher's strongest educational philosophy. "The teamwork was great, and we had positive influence on each other to develop our room's philosophy and pedagogical practices," Rina reflected. By doing so, each room would develop its own teaching philosophy and curriculum in accordance to the room teachers' shared knowledge. The culture in the centre was nurturing and alive, allowing enough space for teachers to experience what it is like to be an active practitioner of their educational philosophy.

Apart from Pikler, Rina also liked some key points from the Reggio philosophy, especially the role of environment as the third teacher and the planning of projects based on children's learning enquiry. She found that Reggio-inspired ideas were very helpful when worked with children over 3 years old. When Rina planned outdoor activities and learning provocations, she would refer to Montessori's resources for mixed-age children. For Rina, there was no absolutely or universally right/best philosophy and practices in childcare. No matter what she did or said to the children, she would make sure that was "from her heart and led by children." That is also why Rina thought highly of *Te Whariki*.

> Te Whariki *is the most mature, open and updated curriculum I know. It integrates the best part of many philosophies in its principles and strands. But it's not dominant or predescriptive. It allows us teachers to practice our agency and practice our interpretation of* Te Whariki *as a whole team. I can always find guidance and support in* Te Whariki *and link our daily practices to it. I also write learning stories with reference to* Te Whariki.

Being aware of, and in response to, children's individual needs and teaching team's educational preference, Rina was able to develop her own childcare philosophy and curriculum in an authentic way, slowly but strongly. She also took part in regular PD training and workshops to meet people and update her knowledge. For Rina, an ECE teacher should have an open mind to learn and grow all their life if they choose to stay in this field. Even at the end of our interview, Rina commented that "every day is a new journey, and these children are my captains to explore the unknowns together." As the researcher, I was moved by her comments and could see that it was quite meaningful and satisfying for her to work in ECE field.

5.4.5 Rethinking Leadership in ECE Centres

Although she had worked in the same centre for 7 years, Rina had encountered many changes of the teaching team and the management team. Each change brought up new challenges and opportunities, and Rina formed her own understanding of centre structure

and leadership based on a lot of observation and discussions. The leadership discussed in this part is mainly about teachers and managers, not about the power structure between teachers and children.

As discussed above, the centre culture was supportive and open which allowed space for each teacher to exercise their agency. That was mainly because of the leadership culture they had in the centre. In each room, the head teacher and other teachers would discuss thoroughly to plan their curriculum and pedagogical focuses. Each room could form their own philosophy which integrated the strongest part of each teacher's background and teaching beliefs. The head teacher in each room performed as a team representative who talked to the manager when they needed support. In most cases, the owner and the manager would say "yes" to their requirements as long as they explained why and how they would need such support.

> *Just give you a simple example: we teachers together plan to do a "dramatic play" in our room. After discussing what we need, we will list out toys, clothes, craft materials and other resources. Then the head teacher will give this list to our manager and explain why we need them and how we will use them in our room. The manager will go and buy this stuff for us. When we need a tablecloth, flowers, stones and some natural loose parts in our Reggio setting, we can get these things from our manager too. We can also get extra relievers to cover our break time if we convince the manager that "it's good to have at least one teacher on each table with children during mealtimes."*

Rina reflected on the leadership in ECE centres as being in two layers: the leadership in each room among teachers, and the leadership between the manager and teachers. "Ideally, the leadership in centres should be democratic and flat," said Rina. By democratic, she explained that everyone in the centre should have the power and opportunity to lead in a way. By flat, she meant everyone was equal and there should be no power hierarchy in the centre. However, such ideals cannot always come true in reality, especially when they

experienced changes in the teaching and managing team. Rina also shared challenges in realizing such ideal leadership in the centre. One was from the collegial relationships, and the other was from the manager.

> *It's great to have everyone's voice in the room and we all agree that teamwork is very important. Each teacher acts as an active leader in the room. But when teachers in the room have conflicts on teaching philosophies and practices, it needs a lot of strategies to build up the team. Sometimes you would feel some strong colleagues "impose" their beliefs and practices on you. They might make you feel you were wrong while they were right. Such painful feelings were more obvious for new teachers who joined the team without enough experiences. It took a lot of time and communication to integrate everyone's strong beliefs in the curriculum.*
>
> *Sometimes it depends who we have as managers. If the manager is not an upright person, or if the manager can't treat us fairly, we would feel stuck into the systems and routines like a working machine instead of honoring our own work. A bad manager made you feel you were working for him/her, not for the children. We used to have one manager who acted as a tyrant and refused to listen to us. That was a difficult time because teachers were unhappy, but they couldn't get the respect and support they needed. I bet the manager was very unhappy too in that situation. That conflict even reached a point that we teachers all wrote a letter to the centre owner to rebel on things the manager had set. Finally, the owner fired the manager and found a new one. Each time when there is a change in the manager position there will be influences on leadership culture in our centre.*

It would appear from Rina's comment that the leadership in her centre changed in response to changes in people, whether teachers or the manager. Rina felt particularly strongly that the collegial relationships they had were the key to good leadership. She also highlighted the importance of communicating and respecting each other in the centre. "The way we adults deal with interpersonal relationships will demonstrate valuable examples of

leadership to children. When teachers are happy to work together, we are more likely to form genuine relationships with children too," Rina concluded.

5.4.6 Inclusiveness in ECE Centres

At Rina's centre, the teaching team had a strong commitment to meet the diverse needs of all the children and encourage participation of all children and their families. They worked as a team to agree on learning goals that were specific, measurable and feasible for each individual child. Her centre's philosophy statement included being "welcoming, respectful, and responsive to the diversity and richness of our teachers, learners and their families." The centre was positioned as a place where everyone belongs and grows together. Rina highlighted the inclusiveness of teachers coming from different social and educational backgrounds in her centre. She was lucky to work in a centre where the owner and the teaching team had a mindset of openness and curiosity.

Rina strongly believed that how the teaching team interacted with each other in an inclusive and respectful way would demonstrate role models to the children and their parents to support each other and show *aroha* (love). As an immigrant teacher, Rina felt that her contribution had been valued along with the increasing number of immigrant children enrolled in her centre. "I know some centres now prefer to have Mandarin-speaking teachers in their team because these teachers can help us establish good relationships with our Chinese immigrant families," Rina said. She also reported that she had never experienced any intentional prejudice or exclusiveness in her centre since she started working there.

> *Take myself as an example, I didn't feel a strong sense of belonging in the centre and the community at the beginning of my work here. One reason was my English language ability constrained in-depth communication with parents and my colleagues, and the other reason was that it did need time to build such trust and closeness. Misunderstandings might happen from time to time, but that was mainly about how we understand or do things differently, not personal. Such*

misunderstandings could be solved with frank and open communication. Inclusiveness doesn't happen once for all or instantly, you know. It also needs a lot of time, communication and empathy to nurture.

The language use in Rina's centre was another example of inclusiveness. In the centre's teaching team, they had three local Kiwi teachers and seven immigrant teachers coming from Japan, India, German, Tonga, China and Mexico. Besides the all-inclusive English and Māori languages, teachers also naturally shared some daily expressions in their own languages with children.

We created a learning environment that invites and honors the culture richness that each teacher, child and their whānau [family] bring. We share oral expressions of greetings, thanks and feelings in real contexts when all children are involved in a meaningful play or mat time. I also share some Chinese nursery songs when I play with them, which is a lot of fun. It's not a language course or something like that. It's just an encouragement from our teachers to set the tone for our children to embrace diversities with an exploring open mind. When children and their families meet each other in the street, it is beautiful to hear they greet and wave goodbye in each other's language.

Apart from language enrichment, having a diverse teaching team was also beneficial for children from the same culture background, especially for settling new children in the centre. Rina could sense the subtlety of inclusiveness and its influences on one's emotional wellbeing.

Imagine you are a 1-year-old child from a Chinese immigrant family where your main caregivers speak Mandarin at home. Then it's time for you to spend 5 to 8 hours in a new daycare centre. How would you feel? For very young children, they feel a natural closeness to someone who look like his or her family members with similar eyes, hair, nose and skin color. That makes them feel safe. And I can

understand their murmuring, talk to them in a language they understand and better support their needs.

Rina kept on talking about how important it was to work in partnership with parents. When teachers and parents collaborate, they could share information about culture, norms, behavior and circumstances of children at home and in the centre. By doing so, teachers and parents created a caring and consistent environment in which children's active participation in real life could be promoted. Rina reported that such day-to-day communication and collaboration between teachers and parents were especially helpful for inclusive practices in the centre.

It's very helpful if parents tell us what's happening in their home and how that influences their children. For instance, a child may come to the centre in a bad mood and act hostilely because he/ she couldn't sleep well last night or witnessed a quarrel between mom and dad. If the parent shares with us some of the circumstances, we can respond and support the child in a better way instead of comparing this child with other children or judging him/her as misbehaving.

Rina's centre organized many interactive activities with families and parents all year long. The latest event she shared was a workshop they had run the previous week to invite parenting coaches from the "Parenting Place" organization to discuss some frequently asked questions with immigrant parents. They had different family fun events to encourage parents' involvement, such as "fish and chips night," "water fun Sunday party," "bakery and cookie fundraising" and many others. The centre manager and teaching team valued the contribution from parents and the community a lot, and they listened to parents' interest and suggestions in organizing such interactive events. Rina was quite proud to announce that "we are a big family where children, teachers and parents all grow together." They had parents who had sent their first, second and third child to the centre during the past 10 years, and they really knew each other very well over the time.

Meanwhile, Rina reflected that she had wished that they could have done better in their inclusive practices, especially for children with special needs or developmental delays. For example, they experienced difficulties in having children with autistic behavior.

> *We didn't know how to support these kids because we didn't have related training of professional knowledge about this. I felt extremely sad when I saw them cry or hurt themselves sometimes in the centre, but I could do nothing more than hugging them in my arms. We had to request for special expert from the MoE to help us, but that was far from enough.*

Rina hoped that they could have more PD training on such topics. She was also regretful to acknowledge the funding limitation from the centre to support such training because "after all, it's not economical." "We may only have one child with special needs in our centre, but we need a lot of more effort and time to support him/her. It's unfair but we all know it's the reality," Rina concluded.

5.4.7 Moving Forward

Many years ago, when Rina was taking the postgraduate diploma program, she met a senior teacher in one of her practicum centres who was over 70 years old and had worked in the same centre from the opening of the centre. That was stunning to Rina and she took that teacher as her role model. After working in the same centre for 7 years, Rina grew from a new teacher to an experienced senior teacher and had worked as the head teacher for 3 years. She described her current working conditions as her "comfort zone" where she felt happy and could grow both personally and professionally. That did not mean that Rina would work in the same centre for the rest of her career though, because she still had the curiosity to explore more and to try out her ambitions in ECE.

Rina had been offered many opportunities during the last few years, especially when she became popular with her sharing on her public WeChat account. She had been invited to work in a new centre as a group leader in under-2 rooms, to join a branch centre of a well-known New Zealand brand as a head teacher, or to work as a facilitator to organize PD

training in ECE. Rina didn't accept these opportunities because she felt it was not the right time for her to leave her current centre. Her plan changed as the situation changed. At the end of our interview, Rina shared that she would like to establish her own centre in the future when she had found enough financial resources. "I have my own understandings of educating children and want to establish my own centre where I have more power to do things in the way I believe," Rina shared. Her final comment on becoming and working as an ECE teacher was "it's all about your heart and commitment for the children."

5.5 Maggie's Interview

5.5.1 Introduction

In 2002, Maggie came to New Zealand as an exchange student to study international business and trade at Massey University. After graduation, she took another training program to become a certified public accountant and worked in a big New Zealand accounting company for many years. After her first child was born, Maggie took time off to look after her daughter and chose to accompany her daughter in a local Playcentre. Out of interest and with support from the Playcentre, Maggie became a parent-educator in a Playcentre in 2012 through passing individual training courses. She worked in the same Playcentre for 4 years until her first child went to primary school.

Maggie left the Playcentre to work in an accounting company for about 1 year, and then came back to the same Playcentre when her second child was born in 2018. By the time of our interview, Maggie had been working on gaining the New Zealand Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care (L4) from Auckland Playcentre Association. She was also contributing to the Association by facilitating the Playcentre Introductory Award (PIA) training program for new parent-educators. Maggie's experiences of working in this Playcentre were quite different from other ECE teachers in other types of ECE services. Her reflections on parents' role and children's growth, the Playcentre's structure and management, the government's funding policy and the overall quality of ECE services in New Zealand are summarized in this writing.

5.5.2 Settling Down and Finding Her Way in New Zealand

Maggie shared several turning points of her life where she had always made good decisions based on her instincts. With big smiles and a happy voice, Maggie described such instincts as a "hidden passion to be inspired." The first turning point Maggie shared was when she came to New Zealand as an exchange student to study at Massey University. She was still a sophomore student when she heard about that opportunity but decided to get that opportunity at all costs because she "didn't like the university life and higher education systems" at that time. (She didn't mention the name of that Chinese university and I didn't ask.)

> *It was not that type of university education which could liberate my thoughts and unleash my potentials. On the contrary, it was very depressing and restricting, far from what I imagined the university life should be. I felt stressful and unhappy, and I wanted to escape.*

Maggie still remembered how determined she was to get that exchange-student opportunity and her academic merits made it possible for her to get that opportunity. She called herself very lucky because her family was well-off enough to support her to pay all the cost to study in New Zealand as an international exchange student. Maggie continued to read for the same international business and trade major as she had in her Chinese university because that was the "designed course structure of the exchange program." It took another 2 years for Maggie to get her dual bachelor's degrees from both Massey University and her Chinese university. After graduation, Maggie found a job in a New Zealand company and her role was to help with her company's import and export businesses with Australia and China. It didn't take long for Maggie to find out that she was not cut out for that job.

Then it came to the second turning point of her life in New Zealand when she quit her job and started to learn accounting. Maggie said that she "had a talent with numbers and loved playing with them." She didn't give any details of what kind of courses she took or where she learned accounting, but it sounded quite straightforward for her to become a certified

public accountant in New Zealand. With that certification, Maggie found a job and had worked in a famous New Zealand accounting company for several years before she decided to take time off to take care for her first child herself.

Having children was another turning point of Maggie's life. She claimed that she had grown mature with her children and they guided her to find her passion in parenting and ECE.

> *I felt I was immature until I was in my late 30s. There is a mental mature stage for everyone, and I didn't know what kind of life I want to live until later on. It's not simple like you can become a wise person if you learn something from school. Timing is very important, and my timing was when I became a mom.*

Maggie started to work as parent-educator in a local Playcentre in 2011 when her first child was about 6 months old. Maggie has stayed in the same Playcentre since then although with some intervals and break times. She became really Playcentre focused and enjoyed watching her children play and learn with others. For Maggie, she could not find a better type of ECE service than the Playcentre where she could grow together with her children and other good people she met there. She made lifelong friends through the Playcentre group. She valued the relationship with other children and parents as the steppingstone for children's education and wellbeing. Her interest in ECE came to the point that she was committed to take the Playcentre education program from the introductory level to the highest L4 level, and advocate for Playcentre services with her knowledge and experience. "I find it's meaningful and rewarding to work as a parent-educator, and I plan to move on with this path to the best result," Maggie concluded.

5.5.3 Why Playcentres?

Playcentre is a New Zealand invention where trained parent volunteers work as program educators rather than paid teachers. Such services are for babies of several months old to 6-year-olds with their parents. Parents take different roles collaboratively to supervise the curriculum, daily routine, safety and health policies, financial and management issues, management and administration, and so on. Maggie preferred this do-it-yourself childcare

service because her own life philosophy—that parents are the first educators and the initial role models for their children—matches Playcentre's. Maggie wanted to give her children the best care and education she could because she strongly believed that "the time of childhood is a time never to be repeated and a base for a person's humanity."

Maggie started to look for quality ECE services when her child was 3 months old. One reason was that Maggie was thinking of going back to work at the very beginning if she could find good care for her child. Another reason was that, as a new parent, Maggie felt lonely looking after children at home and found it necessary to get extra help to perform her role as a mom.

> *I was promoted to a senior position in my company before I was pregnant, and my salary was very high. My husband and I are both busy professionals. I didn't think of looking after my child full time at first. You know, I was thinking that I could always pay someone good and professional to look after my child.*
>
> *I found that I had a lot to learn to be a mom. I couldn't take care of my daughter very well alone at home while my husband was working, and he felt overwhelmed after work with extra baby-caring responsibilities and baby's crying. We both were desperate to get some help from others, like from our midwife and friends. We thought about finding a nanny but gave up that idea soon after I decided to stay at home to look after my child. I chose to go out because I needed more social life and fresh air too.*

Maggie tried several ECE services around her neighborhood before she found Playcentres were her preference. She visited church-based daycare centres, private-run daycare centres, AKA kindergartens, playgroups and Playcentres. In each centre, Maggie spent one or two introduction sessions with her daughter and got a feeling of the centre culture and service quality.

> *I finally decided not to work but to be with my child when she was still young and needed me. If I drop off my child to daycare or kindy in the morning and pick them*

up in the evening, I'd have no idea what has happened for the whole day in my kid's life no matter how good their learning stories are written by their teachers…some teachers treat parents as a bit of "getting in the way" or "interfering" if I hang around for too long or do things for my child and other children in the centre.

Playcentre offers me a way to be with my kid as well we let her enjoy the benefits of a centre life with other kids and adults. I want to grow up with my children, and there are no other better services than going to Playcentres. It's great to be able to play with my kids and other kids, see how they interact with each other and other adults. It's a great opportunity to build maternal relationship with my children and help them develop their inner emotional anchor in life.

Apart from being able to spend time with her children, the adult–children ratio and child-led play philosophy were another two determining factors which attracted Maggie to choose Playcentres. She compared the adult–children ratio at Playcentre and other ECE services:

In our Playcentre, the ratio is 1:1 or 1:2 because parents and primary caregivers come here with their children. In seldom cases, our ratio is 1:3 for older preschool children or when some parents have more than two kids in the same Playcentre. But we can still manage to maintain very good ratio compared with the ratio in some daycare centres which is 1:5 for under 2 and 1:10 for over 2.

In Maggie's understanding, having a low adult–children ratio would create a relaxing environment where children would be given more freedom and parents could have time and opportunities to have in-depth observations and communication. The volunteer context of her Playcentre and the relaxing environment also helped to create cycles of positive parenting within their families and communities. Maggie told me that she enjoyed the lovely chats with other parents when they sat at the edge of the sandpit with a cup of coffee and shared laughter over their children's messy play. It was not stressful with enough helping hands around, and allowed parents as educators to slow down and interact with

children and each other in a better way. Maggie said that parents also felt what they contributed would define the centre quality for their children and themselves.

> *I deem Playcentre as a place where children and parents come to play and grow together. We put in as much as we get out of it. Nobody is just paying lip-service. Every parent contributes in some way, and we are aligning with the woven mat concept of* Te Whariki*. New parents can learn a lot around experienced parents, and long-lasting friendship is nurtured. We all share responsibilities. We don't mind meeting any extra personal costs of involvement as long as they are good for our children and our Playcentre.*

As for the education philosophy in the Playcentre, Maggie emphasized that child-led free and messy play are the philosophical pillars in her Playcentre which hold the whole thing together, from curriculum planning to daily routines, from learning stories to centre evaluations. Parents educators are trained to understand the real meaning of child-led play, and then they will try their best to support children once they start to appreciate the power and beauty of children's seemingly free and messy play. Maggie's old and simple perceptions of play and childhood education had been challenged when she played with her daughter and other kids in the Playcentre. She still remembered that the first compulsory workshop was "Let's Play" and how revolutionary that was in changing Maggie's understanding of "play."

> *I was introduced to the compulsory Playcentre parent education workshop at the end of the first month when I attended my Playcentre. We had practical experiences of playing like children with water, paint, flour, mud, leaves, paper, pebbles and all other cool materials. Debriefing afterwards, we had interactive discussions about creativity and ideas about how to support it in children. I went home with an appreciation of how much we misunderstand children's play with our adult perceptions of the world, and how much their experiences can be altered by an adult with an understanding of their agency and needs.*

Maggie continued to give examples of children's free and messy play in her Playcentre which she believed were difficult to find in other types of ECE centres where the children/staff ratio was much higher than Playcentre's, such as "painting oneself blue and swimming in the sandpit as a little mermaid" or "having food colors all over one's hair, face, mouth and cloth" and so on. "We don't have an issue of safety and health in our Playcentre because the child's parents are here with him/her, and no one worries about cleaning them off," Maggie said, "but it's difficult to have such things in other types of daycare centres which rely on teachers and relievers." Maggie also proudly pointed out that the learning stories of children in her Playcentre were very relevant, not a matter of form or formula. She deemed these portfolios as valuable family assets as they "not only make learning visible, but record real life and memories."

Maggie also pointed out that their philosophy was to support both children and parents in a positive way. "We address their urges and focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses," said Maggie. She then gave an example of how parents in the Playcentre notice and recognize children's different needs and respond accordingly.

> *We used to have a kid who bit other kids sometimes. When that happened, our first reaction was not "what's wrong with this kid?" Instead, we would try to understand his urge and needs by asking questions to ourselves and his parents: "What does he need? Why does he try to express in this way instead of other ways? Does he mean to hurt others intentionally by biting? What else can we and his parents do?"... Because his mom was there with us, we could discuss his behavior and underpinned needs openly and directly on the spot, and such things would be well handled without misunderstandings.*

Finally, Maggie added that the natural way of having mixed-aged children play together was an advantage too. They didn't put children in different rooms according to their ages. Children could choose to stay anywhere in the premises of the Playcentre. They were also free to choose activities and whom they wanted to play with. In most cases, parents became

friends because their children loved playing together. Such friendship and connection extended to primary school or even longer.

5.5.4 Maggie's Participation at Playcentre

Maggie joined the Playcentre because of the word of mouth from her friends. She started as a novice parent and grew into a lecturer of the PIA course over 7 years in the Playcentre with her two kids.

Being a parent-educator at Playcentre is more than "being there." There are various levels of parent involvement. In Maggie's Playcentre, parents actively participated in caring for and educating children and oversaw the Playcentre's management and administration. Through collaboration and thorough discussion, parents took turns to plan the curriculum, set up the environment, purchase and prepare provocation materials, tidy up, write learning stories and other tasks. The operation hours of Maggie's Playcentre were from 9am to 12pm from Monday to Friday. Parents were required to have a regular commitment to attend a minimum of two sessions each week and to be on duty in the team one day a week. Each session was outlined by child-led play, and parents took turns to lead the team to oversee everything. A high proportion of the parents in Maggie's Playcentre dedicated a lot of time and energy to the Playcentre's daily operation as the culture of this Playcentre was very "dynamic, inclusive and supportive." Maggie was "on site" 5 days a week but she was "on team" 1 day a week. At the end of each term, parents worked together to write the "team lead report" and attended national or regional meetings as their schedules permitted.

Parents must attend compulsory workshops and trainings in order to perform their role for the best benefit of their children. Parent education is crucial to deliver quality care and education to children in the Playcentre, and parents' understanding, and support of children are seen as fundamental base for the wellbeing of children. Maggie explained that apart from compulsory Course 1 and related workshops, parents could choose to go beyond or not based on their commitment and interest. These part-time training programs combine childhood education theories with practice in an on-going manner, and are designed to

increase the capabilities and confidence of Playcentre parents. When parents participate in these training programs, they directly observe children while receiving theoretical background in the parent educational component. Maggie commented that these training programs and workshops gave her the opportunity to explore new experiences such as learning about play, participating in children's learning and understanding it in a new way, and being an active contributor through collaboration and idea-sharing. Maggie observed that every parent brought his or her own ideas and personality to the Playcentre which determined a distinct culture of the Playcentre at a given time. She also reported how beneficial it was to learn about other families and parents from a wide range of backgrounds.

> *We have workshops, role-playing, learner participation and group discussions. We share our ideas and understandings, and we debate a bit sometimes to make things clearer. We learn the significance of play, kotahitanga (unity and collective action) and Te Kākano (the Seed), child development, and positive interpersonal relationships. We have parents who are lawyers, chefs, policemen, plumbers, designers, hairdressers and many other occupations. I'm an accountant and I can contribute to the financial management stuff of my Playcentre. When we all learn, play, practice and reflect together in the Playcentre, we are able to perpetuate resources in our local community by contributing our special talents and ideas.*

After working in the Playcentre for a couple of years, Maggie found that the volunteer model of the Playcentre can stimulate personal growth and relationships that are increasingly rare in neoliberal society, and especially important for new immigrant families. Maggie shared that the Playcentre had served as a resource bank to help new immigrant families find their feet in New Zealand.

> *You see, working in Playcentre with other parents is quite different from working in an office with Kiwis. We shared our lives in different ways. At Playcentre, we share more personal things and pick up cultural nuances when we talk about life, such as where we go shopping for family, what we are cooking for dinner, grandma's secret*

recipes and that kind of thing. You gradually build up your network with local families.

As an immigrant herself, Maggie shared her experiences of dealing with language and cultural barriers at Playcentre and how she grew from that. By language and culture barriers, Maggie did not only mean English and Chinese languages and cultures, as parents in her Playcentre came from different countries and places. Maggie was confident with her English because her husband is a local Kiwi and she had received many years of education in English. However, she reported that she sometimes felt lost when she couldn't understand the slang or jokes shared by other parents or when she couldn't get the subtle point of another parent's words because of cultural differences.

Such awkward moments may happen in our casual catchups, not in formal meetings. For example, a mom comes to the centre in low spirits because she has had a bad day. If your EQ [emotional quotient] is not very high or you don't have proper empathy skills, your good will and caring words may sound irritating. But it's alright and you can learn something from each of these awkward moments.

You don't have to fit in at the cost of losing your own identity. Everyone can contribute in his or her own way, adults and children. We all grow together, better and stronger.

Parents can find useful resources and support from the Playcentre organization to help them tackle cultural differences. Maggie said that each licensed Playcentre also had an enrollment officer and training education officer to make sure parents had full access to necessary training and support. They would recommend workshops and PD programs to different parents based on their levels and willingness to learn. The Playcentre organization oversees the training needs from each Playcentre and provides extra help or support workers to some Playcentres after evaluating their needs request. Some parents choose to continue supporting the Playcentre as centre support worker after their children go to school. There are also some external teaching supports parents can get from the Auckland

Playcentre Association, such as having a special needs expert to work with children in need, taking a funded excursion activity, and having an ECE teacher on team for certain days. By the time of our interview, Maggie had finished Course 3 in the parent education program and planned to take Level 4 study which she felt "worth the time and energy to learn." She also started to teach fundamental courses to new parents at entry level, which she found quite rewarding.

5.5.5 Advocating for Parents' Role in Caring for and Educating Children

At Playcentre, the term "parents" does not only mean moms and dads, but refers to anyone who is involved in parenting, such as grandparents, foster parents, stepparents or even nannies. Through discussion and careful planning, Playcentre's events can integrate with family calendars to reinforce the cooperation between Playcentre and the family and to enable the continuity of meaningful and educational experiences both in the Playcentre and at home. Each year, Maggie's Playcentre organizes fish and chip nights, moms' and girls' days or boys' and dads' days, Matariki, discos and other social and cultural events to create a sense of the centre as a shared big home.

Maggie thinks that the natural bond between children and parents is "genetical and in your blood" and it is hard to find anyone else who loves children more than their parents. However, that does not mean every parent is naturally endowed with a skill set of parenting. Instead, parents need to learn how to grow together with their children and make each other's life complete. That is why Maggie strongly believed that the Playcentre is the ideal place for both parents and children, especially with the on-going parents' training programs and sharing among parents. Maggie shared that she went along to Playcentres to get to know her children and other people but ended up on a journey of personal growth and family relationship growth.

> *Two points are fundamentally important in parenting: your relationship with yourself and the relationship between father and mother. We demonstrate how we love ourselves and each other through relationships. I learned that I should live out*

my own best before I educate my children. I started to understand the real meaning of loving myself and live on my own truth. This is a hard but amazing journey, and I'm fully grateful to my children for inspiring me to do so. From my observation, relationship between parents is the base for a family. If the parents love each other and have good relationship, their children won't have any emotional or behavioral problems. And everybody will grow and benefit in our Playcentre.

On the other hand, Maggie warned that some parents had the wrong expectation of relying on teachers to educate their children simply because they "don't know what to do with their children." Maggie commented that:

Parents should never drop their children in the centre and leave the education of their children to teachers. Even when parents have to send their kids to daycare centres, they should always remember that they should know their kids best and cooperate with teachers to support their kids. Not knowing what to do with their kids is not an excuse of being lazy and irresponsible. If you don't know, then learn and grow with kids. If you ask, you can always find all sorts of resources to learn about parenting, from the government, their network, community support centre, hotlines and websites, and many others.

It was Maggie's conviction that parents are children's first and best educators and parents should learn parenting skills and grow with children. Based on this account, Maggie considered her taking time off to look after her children at Playcentre was "the best and most economical choice" she had made because she "can go back to work as an accountant again someday later, but can't spend the same day with my children as a mom after they grow up." When asked by other parents about choosing ECE services, Maggie always answered "come to our Playcentre and we grow together."

5.5.6 On Government ECE Policies

As a parent who had tried different kinds of ECE services before choosing Playcentre, and after working at Playcentre for about 7 years, Maggie felt that she had a lot to say about New Zealand's ECE services and the government's ECE policies.

Her first point is that Playcentres have been undervalued by the government. Although Playcentres have a long history of about 80 years in New Zealand and play a very important role in supporting both children and parents and the whole community, the government funding is very disappointing. Maggie was concerned that this unique organization was suffering in the ECE market.

> *I read a report saying that Playcentres educate more than 7% of preschoolers in New Zealand but receive less than 1% of the government's funding for the ECE sector. This is very unfair if we understand the significance of Playcentre services. It's a myth that parents in Playcentres are rich and free and we don't need government's funding. Yes, we do! We need more funding to pay the property rent, to buy and update learning resources, to replace some broken facilities and to hire qualified helpers and so on.*

Maggie's second point was that ECE teachers have been undervalued in terms of payment and social status. She wasn't judging parents who have to choose to send their children to daycare centres to stay with teachers, they all want to have good teachers to look after and educate their kids. However, the importance of ECE has not earned enough attention from the government and society. The same thing is true about early childhood teachers who work in different community-owned and private-owned centres. Maggie had met many early childhood teachers in different ECE services. Her Playcentre also employed some trained and qualified teachers as supervisors in order to meet the government regulations. However, compared with parents who work voluntarily at Playcentre with their own children, early childhood teachers work there as paid professionals. However, the reality Maggie observed was that "most ECE teachers are not happy with their payment and social

status, and they have to fight for their rights or make their voices heard by employers and the government." She believed the working conditions won't attract really good ECE teachers to come and stay in this career. They should be paid with a much better salary because they are doing the most valuable job in society—educating children, the future of the family and the nation. Maggie compared New Zealand ECE services with that of some north European countries like Switzerland and the Netherlands. She found that the funding scheme and the working professional in ECE field in these north European countries manifested the importance of having enough support from the government and made a lot of sense to the quality of ECE.

> *When I look at the ECE teachers in Switzerland and Netherlands, I'm surprised to find that they are master's, PhDs and post-doctoral who have been working and researching in this field for many years. Are they overqualified? In my opinion, not at all. On the contrary, we should find the best teaching staff for our children. It's a pity that it's not the case in New Zealand.*

Maggie suggested that the government and the MoE should work out a better plan to increase the standards for becoming an ECE teacher, and to train quality ECE teachers and attract them to stay in this field. In Maggie's opinion, the fundamental quality of a good ECE teacher is the genuine passion and love for children.

> *Just like not every parent is capable of parenting, not every teacher is capable for the position. Some quick and easy online ECE qualifications in teaching programs should be cancelled. Besides, teachers who have children will teach and behave very differently from those who have no children. For many ECE teachers, it's just a job to make living. Even it's a job, it's not an easy job. The whole thing is very complex and needs on-going learning.*

Maggie's final point about ECE policies was that the government should limit the number of ECE services and stop approving the new establishment of ECE centres.

Early childhood education should not be a business. We've had enough private daycare centres with low enrollment rates, while a lot more, new centres are approved to establish by the government. The competition is tough. Many managers and owners are sacrificing their service quality for survival purposes. The government and MoE really need to do their homework to find out how centres are run in New Zealand.

5.6 Jane's Interview

5.6.1 Introduction

Jane is an active person with rich experiences and insightful perspectives on ECE. She got her bachelor's degree in computer science in 2004, but her first job after graduation was teaching English to children in a private training company. Jane became interested in children's education after noticing learning differences in children of different ages. This interest was further inspired after she had her son and finally drove her to step into the ECE field. Jane had a better understanding of childhood education in China through working in a kindergarten as a manager assistant. Then she decided to come to New Zealand in 2010 to study in ECE and became an ECE teacher in Auckland centres in the following year, 2011. Jane had been working in different roles in ECE services before she joined my research interview. Her working experiences in ECE, her reflections on culture and education, her understanding of different features of ECE in New Zealand and China, her comments on policies in ECE, as well as her messages to future ECE teachers are valuable references for all readers.

5.6.2. Jane's Background

Jane came from a family of teachers. She said that 90% of her family members worked in different levels of schools ranging from primary to university, and she was the only one who worked in preschool education. Growing up in such a background, Jane developed an early interest in education and she considered being a teacher as a great occupation.

When Jane was studying in a university located in Beijing, her major was computer science which was believed to be the most promising major around 2000. However, after graduation, Jane didn't find a job relating to computing science or coding. Instead, she left Beijing, went back to her hometown and joined a private education company to teach English to school-age children (roughly from 5 to 12 years old). Jane didn't explain why she chose to do so and how she could teach English to young children without necessary qualifications and experience, but she clearly became a "teacher" as she wished. Jane recalled that she became interested in children's education after noticing learning differences in children of different ages.

The selling point of our English training courses was "Small class size. Individual learning plan."

> *We used to have a small group of 10 children in each classroom to keep the best teacher–student ratio and provide individual teaching support to each of them. But we found that sometimes it was just impossible to have 10 kids in a class at the same time. The younger students were, the smaller their groups were. It was crazy to have ten 5–6-year-old children sitting in the same classroom to follow teacher's teaching plan, but we could do so with older children of 10–12 years old…Boys and girls were learning very differently…They were full of amazing questions which I found quite fascinating but I couldn't answer most of them. I wanted to find out more and understand them better…*

After working as an English teacher for 2 years, Jane had her own son. She took time off to stay at home for a year and became more interested in childhood education when she spent time with her son. When Jane decided to return to work, she got an opportunity to join a team to run a kindergarten in her hometown. Jane was very excited because she thought that was a better way of getting to know childhood education field and working in the kindergarten "would provide good education resources to my son." At that time, daycare services for under 3s were not very popular in Jane's hometown and the starting

age for most children to go to kindergartens was from 3 years old. It was a privilege for Jane to take her 2-year-old son to the kindergarten when she worked there.

> *I can see from my own son that an early start in quality childcare centre would do great to his life. The philosophy of our kindergarten was Montessori. My son could play with kids of mixed ages and got extra care as the youngest of them all. Even now I still attribute his social skills and good manners to what he got from his kindergarten experiences.*

Jane worked in this kindergarten as the manager assistant for about 3 years. It was the formal beginning of her career in ECE, and she hasn't stopped her endeavors since then. As a beginner in this field, Jane started to attend a serial of trainings organized by the Chinese Montessori Association. She went to more than 15 cities to attend the training courses and visited local Montessori kindergartens. It was a bit confusing for Jane to notice that each kindergarten had their own interpretation and implementation of Montessori philosophies. Jane also searched for additional childhood education theories and practices from international websites because her English was good enough to do so. The more she learnt, the more she found she didn't know. From daily observations, Jane also noticed the gap between the philosophies her centre advocated and the practices taken by teachers.

> *The teaching in our kindergarten was still teacher centreed and focusing on training children's skills. I had a feeling that was not what I really wanted, but I couldn't explain what I really wanted for children's education as I had very limited knowledge of this field. That was very frustrating. I knew something was not that right, but I didn't know the answer.*

Jane's curiosity and interest in childhood education, together with her ambition to find the best way of educating her son, drove her to decide to take a further study in ECE in 2009.

5.6.3 Reasons to Come to New Zealand

If it seemed unusual for Jane to teach English with an educational background in computer science, it was more exceptional when Jane decided to study ECE in a foreign country. She had both academic and practical reasons for her aspirations.

> *After taking many Montessori training courses, I started to get confused with different interpretations of the original Montessori philosophy and pedagogical practices, and I became critical about early childhood education in China. That was not the quality I was looking for, but I couldn't find the proper learning opportunities in China at that time. Based on the educational system in China, with a bachelor's degree in computer science and my age, I was left with very limited choices if I wanted to study in early childhood education. Everything was based on tests and exams, not on applications or recommendations. It was impossible for me to pass the enrollment exams and meet the requirement for a master's degree in early childhood education. Besides, I was even not eligible to take part in the master's degree enrollment exams because I didn't have a related education background in ECE. On the other hand, the vocational and professional training programs were messy and low quality. I didn't want to waste my time and money in that.*

> *Because my English is good, I often browsed English websites and explored the unknown world apart from China. From my reading and searching online, I felt that the best early childhood education theories and practices were in Europe. So, I wanted to go abroad and have access to the best of them all.*

However, aspirations alone wouldn't take Jane to the places she really wanted to be. She had to take into consideration many other factors before she found the best way achieve her goal, such as family issues, program length and costs, future job opportunities and career placement, etc. Jane remarked that she "had to evaluate everything carefully" because that was a big decision and she couldn't bear any mistake or failure from that. She

had an image of herself as a mature woman who knew what she wanted and how to achieve her goals. She didn't use services from any recruitment agents because she was confident with her English and wanted to save money from using agents' consultancy and services.

At first, Jane was thinking of applying for master's study in ECE as she already had a bachelor's degree. In the typical Chinese logic of pursuing "further" study, it is generally expected that you move up to a higher level of degree or professionalism. The first thing Jane did was to search for information about ECE studies in Italy, Switzerland, the UK, Canada and Australia. New Zealand was not in her list at the beginning. She listed all these admission requirements from different universities and institutes and compared descriptions of ECE programs in these schools. Jane soon gave up on Italy and Switzerland because she couldn't meet the admission requirements of the master's programs she liked. She then applied for a Master of Education at a UK university because that took only one year to finish, and she was attracted by the "theoretical practices" part of the course description. Unfortunately, Jane failed in her application for a UK university, but she didn't explain why.

After that, Jane started to apply for schools in Canada and Australia because she believed that the education system in these two countries had taken the "British style." She soon gave up on Canada after realizing that she couldn't stand the cold weather there. That was a funny, if not easy, reason to make a decision like that. Jane also laughed when she talked about this part and readily admitted that most of her information was from the internet and she hadn't visited any of these countries before applying. Finally, when Jane was searching for ECE programs in Australia, she "accidentally" discovered New Zealand and *Te Whariki*, and was surprised by the international recognition of New Zealand's ECE policy and practices. Jane did a little more research on New Zealand and felt that the best things came when she least expected them to.

> *The Master of Teaching in Australia I was applying for was a 2-year program, which was too long for me in terms of time and money issues. I knew I couldn't take*

my son or my family members with me if I studied abroad. So, the shorter the program is, the better.

I read that New Zealand was small but beautiful. You know, there are so many amazing pictures of the natural beauty of this magic land. The reputation of New Zealand's early childhood education was very good from what I read online. Besides, the program I applied for in New Zealand was a Level 5 diploma degree. The tuition fees were cheaper compared with other optional ones and it only took 1 year to finish.

Therefore, Jane finally chose to come to New Zealand to continue her study in this field. When asked why she chose a Level 5 degree when she had already obtained a bachelor's degree in China, Jane replied that she wanted to start from the most practical part of childhood education. "Theories are easy to remember but difficult to implement. And I wanted to start from the very beginning of early childhood education to get down to the practices," Jane said. She also added that she didn't really know what would happen in schools before she came to New Zealand and it was her preoccupation/misunderstanding that "master's study was only about theories." Since then, Jane has stayed in New Zealand about 10 years, and she feels very lucky and happy to have chosen New Zealand as her destination.

5.6.4 Jane's Reflections on ECE in New Zealand and China

As Jane has working experience in both China and New Zealand, she shared her comparisons and reflections on ECE in the interview when asked her opinion of early childhood services in general. Jane's reflections can be summarized into two points: the position of ECE in the overall education system, and cultural and social values in ECE.

5.6.4.1 Early Childhood Education and the Overall Education System. To start with, Jane stated that the position of ECE in a country's overall education system was determined by social and historical factors, expectations from parents, and the transition programs between ECE and primary school education. Jane believed that the function and

quality of ECE services must be valued in light of local contexts. For example, it fits the social context for most Chinese children to attend kindergartens at the age of 3, while most Kiwi children attend early childhood services at a much younger age. Parents in China and New Zealand have different expectations about ECE, and that will influence the form and function of ECE services in many ways.

> *We shouldn't talk about early childhood education separately from the overall education system like it's something not compulsory or less formal. Early childhood education should match primary education, and in the long run it will act as the fundamental base for the whole education system.*
>
> *On the other hand, the role and objectives of early childhood education are determined by the assessment system. Take China as an example. The curriculum and practices in kindergartens are more like schools which are very much influenced and determined by the ultimate assessment method ... university entrance examination. That's why kindergarten teachers start teaching literacy and math and many other skills in China. This is not the case in New Zealand because the whole assessment system is different.*

From Jane's understanding, there is no right or wrong or perfect education system in the world because each education system is generated from the social and cultural realities and fits the society well in its own way. More specifically about ECE, Jane said that ECE in was different China and New Zealand and we could learn from each other.

> *When Chinese parents and teachers complain about things that they don't like in early childhood education in China, Kiwi parents and teachers complain about similar things in New Zealand too. Such complaints happen in every country, and this is normal and natural. And that's why social changes and needs will drive education to evolve along with them. Every society has the capability to forge their own education system in a particular way to meet their needs. There is no dominant*

or perfect early childhood education sample for other countries to follow, but we can learn from each other and inspire each other to find the answer to our questions.

5.6.4.2 Cultural and Social Values in ECE. The second stand-out point in Jane's reflection was about cultural and social values in ECE. Jane felt very proud of China's long history and cultural heritage, but at the same time she thought that some of the best cultural essences got lost in contemporary Chinese society and education. In general, Jane considered Confucius and Buddhism as the two pillars of philosophy in Chinese education, including early childhood educational philosophies and practices. She personally believed that Buddhism was the untold foundation for most Chinese people's beliefs and life, but she didn't elaborate on that as much as she talked about Confucius. Jane summarized that the Confucius influences in Chinese ECE could be seen in three main aspects: the status hierarchy in kindergartens; the respect for parents, teachers and elders; and the conflict and balance between freedom and rules.

By "status hierarchy" in kindergartens, Jane explained that she meant most Chinese kindergartens were teacher led where children were considered as less competent or independent, which was in contrast to New Zealand's fundamental image of children. Such a hierarchy also existed in the management style of kindergartens which gave the headmaster (equivalent to the "manager" in New Zealand) the most authority and power over other teachers. In Jane's words, an ordinary kindergarten teacher in China was not expected to question any of the decisions made by the headmaster.

A person in leadership is automatically entitled with authority and righteousness in the workplace, even sometimes these people in leadership positions have no essential understanding of childhood education at all. They follow the national regulations, make rules and regulations in kindergartens, and manage the kindergarten in a dominant way. When I was working in my first kindergarten as the headmaster's assistant, I didn't feel anything wrong with that. But now I find it's hard to work in that type of centre culture.

In the same line, Jane said that it was easy to understand the different meanings and forms of "respect" in Chinese and New Zealand daycare centres.

> *In New Zealand daycare centres, kids can call their teachers by first names. That's very natural and nobody would think that would be disrespectful. But it's not the same case in China. It's not simply about names but about the different expectations from parents and teachers for children. We can call it cultural differences of course, but I think these cultural differences are under the long-lasting influences of Confucius philosophy in China. In our Chinese tradition, kids and younger people are educated and expected to respect their elders more.*

In relation to the conflict and balance between freedom and rules in kindergartens, Jane also connected the teacher-led pedagogical practices in Chinese kindergartens with the influence of Confucius. In her opinion, because of the status hierarchy and the unequal respect level between adults and children, Chinese children were given less freedom in their daily experiences in kindergartens and were restricted by more rules set by adults. "If the adults themselves didn't have good experiences of being respected and free, how can you expect them to respect children very well and give enough freedom to children?" Jane asked.

Apart from being critical about the restrictions and problems in Chinese kindergartens, Jane also acknowledged that such things and practices were generated by the real context of Chinese society and we shouldn't judge them as good or bad in comparison with another country's ECE policies and practices. She emphasized again that "every country has its own education system and practices which fit the social needs and historical backgrounds." For example, New Zealand's ECE policies and practices are generated from Māori culture, influences from the UK and other social changes and needs. Jane concluded that educational policies and practices in China's ECE had been changing and improving over the last 10 years along with social changes and international exchanges.

There is no static or perfect education practices in any country. Education always changes along with social and political changes. When Western educational policies and practices are introduced into China, they are no longer taken blindly as "the right model" or "better examples" as they were 10 years ago. Now it's more like an internalization process for Chinese kindergartens and other early childhood education services to learn from the international ECE field. It's the same thing for New Zealand.

5.6.5 Changes in Life and Career

When the interview questions led our conversation back to Jane's experiences of living and working in New Zealand, Jane smiled and shared that the biggest change for her was that she learned to slow down in life and to try new things as she really wanted. Jane compared the fast-paced lifestyle in China where everyone is very busy, and parents have very high expectations for their children's achievements, with the laid-back lifestyle in New Zealand where people are not that busy and enjoy life as it is.

I used to be very busy in China, but now I have a lot of free time to enjoy my life. In China, the society and economy are changing so rapidly that people are under a lot of pressure to catch up with these changes. Parents normally expect their children to obtain high academic degrees and early a lot of money. But here in New Zealand, the general lifestyle is quite laid back, and Kiwi people don't worry about so many things as people in China. My personal life has slowed down and I start to notice beautiful things around me which I didn't notice in the past, such as the falling leaves, singing birds, dogs and children on the beach and so on. But sometimes I also feel bored if I don't know what to do here during my free time.

Another change Jane mentioned was her understanding of ECE. She stated that she had become more open-minded and inclusive in looking at educational policies and practices in different countries. After about 10 years learning and working in ECE centres in New

Zealand, Jane said that now she feels confident to have her own ECE philosophies and to integrate the best part of different philosophies and practices in various teaching situations.

There had also been many changes in Jane's career development since her arrival in New Zealand. Jane firstly started as an international student to study ECE and care at Unitec. It was a Level 5 program according to the NZQA qualification system, and Jane started to explore the landscape of New Zealand's ECE as a volunteer and then an on-call reliever when she was a student. She continued on, finishing a Level 7 ECE program before working full time. She mentioned that she had worked in almost all different kinds of ECE services including daycare centres, kindergartens, playgroups and Playcentres, home-based centres and community centres. "My GPA was not impressive, but I got a lot of working experience during that time as a reliever in different centres. That gave me a better understanding of what kind of centre I like to work in," Jane added. After her graduation with the necessary qualification, Jane started to work as a part-time teacher in two different centres. Then she became a full-time teacher in one of the two centres when there was an available vacancy. Jane didn't give a clear timeline of her career development but shared that she had worked in different roles in ECE centres from full-time teacher to head teacher and then to manager. She reflected that she had focused on different layers and aspects of early childhood teacher when she worked in different roles.

> *When I was an on-floor teacher, most of my attention was on teaching practices and* Te Whariki*. I was busy with learning and understanding* Te Whariki*, linking my practices to* Te Whariki*. Whatever the manager wanted me to learn, I would take related professional development programs as required.*
>
> *When I became a head teacher, I found that I could focus on a broader scope of ECE more than daily practices, such as the yearly and monthly plans of our room, teachers' wellbeing and teamwork and so on. I was able to grow in my leadership knowledge and became more professional.*

> *Then when I became a manager of a new centre, I found myself could access many more resources and opportunities outside our centre. My focus was shifted to centre policies, health and safety issues, national funding policies and marketing skills. My understanding of New Zealand's early childhood education policies and practices became wider and deeper with these experiences in different roles.*

However, after working as a manager for about 2 years, Jane encountered occupational burnout as she felt her job was a repetition of routines, and she couldn't find the drive and fun part in that position anymore. Jane used an analogy of climbing the mountain to describe her position changes from an on-floor teacher to a manager:

> *Before you reach the top of the mountain, you always wonder or fancy what kind of spectacular scenery you can see on the top. When you finally reach to the top, you may feel amazed and content for a certain period of time, but soon you start to feel it's just so-so and you start to notice there are many other higher mountains far or near. It's the same thing for me in working in centres.*

Although Jane didn't say it explicitly, it is obvious that she treated different positions in the centre in a hierarchy sense, with the on-floor teacher as the beginning or lowest level, the head teacher as the middle level, and the manager as the top level. Jane also considered herself as a successful ECE professional who could win these roles step by step in less than 10 years. "Hard work, careful planning and good social network are my keys to success," Jane commented. When she moved from a lower level to a higher level, Jane thought she could see ECE services in a broader scope, learn different things and access more opportunities. She planned to pursue a master's degree study after resigning from the manager role and her interest was in ECE teachers' education and PD.

5.6.6 On New Zealand's ECE Policies

During the interview, Jane also talked about her experiences and observations of ECE services in New Zealand and commented on ECE policies at both the centre level and the government level.

5.6.6.1 On Centres' Policies. The first point Jane made about policies in New Zealand ECE centres was their comprehensiveness and practicality. Each centre must come up with their centre policies, codes and standards in accordance with the requirements of the MoE. In Jane's opinion, policies in each centre covered almost every aspect of daily practices, especially health and safety, and could provide useful guidance to teachers and managers.

> *For instance, when a teacher finds lice in a child's hair or a child has fever, she would know the standard practices listed in the centre's policy documents. She would follow the procedures to deal with this situation, not on her own subjective decisions or answers she could find online.*

Jane shared that they had a full cabinet of policy files in her centre when she was the manager, and they reviewed these policies every month to make sure everything was on the right track. "We expect our teachers to become very familiar with our centre policies because that's very useful for them to deal with emergencies and other health and safety issues," Jane added. They would also adapt and change some policies based on real centre situations, such as new needs from children, teachers' and parents' feedback, new regional and national policy amendments and so on. By doing so, Jane felt that polices in centres could become both instructive and flexible. Jane also mentioned that centre policies were far more detailed than what she had described but she didn't have time to cover too many details.

5.6.6.2 On Government's ECE Policies. Generally speaking, Jane thought the best parts of New Zealand's ECE services were *Te Whariki* and the 20-hours free services supported by the government. On the other hand, she was very critical about the government regulations for opening a new ECE centre, the ratio requirement and working conditions for ECE teachers, and the credibility of Education Review Office (ERO) reports.

As for *Te Whariki*, Jane praised it as the most inclusive and inspiring ECE curriculum in the world. Teachers are inspired to support children in real learning circumstances, instead

of being "required" to follow procedures or practices. Under the guidance of *Te Whariki*, various educational philosophies are woven together in centres which creates an inclusive culture of New Zealand's ECE services as well. Jane also thought the 20-hours free ECE services supported by the government could encourage and include more children to attend different daycare services based on their family situations and choices. "It's more useful for low-income families in some areas to give a good start to their children's life," Jane said.

On the other hand, Jane sounded quite critical about some ECE policies as she believed that such policies should change along with New Zealand's social changes and needs. The first thing she didn't like was the government regulations for opening new ECE centres. In her opinion, the New Zealand government treats ECE services unfairly and differently from primary school education and sets no restrictions on the total number of ECE centres. She questioned the necessity of having new centres come into market constantly when there were so many existing ECE centres.

> *As far as I know, the government regulations of opening a new ECE centre have not changed since I came to New Zealand. The government has no control or plan to decide how many ECE centres are needed in a district. It treats early childhood education as a business and allows market competition to play the game. You may find several ECE centres along the same road which compete fiercely to recruit more children. And I think such competitions are vicious cycles. But when you look at the number of primary schools, it's always well planned in accordance to local population and school-age children in an area or zone.*

Jane thought it was wrong to treat ECE services as a business and the fierce market competition among ECE centres would ultimately hurt the core quality of ECE simply because "education is not a business." She suggested that the New Zealand government should restrict the total number of ECE centres in a certain region based on census statistics and community reviews. Jane even hoped the New Zealand government would make ECE

part of the nation's compulsory education system and establish a system to fund public and private ECE services differently.

> *It will be a similar system in funding primary schools. Public ECE services and centres would receive funding according to their decile rating, while private ECE services and centres would rely mainly on the fees they charge and get less funding from the government.*

Following her comment on government funding for ECE services, Jane said that ECE teachers were underpaid and their salary was not enough to support their daily living expenses. "When you compare the rapid increase in rent and house prices in Auckland during the last 10 to 20 years, it's hard to believe how little the increase is in ECE teachers' salary," Jane said. She also pointed out that the working conditions of ECE teachers were very stressful and demanding, especially when most centres just had the mindset of doing business and kept to the minimum teacher–child ratio. Jane shared that she used to work in the baby room for a couple of years and it was "absolutely crazy" for one teacher to look after five under-2 babies at the same time. "In that kind of situation, it's unrealistic and lying to talk about quality of the care and education in the room. All we managed to achieve was to stay alive at the end of the day." She believed that was also the main reason why many ECE teachers left their teaching positions and worked in other occupations with better pay and working conditions. Therefore, Jane strongly suggested that the government policy of teacher–child ratio should change to a much lower one, like 1:2 or 1:3, in order to reduce the turnover of ECE staff as well as to improve the quality of ECE.

Finally, Jane thought that the ERO could not evaluate and report the "real quality" of an ECE centre by using the current reviewing procedures. She also believed that such reviews could be very subjective and inconsistent if the ERO only came to visit and inspect a centre for a couple of hours every 3 to 4 years.

> *When ERO places a centre on a 3-year review or 4-year review, I just feel things are losing control during these 3 to 4 years after the review is done until the next*

review time. There are many things owners and managers can cheat with and just prepare for the ERO review. They can play the whole "hide-and-seek game" nicely when the ERO officers come to visit. It's so easy for ERO officers to check the list and decide the quality quickly, and they mainly focus on the health and safety part. There should be a quality control in process with a lot of on-site observation and interviews, not the prenotified visit for a couple of hours.

When asked about her suggestions for practical solutions, Jane was also ready to acknowledge that it was more difficult to solve the problem than to point out the problem. Besides, she stressed that was just her personal opinion of the ERO report and she might be wrong with some details. Jane concluded by saying that evaluating quality in ECE services was not an easy thing to do all over the world.

Quality mainly relies on internal factors such as the centre culture and the teaching team, and the bottom line of operating an ECE centre is to put the wellbeing of children in the heart and not to run the centre as a business or company.

5.6.7 Messages to Future Immigrant ECE Student Teachers

In recalling her own experiences of coming to New Zealand as an international student and then becoming an ECE teacher, Jane felt that she had many things to share with future ECE student teachers and people who would like to work in this field.

Her first message to future ECE student teachers was that "you should value yourself as an indispensable contributor to the diversity and quality of New Zealand's early childhood education."

New Zealand's early childhood education curriculum Te Whariki *values different cultures such as Māori culture, Pacific culture, Kiwi culture and Asian culture. Who will deliver Asian culture in centres? We Asian teachers. It's very useful for the wellbeing and belonging of young immigrant children in the centre if they can have a teacher who look like them and can understand their home language. Besides,*

having teachers from different cultural backgrounds will benefit all children in the centre to become more open-minded and creative.

The second suggestion Jane gave was to encourage immigrant ECE students to learn English and Māori very well in order to live and work smoothly in New Zealand. Jane considered English language skills as essential tools to finish the required qualification courses, to find job opportunities and to settle down in New Zealand. At the same time, Jane shared that the Māori language should be valued as equally important as English not only for the historical reason of the Treaty of Waitangi but also for the richness of Māori culture. She felt it was a pity that she couldn't use Māori language very well as an immigrant teacher and noticed that English had become the dominant language in most ECE centres except in some Māori language nests.

From my communication with Māori people and teachers, I find that their culture is full of wisdom, rich and beautiful, not primitive at all. But in my working places, Māori language and Māori culture are not delivered as they should be. We do value the importance of Māori language and culture of course, and we celebrate Māori festivals. But I just feel that's not enough. The reasons can be complicated, but I think the most prominent one is the shortage of qualified teachers from Māori backgrounds. For me and other immigrant teachers, English is the most useful and important language in life and work while Māori language is another challenge to learn.

At the end of the interview, Jane concluded that having a positive mind to learn and try new things would lead the way for future immigrant ECE students and teachers. "There is no perfect example for someone to follow in life's journey," Jane said, "and everyone will find their way if they keep on trying."

5.7 Findings Summary

The six interviews in this chapter cover the issues and challenges confronted by Chinese immigrant ECE teachers when they moved to New Zealand and became teachers in

different ECE services. Their lived experiences identify relevant themes of immigrant teachers' aspirations, pathways, transitions, career development and positions in the field of New Zealand ECE. Their strategies for changing their practices in various social interactions and their transition mechanisms will be discussed through the conceptual lens of Bourdieu's habitus, capital and field in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapters, I have identified the different fields in which Chinese immigrant ECE teachers revitalized their capitals and practiced their agency in international, national and social contexts: migration field and New Zealand's immigration policies, educational field and teacher's education and qualification requirements, professional field and ECE policies, the national curriculum *Te Whāriki*, dominant best practices and PD opportunities. In Chapter 5 Findings, I presented six cases of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers with a focus on how immigrant ECE teachers navigated their way within various fields, settled down and positioned themselves in each field. In this chapter, I will discuss and compare the key findings from the multiple cases and the focus group discussion to address the research questions. To construct the complexity of the interactions, continuity and situations in their narratives, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field and his reconversion theory will be drawn on. Bourdieu's theoretical contributions to this thesis help to reveal how their habitus manifested itself in individual teachers' beliefs and choices, and what strategies and capitals individual teachers deployed to reconcile the tensions arising from various power relations in different fields and to construct both their personal and social worlds.

6.1 Chinese Immigrant ECE Teachers' Aspirations and Pathways

All the six participants came to New Zealand after 2000. Lewin et al. (2011) listed various reasons why immigrants choose to move to other countries, including: economic hardships or poverty in their homeland, better living conditions, safety, better education opportunities for their children, to join family or relatives, business and work opportunities. The reasons the six participants in this present study chose to come to New Zealand are in line with the study by Lewin et al. (2011). The year and reasons for their coming to New Zealand are summarized in Table 6.1 and have been detailed in the data presented in Chapter 5. In this

chapter, these reasons will be examined in light of the theoretical framework and the New Zealand context.

Table 6.1

Year, Reason and Pathway of Coming to New Zealand

Name	Year	Reason	Pathway
Maggie	2002	Education	Exchange student at Massey University
Rina	2007	Lifestyle	Marriage
Carol	2008	Education	High school student in Wellington
Jane	2010	Education	International student at Unitec
Zoe	2013	Lifestyle	Partner of a Level-7 student visa holder
Gloria	2014	Education	Language school student in Christchurch

The above reasons for the choices made by these immigrant teachers are applicable to the concept of habitus. Bourdieu (1989) claims that choice making is a reflection of taste and taste is often cultivated from a person's early years and mapped on a person's social status. The habitus is the underlying structures of social life that become ingrained into how we physically move or talk in the world, how our behaviors are conditioned by objective possibilities, how the social world becomes objectified into a range of probabilities and expectations that make us more likely to choose certain actions rather than others, as demonstrated by the choices made by these six participants in the current study.

6.1.1 Chinese Immigrant ECE Teachers' Aspirations

> Making choices is the subjective expectations of objective probabilities. (Bourdieu, 1989)

6.1.1.1 Coming to New Zealand as Immigrants. On the whole, Chinese immigrant ECE teachers in the current study demonstrated aspirations for a better life and education in New Zealand when they first chose to come to New Zealand. As individuals, their expectations of working and living in New Zealand diverged at the practical level when their family backgrounds came into play and when they were confronted with

different realities. The following characteristics were revealed by detailed analyses of individual cases and the focus group discussion.

First, the previous sections show that these Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' aspirations for moving to New Zealand are largely influenced by their family background and values. Bourdieu (1977) used the concept of habitus to explain this. Habitus here is understood as a series of durable and transposable dispositions which determine a person's beliefs and values, attitudes and aspirations, expectations and practices of social life. As they come from different family backgrounds with differentiated experiences, they have certain activities and perspectives that express the culturally and historically constituted values of their habitus. Their value on education, their aspirations, and their expectations of coming to New Zealand vary. Carol and Maggie wanted to escape pressures from the Chinese university education system and were attracted by the more open education system in New Zealand. Carol could come to Wellington as a high-school student because she wanted to avoid the fierce competition in the national university entrance examination in China, and her parents believed that sending her to New Zealand to study would enrich Carol's experiences and provide a better platform for her future education and career placement. Maggie valued the inspiring and liberal academic atmosphere in New Zealand universities the most.

> *All I wanted was to avoid the University Entrance Examination in China. That's all I thought when I was 16…You know, the tuition fees are cheaper, and the enrollment procedure was relatively simple and less competitive.* (Carol)

> *It was not that type of university education which could liberate my thoughts and unleash my potentials. On the contrary, it was very depressing and restricting, far from what I imagined the university life should be. I felt stressful and unhappy, and I wanted to escape.* (Maggie)

Gloria and Jane were attracted by the English language speaking environment and the reputation of New Zealand's ECE. They deemed teaching as a great occupation and wanted

to get high-quality teacher education and training in New Zealand. Moreover, after comparing the cost and feasibility of going abroad to study, they both thought coming to New Zealand was "cheaper" than going to other places like the USA or UK.

> *I always admire teachers a lot and it is quite suitable for a female to work as a teacher. You will be highly respected and have many holidays. And when you have your own children, you can give them good family education.* (Gloria)

> *I had a feeling that was not what I really wanted, but I couldn't explain what I really wanted for children's education as I had very limited knowledge of this field… So, I wanted to go abroad and have access to the best of them all.* (Jane)

At a more familial level, Gloria was influenced by the trend in her family's social class where many of her friends and classmates went abroad to explore new opportunities after finishing bachelor study. Also, her father's perspective of the teaching profession also influenced Gloria's choice of major in teaching when she came to New Zealand. Meanwhile, Gloria's close relationship with her younger siblings and cousins in her big, extended family also nurtured her interest in choosing the major in ECE and working with children.

For Rina, marrying a Kiwi and moving to New Zealand helped her escape the social pressures in China. Her expectation of coming to New Zealand was to have a new start on everything. Different from other participants, Rina came to New Zealand to join her family and she obtained her resident visa even before she left China. Compared to other participants' uncertainty about the future when they first arrived in this new land, Rina was apparently more settled. Her attention was on her family and raising her two children in New Zealand. What she valued most in living in New Zealand is the Kiwi style of educating children and very supportive facilities for children. In her words, "children can have their best childhood in New Zealand," and that influenced her choice to enter the ECE work field as well.

For Zoe's family, the value and function of education was more than finding a job to make a living. Such a value has been carried on by Zoe all through her life and work, especially when she emphasized "the enquiry mind and open heart" aspect of her cultural and professional identity. Zoe could have more space and freedom to study in three different countries and in three majors: her bachelor's degree in business in China, her master's degree in financial study in UK and her postgraduate study in ECE in New Zealand. When she couldn't bear the air pollution in Beijing, she had the option to move to what she perceived as a clean and healthy environment. She had visited New Zealand as a tourist 3 years before she decided to move to New Zealand and had a very good impression of the environment and people in New Zealand.

Moreover, Bourdieu's concept of habitus can also partly be used to explain the agreement and arguments in the focus group discussion among these six participants when they were talking about reasons for coming to New Zealand. According to Bourdieu (2010),

> The division into classes performed by sociology leads to the common root of the classifiable practices which agents produce and of the classificatory judgments they make of other agents' practices and their own. The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (principium divisions) of these practices. (pp. 165–166)

In the focus group discussion, when they shared about their reasons for coming to New Zealand, it was noticeable that the conversation and interaction among Carol, Zoe, Gloria and Maggie was more active and comfortable. They agreed on each other's motivation to pursue a better lifestyle and they hadn't worried about financial challenges when making choices because their family was able to back them up all the time. In contrast, Jane and Rina were silent in that part of the discussion. The main reason for this could be that Carol, Gloria, Zoe and Maggie come from similar well-off family backgrounds, which leads to similar values and perspectives around making choices. Even though they had different levels of educational backgrounds before coming to New Zealand (Carol was a high school student, Zoe had a master's degree from the UK, Gloria had a bachelor's degree, and

Maggie was a sophomore student at university), which is also linked to Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, their values when making choices were determined mainly by the family background. Carol, Zoe, Gloria and Maggie articulated a self-discovery rhetoric, emphasized "self-fulfillment and freedom," used similar expressions like "what I really like is to explore unknown possibilities," "my family support me to experience new things and meet new people," "I know what I want, and I just follow my heart." However, Jane and Rina didn't join the conversation about reasons for coming to New Zealand in the focus group discussion, and I learnt from individual interviews that both Jane and Rina came to New Zealand out of more pragmatic purposes: Jane was to pursue a better career future in ECE, and Rina was to start a new family life. The way they interacted with each other, reassuring each other about their choices or keeping silent during the discussion, could be connected to Bourdieu's concept of habitus to understand their practices.

Second, these Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' aspirations for coming to live in New Zealand changed after they studied in New Zealand. Before coming to New Zealand, their expectations were more ideal and optimistic, and their choices were simple and straightforward: going to New Zealand. As reported in the cases, teachers articulated a rhetoric of pursuing better education and lifestyle and their expectations of coming to New Zealand diminished the significance of class divisions and obstacles which have been reported in the literature (see Ball & Junemann, 2012; Gong et al., 2017; Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Reid et al., 2014; Schmidt, 2010). They subjectively imagined New Zealand society as simultaneously fair and classless. They also thought all New Zealand people were well-off middle-class. However, discourses on migration, integration and citizenship are inevitably classed (Arndt, 2018). The continued relevance of class in the era of individualizing modernity (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009) underpins the life trajectories of immigrants through geographical mobility, cultural assimilation and integration, and the reproduction of their economic and social position. By way of example, Carol showed her understanding of social classes as largely associated with the occupation she took. After staying in New Zealand for a while and encountering various difficulties or challenges,

their aspirations became more realistic and practical: to obtain a locally recognized qualification and find a job, to make a living and support oneself, to apply for permanent residence visas and to establish new connections and grow new roots in this new land. The change in their aspirations can be understood as their adaptation to objective probabilities. The findings in the in-depth case studies resonated with previous findings indicating that immigrant teachers' beliefs, values and choices (key elements of habitus) can incorporate changes within and across different contexts and conditions (Cederberg, 2017; Kim, 2018; Morrison & Clark, 2011; Schirato & Roberts, 2020).

6.1.1.2 Choosing to Work as an ECE Teacher. Following the former discussion of New Zealand's immigration policies and the government 10-year Strategic Plan for ECE since 2002, I find that international students are possibly encouraged to enroll in early childhood certificate programs in the belief that they will have better opportunities to find employment after graduation and eventually earn the permanent residency status. Favorable immigration policies for international students and the surge in need for ECE teachers are attractive options for international graduates and other immigrants who may not have previously considered a career in ECE. The drive for some immigrants and international graduates to work in ECE may vary from an initial passion for ECE, to its usefulness for gaining employment and permanent residency, or both. The findings in this study have shown similar evidence.

First, a passion for teaching and working with children emerged as a dominant theme throughout the interviews and focus group discussion as the participants described why they chose to enter this field. The understanding of early education's importance to children's lifelong learning and the rewarding relationship with children and parents played a strong part in what attracted them to work in ECE services. In the cases of Maggie, Rina and Jane, they all had their own children to look after and developed their initial interest in ECE from their personal needs. Although they disagreed with each other on what type of ECE service was the best for children, they all agreed on the importance of children' early

age experiences, the quality of early childhood care and education services, and the influence from children's primary care givers. Moreover, their genuine love and passion for ECE enabled them to practice more agency and realize their potentials in this field: Maggie became a lecturer for Auckland Playcentre Association, Rina became a head teacher and then the manager of a newly established ECE centre, and Jane became an activist in promoting service qualities in ECE centres. For them, working as an ECE teacher was more than a job; it was a cause and a career to which they were willing to devote their time and effort. Such findings are similar to what Lee and Kramer (2013) found from their study on the influence of habitus transformation on the realization of one's disposition and aspirations, but differ from Lee and Kramer's study in that these immigrant ECE teachers' aspirations and dispositions were practiced both in institutional contexts and noninstitutional situations.

Second, some immigrants chose to work in the ECE field mainly or at least initially because of its usefulness for gaining employment and permanent residency. Carol's case is quite representative of many other international students who also choose to enter the ECE field under the favorable immigration and ECE education policies. She did her calculation of immigration policies around 2009 and decided to quit her bachelor's study of hospitality and tourism in AUT in 2010. Carol changed her degree to a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) at NZTC "because that gave me a better opportunity to gain my residence visa after graduation." However, such usefulness for gaining employment and permanent residency is not enough to keep these immigrant ECE teachers continuing to work in this field once they get their residency application approved. This could also explain why the turnover rate of immigrant ECE teachers is high in many New Zealand centres (Bishop & Glynn, 2003; Fromberg, 2003; Dunham, 2017). Similarly, in the focus group discussion of the current study, my participants questioned the current immigration policies and ECE policies by asking:

(a) Do we really have a workforce shortage in ECE teachers which needs to be covered by taking in more immigrants?

(b) What are the reasons for many registered ECE teachers to quit their jobs in ECE centres?

It is obvious from the above discussion that the overall policy and power structures in immigration fields and ECE fields influence immigrant ECE teachers' choices and aspirations a lot and determine their directions in educational and professional pursuits. As for the usefulness of entering the ECE field, all my participants concluded that

> *if you don't have the right heart for children and love working with children, your work in centres would be a nightmare full of noises, burdens and stresses…only the true love for early childhood education and care will keep you stay in this profession and guide you through those dark and confusing times*.

Finally, there are many other immigrant teachers who chose to work in this field with a combination of the above two reasons. They managed to find a balance between the practical aspects of becoming an ECE teacher and the idealistic values they attached to this role. The cases of Gloria and Zoe fall into this vein. Gloria knew clearly that she could have a clear pathway from obtaining a qualification to full registration and would be granted a post-study work visa after finishing her Level 7 study even before applying for her graduate diploma study in New Zealand. Zoe turned to graduate diploma study in ECE at NZTC after her hope of finding an English teaching job in Auckland failed. She even volunteered in a small ECE centre and did her homework on the job market to understand that becoming a primary or early childhood teacher would be "better and easier" compared with becoming an English language teacher, and of course she felt she "was capable to become an ECE teacher" because she "really enjoyed the time with children" from her volunteer experiences in local centres.

In conclusion, examination of participants' narratives, in particular their aspirations to come to New Zealand and work in the ECE field, shows immigrant teachers are active meaning makers of their choices and experiences. It is a continual dialogical and negotiable process as a result of the interaction of their personal histories and present social and

contextual probabilities. Their examples also reveal how immigrant teachers' habitus can incorporate changes within and across different contexts and conditions (Schirato & Roberts, 2020) in a ceaseless motion when they have new experiences in different sociocultural contexts.

6.1.2 Chinese Immigrant ECE Teachers' Pathways

In this part, I will examine the teachers' pathways in two parts: the immigration pathways and the pathway to the profession of ECE teacher.

There are mainly two different pathways for Chinese ECE teachers to immigrate to New Zealand: a) join the family or b) immigrate as skilled workers – ECE teachers. Except for Rina who came as a resident with her partnership with a New Zealander, all the other five participants came to New Zealand as international students and they didn't think about applying for a resident visa at the beginning. During the last 2 decades, New Zealand has taken progressive steps to improve the attractiveness and better migration policies to compete for diversified immigrant sources (Bedford et al., 2010; Dalli & Stephenson, 2010; Henderson, 2004; May, 2001; Stats NZ, 2009), and immigrants perceive and evaluate these policies differently based on their backgrounds and personal situations. In light of this, Maggie, Zoe, Jane, Gloria and Carol all earned their resident visas through Work to Residence (in Maggie's case) and Skilled Migrant pathways after finishing their study in New Zealand. It has been a natural choice for many international students since 2000, which is also reported in related discourse (Stats NZ 2018, 2020).

Participants summarized two features of this Skilled Migrant pathway: 1) The earlier the easier, which means the immigration screening criteria for skilled migrants have been raised higher and higher since 2000 and it was much easier to apply for resident visas in the early 2000s than the later 2010s. For example, in focus group discussion they compared their resident visa application experiences and compared how dramatically different the skilled migrant requirements were for Maggie, who came to New Zealand in 2002, and Gloria, in 2014. 2) The "skills" Immigration New Zealand values are just the skills they

want to find to fulfill local ECE teacher workforce shortages, not actually the rich skill sets immigrants have. In other words, under the SMC framework, global migration, be it tourists, visitors, students or investors, has long been driven by neoliberal forces which centre migrants as human capital (Apple, 2005; Robertson, 2012) and investment in global economic competition (Ball & Junemann, 2012; Maguire & Falcous, 2010). Measures of such capitals are shaped by policy constructions of host countries' historical constraints, national economic interests, and protectionist professional policies. They together weave a matrix of immigration policies, incentives and restrictions in the immigration field.

As for pathways to becoming an ECE teacher, five participants (Zoe, Jane, Carol, Rina and Gloria) all shared the same pathway: first taking ITE programs and obtaining required qualifications from ITE providers, then finding a job in a centre as a provisionally registered teacher and finishing the induction and mentoring program (IMP) in 2 years, and then becoming a fully registered ECE teacher. Maggie's pathway was different as she chose to work as a parent-educator in a Playcentre and the whole qualification criteria and regulations of Playcentres are different from ECE centres.

From detailed analyses of case studies and focus group discussion data, four characteristics can be identified: 1) The entry requirements for ECE teachers have become higher and higher during the last 2 decades, including the qualification requirements, English language proficiency requirements and codes and standards (Teaching Council, 2017). For example, Jane could register with the Education Council (the former name of the Teaching Council) with a Level 5 qualification and IELTS 6.5 in 2011, but now the benchmark qualification for New Zealand-qualified ECE teachers is Level 7 or above qualifications as well as IELTS 7 at least for people who want to study and work in ECE field. 2) Tertiary ITE providers vary in their course structure and entry requirements, which makes it hard to compare their ITE program qualities but provides more options for prospective students. In both the individual interviews and focus group discussion, participants argued that they could not claim that a 3-year bachelor's ECE program is better than a 1-year postgraduate

diploma ECE program, nor could we claim that one ITE tertiary institute is better than another as they are all different to serve different people and purposes. 3) The IMP plays vital roles in bridging the knowledge and experience gaps of newly graduated ECE teachers, but new provisionally registered ECE teachers often found themselves conforming to the dominant White middle-class discourses and practices of ECE (Arndt, 2018; Singh & Huang, 2013; Sleeter & Milner, 2011) and it not only took a lot of time and energy, but also courage and passion, to find their own voice and position themselves in their workplace. This finding resonates the arguable strategic directions for ITE and IMP programs in centre-based training communities (Gibson, 2015). 4) The flexibility and transferability of ECE teacher registration pathways provide more options and opportunities for ECE teachers, whether they are immigrants or local. For instance, although Maggie got her qualification in ECE through Playcentre New Zealand, she could also be counted as a registered ECE teacher in other New Zealand ECE service providers.

6.2 Strategies and Activities

Following the above discussion of immigrant teachers' aspirations and choices for migrating to New Zealand, the habitus is the way they enter a field with the explicit and tacit knowledge they have about themselves and the outer society. The actualization of the habitus depends on the social location or field. In other words, habitus is connected to the concept of field and provides a basis for the strategies individuals deploy for the competition in the field (Bourdieu, 1990b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). When entering a certain field or moving from one field to another, they are active agents who understand and acknowledge the rules of the game, enter the field with their subjective expectations, and utilize strategies and their manageable capitals based on what they think is the right balance between the likeliness of success and the appropriate challenges in various contexts.

This is further mediated by the way how individuals take positions and strategies to employ their capital in social reality (Bourdieu, 2010). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) also emphasized the importance of the composition of an individual's overall capital, made up

of cultural, economic and social capital. How immigrants maneuver and make use of their capital in different social contexts should be examined in consideration of the geographic, temporal, and spatial dimensions, which is also in line with the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space approach in this study: interaction (personal and social); continuity (past, present, future) and situation (place) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Based on the data analysis of our participants' narratives, I will discuss three strategies identified by the current study: obtaining necessary qualifications from dominant institutes, building and deploying ethnic and social capitals, and making use of new technologies.

6.2.1 Obtaining Necessary Qualifications

Qualification recognition for skilled migrants, particularly in regulated fields, can represent a major barrier to early employment. A Chinese immigrant teacher, whose qualifications represent cultural capital in China, cannot be transformed quite so easily into the same level of economic capital outside China. That is, they found it unexpectedly difficult to find equivalent jobs in New Zealand with their qualifications gained outside of New Zealand. In order to find jobs and settle down in this new place, participants needed to get the "key to open the door" （literally "敲门砖"in Chinese）to enter into the field. Participants who grow up in well-off families, such as the participants in this study, have more opportunities to study abroad and gain some valuable qualifications and experiences as they have access to necessary economic capital and are able to afford the tuition fees and other expenses to study abroad. Their qualifications from oversea institutions outside China can be seen as a form of cultural capital that could lead them to being able to find a job or be offered a position in a company or an ECE centre.

Two features stand out in their experiences of obtaining necessary qualifications from dominant institutes: 1) The level of their qualifications varied but they all got their registration as fully qualified teachers with practicing certificates under the requirements of the Teaching Council New Zealand, except in the case of Maggie, who works at Playcentre. This feature calls into question for the field the feasibility of comparing the

quality of various ITE programs in New Zealand, especially against the backdrop of the pervasive economic paradigm within both the early childhood and tertiary policy domains in the last 2 decades (see examples in Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Ball, 2003; Farquhar & Gibbons, 2010; Neylon, 2015). Although the notion of quality is a contested one in the ECE community (Dahlberg et al., 2013), there is still a consensus in the discourse that staff need to be well educated with qualifications directly relevant to ECE (Meade et al., 2012), especially the specialized knowledge of those who work with infants and toddlers (Cooper, 2018; ERO, 2015). However, from my observation and analysis of research data, the quality of qualified teachers is more determined by teachers' personality, previous life experiences, personal knowledge, values and beliefs. Getting qualified through ITE programs is just the beginning of their professional journey. 2) The reason for them to choose different ITE qualification programs can be the result of their practical evaluations of personal contexts, costs and gains. For instance, although Gloria and Carol both chose to study for the 3-year bachelor's degree in ECE, they chose different institutions: Gloria chose the University of Auckland because of the fame and general ranking of the university, while Carol chose NZTC because of their cheaper tuition fees and online learning platform. As for Zoe and Rina, they both chose to enroll in the 1-year postgraduate diploma in ECE because they had already obtained a master's degree in other majors and they thought that the 1-year program would be quick to finish and convenient to take courses online.

To conclude, the field of teachers' qualifications and education programs are full of power distributions and debates which are set by different stakeholders ranging from the New Zealand government's education policy and funding schemes, to stakeholders of different ITE providers in determining what counts as quality teacher education and related course structures, and to ECE employers who place different values and expectations on graduates from various ITE programs. When such rules are set and debated in the teacher education field, immigrants need to understand these explicit or implicit rules, make choices to optimize their economic or cultural capitals, and use strategies to obtain the results they

want. In this process, both their habitus and capitals change and accumulate in New Zealand contexts.

6.2.2 Ethnic Capital

Apart from the representative form of newly gained cultural capital—necessary qualifications to enter into the ECE teaching field—there were two other types of capital discussed by the participants in their job finding and career development: the growth of ethnic capital and their social capital.

The theme of "ethnic capital" emerged in the focus group discussion. Cutler et al. (2005) developed the notion of ethnic capital, defined as "the set of individual attributes, cultural norms, and group-specific institutions that contribute to an ethnic group's economic productivity" (p. 206). This definition assumes a causal relationship between cultural traits of a group and economic performance. Although many scholars criticize this notion of ethnic capital for glossing over intra-ethnic differentiations and hierarchies, and I myself find it collapses the levels of individuals and the ethnic group they form, the overall image of Chinese immigrants and their social entrepreneurship have created a certain social space for these immigrant ECE teachers to find jobs with their skills. The geopolitical reorientation of New Zealand from Britain to Asia has occurred over recent decades and such a change has brought China as New Zealand's important partner in trades and international cooperation. By 2014, seven of New Zealand's top 10 trading partners were in Asia, and China has been New Zealand's largest trading partner in goods and second largest overall including trade in services since 2010 (MFAT, 2020). As one of the world's fastest growing economies, China has been regarded as a partner with huge potential with its vast population and growing middle class. These political liaisons and people-to-people exchanges between China and New Zealand have created more opportunities for Chinese immigrants to find skilled jobs. As assumed in the definition of ethnic capital, Chinese immigrants are considered as a group of capable people who can bring in potential opportunities and contribute to economic development. The fact that almost each centre in

Auckland has at least one Chinese immigrant ECE teacher (MoE, Education Counts, 2020) also reflects the growth of Chinese immigrants' ethnic capital. Findings in the current study report similar themes.

Maggie, who arrived at New Zealand in 2002, is the earliest immigrant among these six participants. She reported her feelings about being a Chinese immigrant in New Zealand for about 20 years and her sharing of the changes of New Zealanders' attitudes toward Chinese immigrants evoked a heated discussion of ethnic capital and identity pride during the focus group discussion.

> *Along with the development of China and the growing global influence of our home country, I feel more confident and prouder when I tell others I come from China. I can sense the change of their attitudes toward Chinese immigrants' value and contribution during the past 20 years as I worked in different companies and met all kinds of people. When I started my first job in a local trade company, the general attitudes to us were mostly negative and on-guard. Some media even called us "Asian Invasion" and "job-stealers" which were very humiliating. However, as the political and economic exchanges and cooperation between China and New Zealand have grown steadily during the past 10 to 20 years, general local people start to think us as "crazy rich Asians" which I also loathe, but we are more respected than before, which can be felt from many daily details.* (Maggie)

> *I feel the same thing. It's subtle but real, you know…I'm not saying New Zealanders are snobbish or narrow-minded. I like the lifestyle and mindset of Kiwis. But you can't blame some people for holding prejudices against Chinese immigrants because of the misleading discourse power from the national influential media or people.* (Zoe)

Rina echoed Maggie's and Zoe's words by sharing her personal feeling about this both from her family life and work in centres:

> *When I first moved to New Zealand with my husband, he is a local Kiwi, most of his family members thought I was hankering after economic benefits and comfort from my husband. Their initial image of where I come from was poor, dirty, disordered and miserable. After these years, with the change of the overall social attitudes toward China and Chinese people as well as my own success in my career, they don't think in this way anymore and respect me as an independent woman and family member…Moreover, I've observed the similar change in the centre I worked. More and more Chinese immigrant families and communities join our centre, and my role as an immigrant teacher with similar background has been becoming more and more important.* (Rina)

Gloria also said that with the increasing number of enrolled children from Chinese immigrant families, her centre was prioritizing recruiting qualified teachers who could speak Mandarin, which provided better job-seeking opportunities for Chinese immigrant ECE teachers. Carol mentioned that she felt "more backed-up" to fight against her colleagues' unfair judgments of some Chinese families' practices (such as lunchboxes or clothing) as she said, "I feel I have the responsibilities to help them to shake off their myopic prejudices and let them realize that we Chinese immigrants are far better than they thought."

6.2.3 Social Capital and New Technologies

All these six participants shared how much they valued and made use of their social capital. The meaning of social capital can be understood as the contacts, social networking and relationships an individual is part of or operates. For example, people from China frequently use the term *Guanxi* （关系）to describe the relationship they have with people in different fields. If you know someone who has power in certain fields, such as the school principal or a government leader, a problem or difficult situation can be solved more easily and conveniently by way of appealing to this relevant contact.

In the interviews and group discussion, all of the participants reported the importance of building up connections with people and the support they get from their social network. All of them valued their relationships and connections as the most importance part of their life. My participants all reported that they needed to turn to people they know for suggestions on course selections or study options, for help and recommendations when they tried to find their home centres or practicum centres, as well as in their later job seeking. Apart from direct face-to-face interactions, an emerging theme of online social resources accumulation and the positive correlation between online and offline social connections was highlighted and discussed. Statements from Rina, Zoe and Jane are quite representative.

Rina recorded her reflections on ECE services and practices in her WeChat public account and had a bigger platform to reach out to much wider communities including parents, other ECE teachers in and out of New Zealand, people who are interested in opening and operating an ECE service, potential investors and so on. Rina was recognized by other participants in the focus group discussion after her self-introduction, and all the other five participants were effusive in their compliments to Rina: “Oh, it’s great to finally meet you in person. I read your sharing of designing a parenting workshop in your centre to address some myths of raising up children, and that’s awesome” (Maggie); “Thank you for sharing your suggestions on finding good home centres which helped me a lot” (Carol); “I really like your openness and honesty in your articles, Rina, especially when you share your mistakes and reflections which are so real and empathetic” (Zoe). That part generated a lot of laughter and goodwill at the beginning of our focus group discussion. Rina had been also offered many opportunities during the last few years, especially when she became popular with her sharing on her public WeChat account. Rina said:

> *My writing and sharing give me a feeling of having discourse power. I was encouraged to share more when I got positive feedback from others and when I was challenged by them too. My words and sharing have rationales and evidence behind them and I believe that can influence others in some way. That makes me very proud and leads me to a bigger platform.*

Zoe expressed her hope for an organization to advocate for the welfare and wellbeing of early childhood teachers. “NZEI [New Zealand Education Institute] supports primary school teachers in a good way, not for ECE teachers. Many immigrant ECE teachers even don’t know the existence of this organization. If we have an organization specifically support ECE teachers, that would be great.” In the focus group discussion, Zoe shared that she had joined many WeChat and Facebook groups such as “NZ ECE Teachers Discussion Group,” “Teachers Advocacy Group,” “ECE Leaders and Managers,” “Chinese Association of ECE Teachers” and so on, where members share all kinds of information about job opportunities, teachers’ rights, pay scales for different positions in ECE centres, pedagogical confusions and discussions, and much more. All the other five participants suddenly realized that they were in some of the same groups and even liked each other’s posts and comments in the past on various occasions without knowing each other. “This focus group discussion is kind of meeting cyber friends in the real world and a reunion of people of similar mindset,” commented Zoe. I also observed that all the six participants added each other to their personal contact list, either via WeChat or LinkedIn or Facebook, and new relations and social capital started to establish and expand from then on.

The vast popularity and rapid growth of online communication and new media present new opportunities and challenges for social inclusion (Marlowe et al. 2017). A more recent wave of internet influence studies suggests that social media may also support collective action and political mobilization, thereby providing a potentially positive contribution to the discourse power and the strengthening of minority groups’ political participation (Clayton, 2016; Geraci et al. 2018). Similar evidence can be found in New Zealand’s ECE field, such as the petition “No School or ECE During Alert Level 3” during the COVID-19 pandemic, the advocates for saying “No” as a united voice to doubling ECE teacher registration fees, to having transgender teaching in New Zealand schools, and to the unequal payment of ECE teachers compared with primary teachers’ salary, and for many other social and educational issues in New Zealand.

A further consideration is that migrants not only form social linkages in their new host country, but also maintain social capital in their country of origin. This is particularly true as modern global travel and communication networks allow for a mobile and integrated world, with the cost of maintaining social networks over distances reduced (McCann et al., 2010). Gloria shared that she "still feels very connected" to her family members in China and they "share life moments online almost every day."

Overall, face-to-face social interactions and communications create more space for immigrants to overcome class barriers or information gaps in their host country. Immigrant ECE teachers take strategies to build up their social capital, and the growth of their ethnic capital (as a collective form of their social capital) has enabled these immigrant ECE teachers to navigate their way in employment fields and seek for better validation of their human capital.

6.3 Challenges, Needs and Reflections

6.3.1 English Language Proficiency

English language competency requirements are a frequently reported challenge participants faced in their study, work and living in New Zealand. English language proficiency is a crucial factor in achieving successful settling outcomes for migrants in New Zealand, especially for those from non-English-speaking source countries like China. Most tertiary institutions in New Zealand require high levels of academic English proficiency from international students and, as Datta-Roy and Lavery (2017) pointed out, this requirement is very challenging and can take between 7 and 10 years to achieve. Such a finding is also supported by the experiences of current participants who had spent about 5 to 15 years in growing their mastery of English before and after coming to New Zealand.

In the participants' cases, Jane had to sit the IELTS exams and score 6.5 in all bands in order to get her student visa to study in the Level 5 early childhood diploma course at Unitec. Gloria recalled her experience of the IELTS testing exam as a "nightmare" because it was so hard for her to score 7 in each band to meet the enrollment requirements from the

University of Auckland, that she shifted to study in an English language school in Christchurch first, for a year, and then fulfilled the language requirement for her Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (ECE) at the University of Auckland. That was quite costly in time and money. For Zoe, even though she already earned a master's degree in the UK, where English is the medium of teaching, and had herself worked as an English teacher for 5 years in Beijing, she still needed to meet the English language requirement with her CELTA scores before being admitted to read the Level 7 postgraduate diploma in ECE at NZTC. Carol's high school study experiences in Wellington were certified as adequate to meet the English language proficiency requirement for ECE bachelor's enrollment at NZTC. She was happy about that because "It was much easier and quicker than preparing for and taking IELTS exams…I know some friends took ages to get an overall score of bands 7 to register in the Teaching Council, and that is very hard."

The situation was a little different for Rina and Maggie. Rina entered New Zealand with family sponsorship, and there was no premigration English language requirement for her to live in New Zealand as a resident. However, Rina reported having employment difficulties due to her limited English language skills and accent and could only work part time in a fast-food restaurant although she got her master's degree in China and worked in a local university before moving to New Zealand. She also had to sit the IELTS examination in order to meet the postgraduate diploma course entry requirement for NZTC. Maggie didn't mention any English language tests either as an exchange student at Massey or in her training as a parent-educator. One possible reason could be that Maggie came to New Zealand in 2002 and the English language proficiency requirement at that time was quite low compared with that of the later days. In its review of Immigration documents, the New Zealand government raised the level of competence in English language from 5.0 to 6.5 on the proficiency test for principal immigrant applicants in November 2002. Another reason is that Maggie's learning experiences at Massey University and her working experiences as a chartered accountant were accepted as evidence of her English language proficiency when she took training courses at the Playcentre Association.

Apart from these English language entry criteria for tertiary institutions, all my participants reported the importance and usefulness of using English well in their work and life in both the interviews and group discussions, ranging from having better job opportunities, to feeling more confident in working in centres and more comfortable in living in New Zealand, to actively connecting with the community. Although it's not easy to attain the desirable English language proficiency, all my participants held positive attitudes toward the English language requirements set by the New Zealand Immigration Service and other official organizations. Zoe even thinks that it is a good thing to raise the English language requirement and entry standard for new early childhood student teachers and she said:

> *Having higher standard will have positive effect in ensuring the quality of ECE workforce because at least those who can meet these criteria are smart people and they are capable and willing to learn.*

None of them complained that English language criteria were discriminatory. Their confidence in using English in their workplace and daily life grew during their time living in New Zealand. This is also in line with the findings by Roskruge (2013) that with the growth of immigrants' social capital and experiences such language disadvantage appears to decrease over the first 5 years of migration. In the focus group interview part, they did compare different English proficiency requirements from their former institutions and concluded that the evidence of English proficiency varies among educational providers in different years which reflected the overall political and social scenario. The overall requirement of immigrant teachers' English language proficiency has been to become higher and higher over the last 2 decades. As Jane and Maggie concluded in the focus group discussion, the

> *English language requirement is not purposefully designed as the obstacle for international students and immigrants, but more of a necessary and basic skill for them to settle and live comfortably in New Zealand. Once you overcome this obstacle, it becomes a stepping stone for you to move on.*

Additionally, all the six participants agreed that the IELTS band level or other English language tests were only the threshold to enter the ECE field and successful test results didn't necessarily guarantee their communication competence in real working conditions. They also acknowledged that they didn't need to speak "perfect or native-like English" as they "keep on learning and becoming increasingly confident and proficient in English in everyday life and work." That is quite an active statement because participants hold positive attitudes toward learning and using English as the dominant language in their everyday life and work and they deem the English language as an important add-on skill to the Chinese mother tongue.

6.3.2 Culturally Diverse ITE and IMP

Another theme emerging from the findings is these immigrant ECE teachers' reflections on the need for culturally diverse ITE programs and induction and mentoring programs. Their discussion partially resonated with the critique made by Stremmel et al. (2015) and Ball and Junemann (2012) who argued that teacher education emphasizes accountability more than quality within the broader culture of performativity that characterizes neoliberal higher education in the knowledge economy. But participants did acknowledge the usefulness of these ITE and IMP programs. Just as they all agreed and concluded in the focus group discussion: "You just can't expect one single program will fix everything. Teaching is a lifelong profession, and it's more relying on teachers' motivation, initiations and efforts (From Zoe and Jane)."

It is noted that the student population of New Zealand ITE providers is becoming increasingly diverse, while teacher populations remain largely White, middle-class and monolingual (Santoro, 2009). The mismatch between the student population and the teacher population, in terms of identities and experiences, raises questions about the ability to prepare a diverse teacher workforce through these ITE programs. Currently, the fastest growing ethnic group emigrating to New Zealand are those from Asian countries (Stats NZ, 2019). A large number of Asian immigrants arrive as international students. In 2013 alone,

14% of all tertiary students were of international origin, with nearly 8% of all those enrolled international students being in ITE or teacher education courses (MoE, 2013). In 2019, around 75% of first-time international students were enrolled in an ECE qualification (Education Counts, 2020). Drawn from the experiences of and comments from these six participants in their interviews and group discussion, the results of this present study have revealed the deficient nature of ITE training offered in New Zealand: a lack of culture-specific pastoral care for international students and the superficial understanding of cultural diversity.

A common issue throughout the interviews and group discussion was that there appeared to be little evidence of ethnic-specific pastoral support for student teachers coming from China. As Maged (2014) pointed out in her study of culturally diverse classrooms, one reason for this deficiency can be attributed to the lack of cultural and ethnic diversity amongst lecturers and teachers at ITE providers. Very few of the faculty members and staff in New Zealand higher education institutions and ITE providers are Chinese or Chinese immigrants. Immigrant teachers are sometimes confronted with discriminatory attitudes in schools and educational faculties (Schmidt, 2010). The pervasiveness of systemic discrimination is, "the unequal treatment resulting from 'neutral' institutional practices that continue the effect of past discrimination" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 12). This statement echoes Bourdieu's symbolic violence and his field theory. The results from participants' interviews and group discussion show that having culturally diverse teachers in ITE could provide emotional and social support to cultural-minority students in those "neutral" institutional practices and boost their culture confidence and competence in their future career. Carol said that:

> *I used to have a lecturer who is also a Chinese immigrant when I was in the second year of my study, and I felt so much emotionally and academically supported. I could ask her any questions about the course and the practicum which I wouldn't ask my other teachers because I either felt embarrassed to ask them such questions, or they might think my questions were strange or silly.*

Maggie noted that "being a minority representative in the Auckland Playcentre Association to teach fundamental Course 1" was very rewarding for her. She acknowledged that people often saw her as an expert in regard to working with Chinese children although her own children were both born and raised in New Zealand. Maggie also expressed her need to know all diverse families and respect each other's differences.

In the group discussion, Zoe, Jane and Gloria had meaningful discussions about the positive aspect of having faculty members from the same cultural background in ITE programs.

> *I noticed there is a natural linkage between this teacher [one of her lecturers who comes from Hong Kong] and my classmates who also come from Hong Kong. It's not the same degree of closeness with us from the Mainland China. Strange as it is, but we still like to discuss the comparison of early childhood policies and practices between the east and the west with her.* (Gloria)

> *If we share similar culture and background, the communication cost will be reduced, and subtle things can be understood with smiles not with confusions. Some immigrant teachers may have similar struggles as us when we first come to New Zealand, and they can share with us their experiences and lessons, which are very encouraging and helpful.* (Jane)

> *I also think it makes us immigrant students "look good" to have a representative teacher in the faculty staff. You know, as a kind of social "image" or "icon" who can achieve high in the ECE professional field. I mean, that shows that we immigrant ECE students and teachers are not only working in centres but also can work in universities and higher education sections as lecturers or advisors. That is very encouraging to me and can also motivate many ECE teachers to explore more career possibilities.* (Zoe)

> *I agree that having immigrant lecturers and teaching staff is important. But I see it as a sign of inclusiveness in the teacher education contexts. If you can't demonstrate an inclusive classroom in preservice teacher's education, how can you expect these*

teachers will automatically know how to provide inclusive care to children in various multiethnic centres? (Maggie)

These comments are quite powerful in terms of the cultural bonding, inclusiveness, social image/icon effect and emotional support of having diverse faculty staff in ITE programs. Moreover, their discussions were not only limited to having immigrant faculty staff from China, but also from various cultures such as India, Japan, Russia, USA and other places as long as they can exemplify the rich diversity of children in New Zealand ECE centres. Participants reported that when they turned to their Māori lecturer and classmates for suggestions on working with Māori children, they also realized that even if their classmates were from dominant cultures, Pākehā and Māori, there were still diverse needs to become interculturally competent. Chief executive of Teach First NZ, Jay Allnutt (Education Central, 2019), also said that we're not seeing enough diversity in the current teacher workforce: "The stats about the ethnicity and age diversity of the current teaching workforce suggest that we don't have a good diversity in the profession."

Another stand-out theme of the results is the superficial understanding of cultural diversity in ITE programs: on the one hand, ITE providers have superficial understanding of Chinese immigrant student teachers; and, on the other hand, these students have superficial understanding of cultural diversity of New Zealand's ECE field. Zoe claimed that "you shouldn't put a common 'Chinese' label on us although we all come from China, and our culture is more than the Mandarin language, pandas and dumplings." As discussed in the previous chapter about immigrants' habitus, immigrant ECE teachers come to New Zealand with values, beliefs and habits from their previous life experiences, and the vivid, fluid and vibrant nature of habitus is often understood under the lens of culture. However, as Maged (2014) noted in their research of ITE programs in New Zealand, there seemed to be little evidence of enough or effective educating about cultural and ethnic diversity within groups of students coming from a wide range of different backgrounds. Therefore, many student teachers from minority cultures in these ITE programs who do not possess the presupposed

possession of the dominant cultural capital will face perpetuating stereotypes and experience inefficiency in learning. Just as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) wrote "some students minimize the risks by throwing a smoke-screen of vagueness over the possibility of truth or error" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 114) because these students are afraid of revealing the extent of their ignorance of the dominant social norms. This raises questions about how student teachers' own knowledge can be valued and catered to within these ITE programs. When teachers do not consider or acknowledge the diversity within groups, and that not every student from a certain group is the same, there is a risk of hindering students' freedom to test out diverse ways of being. Such influences will be passed on in real teaching contexts when these preservice students finish their studies in ITE programs That echoes Maggie's question: "If you can't demonstrate an inclusive classroom in preservice teacher's education, how can you expect these teachers will automatically know how to provide inclusive care to children in various multiethnic centres?" Many New Zealand centres put cultures "on show" by celebrating different festivals, organizing international potluck meals, or listening to music in different languages (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2015), which could reflect a tokenistic and superficial multicultural approach to teaching and caring and may even reinforce racist attitudes and perpetuate stereotypical views of certain ethnic groups in young children's absorbing minds. I'm not saying it's totally wrong or worthless to share and celebrate these cultural elements. Such tokenistic practices are just not enough. Individuals' cultural identities are multiple and fluid, and ITE programs should empower our future teachers to test out and demonstrate diverse ways of "being."

On the other hand, immigrant students have a superficial understanding of the cultural diversity of New Zealand's ECE field from these preservice teacher education programs mainly because the program is either too short or New Zealand higher education institutions and ITE providers don't provide enough courses or practical examples to address the needs of culturally incompetent student teachers. Maged (2014) explored how student teachers were prepared to meet the variety of learning needs in New Zealand's increasingly culturally diverse classrooms. Over the period of a 4-year degree, the student-

teacher participants revealed that they had only had one compulsory course specifically on cultural diversity; the course lasted one semester and many students found it too theoretical. Similarly, Zoe, Rina and Carol, who all attended NZTC for their qualification, reported that the courses they learned were mostly online and they learned Māori language just for passing course requirements with little real use in life. Gloria, who attended the University of Auckland, acknowledged her superficial understanding of Māori culture and her limited mastery of Māori language during her graduate diploma study, and her comments were endorsed by all the other five participants even though Maggie was from the un-institutional Playcentre Association. Jane, who graduated from Unitec, took a further step by criticizing the curriculum design of Level 5 early childhood studies. She pointed out that there is a big gap between what the ITE providers believe useful and what the real work in ECE centres requires. "The ITE courses do not really reflect what New Zealand ECE centres look like, the children, their parents, the community, the real life and practical examples." After graduation or in the first few years of their work in centres, they didn't feel competent to provide culturally competent care to children from Māori and Pacific backgrounds, although that is the priority of New Zealand's ECE policies. They also acknowledged that it took them a lot more time to grow culturally competent after graduation. However, they did feel more confident and competent to support children from Chinese immigration families or backgrounds, while they found it was the same situation for their immigrant colleagues coming from other counties. This point will be further discussed in the following section on their professional practices and development.

As for the induction mentoring programs, participants' accounts and discussion can be summarized into the following three aspects: first, the quality of the IMP mainly depends on the expertise and availability of associate teachers (Ats). All of them, except Maggie, reported some confusing times and frustrating occasions in their IMP process when ATs were too busy to help them, couldn't understand their struggles or mistook their intentions due to cultural differences. Some of them, like Carol, even had to change ATs for some untold reasons. Second, sometimes the whole IMP process could turn into a matter of

formality and new teachers were left by their own when not enough support was given to the ATs, such as leadership support, extra noncontact hours and so on. Third, they even stated that the induction and mentoring programs were far more useful and important than ITE in forming one's professional identity and in shaping new teachers' career direction, which is worth more attention and support from the MoE and ECE centres.

To summarize, teacher education is a complex process mediated by student teachers' personal beliefs, attitudes and experiences. My point is that Chinese immigrant teachers do not hold homogeneous cultural capital or social capital; instead, they are both the product of and productive of differentiations of habitus within the immigrant group.

6.3.3 Social Space and Career Opportunities

According to Bourdieu (1984), social space is central to the ways in which reconversion takes place. Moreover, a field is a social space with

> a set of objective power relations that impose themselves on all who enter the field and that are irreducible to the intentions of the individual agents or even to the direct interactions among the agents. (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 724)

The social space for immigrants can be inclusive or exclusive under particular social conditions, such as immigration policies, the labor market, and local people's attitudes and behaviors toward immigrants and international students. From a larger scope, immigration policies may exert both a direct and an indirect effect on immigrant experiences, especially their job-seeking opportunities and work-permit policies. From a closer scope, the contextual conditions are more proximal to immigrant outcomes, such as institutional policies, regional and local policies, occupational regulations like the teacher's registration with the Teacher's Council, and centre policies. Together, they all unpack a complex maze of social space for immigrant teachers to navigate their journey. Making this more complex is the fact that these immigrant ECE teachers are essentially navigating within various social spaces: they first engage in the immigration game, struggling over the game's stakes or rewards, which in this study context is what all other migrants are hoping to achieve

through migration -- the better education and the good life in New Zealand. Then they enter the institutionalization game, creating mechanisms of mobilizing and validating their cultural capital that build on power relations of both the country of origin and the country of migration. After that, they compete in the job market, restricted by the changing demand for qualified ECE teachers and trying to find a job as minority teachers who complement their relatively fewer local working experiences with other advantages. Later on, even when they finally find a job and work in ECE centres, as shown in the data of current study, the centre management policies, collegial relationships, parents and community involvements, mainstream pedagogical practices and everyday interactions with children all make the workplace itself a more proximal space for immigrant teachers to navigate and grow.

Research studies (Gong et al., 2017; Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Schmidt, 2010) show that discrimination has become a universal issue while government systems and society have failed to provide enough social space for immigrant teachers. For instance, since June 2002, there has been a racially charged debate in New Zealand media about both the magnitude and the composition of migration flows. The fact that the majority of immigrants approved for residence in New Zealand in recent years have been from countries in Asia (especially China and India) has added to the concerns of the anti-immigration populist political party, New Zealand First. Chinese immigrants have been portrayed in various ways in political discussions, television programs and reports, social media and so on. In line with Bronfenbrenner's model of practices, both these direct and indirect social spaces influence immigrant teachers' migration experiences and outcomes. During the focus group discussion, it was quite illuminating to hear participants sharing their reflections on social space and discrimination. Maggie, who came to New Zealand in 2002 and has lived in New Zealand the longest of the six participants, shared her observation of New Zealanders' attitudes toward Chinese immigrants and her understanding of discrimination:

> *I think nowadays New Zealanders generally have a positive attitude toward me as a Chinese immigrant. Their attitudes change along with political and social*

changes. I can't speak for all these Chinese immigrants, but I do feel that we can earn the respect and equal opportunities with our good character and abilities. You can't blame others being prejudiced against you unless you don't know who you are yourself and base your self-esteem on others' judgment.

However, with the increased number of immigrant children and families in New Zealand centres and the underlying philosophy of embracing cultural diversity in ECE, workplace discrimination toward the participants of this study is less likely than perhaps in other employment fields. Rina responded to Maggie's comments by saying that "it's a philosophic question of who we are" and "it doesn't have to do with immigration status." Rina also shared that immigrants could step out of their comfort zone and expand their social space along with their self-discovery and development.

Although Carol reported being treated as "a labor worker or cleaner in her first practicum" and Gloria felt that her voice had been silenced as a new teacher in her centre, they both agreed with Maggie in the focus group discussion that "when you become stronger, you don't feel much discrimination." Zoe strongly advocated the connection and united efforts of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers as a useful way to create more opportunities and social space for this ethnic-specific professional group.

In summary, these participants acknowledged the irreducible power relations of certain fields when they first enter them, and they believed such power relations were also changeable. They believed that they were actively creating their bargaining power in various situations with their talents and abilities, which again would help them expand their social spaces in work and life. We must also pay attention to how these immigrants' positional struggles in national and transnational social fields can (re)produce and challenge the hegemonic power relations regulating boundaries between deserving and the underserving, and between successful and unsuccessful.

6.3.4 Pedagogical Practices: Conformation vs. Diversity

Early childhood teachers, parents, centre managers, researchers and politicians often have strong and conflicting views and beliefs about what is right and best for young children in their early-years education (Farquhar & Gibbons, 2010; Carr & May, 1999; May and Sleeter, 2010). Different visions, beliefs and ideas about children can be embedded in centres' curricula and underpin different approaches to ECE curricula and pedagogy. Meanwhile, critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010) has highlighted the power of discourses in privileging and marginalizing certain knowledge, which is evidently true for teachers from different cultures and backgrounds. Critical multicultural pedagogy (Banks, 2004; May & Sleeter, 2010; Rhedding-Jones, 2010) and Gonzalez's (2005) idea of "funds of knowledge" are employed to emphasize the important role of teachers in bringing about a transformative approach (Banks & Banks, 2019) to ECEC which is inclusive of diverse knowledge of parenting, learning and teaching.

New Zealand's ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki,* embraces cultural diversity and aims to foster inclusiveness. The newly revised and updated *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) identifies a focus on children's wellbeing and emotional development and places culturally responsive pedagogies, intentional teaching, active engagement of children and responsive interactions as particularly important to high-quality ECE services. However, there is obvious, growing pressure from vocational and instrumental influences from the political and international fields on the progressive and socioculturally inspired ECE curricula and approaches (Mitchell, 2010). It is evident that social changes may bring a number of transitions as well as lack of consensus regarding the meaning of "childhood" and how ECE "ought" to be. Although each culture possesses a unique developmental niche, nurturing children's potential and development are universal goals shared by many cultures in the world (Kirylo & Nauman, 2010).

Implementing the goals and strands set by *Te Whāriki* is a complex and contested process. Just as there are multiple understandings about the goals and strands of *Te Whāriki,* and

early education as a whole, there are different and contested practices and views of how best to meet these goals and purposes. In the current study, participants found little evidence of the "best practice" and "quality teaching" that they were taught in the initial teacher education programs and expected to find in centres. They found that the rhetoric of ECE did not match the reality of teaching in some centres. For instance, almost all of my six participants experienced confusion and challenges during the first few years of their working in centres, and they took a lot of extra effort to learn in real working contexts. There are scant convergence and consensus about how to transfer the general theories and principles of ECE to teaching practices. As highlighted in the study by Carr et al. (2001), the national ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, is "permeable" and open to contributions from all comers. It relies mainly on individuals' interpretation of *Te Whāriki* and their abilities to develop their own personal curriculum and practices together with their local realities and families' "funds of knowledge" (Chaplin, 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2005).

Gloria's understanding of teaching as both ethical and professional was quite outstanding, and it took her 3 years to develop her own understanding of *Te Whāriki* and to weave Reggio-inspired practices into her centre's curriculum. She felt her job was "looking after the most precious part of the whole family, which means a lot of responsibilities." In Gloria's words, "putting your students at heart is an innate responsibility of a teacher." That is also why Gloria believed that being an early childhood teacher is an on-going learning and discovery journey, which reflects the values, preferences and dispositions in the fluid complex of her habitus.

Similarly, Rina was able to develop her own childcare philosophy and curriculum in an authentic way, slowly but strongly. She learned to plan learning provocations with Pikler, Reggio and Montessori philosophies with links to *Te Whāriki*'s principles and strands. She thought highly of *Te Whāriki* as "the most mature, open and updated curriculum which integrates the best part of many philosophies. Being not dominant or predescriptive, it allows us teachers to practice our agency and practice our interpretation of *Te Whāriki* as a

whole team." Zoe and Jane also praised *Te Whāriki* as "open and compatible with various philosophies and practices" and Zoe further pointed out that "the quality and educational results can also vary a lot depending on each centre's context, namely, the teaching team, environment and settings, as well as financial support."

In focus group discussion, my participants discussed the nature of *Te Whāriki* and its implementation in daily practices with many personal reflections, and they reached one consensus: it is the teaching team who actualize *Te Whāriki* in each centre's unique context and bring life to this well-designed national ECE curriculum. This consensus again puts ECE teachers at the centre of authentic/local curriculum design, pedagogical practices, assessment and interactions with children's parents and the wider community.

In conclusion, through examination of teachers' narratives, in particular their understanding of *Te Whāriki* and the assessment devices, teachers were active meaning makers of their past learning and lived experiences and reflective practitioners of the current teaching context and practices.

6.3.5 Power Structure and Management in ECE Services

The reciprocal relations between power, structure and agency in ECE fields were manifested many times in both interviews and focus the group discussion. My participants also showed their perspectives on the power distribution in MoE policies and in local centres' contexts, shared their strategies to handle these complexities, and demonstrated their agency and capability of being a change and making a difference in New Zealand's ECE fields.

On the power distribution in MoE policies, participants all addressed four factors: first, the pay imbalances across ECE sector, which are supported by the new data released by the ministry (Education Counts, 2020) which show ECE teachers are being paid on average 30% less than their colleagues in kindergartens and primary schools although they are doing substantively the same work; second, the lack of control over the number of ECE centres which leads to a waste of public funding and private investment; third, ERO

evaluations are not sufficient; and fourth, the lack of support from the ministry for children with special needs. All four factors pose different challenges to teachers, not only immigrant teachers, in regard to the fulfilment of the educational goals and strands in *Te Whāriki* as well as teachers' working conditions and wellbeing.

Some statements and comments from these participants were quite bold, and showed their perspectives and needs from different aspects. For instance, Maggie thought the New Zealand government has been funding the wrong places—private ECE centres. She even suggested that,

> *if all these funds are spent on families and allow moms to have at least 3 years maternity leave, there should be no problem in having high-quality ECE care for children.*

However, when Maggie suggested that "the Playcentre service is the best type of all ECE services and the government should provide more political and financial supports to Playcentres," other participants disagreed.

> *Not every parent, especially moms, will be able to have the time to take care of their kids themselves in Playcentres. Most parents need to work to pay bills.* (Zoe)

> *Working in Playcentres can be challenging for new parents, especially for new immigrant parents who know little of local culture and still have language barriers. I knew there were Playcentres in my community when I had my son, but I was unable to work there by then.* (Rina)

> *I visited some Playcentres in the past, and I think they have their problems too, such as loose planning and curriculum design, limited resources and lack of transitional programs to help children get ready for school. They will enter the school system sooner or later and you just can't keep them under your wings all the time.* (Jane)

At a certain point of this discussion, I, as the principal researcher, had to drag their discussion back on track before it turned too personal. We concluded that there was no such

thing as “the best ECE service type” because people make choices based on their beliefs and situations. Maggie’s suggestion was more of her personal feeling and gave little credit to the complexity of needs from different families. All the other five participants worked in ECE centres and they also hoped the government would take some measures to monitor the quality of various ECE service providers.

> *The government should stop giving huge amounts of funds to some big ECE companies like BestStart to let them open new centres in certain areas. The government should encourage experienced ECE teachers to establish new centres because they really care for kids and not treat the centre only as a business*. (Zoe)

> *The payment scheme in kindergartens is far better than ECE day care but they work less hours too. So unfair. Their ratio is very good and most of their staff are permanent. They also have more noncontact hours than us*. (Carol)

> *I think the government should have regulations to limit the number of centres in a certain area based on the demographic statistics and the number of children who need daycare services, as they do with the primary schools. You never see two or three primary schools align on the same road of a community, but you can see so many ECE centres within 200–500 meters distance. That is bad and will lead to fierce competition for children’s enrollment at the cost of quality and teachers’ wellbeing*. (Jane)

> *I hope MoE will have better support for special needs children in centres. We do not have enough experienced staff to support these kids and I feel bad for that.* (Rina)

> *I think the ERO’s review of centres cannot judge the quality of a centre, and sometimes these reviews can be very superficial. Quality evaluation and monitoring are rooted in everyday practices, not only in ticking checks on review forms when ERO officers come and visit…far from the truth and not enough to tell*. (Gloria)

As insiders, all participants hoped the government would distribute public funding to ECE in a more strategic way, act better to monitor the number and quality of ECE services and to support children with special needs. It was very encouraging to observe, in both the interviews and focus group discussion, how much they cared about the ECE sector and how active they were to engage in the discussion and reflection on their working experiences in centres.

On the power structure and management level in local centres, participants also addressed four aspects: first, the hierarchical power structure in some ECE centres hindered dynamic team cooperation, silenced or marginalized teachers' voices and reduced their sense of belonging. The descriptive data of Gloria, Carol and Rina all represented this point. All participants, except Maggie, reported that they changed their place of work in order to be situated in a more positive and satisfying working environment. Second, the collegial relationships teachers have in a centre impacted significantly on teachers' authenticity and professionalism (Subedi, 2008). Relationships with colleagues were not only seen as central to effective team maintenance, but also for personal wellbeing in the workplace of ECE (Dalli & Stephenson, 2010; Warren, 2014). Participants showed their initiative, agency and strategies in building relationships with colleagues, such as the cases of Jane, Rina and Zoe. Third, in the relationships with parents, immigrant teachers from teacher-led ECE centres tended to draw on their expertise and represent themselves as professionals in the teams and communities to inform/educate parents, while parent teachers like Maggie didn't privilege their expertise over parents' knowledge. And fourth, some experienced nonqualified teachers should be valued and paid equally in the centre because they do a similar job and really have the heart for children. Gloria specifically mentioned this part in her interview, and she believed that the salary level should be based on performance and contributions, and the payment scheme should become more transparent for teachers to make adjustments.

6.3.6 Managerialism in ECE: Public Good or Commercial Goods?

Another theme from the interviews and the focus group discussion was that the current ECE services in New Zealand were becoming more like a business, driven too much by neoliberal forces and profit seeking. As pointed out in literature (Alexander, 2016; Ang, 2010; Duhn, 2006; Farquhar, 2015; Westbrook & White, 2020), the current neoliberal market approach to increasing ECE provision has seen significant growth in private childcare services compared with the notable lack of growth in the community, non-profit session-based kindergartens, Playcentres and Te Kōhanga Reo. In my participants' views, New Zealand has no public ECE centres or services in the same sense of public kindergartens in China, not even the community-owned centres or AKA kindergartens, and the ECE services have been undervalued in the whole educational system compared with public schools for primary and above levels in New Zealand.

The number of ECE centres and providers has kept on increasing during the last 2 decades, while the occupancy rates have steadily decreased in most service types since 2017 (MoE, 2021). It's a paradox in New Zealand's ECE field. On the one hand, the fast development of private daycare centres provides more opportunities for parents with different social situations and needs to choose from various service types and providers. On the other hand, the large number of (if not too many) ECE centres and providers has caused competition among ECE services. If the ECE services are treated as public goods instead of the public good, I am worried that the bad ECE services will edge out the good ones due to the unreasonable funding scheme and the loopholes in the license regulation. It is quite wrong for the government to let the market mechanism take the lead in deciding the establishment of new ECE services or the closing-down of some out-of-competition ECE services. The situation is worsened when some centres hire professional managers who have little knowledge of ECE but act as business managers to make the most profit out of government's funding and parents' payment. When many ECE provider companies pay too much attention to controlling budgets and making profits to meet their annual report in the

market, the fundamental value of running the centre is in contradiction with what they claim to provide to children and families.

Moreover, it's even harder for such centres to establish a centre culture and good working conditions to attract good teachers to work there and retain their staff. That is a vicious circle. Consequently, the adult–child ratio, working conditions, food and resources, and daily routines and environment stability all fluctuate with the centres' management styles. Carol argued that there was a big difference between her tertiary education and real working conditions: "While your lecturers and professors encourage you to bring the best out of children as ECE teachers, your employers expect you to face the realities of life and business." Although they couldn't change the top-down policies, all these participants were active practitioners in making a difference in their centres and put children's best interests at the centre of their work, which is very much related to their personal beliefs about being an ECE teachers and their love of children.

6.4 The Position of Chinese Immigrant ECE Teachers in New Zealand

6.4.1 Cultural and Professional Identities: Discursive Self

Participants' discursive and participative experiences were recorded and examined through Bourdieu's sociocultural lenses, which showed that these Chinese immigrant teachers' cultural and professional identity construction was an on-going process which circulated through symbolic and cultural forms as much as through economic positions.

Teachers work in the context of connecting with people, and their work surely reflects their own dreams, values and beliefs, which are embedded in their old and new habitus. Therefore, teaching is a profession in which "who we are" and "what we believe in" are made public and tested, and are in constant motion when teachers enter different fields. Through connecting and interacting with children, parents, colleagues and the wider community, teachers will inevitably encounter challenges that bring them to the frontiers of their knowledge, experience, values and beliefs. And thus, through undergoing all these

challenges and unscripted moments of truth, teachers find out "who we really are, not who we think we are."

In the construction of their cultural and professional identities, four overarching themes emerged from the findings. First of all, their understanding of children and childhood education changed along with their education and working experiences, such as the comparisons made by Jane, Rina and Zoe between the childhood education and care in China and New Zealand. Their beliefs and conceptions of children and childhood were the fundamental base for their professional practices and personal reflections, which underpinned their positioning strategies in their workplaces too. Second, immigrant ECE teachers' positioning of themselves as the innovator and contributor can be interpreted as their positive attitudes toward early education plus the social status value of being a teacher. They took personal pride in caring for and educating children, working as a professional person in the team, as well as acting as an expert when interacting with parents and working in the team. Although they also reported that ECE teachers' salary was not high and the working conditions needed to be improved, these participants, who chose to stay in this field for such a long time since they became qualified, valued the symbolic and cultural forms of their identities of being a teacher more than the economic position of working as an ECE teacher. Third, they all showed their willingness and openness toward new learning which defines ECE professionalism as a constantly evolving process. They realized the importance of being open to dealing with uncertainty in the complex day-to-day and person-to-person contexts. They said being self-reflective and authentic was vital for immigrant teachers to manage their multiple positions and develop their own voices in their identity construction. Committed immigrant ECE teachers like Rina, Zoe and Gloria, were able to negotiate plural contextual power structures through strategic resourcing and personal reflexivity, and managed to locate themselves in various caring and education contexts, and align their practices with their beliefs and conceptions as much as they could. Fourth, immigrant ECE teachers' confidence in teaching increased along with their positive sense of self as an immigrant ECE teacher in the new land, which again drove commitment,

self-discovery and growth and career satisfaction. In other words, their cultural identities were closely related to their professional identities, and sometimes it's hard to distinguish them with a binary perspective. Zoe, who chose to introduce herself with a pepeha, a traditional Māori way, took strong pride in both Chinese and Māori cultures in personal life and work. Rina, who became the centre mum after working in the centre consecutively for 7 years, earned respect from both her workplace and her personal extended families. And Jane, who wanted to integrate virtues of Chinese culture with local cultures, also demonstrated high motivation and positive emotions in working and living in New Zealand.

The manner in which the ECE teachers worked toward these goals reflects different cultural habitus. The construction of their personal and professional identities was a multilayered phenomenon that encompassed personal, historical, and sociocultural dimensions (Dalli and Stephenson, 2010). Through interactions with students and the external world, teacher's qualities and gifts were reflected. They could also spot the events and places where they didn't quite live up to their own values and beliefs. Reflections on these moments are very precious in a teacher's professional and personal growth, not only to become a better teacher, but to become a better self as well, which once again shed light on the never-ending learning and educating journey. Who isn't a learner in one sense? And who isn't a teacher in another sense? Arndt (2015, 2017, 2018) discussed ECE teachers' subjectivities in on-going construction process during which diversity and differences were an inevitable part of social realities. Immigrant teachers' personal and professional identities are seen as a transformative dialogue which involves teachers, children, colleagues and families in constantly changing situations and evolving social contexts.

6.4.2 Innovators and Contributors

Immigrant teachers who positioned themselves as innovators and contributors in New Zealand's ECE field all showed an open-minded and inquiring disposition in facing new, complex and challenging situations which allowed them to make sense of experiences that challenged their views and understandings. Taking one's own identity into consideration

and making a real effort to get to know children or students, could have a significant impact on children's motivation, and their perceptions on diversity (Maged, 2014; Walrond, 2008). Apart from language sharing and cultural events, their identity as Chinese immigrants can naturally bridge the centre and Chinese immigrant families, demonstrate a caring and inclusive example for children in centres, and nurture children's dispositions with wisdom and examples.

Studies have identified the importance of having ethnic representation of the staff to care for children attending centres (Whitebook et al., 2012), and a significant number of the New Zealand population identify themselves as "Asian" (Stats NZ, 2018). As shown in the document of Annual ECE Census (Education Counts, 2020), 65% of teaching staff identified as European/Pākehā in 2019, with 16% identifying as Asian, 8% as Māori, 7% as Pacific, and 4% either identified as other ethnicities or did not state their ethnicity.

Multicultural ECE and care requires committed teachers with intercultural competences, beliefs, sensitivity, and values (Marx & Moss, 2011; Santoro, 2009, 2014). Implicitly or explicitly, teachers' words, behaviors, values and ways of thinking will all influence or contribute to their students' overall development, including young children's social and emotional competence, their identity forming and acceptance, and opportunities to test out different ways of being (Santoro, 2014). This point was beautifully manifested in the reflections of Zoe and Rina.

> *For me, being there as a teacher itself is part of the education. I am there, and that's a natural part of their life. Children will feel I am a nice person and they like me. We build up relationship together and they know they can trust me although I look different from them. They are more willing to embrace differences and show respect each other.* (Zoe)

> *The way we adults deal with interpersonal relationships will demonstrate valuable examples of leadership to children. When teachers are happy to work together, we are more likely to form genuine relationships with children too.* (Rina)

Additionally, scholarship on social stratification has considered habitus to contribute to the perpetuation of social inequality because habitus is formed in early childhood through family interaction and it lasts for the rest of life stages (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). ECE teachers, as caregivers and educators, are considered by Hughes and Kwok (2007) as children's second parents who care for them, set role models for children's disposition forming, and act as the source of acquisition and learning in their primary habitus. Chan (2011) pointed that early childhood centres are becoming increasingly multi-ethnic and Gunn (2002) asserted that there is an expectation by the New Zealand government that early childhood services will "actively contribute to countering racism" (p. 27). In New Zealand's reality, the majority of 2- to 5-year-olds spend more time in ECE centres than at home, and their habitus is largely formed through interactions and experiences in ECE centres with teachers and other children. Again, according to habitus theory, individuals internalize their social position within social structure into their dispositions and unconscious behaviors (Lee & Kramer, 2013), and lasts stably for a long time due to the durability of habitus. When we refer back to the five strands of ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki*, "nurturing children's dispositions" is clearly stated and emphasized. If habitus "functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 83), then every teaching moment in ECE services will nurture children in some way and enrich their early experiences.

6.4.3 Quitters and Drifters

While all of the participants reported they enjoyed working in the ECE field, the findings also identified two other types of immigrant ECE teachers: quitters and drifters. Research has identified a high turnover of ECE teachers in ECE services (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Gibson, 2015; Neylon, 2015), not only of immigrant teachers but also of local teachers. There is no recent data available on teacher retention in New Zealand, but turnover rates in Australia have been reported at between 20–50% annually (Jones et al., 2017). Some immigrant ECE teachers struggled to position themselves in this field, the reasons for such

a phenomenon can be interpreted as follows: a) lack of real interest in ECE, b) salaries and working conditions, and c) changing demands of qualified teachers in ECE centres.

6.4.3.1 Lack of Real Interest in ECE. As discussed in the previous part of immigrant teachers' motivation to enter the ECE field, some immigrants chose to work as an ECE teacher mainly because of the usefulness for gaining employment and permanent residency. Immigrant ECE teachers with such a motivation are most likely to quit their job in ECE centres once they obtain their resident visas. This phenomenon also aroused questions about the quality of care and teaching these immigrant teachers offer in ECE centres as well as the marketing strategies of some New Zealand ITE program providers.

> *If you don't like working with children, never ever think of taking an ECE teaching job for immigration purposes. You will hate your job, and that's devastating to yourself and everyone around you, the children, their family and your family, your colleagues and your leaders and so on.* (Carol)

> *Some quick and commercial ECE teachers' education programs should be cancelled especially when they market such programs with its usefulness to immigrate…and some people mainly choose to work as ECE teachers a springboard to gain their residency.* (Maggie)

6.4.3.2 Salaries and Working Conditions. The job of ECE teachers is physically demanding and requires huge investments of time, care and emotional labor. As discussed in the previous part of the challenges faced by immigrant ECE teachers, the impact of low salaries and a lack of pay parity within the ECE and primary sectors (e.g., ECE centres, kindergartens, primary schools) are the most likely reason for some immigrant ECE teachers to quit their jobs in ECE centres. After years of study and 2 years working toward registration, they earn just above the living wage, and the salary increase has lagged behind other professions. Meanwhile, challenging working conditions, reported by participants such as longer work hours, increasing demands of documentation, poor management teams, lack of enough noncontact hours, as well as physical hazards (noises and hearing damage,

backpain and spiral disorders caused by carrying young babies for too long, etc.) are other main reasons for teachers leaving.

> *I have witnessed many of my former colleagues quit their teaching jobs and chose to work in other better-payment professions, like sales representatives or private tutorial services.* (Gloria)

> *It's strange to see how little increase has happened in ECE teachers' salary. When I started to work as an ECE teacher, the salary was actually quite good compared with other occupations. But now, it's still almost the same while the lowest hourly payment has raised a lot and the housing price has rocketed…no wonder some teachers choose to leave.* (Rina)

> *In that kind of situation, it's unrealistic and lying to talk about quality of the care and education in the room. All we managed to achieve was to stay alive at the end of the day, and everyone has a breaking point and you just want to leave, to do nothing and have a good rest.* (Jane)

6.4.3.3 Changing Demands of Teachers in ECE Centres. Under different government funding policies, the changing demands for 50%, 80% and 100% qualified and registered ECE teachers have led to better or worse salaries and fringe benefits in the competition for ECE centres to recruit teachers, and caused some immigrant ECE teachers to move in and out of the ECE field as drifters. They choose to work as relievers rather than full-time staff when demand and payment for registered relievers is high; they choose to shift to another centre when working conditions change; and they choose to quit working in the ECE field when they find other better opportunities, such as in sales or shadow education training centres. These immigrant ECE teachers are formerly qualified or registered teachers, and they work as tacticians who bargain and trade their time and qualifications with ECE centres. Observing and sharing such a phenomenon in the focus group discussion part, participants questioned the quality and quantity of New Zealand's ECE workforce.

Do we really have a workforce shortage of ECE teachers? Or do we have a wrong policy mechanism to retain teachers? Maybe we have more than enough qualified ECE teachers who just don't want to work in this field. (Zoe)

Some ECE teachers choose to work as relievers instead of full-time teachers as there is less paperwork, flexible working hours and higher hourly pay. I used to work as a reliever for a year and relieved in about 30 different centres too. But that is not good for the team stability or the wellbeing of children. And I felt less attached to any of the team too. (Carol)

6.4.4 Future Plans

Looking to the future, all current participants reported planning to continue to work in the ECE field and seek further career opportunities. The findings identified a range of factors that contributed to job satisfaction for these participants and thereby supported their retention and success in this field. These have been drawn together under the following themes: a) personal dispositions and professional qualities, b) strong sense of professional identity and passion for teaching early children, c) opportunities for leadership and personal growth. Each theme is now discussed in order.

6.4.4.1 Personal Dispositions and Professional Qualities. It is noted that current participants represent some active and committed immigrant ECE teachers who play an active rather than passive role in their retention and PD. The narrative findings reveal that a range of personal dispositions and professional qualities, including flexibility and adaptability, resilience and self-reflection, capacity to communicate and build collegial relationships in diverse teams, all contribute to their positioning in ECE contexts.

6.4.4.2 Strong Sense of Professional Identity and Passion in ECE. Another influential factor was the teachers' professional identity and passion to work with children. Previous research has identified a strong sense of professional identity as an important factor for teacher agency and retention (McKinlay et al., 2018; Gibson, 2015), and the participants in this study clearly developed their professional identity as lifelong learners,

professional experts, and people with the "right heart" (words from Zoe, Rina and Gloria) for children. There also appears to be a link between their professional identity and future career plans. Although Osgood (2006) argued that an overemphasis on passion, with its emotional connections and requirements, would pose a threat to the professional identity of ECE teachers, current findings revealed that passion was more of a personal preference and natural inclination rather than an imposing exterior requirement on every teacher. Meanwhile, years of teaching experience also significantly interacted with reasons for remaining a teacher (Bates, 2018b). All current participants have been working in this field for more than 5 years, and plan to go on with this career.

6.4.4.3 Opportunities for Leadership and Personal Growth. Reflecting on what they planned to achieve in their job, these participants drew attention to pedagogical and management leadership opportunities across ECE service providers, and the sense of achievement when they enjoyed supporting the teaching team and children's overall wellbeing. The participants all had plans for their future career.

> *I will have better opportunities as the head teacher of my centre and I hope to establish an organization to support ECE teachers.* (Zoe)

> *I have my own understandings of educating children and want to establish my own centre where I have more power to do things in the way I believe.* (Rina)

> *Currently I can only see myself as the head teacher in a year. In the future, it will be great if I can start my own centre.* (Carol)

> *After finishing my master's study in leadership in ECE, I'd like to take some leadership positions to create a nurturing place for everyone in the centre and to help the team and centre develop in a healthy and sustainable way.* (Gloria)

> *I will accompany my younger daughter in the Playcentre until she turns 5 and goes to school. I enjoy teaching fundamental courses to new parents at entry level in the Auckland Playcentre Association. I will take Level 4 study as well.* (Maggie)

I want to finish my master's study in technology use in ECE and work as a professional development facilitator or advisor in the future. (Jane)

6.5 Conclusion

This discussion has shown the dynamic character of formation and conversion of habitus and capitals in immigrant ECE teachers' migration trajectory in immigration, educational and professional fields. Bourdieu's theory allows me to see the dispositions, attitudes, worldviews, values (which are often included in the habitus concept) and practices that immigrant teachers display in the process of transforming various capitals within a complex system of power relations between immigrants themselves, their host societies and their transnational social networks.

First, these case studies demonstrated that individual and collective agency are important for transforming habitus and creating new forms of cultural and social capital in migration. Though the process of immigrant ECE teachers' educational and professional experiences are often be interpreted as the assimilation process into a very specific segment of racially and socially stratified societies, namely the White middle class (such as studies by Arndt, 2018; Santoro, 2009; Singh & Huang, 2013), I personal argue that we should focus more on their agency and use the theoretical merits of habitus transformation to explore the ways in which individual immigrant teachers interact with social structure and social changes. It's not a one-way, dominant and top-down process which brings ethnic minorities and immigrant ECE teachers into the mainstream of New Zealand life. Rather, these immigrant ECE teachers navigate the new field with a set of dispositions, capital and strategies to take up different social positions through competition with others, share core values and practices of the host society, and bring new benefits to New Zealand.

Second, the case studies show how immigrant teachers create strategies and mechanisms for validating their capital through dominant institutions and by engaging with social networks. Where human capital theorists conceptualize cultural capital as a key that the migrant puts into her rucksack and, once in the country of immigration, unpacks to see if

it fits the "keyhole" of the cultural system of the country of immigration, Bourdieusian scholars view migrants' cultural capital varying with social class and linking to educational credentials and occupational positions. Again, immigrants move with a rucksack of capital, but when unpacked in the country of migration, rather than looking for a "fit," according to Bourdieusian approaches the immigrant engages in bargaining activities with institutions (such as professional bodies or universities) and people (such as employers or managers) about the value of these treasures. In the process of bargaining, the migrants' treasures are often undervalued, as they have limited power over the rules of the game, at least at the very beginning (see studies like Kelly & Lusis, 2006). Yet, they can also add new skills and treasures to their chest that may not be seen as particularly valuable in the country of immigration but are considered treasures in their country of origin, thus negotiating and benefiting from differential "exchange value" (Bauder, 2003) of cultural resources, practices and forms in two national contexts.

Third, I want to argue that a migrant group does not hold homogeneous cultural capital or social capital; instead, they are both the product of and productive of differentiations of habitus within the migrant group. These Chinese immigrant ECE teachers arrived in New Zealand with particular, internally differentiated habitus and capital created in China. They acquired, accumulated and lost their cultural and social capital at times in unexpected ways. This process has to be bound up with wider historical, social, political and institutional factors.

Finally, participants in the current study have demonstrated a general opposition toward social divisions and hierarchical distinctions where class is predominately employed as an objective category of occupational status and income. The current study showed that the structure of social divisions and class cannot be understood through economic position alone. Success is an individualized complex web of concepts, perceptions and meanings. In the cases of these participants who represent middle-class immigrants coming from China to New Zealand to work as ECE teachers, they position themselves as worthy

professionals in the society, not the substitute for local workforce to take unwanted jobs with low salaries. The way in which these Chinese immigrant ECE teachers identify and disidentify with these intermeshing social positions enables them to subjectively reproduce their habitus and mobilize their capitals. They managed to produce and reproduce their multiclass positions through habitus and the qualitative means of (re)creating divisions, including preferences in education, lifestyle, taste and professional satisfaction. Class in this context is dynamic, circulating through symbolic and cultural forms as much as through economic positions.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This conclusion chapter begins with a summary of key findings of the current study. It will then outline the theoretical, empirical and practical contributions in the field of immigrant teacher studies, and discuss the implications for policy making, ITE, induction and mentoring programs, ECE centres and provision. Finally, it will address the limitations of the current study and make suggestions for how future studies could build on the findings of this study.

7.1 Summary of Major Findings

As noted at the outset of this thesis, the key purpose of this study is to bring a rich and detailed understanding of the life trajectory of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers against the changing policy and power structures in immigration, institutional and professional fields. Starting from sharing their motivations and aspirations to coming and working in New Zealand, Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' challenges and strategies in their transitional and professional experiences started to unfold from both the individual interviews and focus group discussion. The major findings are summarized as follows.

7.1.1 Chinese Immigrant ECE Teachers' Aspirations and Pathways

The first research question was motivated by my curiosity about Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' aspirations for moving to New Zealand and working in the ECE field. My overall conclusion to this question it that their aspirations are largely influenced by their personal beliefs and values which are ingrained in their habitus and former experiences, including their family background, their former educational experience, the value they place on the teaching profession, and so on. Despite the fact that they came from different family backgrounds with differentiated experiences and their aspirations changed before and after their arrival in New Zealand, the findings show that both personal agency and external structural factors influence Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' aspirations. Personal agency

considers the personal, conscious choices these Chinese immigrant ECE teachers made in their life trajectory for their own reasons, while external structural factors consider the political, societal and workplace factors which are beyond their control.

In terms of their personal agency, three major themes arose. The first was their general aspirations for better life and education in New Zealand. Although their individual perceptions of better life and education differed from each other, all six participants pursued educational qualifications in New Zealand and considered the lifestyle in New Zealand as free, laid-back and enjoyable. The second most prevalent theme was the passion and value they attached to children and ECE. All six participants had made this theme distinct over the course of their lives and appeared to be driven by their desire to have a positive and continuing impact on children's learning and growth. The third was about theor social image and personal pride of being a teacher. This respectable and honorable image of teachers is deeply rooted in their Chinese cultural background. Participants showed their preference for working and staying in the ECE field regardless of the inadequate payment and challenging working conditions. This offered a fresh perspective on immigrant teachers' studies, a domain where class is predominantly employed as an objective category of occupational status and income (Olwig, 2007), and synthesized both economic positions and qualitative means of (re)creating class and divisions in host countries.

In terms of external structural factors shown in the investigation of immigrant ECE teachers' aspirations, findings of the current study highlighted three layers of factors: the changing immigration policies, the job market for ECE teachers, and the management practices in their workplace. Favorable immigration policies for international students and the surge in need for ECE teachers are factors attracting immigrants to enter the ECE field. When they work in ECE centres, the centre management policies and practices make the workplace itself a more proximal space for immigrant teachers to make decisions and choices. All these three external factors create together a complex matrix of social space for immigrant teachers to navigate their journey.

As for the research question of their pathways, there are mainly two different pathways for Chinese immigrant ECE teachers to immigrate to New Zealand: to join the family, such as the case of Rina; and to immigrate as skilled workers under the SMC scheme, such as the cases for Zoe, Jane, Carol, Grace and Maggie. As for pathways to becoming an ECE teacher, the MoE and Teaching Council have the same qualification and registration requirements for all people who want to enter this teaching field regardless of their citizenship status. Becoming a qualified and registered ECE teacher in centres is different from becoming a parent-educator at Playcentre. They take different training programs and follow different PD procedures to meet the requirements set by MoE and Teaching Council. Five of my participants (Zoe, Jane, Carol, Rina and Gloria) all shared the same pathway: they first took ITE programs and obtained required qualifications from ITE providers, found a job in a centre as a provisional registered teacher, finished the IMP in 2 years, and finally became a fully registered ECE teacher. Maggie, who works in Playcentre, took training programs in the Auckland Playcentre Association, fulfilled the required field-based learning and teaching hours in the Playcentre and kept on learning along with the emergence of new needs. In Maggie's words, she "graduated from Playcentre" and continued to contribute to her community and to the wider ECE sector.

7.1.2 Chinese Immigrant ECE Teachers' Transition and Career Development

In order to understand Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' transitional and professional experiences, two research questions were asked. One was about the strategies and activities adapted by Chinese immigrant ECE teachers to navigate their life and career transition in New Zealand. The other was about the challenges, needs and reflections of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' career development.

First, three strategies stood out in the current study's findings: obtaining necessary qualifications from New Zealand institutes, building and deploying ethnic and social capital, and making use of new technologies. Their New Zealand qualifications can be understood as a form of cultural capital which could lead to them being able to find a job

or being offered a position in a company or an ECE centre. They chose different qualification programs based on their practical evaluations of personal contexts, costs, and gains. Meanwhile, as assumed in the definition of ethnic capital, Chinese immigrants are considered as capable people who can bring in potential opportunities and contribute to economic development. The ethnic capital shared by immigrant teachers as a collective group and the overall image of Chinese immigrants and their social entrepreneurship have created a certain social space for these immigrant ECE teachers to find jobs with their skills at different times during the last 2 decades. Findings also showed how much participants value and make use of their social capital, the importance of building up connections with people and the support they get from their social network. More interestingly, their social capital has been accelerated by new technologies. The vast popularity and rapid growth of online communication and new media present new opportunities and challenges for social inclusion and more space for immigrants to overcome class barriers or information gaps in their host country (McCann et al., 2010). Overall, immigrant ECE teachers take strategies to build up their cultural and social capital, together with the growth of their ethnic capital, have enabled these immigrant ECE teachers to navigate their way in the employment field and seek for better validation of their human capital.

Second, in the discussion of the challenges, needs and reflections of their career development in ECE, participants started by reporting the changing requirements of English language competency in their study and workplace as well as in their daily life. Different from the literature discourse which suggested that English language tests were discriminatory (such as Butcher et al., 2015; Huang & Singh, 2014), participants in the current study held positive attitudes toward English language requirements set by the New Zealand Immigration Service, MoE and other official organizations. None of them complained that the English language criteria were discriminatory. They also acknowledged that they didn't need to speak "perfect or native-like English" and their confidence in using English in their workplace and daily life had grown during their time living in New Zealand. This is also in line with the findings by Roskruge (2013) that with

the growth of immigrants' social capital and experiences such language disadvantage appears to decrease over the first 5 years of migration.

Another challenge emerging from the findings is the need for culturally diverse ITE programs and induction and mentoring programs for immigrant ECE teachers. Participants called for a better understanding of Chinese immigrant student teachers and a more ethnic-specific pastoral support for student teachers coming from China in the ITE programs. The results also showed that having culturally diverse teachers in ITE can provide emotional and social support to cultural-minority students in those "neutral" institutional practices and boost their culture confidence and competence in their future career.

Moreover, findings showed that the social space can be inclusive or exclusive for immigrant ECE teachers which was very much influenced by immigration policies, the labor market, local people's attitudes, institutional policies, occupational regulations and centre cultures. Such factors together create a complex matrix of social space for immigrant teachers to navigate their journey. My participants acknowledged the irreducible power relations of certain fields when they first entered them, and they believed such power relations are also changeable. They believed that they were actively creating their bargaining power in various situations with their capital, talents and abilities, which again helped them expand their social spaces in work and life.

In their professional practices and career development, participants reported their understanding of *Te Whariki* (MoE, 2017) and power structures in the ECE field. They shared confusions and challenges during the first few years of their working in centres and how they developed their interpretation of *Te Whāriki* in an ethical and authentic way. Participants agreed that it is the teaching team who actualize *Te Whāriki* in each centre's unique context and bring life to this well-designed national ECE curriculum, and they emphasized the importance of being reflective and adaptative in their daily practices. As for the power structures in the ECE field, participants had insightful reflections on policies from the national MoE and ERO level and at the individual centre level. They called for

pay parity, national planning and control of the number of ECE centres, more sufficient evaluation tools and measures of the quality of ECE services, better teacher-to-children ratios in centres for infants and toddlers, better leadership and management teams, and more support for children with special needs. Their reflections showed that they were active practitioners and insiders of ECE policy implementation in ECE services, and such reflections resonate with the newly released Early Learning Action Plan 2019–2029 (MoE, 2019). Participants also criticized the profit-driven phenomenon in some private ECE services and acted actively for the best care and education for children and for the public good of society.

7.1.3 Image and Position of Chinese Immigrant ECE Teachers in New Zealand

Generally speaking, my participants positioned themselves as innovators and contributors in the New Zealand ECE field. This can be interpreted as their positive attitudes toward early education plus their social status value of being a teacher. They took personal pride in caring for and educating children, working as a professional person in the team, as well as acting as an expert when interacting with parents and working in the team. Also, they all showed their willingness and openness toward new learning which defines ECE professionalism as a constantly evolving process. They said being self-reflective and authentic was vital for immigrant teachers to manage their multiple positions and to develop their own voices in their identity construction. Their confidence in teaching and working in the ECE field increased along with their positive sense of self as an immigrant ECE teacher in a new land, which again drove commitment, self-discovery and growth and career satisfaction. Immigrant teachers' personal and professional identities are seen as a transformative dialogue which involves teachers, children, colleagues and families in constantly changing situations and evolving social contexts.

This study showed that the identity construction of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers is an on-going process which involves the reciprocal relations of their habitus and capital in various fields. Teacher education and PD opportunities could serve as mediating factors in

this process. There is no doubt from the evidence provided that the image and position of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers in contemporary New Zealand has undergone significant reconceptualization over the last 2 decades. It's a journey full of ups and downs, tears and laughter, confusions and enlightenments, losses and gains. With the recent attention afforded to the ECE sector by the government's new 10-year strategic plan, the current study has positioned Chinese immigrant ECE teachers as agential rather than compliant passive subjects in their immigration, learning and working experiences. It is important for scholars and policy makers to consider, understand and respect immigrant ECE teachers' identities and professionalism through their own articulations.

7.2 Contributions of the Study

7.2.1 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

Based on Bourdieu's concept tools and the multicase findings, this study makes several theoretical and empirical contributions to the field of immigrant ECE teacher research.

First, this study contributes to the pragmatic approach of Bourdieu's theory by further developing Bourdieu's nation-state-centreed field analysis toward a transnational or global level. Bourdieu advocates a pragmatic use of his theory and he considers "concepts" first and foremost to be "temporary construct(s)" or "tool kits" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, preface by Bourdieu) for organizing empirical research, which can and ought to be modified in light of different cases and problems of research (Bourdieu, 1985; Wacquant, 2014). This current study is simultaneously oriented at a national as well as a transnational or global field level, in which Chinese immigrant ECE teachers pursue double or multiple games in their various national and transnational positions. Thus, I argue that it is important to account for and further theorize the multipositionality of agents in changing structures.

Secondly, the ethnic capital notion emerging from the rich data of the current study added an important layer of complexity in how Bourdieusian approaches view the constitution and convertibility of capital in immigrants' trajectories. Attempting to combine human capital concepts with Bourdieusian theorizations of forms of capital, I argue that when the

host society (here, New Zealand) considers immigrants as human capital and classifies them into different ethnic groups, it's very important for policy makers to provide culturally responsive support for these immigrants to convert, accumulate and utilize their various forms of capital to serve social mobility in the cultural and institutional context of the society of residence. The intention is that this discussion should revive the value and uniqueness of immigrants in the context of immigration, educational policy developments, and professional learning and development programs in New Zealand.

Third, my representation of immigrant ECE teachers' life trajectory with the three-dimensional narrative inquire approach, drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field, enhances the construct validity of key themes. With reference to Bourdieu's (1984, 1990) reconversion theory, I managed to discuss the structure of social space through both objective analyses of relative positions and the qualitative means of (re)creating divisions. In the discussion of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' practices in New Zealand, their choices of entering and remaining in the ECE field, and the production and reproduction of their social positions, immigrant ECE teachers are conceived as active and creative Bourdieusian subjects who have their own understanding of success and career plans, capable of creating their bargaining power in various situations through the transformation of habitus and utilization of various capitals, which again help them expand their social spaces in work and life.

7.2.2 Practical Contributions

One of the practical contributions of this study is the detailed insight provided by the six case studies and the focus group discussion. The findings reveal that immigrant ECE teachers and us should be all understood in a holistic manner: inward and outward, personal and social, through different times and places. If we know where we came from, where we are now and where we are heading, we can walk along with each other in the long journey with empathy and compassion. Their lived and living beings can reflect and project our lived and living beings, and together, we see the Otherness in each of us and embrace this Otherness as growing moments. This implies that for effective leadership in ECE centres,

emphasis should be placed on culturally inclusive team building and on-going communication. This will help to increase the wellbeing and belonging of every teacher, including immigrant ECE teachers, which again will enhance the culturally responsive practices in the ECE field.

Another practical contribution comes from the reflections and suggestions given by these participants as insiders and practitioners in the ECE field. Policy makers and government agencies, ECE service providers and managers, future ECE student teachers or people who want to enter into this world, can all draw on their reflections and suggestions to inform their decision making.

7.3 Implications

7.3.1 Implications for Policy Makers

First of all, the findings and discussions have suggested that immigration policies should change their strategies and policies: to reconsider putting ECE teachers on the long-term or short-term shortage lists as policy incentives to attract new immigrants to enter ECE field, and instead create new mechanisms and social space for settled immigrant ECE teachers' growth and success. There will always be a shortage of qualified and registered ECE teachers already in New Zealand if there is a persistent shortage of action to tackle unfair wages, worsening working conditions and low social acknowledgement in ECE field. Instead of attempting to attract new immigrants as low-cost labor to cover unwanted vacancies in ECE centres, policy incentives should be enforced to create effective mechanisms to retain immigrant ECE teachers to stay and grow in this ECE field.

Secondly, the New Zealand government and MoE need to play a more active role to develop and implement policies in a number of education-related areas, including ITE, license registration regulations for establishing new ECE centres and service providers, to turn the tide away from a privatized, profit-focused education system to a public good for young children and the family. All participants hoped the government would distribute public funding to ECE in a more strategic way, act better to monitor the number and quality

of ECE services and provide more support to children with special needs. Funding allocations should be differentiated for private ECE centres and public provision, and new categories for funding systems should be established. The government also need to address the rising diversity and multiculturalism against the backdrop of bicultural policies. Although some policy solutions were proposed, such as the Early Learning Action Plan (MoE, 2019), strategic action plans and effective implementation are very slow and still waiting for review and evaluation.

7.3.2 Implications for ITE and IMP Providers and Programs

ITE and IMP programs should address the multiple and fluid cultural identities of immigrant teachers and empower our future teachers to test out and demonstrate diverse ways of being to avoid a tokenistic and superficial multicultural approach in teaching and caring. More culturally diverse lecturers and teachers should be included in ITE and IMP programs. Ethnic-specific pastoral support should be provided to minority immigrant students to help them flourish emotionally, socially and academically. The reality calls for ITE providers and IMP programs to meet the variety of learning needs in New Zealand's increasingly culturally diverse student-teacher population and workforce, paying attention to their needs without forgetting their initial inequalities and diversities stemming from socioeconomic factors.

7.3.3 Implications for ECE Centres and Provisions

First, under the current funding system, centre management teams should improve their leadership skills to create a good working environment, to boost dynamic team cooperation and to support immigrant ECE teachers' professional growth to retain them. Second, the collegial relationships teachers have in a centre impact significantly on teachers' authenticity and professionalism. Therefore, a respectful relationship-based work ethic is essential in good centres. Last but not least, ECE centres and providers must value immigrant ECE teachers' contributions, and have long-term strategic thinking and planning to establish an inclusive and nurturing centre culture for everyone.

7.4 Limitations and Recommendations

In a study such as this it is difficult to reduce the idiosyncratic nature of the qualitative data to present a comprehensive account of such a diverse group of all Chinese immigrant ECE teachers in New Zealand. The ECE services and workforce within New Zealand are extremely diverse and I could not hope to cover the breadth of perceptions through such a limited sample.

There are a number of aspects of the study that need to be drawn to readers' attention including: the interview and focus group discussion participants contributing to this study do come from different ECE contexts including ECE centres and Playcentre, but they are by no means representative of the wide diversity of ECE settings and personnel in free kindergartens, home-based networks and services, other community-based ECE services (like the church), ngā Kōhanga Reo, and playgroups. Secondly, these participants are all based in the same geographical location (Auckland) due to the feasibility of attending interviews and focus group discussion in person. Thirdly, gender differences in Chinese immigrant ECE teachers were not reflected in the current study, which can be extended into future research projects. Such instruments could be applied to a population with similar characteristics, but modification and validation are highly recommended.

Any future research building upon this study could try to address some of these limitations. Recommended research topics may include Chinese immigrant ECE teachers who come from other places more than the Mainland China and Auckland, the second generation of Chinese immigrants who become ECE teachers in New Zealand, gender differences in Chinese immigrant ECE teachers and so on.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment of Research Participants

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

The School of Learning, Development and Professional Practice
Te Kura Whakatairanga i te Ako Ngaio me te Whanaketanga
Epsom Campus
Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave
Auckland, 1023, New Zealand
T +64 9 623 8899
W www.education.auckland.ac.nz

RECRUITMENT OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

- **Are you an immigrant who came to New Zealand during the last two decades (1998-2018)?**
- **Are you a fully registered early childhood teacher in New Zealand?**
- **Were you born in China and spent at least three years in China before coming to New Zealand?**
- **Are you a non-native English speaker?**

If your answer to all 4 questions above is YES, we invite you to participate in the research study on **Chinese immigrant early childhood teachers** to share your experiences and have your voices heard. The aim of this study is to explore the aspirations, pathways, transitions, career development and positions of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers in the field of New Zealand early childhood education.

We invite you to participate in both an individual semi-structured interview and a focus group discussion with other participants. Every effort will be made to ensure the reporting of information in this research or any subsequent

publication of information is done in a way that protects your identity. Pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant. Participation in the research is voluntary.

For queries, please contact Feifei Huang for further information.

E-mail: f.huang@auckland.ac.nz Number: +64 9 623 8899 ext 48384

We-chat ID: feifei636476

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on ..... for three years. Reference Number 022017.

Appendix B: Email to Participants

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

The School of Learning, Development and Professional Practice

Te Kura Whakatairanga i te Ako Ngaio me te Whanaketanga

Epsom Campus

Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave

Auckland, 1023, New Zealand

T +64 9 623 8899

Email

(To participants)

Dear Participants,

Thank you very much for your attention to this email. You have been invited to participant in this study because you are a qualified ECE teacher in New Zealand with Chinese immigrant background and you responded to my advertisement recruiting voluntary participants. The selection is random and there is no bias or unfairness in the process of selection.

*Please n*ote that your involvement in this research consists of two parts: an individual semi-structured interview and a following focus group discussion with other participants. Please read through the enclosed Participation Information Sheet for the interview and the Participation Information Sheet for focus group discussion for more details. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by responding to the current email address or call me on +64 9 623 8899 ext 48384. I will clarify or answer to your satisfaction.

Your intention to participate has been highly appreciated. If you agree to participate, please sign the Consent Form and get back to me at your earliest convenience.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,

Feifei Huang

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on ..... for three years. Reference Number 022017.

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet – Interview and Focus Group

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

The School of Learning, Development and Professional Practice
Te Kura Whakatairanga i te Ako Ngaio me te Whanaketanga
Epsom Campus
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Auckland, 1023, New Zealand
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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
(Interview and Focus Group)

Title: Chinese Immigrant Teachers in New Zealand Early Childhood Education: Aspirations, Pathways, Transitions and Career Development
Researchers: Feifei Huang, Dr Marek Tesar and Professor Lawrence Jun Zhang

Researcher introduction

My name is Feifei Huang, and I am a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education and Social Work, The University of Auckland, New Zealand. My supervisors are Dr Marek Tesar and Professor Lawrence Zhang. I am conducting research on the lived experiences of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers with a focus on investigating their aspirations, pathways, transitions and career development.

Research project and Invitation

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative methodological approach. The main research objectives of the present study are: 1) to understand Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' aspirations and pathways from moving to and work in NZ; 2) to identify strategies and activities adapted by Chinese immigrant ECE teachers to navigate their life and career transition in NZ; 3) to probe into the challenges, needs and reflections of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers' career development; 4) to discuss the role and position of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers in NZ's early education field. It is anticipated that the findings from my project will provide the empirical evidence of the "Othered" group of Chinese immigrant ECE teachers and shed new light on education and policy implications. This project will give agency to Chinese immigrant teachers and provide insights into their dynamics.

In order to gather data for my research, I would like to invite you to participate in the one-on-one interview and the focus group discussion. You have been invited to participant in this study because you are a qualified ECE teacher with Chinese immigrant background and you responded to my advertisement recruiting voluntary participants. Your approval and cooperation are the prerequisite of conducting this research. Your lived experiences and reflections may serve as suggestions to those who come after them on the same path, call for appropriate policies and support for immigrant teachers inclusion and equity, and help to exert the most potential of immigrant teachers and create common worlds for every teacher and child.

To facilitate my research I am asking that you:

- Consent to participate my study.
- Volunteer for both the one-on-one interview and the focus group discussion.

Project Procedures

Your participation in this research will involve an individual semi-structured interview and a focus group discussion. This information sheet covers both the interview part and the focus group discussion.

As for the one-on-one interview, it takes about one hour at a time and place suitable for you. The language used in the interview will be Chinese and I will translate the content of interview into English. The researcher will conduct, audio-record and transcribe each interview. During the interview the recorder can be turned off at any time if requested and you may leave the interview or refrain from answering a question anytime as you wish without giving reason. After the interview, you will be invited to participant in a focus group discussion too. You will be offered a copy of your transcript for checking and editing within 4 weeks after the interview. Please provide an email address on the Consent Form so I can send the transcript to you. I will provide a date for return of any amendments to me.

As for the focus group, you are invited to join in the focus group discussion with other participants after the interview. There is no time limit for the group discussion, but a maximum of two hours is anticipated. The researcher will conduct, audio-record and transcribe the focus group discussion collectively. During the focus group discussion and digital record, you can choose to not answer any questions or leave the room without giving reason, but you cannot

ask for the recorder to be turned off since we have other participants at the same time. You will not be able to given the option of editing their transcripts due to the conversational and contextual nature of group discussions.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Any identifying details about your personal information will be removed. Each participant will be required to use a unique identification number in data collection. No participants will be named in any presentations, publications or any other form of dissemination, but rather it will be replaced with a pseudonym. During data analysis, each participant is given a code with numbers to link their identification number with the interview and discussion. This information is kept separately from the data, and is known to the researcher only. No identifiable information will be revealed to a third party. The information and consent sheets will include a statement stating that while every effort will be made to protect their anonymity, this cannot be guaranteed.

There is a chance that other focus group participants in this research may recognize some of the details shared in presentations or publications arising from our focus group discussion. Participants will be made aware that, like anonymity, we will take all possible steps to maintain confidentiality, but it cannot be guaranteed. During data analysis, each participant is given a code with numbers to link their identification number with the discussion. Your comment on and discussion about employers will be confidential and anonymous. We strongly encourage you and other participants to maintain the confidentiality of information shared under such conditions. While complete anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, all data will be de-identified and protected as much as possible to protect your identity and confidentiality.

Participants' Rights to Withdraw

Through the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form, you will understand the purpose and procedure of the research, and you will be made aware that you are completely voluntary.

For interviews, you are entitled to withdraw either yourselves or any data provided by you without giving reason within up to 3 weeks after the data collection is completed. After that time any withdrawal of data could not be possible as data analysis would be underway. You can also refuse to answer any questions in the interview or discussion and request the recording to be stopped anytime without giving a reason.

For the focus group discussion, you can choose to not answer any questions or leave the room without giving reason, but you cannot ask for the recorder to be turned off since we have other participants at the same time. For this reason, any data submitted as part of the focus group discussion cannot be withdrawn lest the contextual meaning of the remaining data could be affected.

Data Management

The collected Consent Forms and hard copy data will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in Dr Marek Tesar's office at The University of Auckland. The electronic data will be stored confidentially on the researcher's and the principal investigator's password-protected computer, and also on a password-protected University of Auckland computer, backed up by a server. After six years, all hard copy data will be shredded and the digital information will be deleted permanently from all electronic devices. The collected data will be primarily presented in the researcher's PhD thesis and may also be used for future academic publications or conference presentations. A written summary of findings can be provided to participants upon request.

Contact details

Enquiries about the research can be made to:

Researcher	Main supervisor	Co-supervisor
Feifei Huang School of Learning, Development, and Professional Practice, Faculty of Education and Social Work, The University of Auckland, Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave, Auckland f.huang@auckland.ac.nz Ph: +64 9 623 8899 ext 48384	Dr Marek Tesar School of Learning, Development, and Professional Practice, Faculty of Education and Social Work, The University of Auckland, Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave, Auckland m.tesar@auckland.ac.nz Ph: +64 9 373 7999 ext 46375	Professor Lawrence Jun Zhang School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education and Social Work, The University of Auckland, Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave, Auckland lj.zhang@auckland.ac.nz Ph: +64 9 373 7999 ext 48750

You may also contact the head of the School of Learning, Development and Professional Practice (LDPP), Dr Richard Hamilton at rj.hamilton@auckland.ac.nz or +64 9 923 5619.

If you are willing to participate in this research, please sign the Consent Form and send it back to me. Thank you.

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142, New Zealand. Telephone 09 373-7999 ext. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz.

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on ..... for three years. Reference Number 022017.

Appendix D: Consent Form – Interview and Focus Group

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

The School of Learning, Development and Professional Practice
Te Kura Whakatairanga i te Ako Ngaio me te Whanaketanga
Epsom Campus
Gate 3, 74 Epsom Ave
Auckland, 1023, New Zealand
T +64 9 623 8899

CONSENT FORM
(Interview and Focus Group)

This form will be held for a period of six years

Title: Chinese Immigrant Teachers in New Zealand Early Childhood Education: Aspirations, Pathways, Transitions and Career Development

Researchers: Feifei Huang, Dr Marek Tesar and Professor Lawrence Jun Zhang

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understood the nature of the research and why I have been invited to participate. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to participate in both the interview and the focus group discussion in the research.
- I understand that participation in this research project is completely voluntary.
- I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded individually, and I have the right to ask the recorder to stop at any time during the interview without giving reason.
- I understand that the group discussion will be audio-recorded collectively, and I cannot ask for the recorder to be turned off in the group discussion.
- I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions, and may request the recording to be stopped anytime during the interview without giving reason.
- I understand that I can choose not to answer any question or leave the room during the focus group discussion without giving reason.

- I understand that in interviews I have the right to withdraw either myself or any data provided by me without giving any reasons within up to 4 weeks after the data collection is completed. After that time any withdrawal of data could not be possible.
- I understand that the researcher will conduct and transcribe the audio-recording, and a copy of them will be provided to me individually for review, editing, deletion, and final approval.
- I understand that I will be asked to use a unique identification number, which can only be recognized by myself, in my interview. No identifiable information will be revealed to a third party.
- I understand that any identifying details about my personal information will be removed.
- I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed to a third party or the public.
- I understand that if the information provided by me is reported/published, confidentiality is assured and pseudonyms will be used to protect my identity.
- I understand that although complete anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the researcher will try their best to protect my identity and confidentiality.
- I understand that the data collected from the research will be used for the researcher's PhD thesis, and may be used for conference presentations and journal publications.
- I understand that the collected Consent Forms and hard copy data will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in Dr Marek Tesar office at The University of Auckland, and electronic data will be stored confidentially in the researcher's computer, which is password-protected. After that time all hard copy data will be shredded and the digital files will be deleted permanently from all electronic devices.
- I wish / do not wish to have the opportunity to check the transcript of my interviews. [circle only if appropriate]
- I wish / do not wish (please circle) to receive a summary of findings, which can be emailed to me at this email address: _____ [circle only if appropriate]

I therefore give my informed consent for the participation in the interview in the research project "Chinese Immigrant Teachers in New Zealand Early Childhood Education: Aspirations, Pathways, Transitions and Career Development".

Name: ……

Email: ……..…….

Signature: ……..…. Date……...

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on ……. for three years. Reference Number 022017.

Appendix E: Semistructured-Interview Guide

Name: _____ Pseudonym: _____

Introduction

About the main aim of the study, how much time each interview will take, etc.

(*Note: Further questions or statements to prompt the participants may arise during the interview as the participants narrate their experiences. I encourage participants to continue telling me their stories by using phrases e.g. tell me more, than what happened? Please continue, etc.)*

Demographic Questions

1. Where in China are you originally from?

_____

2. How long have you been in New Zealand? Which city are you in?

_____

3. How long have you worked as an early childhood teacher in New Zealand?

_____

4. Did you work as an early childhood teacher before coming to New Zealand? If yes, where and for how long?

_____

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences working in NZ's ECE centres.

2. What motivates you to make such big decision to move to New Zealand?

3. What are the reasons for you to choose to work in early childhood education?

4. Did you receive any kind of training or education before you could work in NZ's ECE centres? If yes, what is it?

5. What are your pathways and procedures for you to become a fully registered ECE teacher? What, in your experience, are the obstacles in your pathway to become a registered ECE teacher?

6. What do you think about NZ's education policies of early childhood education?

7. What difference have you found in doing ECE job here in New Zealand or in China?

8. What do you think about early childhood education employers?

9. What are the channels and resources when you need help?

10. Looking back at your own experiences, if you are asked for suggestions on coming to NZ and work as an ECE teacher, what would you like to say?

Appendix F: Focus Group Discussion

Introduction and Warm up

Below is a summary of the information the project researchers use to make sure participants understand the information in the PIS and Consent Form.

Ground Rules

- Everyone should participate.
- Information provided in the focus group must be kept confidential
- Stay with the group and please don't have side conversations
- Turn off cell phones if possible
- Have fun

Guiding questions

1. Tell me about your experiences working in NZ's ECE centres.

2. What is your general comment on your own immigration experience?

3. What do you think of NZ's early childhood education?

4. What are your hopes, aspirations, dreams and expectations before come to NZ? And what is the reality?

5. What do you think of *Te Whāriki*? And how do you practice it?

6. What difference have you found in doing ECE job here in New Zealand or in China?

7. What are the regulations and procedures for you to become a fully registered ECE teacher?

8. What do you think about early childhood education employers?

9. What difference have you found in doing ECE job here in New Zealand or in China?

10. What are your professional development needs as an ECE teacher?

Probes for Discussion:

- *Motivations*
- *Culture*
    - *Relationships, camaraderie*
- *Transitional efforts*
    - *Local education and experiences*
    - *Cultural assimilation*
- *Working conditions*
    - *Access to supplies, equipment, shift*
- *Respect/recognition from management or others*
    - *Job satisfaction, promotion opportunities*
- *Opportunity, achievement, growth*
    - *Advancement, further education, responsibility*
- *Management and supervision*

Concluding question

Of all the things we've discussed today, what would you say are the most important issues you would like to express about this checklist?