



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**AUCKLAND**  
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau  
NEW ZEALAND

# Home Language and Multilingual Support to Preschoolers in Early Childhood Education Settings and Community Language Schools

**Chinese Immigrant Families' Aspirations  
for Home Language Retention and  
Children's Early Bilingual Education in  
New Zealand's Social Spaces**

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# Purpose and Overview

This presentation will use findings from a qualitative study to illustrate complex relationships between dominant language discourses in New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) and Chinese immigrant families' aspirations for children's language learning.

# Demographics

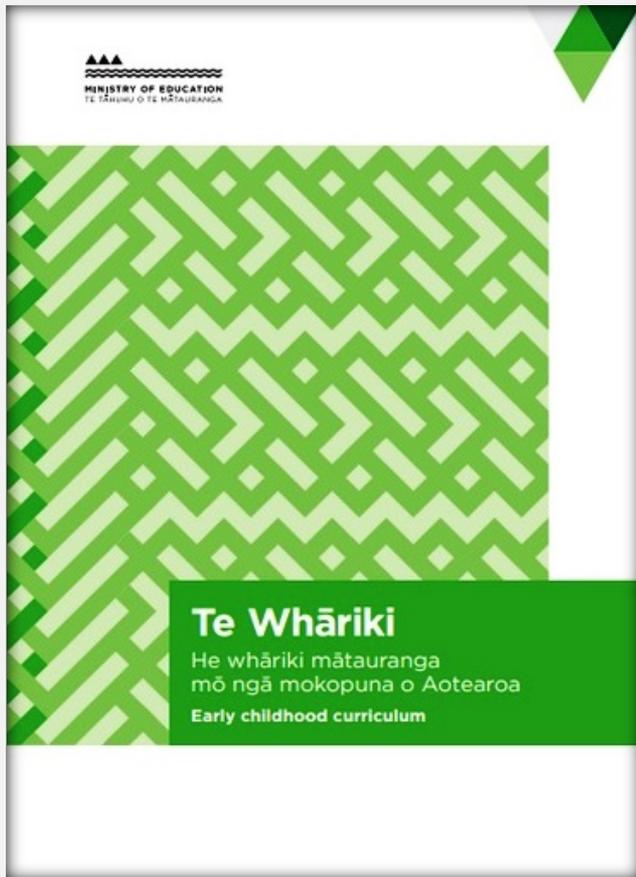
- Aotearoa New Zealand has a large population of immigrants
- 27.4% of the country's residents and 39.1% of 'Aucklanders' were born outside New Zealand (Auckland Council, 2014; Statistics New Zealand, 2019)
- The nation is home to more than 200 ethnic groups (Royal Society of New Zealand, 2013)
- A superdiverse nation (Royal Society of New Zealand, 2013)



# Languages in New Zealand

- Two official languages: Te reo Māori (the language of Indigenous Māori) and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL)
- English is “a de facto official language by virtue of its widespread use” (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2007, p. 14)
- Home to more than 160 languages (Royal Society of New Zealand, 2013)
- Five most common languages in New Zealand: English, te reo Māori, Samoan, Northern Chinese (including Mandarin), and Hindi (Statistics New Zealand, 2019)





# New Zealand ECE

- 0-5 years old
- Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa/The New Zealand Early Childhood Education Curriculum (MoE, 2017)
- A bicultural and bilingual curriculum



## ECE Statistics

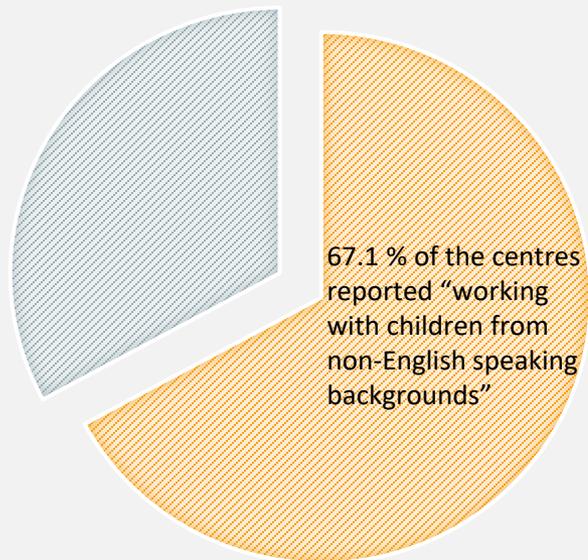
### Enrolments of children:

- Asian children – a significant increase (MoE, 2014)
- European/Pākehā children – less than 50% (Education Counts, 2020)

### Teaching Staff:

- An increasing number of non-Pākehā ECE teachers (Education Counts, 2020).
- 2019 – 65% Pākehā, 16% Asian (Education Counts, 2020)
- A dramatic increase of immigrant teachers and teachers of Asian ethnicity (Hyslop & Le, 2019)

# Languages in ECE



(Shuker & Cherrington, 2016, p. 177)

Statistics from the Ministry of Education (Education Counts, 2020):

- 77 different languages used
- 35 Asian medium licensed ECE services
- The number of Asian medium ECE services has decreased since 2018



## Literature Review

- Children with an EAL (English as an additional language) background should be encouraged to use home language at home *and* ECE settings (Podmore et al., 2016).
- Chinese immigrant families in English-speaking countries expected their children to be bilingual in Chinese and English but they expressed some language concerns (Francis et al., 2010; Guo 2010; Hu et al. 2014a, 2014b; Law, 2015; Wu 2009).





## Pragmatic Concerns

Parents believed that Chinese language and literacy ability:

- Opens up career opportunities in the future (Francis et al., 2010)
- Maintains family ties (Hu et al., 2014a; Law, 2015)
- Affects English learning and readiness for schools and subsequent academic achievements (De Gioia, 2013; Hu et al., 2014a; Obeng 2007)
- Yet, teachers are unaware of families' language preferences and aspirations (De Gioia 2013; Hu et al., 2014a; Obeng 2007)

# Theorising: Social Spaces

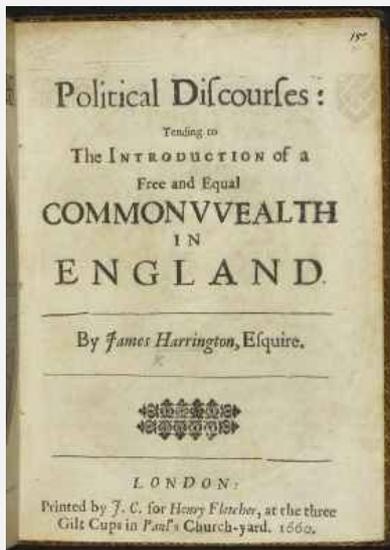
- “The system of relations” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 16)
- All spaces are interrelated and interdependent (Georgiou, 2006; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007)
- Private spaces – private familial activities
- Public spaces – social rules and regulations (Georgiou, 2006)
- Social meanings of public spaces shape practices in the private (Georgiou, 2006)

# Theorising: Social Spaces

- Cultural exchanges – conflicting messages, displacement, disorientation (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007)
- Active agents (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007)
- Navigate and negotiate across private (home) and public (ECE setting) social spaces where different languages and cultures are practised

# Research methods

- **Documentary analysis** – institutionalised discourses promoted in national publications published by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Education Review Office (ERO)
- **Individual interviews** with Chinese immigrant mothers



# Findings overview

- **Alignments** and **misalignments** between dominant language discourses promoted in institutional documents (public space) and Chinese immigrant families' aspirations for children's language learning (private space)
- Complex relationships



## Private spaces: Retention of heritage language

### Functional reasons:

- Expected children to maintain the ability to communicate in Chinese
- Expected children to communicate with extended families in China

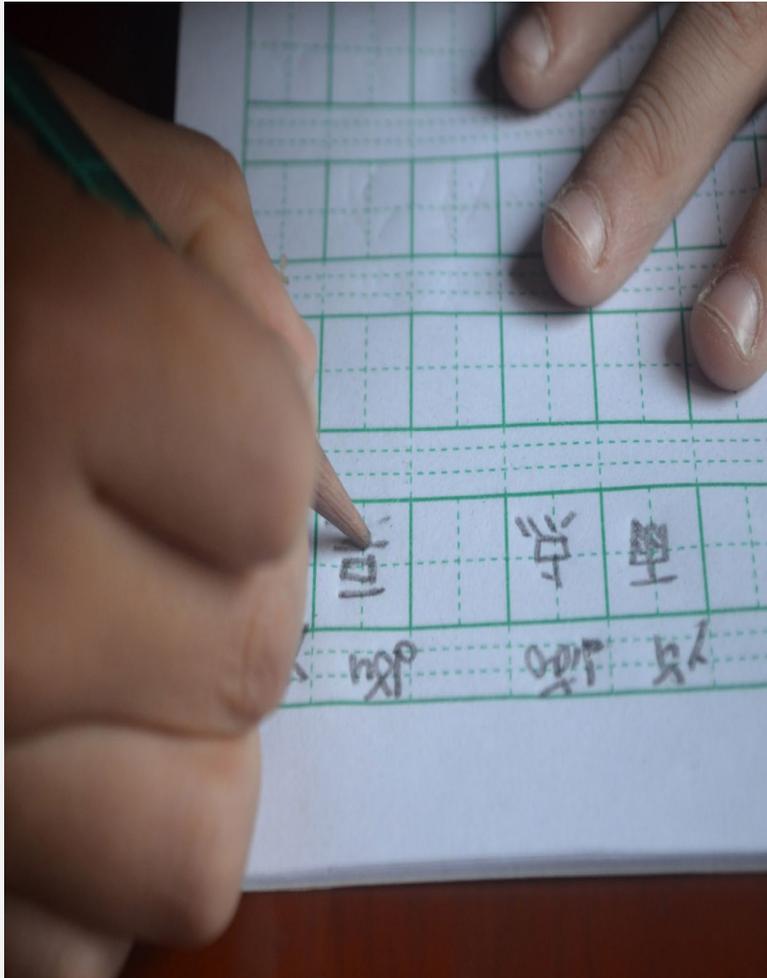
*Sonia: There are so many Chinese here [in New Zealand]. They [her children] may need to speak Chinese in the future when working with other Chinese here.*



# Language concerns

- *Lian: Once he [the elder son] started attending childcare centre and primary school, his Mandarin deteriorated. For Eddy [the younger son], he was already at childcare centre when he began talking. So his English is better than his Chinese ... They were not even interested when I told them stories in Chinese.*





## Relaxed and pragmatic expectations

The ability to read was perceived to be more important than the ability to write.

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

*Lian: I do not teach them how to write Chinese, only how to read ... My expectation of their Chinese is not very high ... It doesn't matter if he can write or not ... I just want him to be able to read some Chinese when we are back in China, something simple, like notices and signs.*

# Strategies

- Provided resources in private spaces
- Sent children back to China for a year or two

*Jean: I think going back to China to learn Chinese is more practical because they have the right environment there. In here, you learn it only once a week. It's tiring for parents to take their children to classes, and the children struggle to learn [Chinese]. Most importantly, the outcome is not good.*

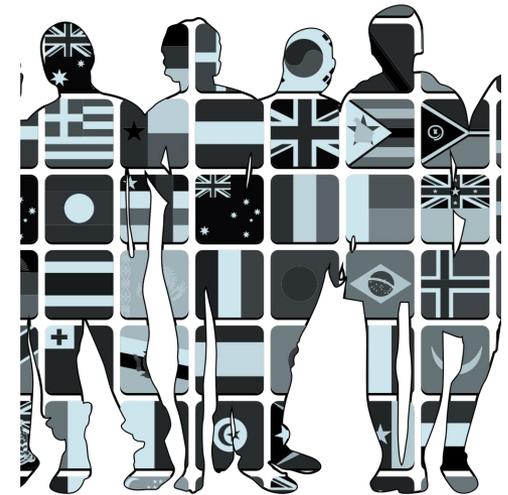
## Alignment with public discourses

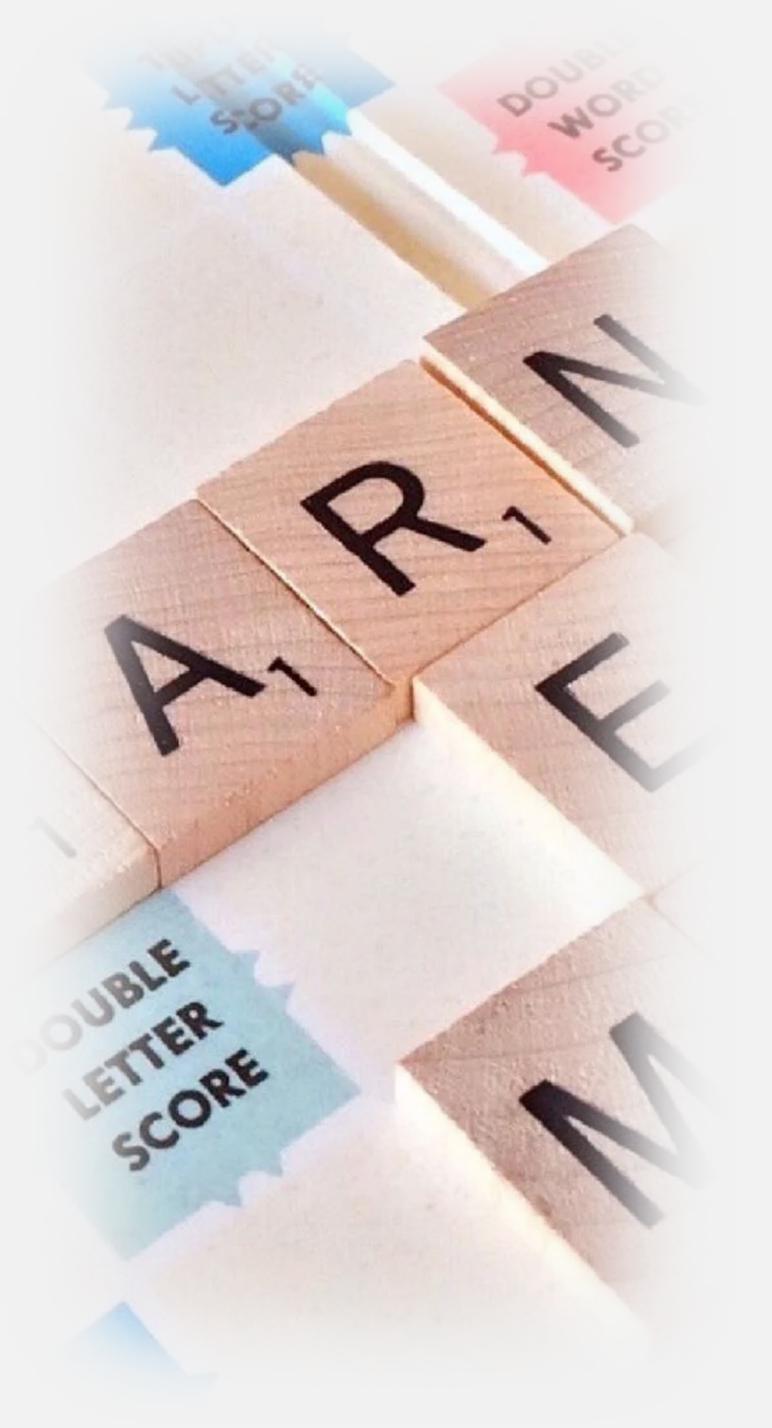
Embracing children’s home languages is promoted in a range of institutional documents (ERO, 2011; MoE, 2004a, 2004b, 2017).

For example, *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017)

- promotes and protects “the language and symbols of children’s own and other cultures” (p. 41)
- expects teachers to “respect and encourage the use of children’s home languages” (p. 45)

An alignment between public discourses and parents’ aspiration – ONLY in private spaces





## Public spaces: Significance of English

*Katie: Without English, my children cannot make friends.*

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

*Katie: If their English is not good, they learn everything slower, and their comprehension is not as good ... [without English], they won't be able to understand what the teachers say, and I will be very worried.*

*Lian: How will a child be able to learn without English when he/she starts primary? How can the child communicate with the teachers?*

# Prioritise the learning of English

- Sent children to Montessori ECE centres to improve English
- Stopped sending children to bilingual (Chinese and English) ECE centres

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

# Disappointment

*Nan: Teachers will tell you children 'learn very quickly' and [you] don't have to worry. But we know so well that if my children don't know English, they will find it very tough and be very upset [at primary school] ... I told the teachers he [her son] did not know any English at all, hoping that they would teach him some English, and of course they didn't, so now I don't have this expectation anymore.*





# Misalignment

- Teaching practice is shaped by the curriculum and institutional discourses
- Children's English language and literacy acquisition is minimally highlighted in official documents by the Ministry and Education Review Office
- Teachers' decisions regarding English language and literacy experiences provided in the public space did not align with parents' aspirations

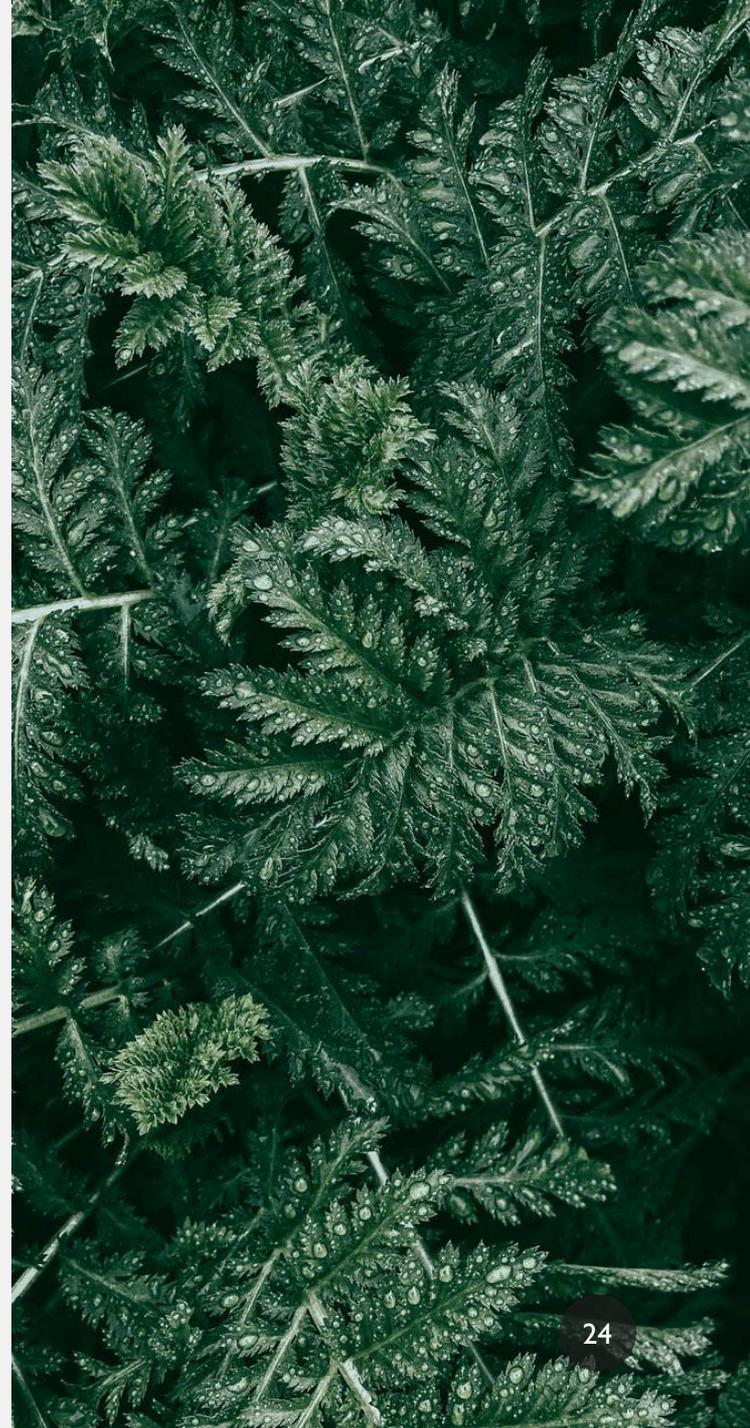
## Conclusion & Implications

### Conclusion:

- Complex alignments and misalignments between dominant language discourses and parents' aspirations

### Implications:

- Connections between public and private spaces
- Parent–teacher dialogue
- An awareness of the relations between public and private spaces underpins a language inclusive pedagogy



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