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**Intentionality and Partnership**

**Building Effective Partnerships Between Chinese Immigrant Parents and Early Childhood  
Educators in New Zealand**

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## **Abstract**

Teacher-parent partnership is promoted in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand as it positively influences children's learning (Ministry of Education, 1996). However, the growing number of enrolments of Chinese children in early childhood education services in Auckland, New Zealand makes most early childhood teachers' daily work challenging in terms of working in partnerships with Chinese parents who are new to New Zealand. Due to cultural and language differences, teachers and Chinese parents have different understandings of teacher-parent partnerships and early childhood education. These different understandings have impeded the development of effective teacher-parent partnerships (Chan, 2011).

The objective of this study is to investigate the construction of partnerships between New Zealand early childhood teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents and to identify and propose effective strategies for teachers to develop effective partnerships with Chinese parents.

This qualitative study examines discourses of intentionality evident in the way that three New Zealand early childhood teachers and three Chinese immigrant parents perceive effective partnerships. Data generated in this research through conducting semi-structured interviews was analysed and used to create a conceptual partnership framework specifically with Chinese parents/whānau, and intentionality, in mind.

Findings of this research suggest that the construction of effective partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents is influenced by their comprehension of partnerships, intentionality,

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knowledge of cultural diversity, and communication. This research introduces a conceptual framework for investigating partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents in the early childhood sector in New Zealand.

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### **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Table 2: Intentional actions undertaken by the three participating Chinese immigrant parents.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study

The current society of New Zealand is now increasingly becoming a multicultural one, as people from different countries immigrate to New Zealand for the purposes of seeking better career opportunities, alternative lifestyles, and quality education for their next generations (Singham, 2006). Specifically, there are increasing numbers of people in New Zealand who identify with the Asian ethnic group, of which Chinese immigrants occupy a large portion. According to Statistics New Zealand (2013), the total number of ethnic Chinese in New Zealand had increased dramatically from 105,000 in 2001 to 171,411 in 2013. While the number of Asian people living in every region of New Zealand had increased, “the biggest growth occurred in the Auckland region” (Statistics New Zealand, 2013, p. 12). Statistics New Zealand captured this growth in 2013 when 23.1% of people living in Auckland identified with the Asian ethnic group, compared with 18.9% in 2006. The number of ethnic Chinese occupied approximately 40% of the total number of ethnic Asians in Auckland (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

The increasing number of Chinese immigrants in Auckland has contributed greatly to the diversity of New Zealand's society in terms of language and cultural richness. The number of enrollments of Chinese children in early childhood education services in Auckland is growing rapidly. New immigrant Chinese families, whose children are attending early childhood services, have made the diversity of early childhood education in Auckland more complex by bringing Chinese culture and values into early childhood centres that were permeated by a dominance of Western culture (Burke, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2013). To work with this diversity, New

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Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, requires early childhood services to provide all children with meaningful early learning experiences by teachers working in collaborative partnerships with children's families and the communities to which they belong (Ministry of Education, 1996; Mitchell, Haggerty, Hampton, & Pairman, 2006).

Zhang (2012) finds that although some early childhood centres in New Zealand are doing an excellent job in developing effective partnerships with new immigrant Chinese parents, the main factors that contribute to their success are not identified. Thus, it is necessary to further explore practical strategies that enable teachers and Chinese parents to work effectively and collaboratively in partnerships that benefit children's learning. Although the notion of diversity is well researched in the early childhood education field internationally, little research specific to partnerships between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents in early childhood education in New Zealand has been done to present practical suggestions for teachers and Chinese parents to improve their working partnerships so as to better support children's learning (Mitchell et al., 2006). This study, therefore, aims at providing practical suggestions for both early childhood teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents to build collaborative partnerships that benefit children, adults, and communities.

Although *Te Whāriki* provides a framework for teachers to consider effective partnerships, a broad range of research has revealed that many New Zealand early childhood practitioners encounter difficulties when working with new immigrant families (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005; Liao, 2007; Zhang, 2012). Specifically, previous studies have found that most early childhood teachers in New Zealand find their work challenging in terms of working in partnerships with new

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immigrant Chinese families (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2006; Zhang, 2012). Many contributing factors are believed to have negative influences on the enactment of effective partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents, such as cultural differences, language barriers, lack of Chinese parents' sufficient understanding and knowledge of New Zealand's educational system, different views between parents and teachers about teacher-parent partnerships and parental involvement in children's learning, and conflicting perspectives on the value of play (Guo, 2006; Guo, 2010; Guo & Dalli, 2012; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012). Play is a key theme for early childhood education in New Zealand. The pedagogy of utilizing play to foster children's learning is questioned by many Chinese parents (Guo, 2010; Wu, 2009).

Although these negative contributors have been identified, there is little research focusing particularly on the process of the construction of effective partnerships between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents and providing practical suggestions for teachers and Chinese parents to improve their partnerships. This study investigates cultural differences and language barriers on a deeper level. It explores and examines how language barriers affect the communication between teachers and Chinese parents and how cultural differences influence these two parties' understandings of early childhood education, parental involvement, and teacher-parent partnerships.

This research builds upon previous research (see Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005; Guo & Dalli, 2012; Wu, 2009; Yang, 2011; Zhang, 2012) that sought to ascertain the dynamics that contribute to partnerships between early childhood teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents. The concept of partnership is activated and regarded as a dynamic process in this study. This study

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contributes to the view that the construction of collaborative partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents is a dynamic process in which the two parties communicate their distinct beliefs and aspirations constantly so as to develop a shared responsibility for children's learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). This study adopts the position that parents and teachers are both valuable contributors in partnership construction.

Previous research has confirmed that the construction of partnerships between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents is indeed difficult due to language barriers and cultural differences (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005; Wu, 2009). However, there are two main limitations that emerge from previous research. Firstly, previous studies have been mostly based on the belief that Chinese parents' perspectives on teacher-parent partnerships are influenced by the traditional Confucian Chinese culture (Chan, 2011; Guo & Dali, 2012; Liao, 2007), except for Yang (2011). Yang (2011) proposes that partnership is dynamic and flexible in nature, and that rather than being shaped solely by Chinese culture, Chinese parents' beliefs about teacher-parent partnerships may be adapted under the influence of the mainstream Western culture of New Zealand. Yang (2011) finds that some Chinese parents start to recognize the value of working in partnerships with teachers after they immigrated to New Zealand. This change in Chinese parents' beliefs about partnerships is likely to have an impact on the actions they carry out when developing partnerships with teachers. Secondly, although previous research points to the need for teachers to make changes to work more collaboratively with Chinese parents, little research recognizes parents' contributions towards the development of teacher-parent partnerships (Huang, 2013; Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999; Mitchell et al., 2006). Zhang (2012) and Gottlieb, Feeley, and Dalton (2006) argue that parental contributions

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should also be valued in the process of fostering collaborative partnerships that positively affect children's learning.

This study is intent on working with partnership as a dynamic process that is reciprocal and responsive to people, cultures, and locations. To be specific, this research acknowledges that Chinese immigrant parents' views about partnerships may be shaped by both traditional Confucian Chinese culture and New Zealand culture (Tamis-LeMonda, Way, Hughes, Yoshikawa, Kalman, & Niwa, 2008). It investigates the process of partnership construction between teachers and Chinese parents with a specific focus on the intentional actions that both parties undertake when developing partnerships. Furthermore, this study adopts a "community of learners" approach that positions both teachers and Chinese parents as being implicated in the processes that foster dynamic teacher-parent partnerships (Mitchell & Carr, 2014; Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 2010). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) support this approach, claiming that both parents and teachers should actively engage in the construction of teacher-parent partnerships, which enables a shared responsibility for children's learning to be developed.

In response to recent research that speaks generically to the key elements of teacher-parent partnership in New Zealand's early childhood education field (Duncan, Te One, Dewe & Te Punga-Jurgens et al., 2012), this interpretive phenomenological study provides evidence of how a number of teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents perceive the intentional actions they undertake. Duncan et al. (2012) develop four key theoretical concepts to investigate teacher-parent partnerships in the early childhood education field in New Zealand, namely,



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authentic relationships, sustainable relationships, intentionality, and embedding. Amongst these four concepts, it is intentionality that Duncan et al. (2012) emphasize as being central to effective teacher-parent partnerships. Duncan et al believe that teachers' intentional actions have essential influences on the construction of authentic, sustainable, and effective teacher-parent partnerships. Based on the contributions of Duncan et al. (2012), this study works with the concept of intentionality, with and alongside the other theoretical concepts they identified, as an initial conceptual framework for thinking about effective partnerships in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand.

On the basis of the four theoretical concepts developed by Duncan et al. (2012), this study aims at generating a conceptual framework for studying and examining partnerships, specifically in relation to Chinese parents/whānau, and this framework will offer guidelines for effective practices to teachers working in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand.

## 1.2 Organization of this thesis

This thesis will be presented in six chapters.

Chapter 2 presents a review on literature regarding teacher-parent partnerships in the early childhood education sector. The literature review chapter explores the concept of partnership and intentionality in the early childhood education field in New Zealand. It examines the benefits and challenges that diversity has brought to teachers' daily practices in terms of working in partnerships with immigrant parents and families. Additionally, the significance of effective partnerships is discussed. Suggestions made by previous research for teachers to

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improve teacher-parent partnerships are summarized. Moreover, the importance of parental involvement for children's learning and teacher-parent partnerships is analysed.

Chapter 3 introduces and justifies the design and methodology of this research. It presents the rational of utilizing qualitative research methodology for this study. Specifically, chapter 3 justifies the selection of interpretive and phenomenological approach. Additionally, four ethical considerations involved in this research project are presented. Finally, it introduces data collection and data analysis methods.

Chapter 4 presents key findings of this research. Discourses offered by research participants are carefully investigated and analysed in this chapter. It discusses the four key themes that emerged from data analysis: comprehension of partnerships, intentionality, knowledge, and communication. This chapter analyses how the four identified key themes influenced the development of partnerships between teachers and Chinese immigrant parents.

Chapter 5 presents discussions regarding the theoretical concepts of comprehension of partnership, intentionality, knowledge, and communication. It provides practical suggestions for early childhood practitioners and Chinese immigrant families to develop more desirable, meaningful, and effective partnerships.

Chapter 6 summarizes the key findings of this study. Implications for pedagogy and teachers' practices arising from this research are presented. Additionally, this chapter addresses the limitations of the study and suggests possibilities for future research. Lastly, the contributions of

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this research are outlined.

### 1.3 Research questions

This research was undertaken in New Zealand's early childhood education field with a specific focus on the partnerships between parents of Chinese immigrant children and early childhood teachers.

The key research question is:

How do Chinese immigrant parents and New Zealand early childhood teachers perceive effective partnerships that impact shared responsibility for children's learning?

The three subquestions are:

- What discourses do teachers and Chinese parents use to articulate their understandings of effective partnerships?
- What processes of intentionality do teachers and Chinese parents undertake to build effective partnerships?
- What are the outcomes of effective partnerships, for teachers, for parents, and for children's learning?

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## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Teacher-parent partnership is promoted in the field of early childhood education in New Zealand as it positively influences children's learning experiences and outcomes (Ministry of Education, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2006; Yang, 2011). However, as increasing numbers of cultural and language minority children are attending early childhood services in New Zealand, many teachers confront difficulties when building partnerships with parents of these children (Zhang, 2012).

This chapter presents a review of the literature regarding collaborative partnerships between teachers and parents in New Zealand's early childhood education sector. It firstly discusses the concept of partnership in the early childhood education field. Moreover, the relationship between intentionality and partnership is considered with reference to the study of Duncan et al. (2012) that position intentionality as being central to partnership construction. Furthermore, this chapter presents a brief discussion of the cultural diversity of New Zealand's early childhood education field. This chapter also addresses the significance of effective teacher-parent partnership in terms of its contributions towards children's learning, adults' shared understanding, and community construction. Additionally, it discusses elements that impede the construction of partnerships between teachers and immigrant parents in general, and factors that hinder the development of effective partnerships between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents in particular. This chapter also develops a summary of the suggestions for building collaborative partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents that have been made by previous studies.

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## 2.2 Meaning of partnership

The term *partnership* has diverse meanings. Literally, it means partners work together in a relationship (Montuori & Conti, 1995). Many people regard partnership as a synonym to relationship. However, the word relationship itself along does not encompass the full meaning of partnership. Montuori and Conti (1995) contend that what really matters in partnership is the quality of the relationship rather than the relationship itself. Montuori and Conti (1995) argue that a real partnership involves democracy rather than hierarchy, collaboration rather than instruction, and mutually beneficial practices rather than one-sided, win-lose actions. Essentially, partnership has two key elements, namely, relationship and human interaction (Montuori & Conti, 1995).

Partnership means that individuals actively share their knowledge with one another in a relationship. Davis (1988) presents that a partnership is built when partners or individuals in a relationship share “common goals, practices, and commitments as well as rights and responsibilities” (p. 9). Davis believes that the true meaning of partnership in practice is to share with and learn from each other, so that all parties in the relationship grow and become more capable and knowledgeable. This viewpoint is in tune with the idea of a community of learners, which promotes the belief that all community members should be seen as active and valuable participants who possess significant knowledge and distinctive skills and abilities (Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 2010). All members in a community of learners are willing learners who actively seek information and knowledge from others to strengthen and enrich their understanding and funds of knowledge (Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 2010).

Rogoff (1994) presents that one symbolic feature of a community of learners is that all

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participants or community members collaboratively work on shared endeavours. This statement is comparable to Davis's (1998) idea that individuals share practices and commitments in partnership. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that one shared feature of partnership and a community of learners is that people involved in both of them have close and active relationships. Having discussed the connection between partnership and a community of learners, it can be seen that the quality of relationships between individuals is paramount for the construction of an effective partnership as well as for a quality community of learners. It is through equitable relationship that individuals carry out actions to interact with each other, which in turn constructs a community of learners.

Partnership involves human interaction that can be viewed from the perspective of two models: the dominator model and the partnership model (Montuori & Conti, 1995). Human interaction under the dominator model involves hierarchy and high degree of power distance which implies that people involved in such human interaction are unequal (Manikutty, Anuradha & Hansen, 2007). Under the dominator model, people are distinguished by the standard of "either or." This is to say, individuals are labelled as either the dominator's friends or the dominator's enemies. Montuori and Conti (1995) point out that members in a community generated by the dominator model of human interaction spend most of their energy and time obtaining and securing a higher hierarchical position and that members see others who are in the same position as them as opponents rather than as partners. The dominator model of human interaction normally generates a community wherein a high level of power distance exists. Engagements and commitments of members are superficial in this type of community wherein deep learning and meaningful commitments seldom occur (Manikutty et al., 2007). In the dominator model,

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“partnership” merely means that members work together in a physical location, yet are reluctant to engage in meaningful communication or commitments.

In contrast, the partnership model of human interaction promotes deep learning and contributes positively towards the construction of an inclusive, democratic learning community wherein all members and participants are equal and valued; therefore, it is more desirable. Human interactions under the partnership model are more meaningful and constructive because individuals who carry out these types of human interactions have a sense of belonging and ownership towards a community of learners. In such a community of learners, all community members work towards the same direction to produce extraordinary outcomes. The visions, values, and aspirations of members are communicated and negotiated so that they have a shared goal that leads to shared endeavours and commitments (Montuori & Conti, 1995).

Human interactions under the partnership model are beneficial for all participants. These interactions help community members to develop collaborative relationships with one another and to recognize that they are valued contributors. Such relationships and recognition will in turn positively influence the construction of a learning community as well as the personal and professional development of community members.

In summary, in the early childhood education field, the concept of partnership is best understood in the context of a community of learners. An effective partnership results from a quality learning community in which the environment is welcoming, democratic, inclusive, engaging, and collaborative. Members in a community of learners have shared goals, visions, practices, commitments, and responsibilities (Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 2010). In a community of learners,

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there is a low level of power distance, but a high level of collaboration amongst community members, who are seen as equal and valued contributors (Manikutty et al., 2007). Individuals in a community of learners become capable and knowledgeable as a result of collaborative partnerships between community members; this is to say, all members grow by drawing on other members' expertise and knowledge.

An effective partnership benefits both individuals and the community. The best result of teacher-parent partnerships is that teachers and Chinese parents all belong to a community of learners, in which they share their personal or professional knowledge about children's learning in order to support each other in fostering children's learning at home and at the early childhood centre. Based on the literature review, for the purpose of this study, partnership is operationally defined as teachers and parents working together to better support children's learning; it encompasses the ideas of community construction, mutual respect and benefits, communication and negotiation of aspirations and goals, and meaningful engagements and commitments.

### 2.3 Intentionality and partnership

Intentionality is one of the key elements when investigating teacher-parent partnership in the early childhood education field in New Zealand (Duncan et al., 2012). Duncan et al. (2012) identify four key theoretical concepts to investigate teacher-parent partnerships in New Zealand's early childhood field, namely, authentic relationships, sustainable relationships, intentionality, and embedding.

Duncan et al. (2012) claim that authentic relationships mean that the relationships between



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parents and teachers are authentic because they have a shared interest in children's learning.

Additionally, Duncan et al. (2012) present that sustainable relationships indicate that teacher-parent partnerships are sustained over time. Intentionality depicts the idea that teachers can undertake intentional, deliberate, purposeful, and thoughtful actions to interact with parents so as to foster the construction of effective teacher-parent partnerships. Duncan et al. (2012) suggest that parental involvement in children's learning can be enhanced by teachers undertaking intentional actions. Including parents in the process of developing teacher-parent partnerships signals the concept of embedding which suggests that early childhood education services are embedded with children's family and community, and that teacher-parent partnership is a product of the interaction between the two parties (Duncan et al., 2012; Ministry of Education, 1996).

Malle (2010) presents five essential components of the concept of intentionality, namely, desire, belief, intention, skill, and awareness. The term intention is positioned by Malle (2010) as being fundamental to the concept of intentionality, as it leads to intentional actions through which people put their intentionality into practice. This study defines intentionality as the purposeful actions that teachers and parents carry out when building partnerships with each other, it leads to the two parties' shared understanding and responsibility for children's learning.

#### 2.4 Diversity in early childhood education in New Zealand

New Zealand is one of the biggest migrant-receiving countries in the world (Singham, 2006). The rapidly growing number of immigrants settling in New Zealand has made the current society of New Zealand more diverse in terms of cultures and languages. The diversity of New Zealand's

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contemporary society adds a dimension of multiculturalism to its educational system. Specifically, the early childhood education sector is becoming increasingly multicultural as children from diverse cultural and language backgrounds are attending early childhood services in New Zealand (Burke, 2008; Singham, 2006). Similarly, Wu (2009) presents that one of the most distinct characteristics of early childhood education in New Zealand is its diversity. To work with diversity, *Te Whāriki*, New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, provides a framework of expectations for teachers to promote and protect the languages and cultures of minority children (Ministry of Education, 1996). Early childhood services in New Zealand are expected to counter racism and other forms of prejudice by providing quality programmes that are responsive and sensitive to the diverse cultures of children's families and communities (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The diversity of the early childhood education sector in New Zealand has brought both benefits and challenges to early childhood teachers. On the one hand, diversity affords opportunities for teachers to enrich the early childhood education sector by integrating diverse cultural and language elements into their daily practices (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2013). Wisely working with diversity enables teachers to develop a learning environment that represents the sociocultural context of New Zealand's multicultural society (Ministry of Education, 1996; Nagel & Wells, 2009). On the other hand, this diversity has presented challenges to teachers' daily practices in terms of building inclusive learning communities and working in partnerships with parents and families that come from diverse cultural backgrounds (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005; Liao, 2007; Zhang, 2012). It is not an easy task for teachers to create a welcoming and inclusive community that involves and engages parents of all children who hold distinct educational beliefs and expectations

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(Mitchell et al., 2006; Wu, 2009). This difficulty is possibly caused by cultural and language differences between teachers and immigrant parents (Gunn, 2003). Thus, to make the best use of the diversity in early childhood education in New Zealand, teachers are expected to develop an awareness of cultural differences so that they can assist children to develop understanding and awareness of both their own and other's cultures by affirming and celebrating cultural differences (Grey, 2013; Ministry of Education, 1996). In doing so, teachers help ethnic minority children and their families develop a strong sense of cultural identity.

## 2.5 Different views on early childhood education between Chinese immigrant parents and New Zealand early childhood teachers

Many early childhood teachers in New Zealand find their daily work challenging when working with parents from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, as those parents often hold distinct views on early childhood education (Chan, 2011). For instance, new immigrant Chinese parents may not understand the idea of using play as the main method for fostering children's learning. Additionally, Chinese parents are likely to have unique expectations of early childhood centres and teachers (Yang, 2011). For example, they may expect teachers to assist their children's learning of literacy and numeracy.

### 2.5.1 Differences between early childhood education in China and New Zealand

Early childhood education in China and New Zealand is different in terms of its affordability, programme approaches, and teacher-parent partnerships. Firstly, early childhood education in China is far more expensive than it is in New Zealand (Mitchell et al., 2006). Thus, it is difficult for people who live in poverty in China to enroll their children in kindergarten, which is the most

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popular type of early childhood service (Mitchell et al., 2006). In contrast, early childhood education services in New Zealand are more affordable with 20 hours free early childhood services available for children who are over three year old. In addition, early childhood education in New Zealand is more diverse in terms of its programmes compared with what is offered in China (Bushouse, 2008); this diversity offers parents opportunities to purposefully choose services that better meet their children's educational needs.

The programme used in early childhood education services in China is different from the one used in New Zealand. Early childhood education in China typically adopts a one-sided adult-run educational approach in which teachers are seen as active knowledge-givers, while students or children are regarded as receptacles of knowledge (Rogoff, 1994). It focuses on children's academic learning through teachers providing formal instructions (Li, 2005). The early childhood education programme in New Zealand has a specific focus on promoting and fostering children's learning that is responsive to their holistic development (Ministry of Education, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2006). Early childhood education services in New Zealand are expected to develop an inclusive learning environment where parents feel a sense of belonging, so that they are empowered to participate in the programme in ways that make learning meaningful to them and their children (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The teacher-parent relationship in the early childhood field in New Zealand is more balanced than it is in China. In Chinese kindergartens, "the kindy teachers treat the kids like kids. They always pose themselves as the authority figure" (Mitchell et al., 2006, p. 53). This statement implies that the teacher-parent partnership in the early childhood education field in China is

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unbalanced. In contrast with early childhood teachers in China, teachers in New Zealand are normally seen as more friendly and approachable. They are open to communication and negotiation both with children and parents (Mitchell et al., 2006). Thus, the teacher-parent relationship/partnership in early childhood services in New Zealand is more equitable.

#### 2.5.2 Different understandings of play

The concept of play is understood differently by early childhood teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents. Western culture typically believes that play is necessary for the “stimulation of cognitive and social development, crucial for success in school and in later life” (Parmar, Harkness, & Super, 2004, p. 97). Many Asian parents, on the other hand, view children’s play as just for amusement while neglecting the educational and developmental benefits of children’s play (Parmar et al., 2004; Yang, 2011).

Play is utilized as a vehicle for learning in the field of early childhood education in Western countries (Santer, Griffiths, & Goodall, 2007). Specifically, early childhood services in New Zealand are expected to build an environment where children could engage in a diverse range of play activities that simultaneously foster their learning (Ministry of Education, 1996). Therefore, play is highly valued by early childhood teachers in New Zealand (Stover, 2011). Under the guidance of the national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, early childhood teachers build rich play environments at centres, so as to encourage children to learn through play (Huang, 2013; Ministry of Education, 1996). The justification of using play as a context for children’s learning in Western countries is that the Western culture believes children are highly intrinsically motivated themselves, and thus their learning should be led by themselves rather than by the

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adults (Huang, 2013; Santer et al., 2007). A body of research has revealed that the pedagogy of “learn through play” in Western countries is challenged and sometimes criticized by many new immigrant Chinese parents in New Zealand (Guo, 2006; Guo, 2010; Guo & Dalli, 2012; Liao, 2007; Huang, 2013; Wu, 2009; Yang, 2011; Zhang, 2012).

People from different cultural backgrounds adopt different child-rearing patterns and place emphases on different knowledge and skills (Ministry of Education, 1996). New Zealand is a country that advocates individualism in contrast with China which emphasizes collectivism (Manikutty, et al., 2007). The values of collectivism empower many Chinese parents to teach their children not to be assertive or self-interested, and parents normally make decisions for children (Chan, cited in Grey, 2013). In contrast, the values of individualism encourage children to initiate self-interested play activities that simultaneously foster their learning (Grey, 2013; Manikutty et al., 2007). The value of play is not agreed upon by most new immigrant Chinese parents who believe that early childhood centres should focus on children’s academic learning, such as the acquisition of literacy and numeracy (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005; Huang, 2013; Yang, 2011). Chinese parents have different understanding of play (Guo, 2006). From the traditional Chinese perspective, play and learning are two totally different and separate concepts (Parmar et al., 2004). Chinese parents generally regard play as a means of obtaining amusement rather than a desirable approach for educational purposes. Learning, on the other hand, is a serious thing that requires children to work hard and follow the instruction of teachers or adults (Bai, 2005). Therefore, new immigrant Chinese parents expect teachers to engage children in structured teaching-learning activities.

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Placing an emphasis on children's academic performance makes Chinese immigrant parents' communication with teachers become content specific. When exploring Chinese parents' parental involvement in their children's learning, Dyson (2001) investigates the content of communication between Chinese parents and schools. Dyson involves both immigrant families and non-immigrant families in his research project, and he finds that Chinese immigrant families' communication with schools had a specific focus on children's academic performance and the quality of teaching compared with their non-immigrant counterparts. This finding resonates with Chan (2011), Guo (2006), Liao (2007), and Yang (2011), who similarly claim that Chinese parents emphasize their children's academic learning. This specific emphasis implies that Chinese parents may hold distinct expectations of early childhood services and teachers.

### 2.5.3 Chinese immigrant parents' expectations of early childhood services and teachers

Mitchell et al. (2006) point out that New Zealand early childhood teachers' daily practices have been continuously challenging in terms of fulfilling parents' expectations that their children obtain more formal literacy and numeracy learning, and in terms of working in partnerships with parents from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. To be specific, previous research has identified that many early childhood teachers in New Zealand face difficulties when working with Chinese parents (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2006; Liao, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2006). Starting line theory, which suggests that children should start academic learning as early as possible so as to provide them the best opportunity for their school success, is widely acknowledged by most Chinese parents (Wang, 2009). As a result, Chinese immigrant parents normally have different views on children's learning compared with those of New Zealand early childhood teachers (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005).

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Hartley (1995) illustrates that most Chinese parents believe that providing resources and opportunities for children's growth and learning is one of the most important responsibilities of a family. Chinese immigrant parents' beliefs and values about early childhood education are influenced by the traditional Confucian culture that prioritizes children's academic excellence (Dyson, 2001). Under the influence of Confucianism, Chinese parents highly value children's education, as they believe that children's academic success leads to higher social status (Liao, 2007; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010). For example, one set of Chinese immigrant parents that participated in a study conducted by Mitchell et al. (2006) expressed high expectations of their daughter's education when they were asked to address their aspirations for their daughter's education. They believed that education to be an extremely crucial premise that assists their daughter to obtain better job opportunities in the future and to have an enjoyable life. Therefore, Chinese parents expect early childhood teachers to actively support and foster children's academic learning, which is believed to have profound impacts on the quality of children's later lives (Yang, 2011).

Like most other parents, new immigrant Chinese parents expect early childhood teachers to assist their children with learning of literacy and numeracy (Yang, 2011). Mitchell et al. (2006) reveal that most parents believe that literacy and numeracy learning should be key components in children's learning at early childhood centres. Therefore, parents expect early childhood centres to provide children with more structured and formal learning opportunities that foster children's learning of literacy and numeracy. Compared with European parents, Chinese parents are more concerned with their children's academic achievement and hope that children's



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attendance at early childhood centres will foster the literacy and numeracy skills that are seen as significant factors in offering children a head start (Yang, 2011).

Chinese parents highly value children's traditional academic learning, and they expect teachers to assess children's learning. Chinese parents sometimes perceive themselves as being in a disadvantaged position in their host country due to their limited English language proficiency and foreign cultural backgrounds (Li, 2001). Thus, they expect their children to be proficient in English language and to experience the mainstream culture in the host country as early as possible. Consequently, new immigrant Chinese parents in New Zealand expect early childhood centres to assist children's learning of English language and the native ways of living (Wu, 2009). Additionally, some Chinese parents consider that early childhood centres should make children's learning outcomes more visible by utilizing formal tests to examine children's mastery of skills and knowledge (Mitchell et al., 2006).

These expectations Chinese parents hold have put forward a challenge to teachers, as teachers find it is difficult to explain how literacy and numeracy learning occurs in the process of children's play. Many early childhood teachers in New Zealand find their work becomes particularly challenging in terms of explaining to Chinese parents, whose English language proficiency is limited, how children learn numeracy and literacy through play (Guo, 2006). In the early childhood education field in New Zealand, teachers utilize learning stories to assess children's learning (Carr, 2001). Although teachers are trying to make children's learning of literacy and numeracy more visible to parents through clearly documenting learning stories of children, some new immigrant Chinese parents believe that this approach of assessing children's learning is not

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sufficiently explicit (Mitchell et al., 2006).

## 2.6 Significance of effective partnerships

Constructive and collaborative partnerships between teachers and parents are of significance for both adults and children. A well-established teacher-parent partnership offers children more learning opportunities and improves the quality of children's learning experiences at both home and early childhood settings (Chan, 2011). Meanwhile, it assists both teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents to gain new knowledge and understanding of children (Mitchell et al., 2006). Essentially, previous research agrees that effective teacher-parent partnerships have positive influences on all parties, including children, teachers, and Chinese parents (Mitchell et al., 2006; Rouse, 2012; Zhang, 2012).

### 2.6.1 Partnerships and shared understanding

Effective teacher-parent partnerships enable shared understanding between teachers and Chinese parents to be developed. Guo and Dalli (2012) emphasize the importance of teacher-parent partnerships for children's early learning and development. They also claim that teachers and parents can learn from each other in terms of knowledge about cultural differences through collaborative teacher-parent partnerships. An awareness and knowledge of cultural differences will further help teachers and parents to better support Chinese children's continuous learning and bicultural development (Guo & Dalli, 2012). Specifically, Loveridge, Rosewarne, Shuker, Barker, and Nager (2012) propose that it is extremely important for teachers to have a deep understanding of each family so as to come to a shared understanding of children's unique cultural backgrounds with parents. Grey (2013) suggests that it is significant for teachers "to be

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aware of their own cultural lens, and to initiate relationships with families that lead to intercultural competence and understanding” (p. 131). This shared and intercultural understanding enables “differences to coexist and be respected rather than achieving a surface level consensus” (Loveridge et al., 2012, p. 112). A shared understanding and intercultural competence can only be achieved when an effective teacher-parent partnership is present.

#### 2.6.2 Home-centre continuity

Early childhood educators in New Zealand are required to establish collaborative partnerships with children’s parents so as to afford a continuity to children’s learning (Ministry of Education, 1996). This is to say, children’s learning activities and experiences at home and centre settings are expected to be similar and continuous to some extent (Ministry of Education, 1996; Yang, 2011).

Collaborative partnerships are essential for children’s continuous learning. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposes that a child’s developmental potential is more likely to be achieved when a continuity in the child’s learning is present. Continuity in children’s early learning experiences means that teachers and parents have shared goals about children’s early learning and that strong and supportive connections between children’s learning at home and early childhood centre are evident. These shared goals for children’s learning cannot be developed without collaborative partnerships (Mitchell et al., 2006). An effective teacher-parent partnership encourages parents to seek information from teachers about children’s learning at centres, so that they are empowered to provide children with similar learning activities at home that facilitate children’s continuous learning (Mitchell et al., 2006). Likewise, Mulligan (2005) finds that active

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parental involvement in children's education can provide children's learning a continuity between home and school life. Specifically, for children who experience cultural discontinuity, an effective teacher-parent partnership has been found particularly important (Ogbu, 1982). In this regard, partnerships between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents are particularly significant for the continuous learning of Chinese children who experience cultural and language discontinuity between the home environment and the centre setting.

### 2.6.3 Factors that impede the construction of partnerships between new immigrant Chinese parents and New Zealand early childhood teachers

Previous research has identified that language and cultural barriers are two main factors that hinder the involvement of immigrant parents in their children's learning and the construction of collaborative teacher-parent partnerships (Dyson, 2001; Gunn, 2003; Loveridge et al., 2012). Specifically, for new immigrant Chinese parents in New Zealand, Guo (2005) and Chan (2011) similarly indicate that Chinese parents experience difficulty in building partnerships with children's teachers as well as in participating in centre-related activities. These difficulties are mainly caused by cultural differences and Chinese parents' limited English proficiency (Chan, 2011; Johns, 2001). To work with parents whose first language is not English, it is suggested that early childhood services should adopt effective communication strategies to communicate with Chinese parents, such as using written messages and employing bilingual staff (Guo, 2005). Having bilingual staff may significantly increase the level of involvement of parents from language minority groups (Tang, Dearing, & Weiss, 2012). Additionally, Yang (2011) put forward the idea that early childhood centres should provide workshops for teachers regarding Chinese culture so as to improve teachers' understanding of Chinese parents' beliefs and values about

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children's early learning.

## 2.7 Tentative suggestions for teachers to improve their working relationships with Chinese immigrant parents

Teacher-parent communication cultivates the emergence of an effective partnership. The previous section (see chapter 2.5.2) illustrated that many new immigrant Chinese parents disagree with the idea of using play to foster children's learning. Teachers and Chinese parents have conflicting views on early childhood education. To enable Chinese parents to understand the significance of play, teachers need to conduct meaningful and informative communication with Chinese parents, which improve collaborative partnerships.

Teacher-parent communication fosters partnership construction between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents. A broad range of research suggests that one desirable way to work with Chinese parents is to develop effective partnerships with them (Chan, 2011; Guo & Dalli, 2012; Nagel & Wells, 2009). An effective teacher-parent partnership is likely to be built when meaningful communication is conducted between teachers and Chinese parents (Mitchell et al., 2006). Epstein (2007) suggests that communicating regularly with families and providing opportunities for families to participate in their children's learning will benefit both adults and children (as cited in Nagel & Wells, 2009). Loveridge et al. (2012) present that sustained communication helps teachers to obtain trust and respect from families when working with parents from diverse cultures.

Properly working with cultural diversity has positive impacts on the construction of professional

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relationships between teachers and Chinese immigrant parents. Research by Loveridge et al. (2012) about diversity in the New Zealand's early childhood sector suggests that diversity is about understanding both individual and families. To understand individuals and families, teachers need to cater for the needs and interests of individual children and encourage and support family participation in children's early learning in ways that are respectful to their cultural values and differences (Ministry of Education, 1996). This requires teachers to build an inclusive community at the centre. This statement is supported by Ponciano and Shabazian (2012) when they suggest that teachers of young children must have a positive attitude towards differences and develop an environment that is inclusive and respectful to all.

Teachers' intentional actions can to some extent overcome language and cultural barriers. Guo (2005) finds that many early childhood teachers in New Zealand believe that language and cultural differences make their work with Chinese parents challenging. To work with these challenges, Guo (2005) presents four suggestions for teachers to improve their working relationships with Chinese parents. Firstly, it is suggested that teachers need to be reflective so that they can identify their own values and beliefs regarding teaching and other cultures. This self-reflection conducted by teachers ensures that teachers do not hold biases regarding minority groups and other cultures (Guo, 2005). Secondly, it is recommended that teachers smooth and enhance communication with Chinese parents. Adopting particular communication strategies, such as "using written messages, clear speaking techniques and interpreters" (Guo, 2005, p. 132) may help Chinese parents to better understand the information delivered by teachers. Thirdly, it is suggested that teachers may need to put forth deliberate time and efforts into establishing relationships with Chinese parents (Guo, 2005). Lastly, teachers may need to

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see themselves as a resource for Chinese parents. These four suggestions indicate that teachers need to be intentional and purposeful when working with Chinese parents.

## 2.8 Parental involvement

### 2.8.1 Importance of parental involvement

Parental involvement in children's learning positively influences children's learning outcomes. In the early childhood education field in New Zealand, parental involvement is seen as a sign of parents and teachers working in partnerships to better support and nurture children's early learning (Mitchell et al., 2006). In order to achieve the goal that early childhood centres and families support each other, Mitchell et al. (2006) suggest that adults (teachers and parents) need to be aware that their involvement and communication must be related to children's learning experiences. As the purpose of building relationships and partnerships between teachers and parents is to support and enhance children's early learning and well-being, Mitchell et al. (2006) underline that parental participation and involvement should focus on centre pedagogy and children's learning. This is to say, it has to be admitted that some other types of involvement, such as fundraising, voluntary help at centres, and attending social events held by centres, are valuable contributors that assist early childhood education services to develop and improve their daily practices (Zhang, 2012). However, what really reinforces and strengthens children's learning and teacher-parent partnerships is effective teacher-parent communication regarding centre pedagogy, curriculum design, and children's learning experiences at both home and centre settings (Mitchell et al., 2006).

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### 2.8.2 Types of parental involvement

The term *parental involvement* is widely mentioned when studying teacher-parent partnerships, as it is a crucial indicator of the effectiveness of partnerships (Zhang, 2012). Previous research has identified that parental involvement has great influences on children's early learning experiences and outcomes (Yang, 2011). Although the wording of parental involvement implies that parents should be ultimately responsible for establishing and maintaining their partnerships with the teachers (Palenchar, 2002), this study agrees with Zhang's (2012) interpretation of parental involvement. Zhang claims that parental involvement is a mutual endeavour that requires both teachers and parents to make conscientious efforts, while teachers bear more responsibility for constructing and maintaining teacher-parent partnerships that empower parents to be involved in their children's learning.

According to Waanders, Mendez, and Downer (2007), parental involvement in children's education can be divided into three categories: centre-based involvement, home-based involvement, and teacher-parent relationships. Centre-based and home-based parental involvement can be seen as direct parental participation in children's learning, while teacher-parent relationship can be seen as indirect parental participation (Waanders et al., 2007). A quality teacher-parent relationship is the essential element that allows meaningful centre-based and home-based parental involvement to be conducted (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The reason being, effective relationships assist parents to obtain information from teachers regarding their children's learning at centres so that they can carry out meaningful, purposeful, and thoughtful efforts to engage in their children's learning at either home or at the centre (Mitchell et al., 2006).



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Parental involvement for Chinese immigrant parents is limited in the aspects of centre-based involvement and teacher-parent relationships. Previous research has shown that parents' role construction and sense of efficacy are two major determinants of their involvement in children's learning (Holloway, Suzuki, Yamamoto, & Behrens, 2005; Zhang, 2012). Chinese culture has great influences on Chinese immigrant parents' involvement in children's early education. Previous research has revealed that Chinese parents' child-rearing practices are significantly influenced by traditional Confucian cultural beliefs and values, regardless of the physical location that the family resides (Chen, 2001). Specifically, under the influence of China's traditional Confucian culture, Chinese parents new to New Zealand perceive they are responsible for their children at home, while teachers are responsible for their children at centres (Chan, 2011; Faye, Sabah, & Rudwan, 2011; Guo & Dalli, 2012). This role construction of Chinese parents results in their reluctance to build teacher-parent partnerships and conduct centre-based involvement. Wu (2009) finds that Chinese mothers are generally quiet when working with early childhood centres in New Zealand. The reason being, Chinese parents normally regard themselves as being incapable of helping their children to learn the Western ways of living (Liao, 2007). Therefore, Chinese parents' involvement in their children's learning at centres is limited or insufficient due to the fact that they see themselves as not having enough knowledge about Western culture (Zhang, 2012).

To increase the level of parental involvement of Chinese parents, it is essential to develop an effective teacher-parent partnership. The construction of effective teacher-parent partnerships is significant as it fosters teacher-parent communication that enables teachers and parents to

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receive information from each other regarding children's learning (Mitchell et al., 2006). In this sense, effective partnerships enhance and increase parental involvement of Chinese parents, as parents are more likely to be involved when they have sufficient information about their children's learning (Zhang, 2012).

### 2.8.3 Proposed ways to increase parental involvement

Mitchell et al. (2006) recommend three main ways that early childhood teachers could adopt to increase the level of parental involvement in children's learning, namely, "parents contributing to assessment, planning, and evaluation," "explaining the curriculum and environment," and "involving parents in the education programme" (p. 92).

#### 2.8.3.1 Involving new immigrant Chinese parents in assessment practices

In early childhood centres in New Zealand, children's learning is normally assessed and documented by teachers utilizing a narrative approach, namely, through learning stories (Carr, 2001). Children's learning stories are documented by teachers for the purpose of assessing and recording children's learning processes at centres. The Ministry of Education (2009) indicates that the proper utilization of learning stories by teachers can make considerable positive contributions towards increasing parental involvement in children's learning. In addition, the collection of children's learning stories assists teachers to review their daily teaching practices. The quality of children's learning stories is also a key indicator of the curriculum quality of an early childhood centre (Katz & Chard, 1996).

Parents should be involved in assessment processes, as they have a great deal of valuable

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information about and understanding of their children (Ministry of Education, 1996). “Families should be part of the assessment and evaluation of the curriculum as well as children’s learning and development. Parents and caregivers have a wealth of valuable information and understanding regarding their children” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 30). When involving parents in assessment practices, teachers should assure that parents do not feel they are being judged. It is suggested that assessment practices be seen as a means of conducting two-way communication that enhances teacher-parent partnerships (Ministry of Education, 2009). The aim of assessing children’s learning is to provide useful information for teachers to reflect on their practices so as to improve the quality of curriculum and for parents to receive information regarding their children’s learning at centres so that they can support and expand their children’s learning at home accordingly (Ministry of Education, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2006).

Involving Chinese parents in assessment practices of children’s learning is beneficial for fostering parents’ participation as well as for developing effective teacher-parent partnerships (Huang, 2013). Including parents in assessment practices is a powerful way of building a democratic community within which both parents and teachers are willing, valued learners and sources of knowledge (Carr, Cowie, Gerrity, Jones, Lee, & Pohio, 2001; Rogoff, 1994).

Evaluating and assessing children’s play makes children’s learning of skills, abilities, and knowledge visible to teachers who may then provide parents with solid evidence that justifies the pedagogy of using play to foster children’s learning (Ministry of Education, as cited in Huang, 2013). Involving Chinese parents in assessment practices could be particularly meaningful because it enables them to understand the value of play in their children’s learning, which in turn increases their level of involvement and commitment to their children’s learning.

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Involving Chinese parents in assessment, planning, and evaluation of children's learning is likely to stimulate the involvement in their children's learning at both home and centre settings (Mitchell et al., 2006). In the study by Mitchell et al. (2006), teachers from three participating centres provided opportunities for parents to participate in and contribute to assessment, planning, and evaluation of their children's learning. This type of parental involvement was found meaningful and informative, as it allowed teachers and parents to know each other's perspectives and to obtain more understanding of and information about the children. As a result of parental involvement in assessment, planning, and evaluation of children's learning, teachers in the three centres had recourse to parents' specific knowledge about their own child, "combined with their own professional knowledge, to develop formative assessments and plan for children's learning" (Mitchell et al., 2006, p. 92). For instance, one participating centre asked parents to document their children's learning experiences at home, including videotaping and observing their children's learning. Thereafter, parents shared these documentations with teachers. This approach was found particularly helpful in improving the quality of the educational programme. Meanwhile, it enriched parents' understanding teaching curricula, centre pedagogy, and their children's learning at the centre, which assisted them to thoughtfully design and develop more learning activities at home to support and expand their children's learning. It is evident that this type of parental involvement not only has direct positive influences on children's learning, but also contributes greatly to the construction of an inclusive community as well as an effective teacher-parent partnership.

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### 2.8.3.2 Explaining the curriculum

Explaining the curriculum is another effective way of working with parents. In order to explain the curriculum and environment of the centre, teachers who participated in the study used the method of showing videotaped episodes of children's learning in the centre to parents.

Simultaneously, the teachers explained the learning that happened in the episodes. Mitchell et al. (2006) find that this method is particularly engaging, as it makes children's learning visible and lively to parents who want to know more about their children's learning. Showing children's learning episodes accords with parents' interests, and thus it may cultivate in parents a sense of belonging in the centre's community, which enhances the teacher-parent partnerships that increase the level of parental involvement.

### 2.8.3.3 Involving parents in the education programme

Involving parents in the education programme is also found to be helpful in increasing the level of parents' confidence in participating in centre-related activities as well as assisting them to recognize their membership in the community (Rogoff, 1994). For example, two centres in the study by Mitchell et al. (2006) invited parents from multicultural backgrounds to participate in the education programme. Some of these parents helped to enrich the centres' curricula by providing unique experiences and activities from their cultural backgrounds that teachers were not knowledgeable about or familiar with. Inviting parents from diverse cultural backgrounds to be involved in centres' practices is beneficial for all parties. Firstly, parents feel that their contributions are valued and appreciated so that they can identify themselves as members of the centre's community, rather than outsiders (Hughes, 2010). In addition, it offers teachers opportunities to understand more about children's cultural backgrounds so that they can reflect

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on and redesign their practices to better support children's learning by developing a multicultural, respectful, and welcoming centre environment. Lastly, contributions from diverse cultures add values to the centre's community, which are comprised of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire (Clarkin-Phillips, 2011; Wenger, 2010).

Instead of claiming that language barriers and cultural differences influenced partnership construction between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents, Mitchell et al. (2006) analyse this problem from another angle. They suggested that immigrant families' lack of familiarity with New Zealand's social and cultural contexts may prevent them from knowing taken-for-granted information that is likely to help them to better settle in New Zealand and better support their children's learning. In this regard, Mitchell et al. (2006) suggest that teachers act as a bridge, guiding immigrant families to approach social services in New Zealand to assist them in terms of their settlement and children's education. Chinese parents are more likely to be involved in the education programme once they are well settled in New Zealand.

## 2.9 Building collaborative partnerships

A common suggestion made by previous research is that early childhood teachers in New Zealand should undertake thoughtful actions to build effective partnerships with Chinese immigrant parents (Chan, 2011; Duncan et al., 2012; Guo, 2006; Guo & Dalli, 2012; Huang, 2013; Liao, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2006; Wu, 2009; Yang, 2011; Zhang, 2013). Early childhood education services in New Zealand aim at providing all children with quality education by working collaboratively with children's families and communities (Wu, 2009). All early childhood teachers are required to work in partnerships with parents to support and expand children's early learning

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(Ministry of Education, 1996). Specifically, working in partnerships with new immigrant Chinese parents enables teachers to work responsively to cultural diversity, so that teachers support the development of children's cultural identities in a positive way (Ministry of Education, 1996). Moreover, effective teacher-parent partnerships between teachers and ethnic minority parents signal that teachers respect children's families and cultures, which enables children and their families to feel a sense of belonging (Ministry of Education, 1996). To establish an effective partnership, partners need to involve in meaningful human interactions and communication within a relationship (Montuori & Conti, 1995).

#### 2.9.1 Constructing relationships

Chinese immigrant parents have been found to be reluctant to build relationships with early childhood teachers in New Zealand (Chan, 2011). Anderson and Minke (2007) indicate that a high-quality personal relationship between parents and teachers has positive influences on the construction of effective teacher-parent partnerships. In addition, a quality relationship fosters in-depth teacher-parent communication regarding centres' philosophies, curricula, and practices. However, many Chinese parents have mixed feelings about establishing personal relationships with early childhood teachers in New Zealand (Zhang, 2012). On the one hand, under the influence of the traditional Confucian culture of China, Chinese parents regard personal relationship as a particularly significant element that assists them in adapting to New Zealand society (Gold, Guthrie, & Wank, 2002). On the other hand, many parents are fearful of building relationships with teachers who come from different language and cultural backgrounds with them (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005). This situation points to the need for teachers to undertake purposeful actions to invite Chinese parents to be involved in building teacher-parent

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partnerships. Mitchell et al. (2006) remind teachers that the basis of fostering relationships between teachers and parents is mutual respect, without which meaningful communication will be impeded. An effective relationship between teachers and Chinese parents will increase the breadth and depth of teacher-parent communication, contributing to the construction of collaborative partnerships that foster a shared responsibility for children's learning between teachers and parents (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

### 2.9.2 Importance of communication

Teacher-parent communication enables sharing of knowledge and negotiation of educational aspirations for children's learning, which contribute considerably to children's learning and to constructing community. Broström (2003) put forward the idea that more communication between teachers and Chinese immigrant parents in terms of their visions and aspirations for children's early learning is needed for the purpose of developing a shared goal for children's learning. This shared goal ensures the continuity of children's learning between centre and home settings. Mitchell et al. (2006) emphasize the importance of respect and belonging in constructing teacher-parent partnerships that facilitate meaningful communication. This is to say, teachers should work towards the goal of building an inclusive community whereby Chinese parents can feel a sense of belonging. In such a community, every member is valued and respected (Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 2010). Only then will Chinese parents feel free to express their perspectives and concerns with regard to their children's learning without fearing that they will be discriminated or looked down upon.

Meaningful teacher-parent communication assists Chinese immigrant parents to obtain



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information about New Zealand's mainstream educational system. Language minority families often do not have sufficient information about the "mainstream educational system, including basic school philosophy, practice, and structure, which can result in misconceptions, fear, and a general reluctance to become involved" (Gorinski & Fraser, as cited in Zhang, 2012, p. 17). To provide Chinese parents with essential and useful information regarding the early childhood education system in New Zealand, teachers need to carry out deliberate efforts to communicate with them (Meade, Robinson, Smorti, Stuart, & Williamson, 2012; New Zealand Teachers Council, 2004). Teacher-parent communication enables teachers to understand Chinese parents' beliefs about children's learning and to provide Chinese parents with meaningful information in terms of the pedagogy and curricula of early childhood centres. Teacher-parent communication is believed to have positive impacts on the development of collaborative teacher-parent partnerships (Meade et al., 2012).

Meaningful teacher-parent communication increases the level of parental involvement in children's learning. Mitchell et al. (2006) propose that finding out parents' views and interests could be the starting point for teachers in developing effective teacher-parent partnerships. Teachers could reconstruct their practices to involve the parents' voice in centres' curricula once they have identified parents' perspectives and aspirations for their children (Mitchell, et al., 2006). This reconstruction is highly likely to be agreed upon and appreciated by parents whose involvement and commitment in their children's learning in centres will be in turn stimulated. Chinese immigrant parents, who can clearly feel that their voice is heard and valued, will be empowered and willing to communicate and negotiate more with teachers (Huang, 2013). In summary, parental involvement in children's learning is likely to be increased when parents'

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beliefs about children's education is heard and valued and when they are offered information regarding the pedagogy and practices of centres.

Meaningful teacher-parent communication enables early childhood teachers to update their understanding of Chinese parents. Wu (2009) calls for early childhood practitioners to "re-examine their assumptions underpinning their practices and beliefs" (p. 78) when working with children and parents from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Wu (2009) considers that early childhood teachers' views on ethnic minority parents could be stereotyped. For example, early childhood teachers in New Zealand may see Chinese immigrant parents' educational expectations of children's learning as solely shaped by the traditional Confucian culture in China (Yang, 2011), yet the reality is that Chinese parents in New Zealand are likely to adapt their expectations under the influence of the Western culture that dominates New Zealand society (Wu, 2009; Yang, 2011). Instead of solely focusing on children's academic learning, some new immigrant Chinese parents in New Zealand also perceive the significance of children's emotional well-being and communication skills (Liao, 2007; Yang, 2011). In this regard, meaningful teacher-parent communication will enrich teachers' comprehension of Chinese parents, which assists teachers to examine their stereotyped views on Chinese parents so that they can develop responsive curriculum to meet the special educational needs of Chinese children (Yang, 2011).

## 2.10 Summary

This chapter presented the background information of this study. People from diverse cultural and language backgrounds are migrating to New Zealand to seek better job opportunities,

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alternative lifestyles, and quality education services for their next generations (Singham, 2006).

As a result, the sector of early childhood education in Auckland, New Zealand is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of the cultures and languages that exist in early childhood centres. Specifically, increasing numbers of Chinese children are being enrolled in early childhood services in Auckland as the number of Chinese immigrant families living in Auckland continues to increase considerably (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Under the guidance of the national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, early childhood teachers are required to work closely and collaboratively with children's parents so as to effectively foster and expand children's early learning (Ministry of Education, 1996). However, previous research has identified that many teachers encounter difficulties when working with Chinese immigrant parents due to cultural differences and language barriers (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2006; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012).

Language barriers between teachers and Chinese parents lead to a situation where the communication between these two parties is sometimes limited in terms of its breadth and depth. In addition, due to cultural differences, teachers and Chinese parents hold different views on children's early learning, on parental involvement, and on teacher-parent partnerships (Guo, 2006; Huang, 2013; Zhang, 2012). These different views have impeded the construction of effective teacher-parent partnerships. The significance of partnership is widely acknowledged by previous research (Mitchell et al., 2006; Rouse, 2012; Zhang, 2012). An effective teacher-parent partnership offers children's learning a continuity (Mitchell et al., 2006; Ministry of Education, 1996; Ogbu, 1982; Yang, 2011). Moreover, effective teacher-parent partnerships enable the two parties to conduct meaningful communication and negotiation so as to develop common goals and shared responsibilities for children's learning (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2002; Goodall &

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Montgomery, 2014). To build an effective teacher-parent partnership, both parties need to undertake intentional actions that cultivate in-depth communication between them (Duncan et al., 2012; Yang, 2011). Teachers' and parents' intentional actions contribute significantly towards the construction of authentic and sustainable relationships, as well as the community wellness of early childhood centres (Duncan et al., 2012).

This literature review has identified that many early childhood teachers in New Zealand face difficulties when working with new immigrant Chinese parents due to language and culture issues. Duncan et al. (2012) propose that teacher-parent partnerships could be improved by teachers undertaking intentional actions. Working with Chinese immigrant parents is different from working with local parents who share similar language and cultural backgrounds with early childhood teachers. Thus, there is a need to investigate early childhood teachers' work with Chinese parents. This study specifically examines and investigates intentional actions undertaken by early childhood teachers and Chinese parents when building partnerships. This research aims at generating a conceptual framework for studying and examining partnerships, specifically in relation to new immigrant Chinese parents/whānau, and this framework will offer guidelines for effective practices to teachers working in early childhood education.

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## Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter justifies the selection of qualitative, interpretive, and phenomenological research approaches for this study. It details, explains, and justifies the design and process of this study. The four key ethical issues and considerations involved in this study are discussed. The way in which the research participants were selected and recruited is outlined. The main methods and techniques used in data collection and data analysis are introduced and justified.

Many early childhood educators in New Zealand have difficulties in building effective working partnerships with Chinese immigrant parents (Zhang, 2012). Underpinned by the national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, early childhood educators in New Zealand are expected to establish effective partnerships with parents and communities of children attending early childhood services (Ministry of Education, 1996). An effective teacher-parent partnership has great influences on children's early learning. In addition, effective teacher-parent partnerships enable teachers to work more effectively and responsively in their daily practices where diversity is present (Nagel & Wells, 2009). However, previous research has found that many teachers encounter challenges that compromise the effectiveness of partnerships when working with Chinese parents and families (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005; Huang, 2013; Liao, 2007; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012). This undesirable situation calls for more deliberate and thoughtful actions to be undertaken by both teachers and Chinese parents to foster effective teacher-parent partnerships that positively influence children's early learning experiences and educational outcomes (Ministry of Education, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2006; White & Miller, 2006). This study investigated intentional actions undertaken by teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents when building effective

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partnerships.

### 3.2 Research methodology

This section introduces the researcher's ontological and epistemological stances. It justifies the selection of qualitative, interpretive, and phenomenological research approaches for this study.

#### 3.2.1 Ontology and epistemology

From a philosophical perspective, ontology refers to the nature of reality. It involves the study of existence and the fundamental nature of reality or being (Grix, 2002; Scotland, 2012). In the field of research, "ontology is the starting point of all research" (Grix, 2002, p. 177). Similarly, Mack (2010) highlights the importance of ontology by claiming that all researchers start researching by understanding their own ontological stance that is likely to guide the theoretical framework that upholds their research. To be specific, ontology is about theories of existence and being, and it involves "claims regarding the nature and structure of being" (Rawnsley, 1998, p. 2).

The ontological position of the researcher of this study is that reality is socially and culturally constructed. This research undertakes a phenomenological approach that values opportunities whereby the participants are able to articulate their lived social and cultural experiences. Thus, the intentional actions articulated by the participants, and undertaken in the partnerships they establish, are understood as being, to some extent, influenced by their social and cultural backgrounds. Participants' views and experiences regarding teacher-parent partnerships are best investigated and understood in the social and cultural contexts that they live in. Specifically, in this study, the researcher explored how participants' cultural backgrounds had influenced their

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perceptions of partnerships. This ontological stance informed the researcher's epistemological position.

Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and it is determined and driven by ontological beliefs that concern what reality is or what exists (Scotland, 2012). From an epistemological perspective, knowledge and reality are subjective and dynamic because they depend on ways in which individuals perceive them and on social factors that have impacts on them (Grix, 2002). A researcher's epistemological position is suggested by Holloway (1997), Mason (1996), and Creswell (1994) to be informed by his or her theory of knowledge that influences the way in which the studied phenomenon will be explored (as cited in Groenewald, 2004).

On the basis of the researcher's ontological stance, epistemologically, this research takes the position that teacher-parent partnership is a product of the joint effort of teachers and Chinese immigrant parents and that the discourses used by individuals to articulate their perceptions of teacher-parent partnerships are influenced by social and cultural factors. These epistemological positions imply that the researcher believes that the construction of effective teacher-parent partnerships entails both teachers and Chinese parents to undertake intentional actions to interact with each other. This study explores the perception that both teachers and Chinese parents have about their processes of intentionality when developing effective partnerships.

Epistemologically, the process of partnership construction is possibly influenced by the intentional actions undertaken by teachers and Chinese parents, which are likely to be impacted by their cultural backgrounds.

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### 3.2.2 Qualitative study

There are two main types of research approaches: qualitative and quantitative. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have advantages and disadvantages (Kumar, 2005). Quantitative research is defined by Creswell (1994) as a type of research that aims at “explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)” (as cited in Sukamolson, 2005, unpaged). Quantitative research approach is commonly used when researchers intend to test a hypothesis or explain a certain phenomenon in breadth (Meadow, 2003; Sukamolson, 2005). The qualitative research approach, on the other hand, relies largely on non-numerical and linguistic data to explore and understand the in-depth meaning of the world of the participants by investigating ways by which participants make sense of their physical, cultural, and social surroundings (Elliott & Timulak, 2005; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

In contrast with quantitative research, which normally involves a large sample size, qualitative research aims to involve samples that share specific characteristics. The quality of a qualitative study is determined by the way in which the information or data provided by participants is analysed by the researcher, rather than by the sample size (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). Although the sample size of this qualitative study is relatively small, the quality of this study is ensured by the in-depth exploration of participants’ perspectives on the studied topic. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) claim that the utilization of small sample size in qualitative research can be justified by the in-depth and flexible nature of qualitative study. Involving a relatively small number of participants in research offers the researcher opportunities to explore participants’ authentic and insightful opinions, contributing significantly to the generation of rich data (Crouch & McKenzie,



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2006).

Qualitative researchers hold the view that concepts are developed within a semantic process. In order to fully understand a concept, qualitative researchers often try to identify the key attributes by which the concept is constituted through analysing and interpreting participants' experiences (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). Qualitative research is designed to investigate different aspects of researched phenomenon (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). Qualitative research methodology is desirable when one attempts to understand human behaviours that are difficult to explain in quantifiable and measurable terms (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 1998). In summary, qualitative research is a process of studying participants' experiences that are relevant to the researched topic. When conducting a qualitative research, the researcher strives after a clear and comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the studied topic, including the social and cultural factors that have influenced the researched topic.

This research is a qualitative study. It involves investigations and explorations of intentional actions that a number of teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents carry out when constructing partnerships as well as examinations of participants' interpretations in terms of their experiences of working in partnerships with each other. The researcher was particularly interested in the intentional actions that parents of Chinese immigrant children and New Zealand early childhood teachers undertook when developing effective partnerships with each other.

Therefore, during the semi-structured interviews, the researcher actively sought participants' perspectives on teacher-parent partnerships that were largely influenced by their social and

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cultural backgrounds. Additionally, teachers and Chinese parents were asked to elaborate the deliberate and purposeful actions that they undertook when constructing partnerships. In other words, the researcher tried to understand participants' experiences of constructing teacher-parent partnerships from their perspectives, rather than from the researcher's own assumptions. In the meantime, the researcher tried to find out the underlying factors that had influenced participants' experiences. The researcher's understanding of the construction of partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents was informed by the information provided by the participants; it was through the in-depth investigation of the participants' discourses that the researcher obtained a comprehensive understanding of the researched topic.

### 3.2.3 An interpretive phenomenological study

#### 3.2.3.1 Interpretive study

Interpretive research falls under the category of qualitative research, and it refers to a process in which researchers study a specific phenomenon by taking account of the social contexts in which the studied phenomenon exists. Researchers who use the interpretive research approach normally regard reality as socially constructed. Therefore, they aim to find out the social elements and factors that construct the reality (Andrade, 2009). Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (1994) point out that an interpretive researcher's ontological stance is that social reality is constructed by individuals' actions and interactions and that social reality is based on people's experiences. Essentially, interpretive researchers view the world as bound by specific contexts rather than existing objectively (Andrade, 2009). Thus, from an interpretivist perspective, to understand a specific phenomenon, researchers need to explore the social contexts in which the phenomenon emerges or exists.

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This research is an interpretive study as the purposes of this study are to understand the difficulties teachers and Chinese parents confront in the process of building partnerships with each other as well as to dig out the social and cultural factors that influence the construction of effective partnerships between the two parties. Interpretive researchers understand phenomenon by exploring the meaning of the discourses that participants offer them (Rowlands, 2005). In this study, the only source of data the researcher utilized was the interview transcripts. Information provided by participants was carefully and deeply explored and examined so as to capture the authentic meaning and perspectives of the participants. Rowlands (2005) claims that one key element of all interpretive studies is social context. Specifically for this study, the researcher was especially keen to explore the social and cultural factors that may have influenced participants' beliefs about teacher-parent partnerships. As the research participants in this study were Chinese immigrant parents and New Zealand early childhood teachers, it can be seen that participants were from different social and cultural backgrounds and that Chinese culture and Western culture were involved.

Previous research has identified that cultural origin plays a significant role in shaping and affecting one's beliefs about early childhood education (Guo, 2005; Guo, 2006; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012). Due to cultural differences, New Zealand teachers and Chinese parents hold distinct views on early childhood education. Chinese parents' beliefs about early childhood education and teacher-parent partnerships are believed to be determined not solely by their original Chinese culture, but also by the culture of the country where they reside (Yang, 2011). Therefore, in this research, rather than merely focusing on the investigation of teacher-parent partnership

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itself, the researcher explored how cultural factors have impacted the construction of teacher-parent partnerships as well.

### 3.2.3.2 Phenomenological study

In the field of research, phenomenology means the study of the meaning and nature of phenomena (Selvi, 2008). Phenomenological research involves studies of a shared experience or phenomenon experienced by participants, with a specific focus on discovering the essence of the studied topic and pointing out the universal nature of the phenomenon or shared experience (Kafle, 2013).

Although both phenomenological and interpretive research approaches deal with people's perceptions of their experiences, they study the experiences in different ways. An interpretive researcher strives to investigate the social factors that shape the experiences by studying participants' experiences within the social contexts in which the participants are embedded. A phenomenological researcher, on the other hand, places a specific focus on the description of the researched phenomenon or on the participants' experience itself, and he or she works towards the goal of identifying the universal nature or essence of the participants' shared experience. A combination of interpretive and phenomenological philosophies offers researchers opportunities to comprehensively understand a phenomenon. In other words, researchers are enabled to comprehend the studied phenomenon as well as the social contexts wherein the phenomenon exists when combining interpretive and phenomenological research approaches.

This study combined interpretive and phenomenological research approaches to study a specific phenomenon that exists in the early childhood education field in Auckland, New Zealand. The

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studied phenomenon is that many teachers encounter difficulties when working with Chinese parents and families (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005; Zhang, 2012). From an interpretivist perspective, this study was designed to explore ways in which teachers and Chinese parents interpret their experiences of working in partnerships with each other. In the process of interacting with participants, the researcher took into account the participants' cultural backgrounds as well as the social contexts in which they lived.

From a phenomenological perspective, this study intended to study a participants' shared experience, which was that participants experienced difficulties in working together effectively with each other. It was through investigating the nature and essence of the shared experience that the researcher further understood participants' experiences, which in turn guided the researcher to scrutinize the social and cultural factors that may directly or indirectly influence the participants in terms of their perspectives on early childhood education, teacher-parent partnerships, and parental involvement. Thus, in this research, the flavours of both interpretivism and phenomenology are present. The combination of these two research approaches assisted the researcher to comprehensively understand the studied phenomenon as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the studied phenomenon existed.

### 3.3 Ethical considerations

Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2001) claim that any kind of qualitative research involves ethical issues, and that it is crucial for researchers to protect human subjects or participants if they are involved in the research process. This study invited participants to share information in the process of data collection. Therefore, ethical considerations were identified and addressed

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before the researcher started recruiting participants.

According to Fritz (2008), when involving people in research projects, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure the following four aspects. Firstly, the purpose and justification of conducting the study should be clearly and fully communicated with all research participants (Fritz, 2008). Secondly, participants should be informed of the potential risks that may be exposed to them as a consequence of their participation (Fritz, 2008). Thirdly, Fritz claims that researchers are responsible for enabling participants to be aware of the benefits of their involvement in the research. Fourthly, participants' rights must be respected. To be specific, participants should be empowered to make independent decisions freely without causing any negative consequences. In other words, participants' autonomy and human rights must be protected and respected (Fritz, 2008; Orb et al., 2001; Resnik, 2011).

This study involved all four of these ethical aspects presented by Fritz (2008). These four aspects can be condensed into two aspects:

- communication between the researcher and participants, including communication of the justification of this research, communication of the benefits that the participants can obtain from their participation, and communication of the potential risks and discomfort that may be experienced by participants, and
- the protection of participants in terms of their human rights and autonomy.

These two aspects, accompanied by informed consent, and confidentiality and privacy are the four main ethical issues involved in this study.

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### 3.3.1 Communication

The researcher clearly and fully communicated justification for conducting the research to participants. To be ethical, researchers must inform potential participants of the significance of the research and the contributions of participants' participation and involvement in the research. For this research project, the researcher provided each participant with a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A) which was written in the participants' first language to assure that all research participants were fully aware of the importance and potential contributions of this research as well as of their participation before they decided to participate. Additionally, the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A) informed participants of the benefits they could obtain from their participation and of any potential risks and discomfort they may experience.

### 3.3.2 Human rights and autonomy

Participants' human rights and autonomy were respected and protected throughout this study. Capron (1989) warns researchers that any study must "be guided by the principle of respect for people" (as cited in Orb et al., 2001, p. 95), which includes respecting participants' rights to be fully informed about the study as well as their rights to autonomy. The right to autonomy implies that potential participants should be given the freedom to choose whether to participate in the study and the right to withdraw at any time without being disadvantaged.

In this study, respect for people was evident in several aspects. For example, in the process of recruiting participants, rather than making direct contact with potential participants, the researcher asked his colleagues, centre managers, and the Auckland Chinese Community

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Centre to assist him in recruiting voluntary participants by providing them with Invitation Letters (see Appendix D) to distribute to potential participants. This indirect recruiting approach ensured that potential participants could choose not to participate without experiencing any embarrassments that might arise if the researcher directly invited them to participate.

The utilization of this indirect approach assured that all participants' participation was voluntary so that they were more likely to provide authentic and meaningful information in the interviews. After potential participants expressed their interest, they were sent the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A) which clearly state that they had the right to withdraw at any time, and if they chose to withdraw all information they had provided would be destroyed. In addition, the participants' beliefs and values were respected by the researcher. During the interview, the researcher adopted a non-judgmental stance which was a sign of respect for participants (Charmaz, 2006).

### 3.3.3 Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The researcher obtained informed consent by asking all participants to sign the provided Consent Forms (see Appendix B), which were written in the participants' first languages. All six research participants chose to give verbal consent first and signed the Consent Form later when they met with the researcher to attend interviews. In this research, apart from asking the participants to sign and return the Consent Form, the researcher kept communicating and negotiating with all participants, in terms of their participation, the time and location of the interviews, and the protection of their confidentiality and privacy, throughout the whole process of this study.



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### 3.3.4 Confidentiality and privacy

Participants' confidentiality and privacy was protected in this study. None of their identity features are mentioned in this thesis. Each participant was given a pseudonym so that the participants could not be identified. The information obtained from the participants will only be used for this study or any resulting presentations or publications about this study. Only the researcher himself and his supervisor had access to the research data. The audiotapes and transcribed material will be securely stored by the Auckland University of Technology for a period of six years after the completion of this research project. After six years of preservation, all paper material from this study will be shredded and digital information will be deleted.

Ethical approval was required for this research as this study design involved inviting people to participate in face-to-face semi-structured interviews (Beavers, 1990). Ethics was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 19/08/2015, reference number 15/298.

### 3.4 Research process

Qualitative research data was collected utilizing semi-structured face-to-face interviews with three teachers and three new immigrant Chinese mothers. Each participant was invited to attend one interview that lasted 40–60 minutes. All interviews were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed by the researcher. Data analysis was conducted by the researcher utilizing the content analysis technique.

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#### 3.4.1 Population and sampling

Research participants of this study were recruited utilizing snowball sampling method. Criteria for recruiting participants were developed prior to the commencement of participant recruitment.

Under the assistance of the Auckland Chinese Community Centre, some early childhood centre managers, and the researcher's colleagues, six participants were recruited for the purpose of collecting qualitative data. There was no coercion involved in the process of recruiting participants, the process of participant recruitment is detailed presented in chapter 3.4.2.

Purposeful and selective sampling philosophies were adopted in this study in the process of recruiting research participants. Purposeful and selective sampling means that the identity and key features of participants are preconceived by the researcher before he or she starts recruiting participants (Coyne, 1997). As the purpose of this study is to explore and understand New Zealand early childhood teachers' and Chinese immigrant parents' perceptions of partnerships, the participants were specified by their identity. To be specific, in the process of recruiting research participants, the following criteria were applied:

- To participate in this study, potential parent participants firstly need to be Chinese who were born in China; additionally, they must have or have had at least one child attending early childhood education service in Auckland, New Zealand.
- To be recognized as potential teacher participants, individuals need to be qualified New Zealand early childhood teachers; moreover, they must be working with or experienced in working with Chinese immigrant parents.

Snowball sampling, which is the most widely used approach in qualitative research for the

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purpose of recruiting participants, was utilized in this study (Noy, 2008). Snowball sampling is a method by which qualitative researchers recruit hard-to-reach or hidden populations to take part in research processes (Faugier, & Sargeant, 1997; Noy, 2008; Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2010). Specifically for this study, due to the researcher's limited access to potential research participants, Chinese immigrant parents and New Zealand early childhood teachers were, by and large, hard-to-reach populations.

### 3.4.2 The participants

Six participants were recruited for this study: three Chinese immigrant parents and three qualified New Zealand early childhood teachers. Pseudonyms were given to the six participants. All three Chinese parents were females, and they all lived on the north shore of Auckland, New Zealand. All three were Chinese immigrant mothers with at least one child attending childcare centres in Auckland, New Zealand at the time. The three Chinese mothers were all born in mainland China and then immigrated to Auckland. The time they had been in Auckland differed significantly; one mother had been in New Zealand for less than three months, one mother had been in New Zealand for two years, and one mother had been in New Zealand for twelve years. Two of the three Chinese mothers were employed while the other one was unemployed.

All three participant teachers were working at childcare centres. Two of the three participant teachers were from New Zealand, while one was from China. They were all qualified early childhood teachers. The Chinese teacher was a newly qualified New Zealand early childhood teacher, but she had been working in the early childhood field for approximately two years by the time of interview. The other two New Zealand European teachers were both experienced early

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childhood practitioners; one had been an early childhood teacher for six years and the other one for nearly four years. All three teachers had experiences of working with Chinese immigrant parents.

In order to recruit teacher participants, the researcher shared the Invitation Letter (see Appendix D) with colleagues working at early childhood centres and asked them to distribute the letters to their colleagues who may be interested in this study. Moreover, the researcher visited approximately 30 early childhood centres around the area of Northcote, Auckland and introduced the research project to centre managers. Centre managers who showed interest in the research were given copies of the Invitation Letter for teacher participants (see Appendix D) and the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A), which the managers distributed to their teachers.

In order to recruit Chinese parents who were new to New Zealand, the researcher firstly contacted the Auckland Chinese Community Centre to seek assistance. After the chairman of the Auckland Chinese Community Centre agreed to help, the researcher provided him with sufficient copies of the Invitation Letter (see Appendix D). The chairman subsequently distributed these letters to the community members and asked them to share the letters with people they knew who might be interested in participating. Most invitations ended up with no response. In the end, three new immigrant Chinese parents and three qualified early childhood teachers were recruited.

In this study, the researcher was especially interested in the perceptions of partnerships held by

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New Zealand early childhood teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents as well as the social and cultural factors that influenced their views on teacher-parent partnerships. Therefore, the researcher was striving after deep understanding of both participating parties' views on teacher-parent partnerships as well as the impacts that Chinese culture and Western culture had on participants' views and beliefs. The small sample size of this study allowed the researcher to conduct meaningful conversations with each participant during interviews, and it offered the researcher flexibility to probe the social and cultural factors that might have influenced the studied topic.

#### 3.4.3 Data collection

The data collection method used for this study was the semi-structured face-to-face interview because of its focused but flexible nature. This enabled the researcher to focus on exploring partnership construction between teachers and Chinese parents, while simultaneously enabling the flexibility to probe ways in which the social contexts and participants' cultural backgrounds influenced their experiences.

Diverse methods are used by qualitative researchers for the purpose of collecting data, amongst which the qualitative interview is the most commonly used data-gathering strategy (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). Interviews are normally used when one attempts to access people's experiences and their perceptions and interpretations about their experiences (Wildemuth, 2009; Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). There are three main types of interview, namely, the structured interview, the unstructured interview, and the semi-structured interview (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).

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The structured interview is commonly considered by researchers to be a verbally administered questionnaire, as the structured interview is rigid and strict with predetermined interview questions (Gill et al., 2008). Researchers predetermine all interview questions and put them into a standardized order. As questions used are normally closed-ended, information gathered from structured interviews sometimes lacks details. Gill et al. (2008) suggest that the very nature of the structured interview makes it easy to administer. However, the strict nature of structured interviews may impede in-depth exploration. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) believe that structured interviews are best used when quantitative data is needed. In contrast, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews are more likely to produce meaningful and in-depth data for qualitative research.

Unstructured interviews, in contrast with structured interviews, are much more flexible in nature. An unstructured interview is perceived, to some extent, as a guided conversation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Questions used in unstructured interviews are progress-based rather than predetermined (Gill et al., 2008). Researchers who use unstructured interviews do not use predetermined questions. Instead, they ask the participants open-ended questions that allow for detailed explanation and elaboration. The application of the unstructured interview enables the researcher to probe a deeper understanding of participants' discourses, as this type of interview offers participants the freedom to express themselves in depth. However, conducting an unstructured interview is extremely challenging, especially for novice researchers. It is not easy to manage an unstructured interview because there is no clear guidance for researchers in terms of the questions that should be asked (Gill et al., 2008). If the researcher is

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not experienced and knowledgeable enough about the studied area and this type of interview technique, the quality of data produced by unstructured interviews could be limited.

The semi-structured interview has recently gained increasing popularity in qualitative research practices. A semi-structured interview is organized around a set of predetermined key questions, or indicative questions, accompanied by other questions that emerge from the conversations between the researcher and participants when the interview proceeds (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The predetermined key questions assist researchers to obtain information that is relevant and meaningful to the researched topic. Simultaneously, the flexible and exploratory nature of the semi-structured interview not only allows researchers to ask for clarification and further explanation where necessary, but it also affords the participants opportunities to elaborate on things that are important to them, and this elaboration may offer fresh and insightful thoughts (Gill et al., 2008).

The qualitative data of this study was gathered using semi-structured interviews. The researcher developed indicative interview questions (see Appendix C) before conducting interviews. When using semi-structured interviews to collect data, an experienced qualitative researcher normally develops an interview guide that includes a few indicative interview questions to help him or her focus on specific topics without imposing a strict structure on the interviews (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). In this study, qualitative data was collected by the researcher utilizing semi-structured face-to-face interviews.

All the interviews were conducted in participants' first languages so that all participants were able

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to express their views fully without experiencing any language barriers. The locations of interviews were discussed between participants and the researcher. All three interviews with Chinese parents were conducted at the shop that two of the three participated Chinese mothers were working at. The Chinese mother who was unemployed agreed to go to that shop to attend interview. The interview with the participated Chinese teacher was conducted at a café near her home. Interviews with the other two New Zealand European teachers were conducted at the childcare centres they were working at with the permission of centre managers.

In the process of conducting interviews, the researcher actively participated in conversations with the research participants. Meanwhile, the researcher adopted a non-judgmental stance so as to ensure that the researcher's previously held assumptions did not affect the data. This stance is supported by Glaser (1978) when she claims that researchers must ensure that they do not force interview data into preconceived categories (cited in Charmaz, 2006; Peters, 2004). The non-judgmental stance of the researcher ensured the credibility and reliability of research data, as participants were empowered to lead the conversations, which invited them to share more meaningful and thoughtful information with the researcher (Golafshani, 2003).

All interviews were audiotaped with participants' permission (see Appendix C). The digital records were subsequently transcribed by the researcher. Thereafter, the researcher sent the interview transcripts to participants via email and invited them to check them for accuracy. The participants were informed that they could change the transcripts freely if they believed that the researcher had misunderstood their initial thoughts. Five of the six interview transcripts needed no adjustment, while one teacher provided additional thoughts and information as she checked



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the interview transcript. Transcripts of interview with three Chinese mothers and one Chinese teacher were translated by the researcher. The translation was checked by one of the researcher's colleagues who speaks both English and Chinese.

#### 3.4.4 Data analysis

This study used the qualitative content analysis technique for the purpose of analysing information provided by research participants. The outcomes of data analysis were directly based on research data, rather than on the researcher's assumptions or previous research findings (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In this study, using qualitative content analysis not only enabled the researcher to identify key themes arising in relation to the subquestions from the interview data, but also assisted him to group, organize, and digest the raw interview data (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Qualitative content analysis is developed to investigate the underlying meanings of physical messages, referred to as "words or texts" in the field of qualitative research (Wildemuth, 2009). When conducting qualitative content analysis, one attempts to identify themes and key categories that illustrate the studied topic by analysing discourses provided by the participants who are normally asked to articulate their perceptions of their experiences in relation to the studied topic (Burnard, 1991; Wildemuth, 2009). Qualitative content analysis involves a process in which researchers group raw data into categories or themes that reflect the core nature or essence of the studied topic (Wildemuth, 2009).

Berg (2009) suggests that generating key concepts or variables of the studied phenomenon

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based on theories or past studies prior to the conduct of qualitative content analysis could be extremely helpful in assisting the researcher to start the initial stage of data analysis. Specifically, for this study, the three preidentified subquestions (see chapter 3.1) provided a framework for the initial stage of data analysis. The researcher developed these three questions referring to the study by Duncan et al. (2012) entitled “Active adult participation in early childhood education: Enhancing child learning and community wellness.” The four theoretical concepts developed by Duncan et al. (2012) to investigate teacher-parent partnerships—authentic relationships, sustainable relationships, intentionality, and embedding—were used. Although these four theoretical concepts were developed by Duncan et al. (2012) to understand teacher-parent partnerships in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand in general, they were also suitable for guiding this study that focused specifically on teacher-partnerships with new immigrant Chinese parents.

Qualitative data is normally analysed on two levels. The first level is descriptive and the second level is interpretive (Hancock et al., 1998). To be specific, the descriptive level of data analysis is merely a description of raw data. The interpretive level involves deep exploration of what was said by the participants and what underlying implications may exist in participants' discourses (Hancock et al., 1998).

The first stage of using qualitative content analysis is to transform the original data into written form (Wildemuth, 2009). For this study, the researcher transcribed the audiotaped data into written form as soon as the interviews were finished. Afterwards, the transcripts of interviews were sent back to the participants who verified their accuracy. Having the participants verify the

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transcripts enabled the researcher to move on to the second level of data analysis.

Meaningful analysis begins at the second level of data analysis. The main purpose of conducting qualitative content analysis is to summarize the collected data and to present findings in ways that illustrate the essential and significant features of the studied phenomenon as well as the social contexts in which the phenomenon exists (Hancock et al., 1998). In other words, qualitative content analysis not only aims for the discovery of the universal nature of the experiences of participants, but also attempts to identify the social factors that have influences on participants' experiences. It goes far beyond the scope of merely counting words or summarizing objective meanings from words or texts to understanding and discovering "meanings, themes, and patterns" (Wildemuth, 2009. p. 1) that may be implied in particular contexts. Essentially, qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to understand the studied topic in a "subjective but scientific manner" (Wildemuth, 2009. p. 1).

In this study, data analysis was an ongoing process that was conducted continuously throughout the research project. In the initial stage of data analysis, the researcher coded the information provided by participants under the three preidentified research subquestions that afforded the researcher a way to group, organize and digest the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After carefully read the interview transcripts several times, the researcher developed four key categories for further analysis: partnership, intentionality, knowledge, and communication.

Instead of confining himself to these categories, the researcher remained open to all possibilities.

The researcher looked back and forth on the data, which enhanced and improved the credibility

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of the research because the researcher discovered meanings directly from the data, rather than from his own assumptions (Westbrook, 1994). In the process of analysing data, other key themes arose, such as comprehension of cultural differences, knowledge of curriculum, and effectiveness of communication. The emergence of these key themes denotes that the researcher looked for similar interpretations of specific ideas and that the studied phenomenon was examined in relation to its social and cultural contexts (Elliott & Timulak, 2005; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, as cited in Wildemuth, 2009). Finally, the researcher coded the data into two main part: New Zealand early childhood teachers and Chinese immigrant parents. Results of data analysis will be presented in next chapter.

### 3.5 Summary

Qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study as it allowed the researcher to understand participants' beliefs about parental involvement and participation in children's early learning as well as their experiences of developing teacher-parent partnerships with each other (Elliott & Timulak, 2005; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). The application of qualitative research methodology in this study enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the studied topic and ways in which the studied phenomenon has been influenced by the social and cultural backgrounds of participants. Four main ethical considerations were addressed before this study commenced: communication, human rights and autonomy, informed consent, and confidentiality and privacy.

Six participants, including three qualified New Zealand early childhood teachers and three new immigrant Chinese parents, were recruited utilizing the method of snowball sampling.

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Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant. The interviews were conducted in participants' first languages to make sure that participants could express their thoughts fully and clearly. All interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed by the researcher. Subsequently, interview transcripts were sent back to participants for confirmation and feedback. Participant confirmation was followed by data analysis, which was conducted utilizing the content analysis technique.

The process of data analysis was guided by the four theoretical concepts presented by Duncan et al. (2012). Duncan et al. (2012) present that authentic relationships, sustainable relationships, intentionality, and embedding are four key concepts when examining teacher-parent partnerships in the early childhood education field in New Zealand. This research positions intentionality to be central to the construction of teacher-parent partnerships and aims to explore and study intentional actions that teachers and Chinese parents undertake when building partnerships with each other. Four key themes finally emerged from data analysis were partnership, intentionality, knowledge, and communication.

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## Chapter 4: Research Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

Data generated by conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews with three Chinese immigrant parents and three New Zealand early childhood teachers was analysed to create a conceptual partnership framework, specifically with Chinese parents/whanau and intentionality in mind. This chapter presents key findings of this study. Discourses offered by research participants were analysed to identify participants' perceptions of teacher-parent partnerships, processes of intentionality undertaken by both teachers and Chinese parents, teachers' knowledge of cultural diversity, Chinese parents' knowledge of curriculum, and ways that teachers utilize communication to construct partnerships with new immigrant Chinese parents.

This study introduces a conceptual framework particularly for investigating partnerships, from both the teachers' perspectives as well as the new immigrant Chinese parents' perspectives, in New Zealand's early childhood education sector. Data generated by face-to-face interviews reveals that the construction of collaborative partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents is to a large extent influenced by both parties' comprehension of partnerships, intentionality, knowledge of cultural diversity and curriculum, and teacher-parent communication.

### 4.2 Teachers

#### 4.2.1 Partnership

Data generated from semi-structured interviews with the three early childhood education teachers indicated that the teachers had different levels of understanding of the concept of

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partnership. This section presents the teachers' expressed understandings of partnership, the teachers' perceived benefits of partnership, and the factors teachers identified as contributing to undesirable partnership construction.

#### 4.2.1.1 Different levels of understanding of partnership

The three teachers' understandings of partnerships were rather different in terms of depth (see table 1). One teacher showed a surface level of understanding of the concept of partnership, while the other teacher held a far deeper understanding. Emily considered that partnership was about working alongside Chinese families and communities while Zara indicated a deeper comprehension believing that partnership involves collaboration and parental involvement and contributions (Ministry of Education, 1996; Montuori & Conti, 1995; Wu, 2009).

Teachers Emily and Zara were asked to interpret their understanding of partnerships.

*I think it is just working alongside the Chinese community and basically respecting the culture and respecting what the parents tell us. For us, it is like how they [Chinese parents] take care of the children, and we will take care of the children like that. Some basic things, like, they [Chinese parents] want the children to get their jackets on if they go outside. Respecting those wishes, you know, making sure they do have their jacket on when they go outside.*

[Emily]

Emily showed a surface level of understanding of the concept of partnership. From her point of view, partnership was about working together with Chinese families and communities, respecting Chinese culture and parents' wishes. For example, Emily indicated that they organized Chinese New Year event, which was a sign of respecting Chinese culture. In terms of respecting wishes

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of Chinese parents, Emily said teachers would ensure that Chinese children have their jackets on when they go outside. Although Emily did not clearly express that respecting Chinese culture and wishes of Chinese parents ended up in teachers' intentional actions, she did undertake deliberate efforts in involving Chinese parents by organizing Chinese New Year events.

*For our teaching, it think it makes it more interesting, if we have a partnership, and we can understand each other and learn together.*  
*There is a lot we can learn from everybody. [Emily]*

Although Emily perceived partnerships as opportunities for learning, the discourses she offered did not give much indication that she used these learning opportunities wisely. For example, Emily expressed that teachers would learn some basic Chinese words. Rather than seeking assistance from Chinese parents, they would search those words up on the Internet. This example reveals a conflicted approach. Emily shows a desire to “understand each other and learn together” yet the opportunity to seek assistance to learn Chinese words directly from Chinese parents is overlooked.

In contrast, teacher Zara had a much deeper and meaningful understanding of partnerships.

*I think partnership is the constant collaboration between teachers and parents—between teachers and the whole family, actually.*  
*Involving them in our centre, you know, if they have something to share from home, they need to come and show us, whether it is special clothing, special food. If they have a visit, a holiday in China, you know, just come to share these things with us. [Zara]*

Zara believed that partnership involved constant collaboration and parental involvement. She acknowledged that parental involvement indeed helped teachers to better support children's



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learning at centres.

*If they have special cultural stories, we would love to hear that, you know. Also the fact that we really put in an effort to know parents by their first names makes a huge difference. They feel welcome.*

[Zara]

Similarly to Emily, Zara also expressed that cultural differences should be respected. Apart from respecting cultural differences, Zara strived to integrate and celebrate different cultures at the centre. She utilized cultural diversity wisely to construct a welcoming environment at the centre by knowing Chinese parents by their first names. Additionally, she perceived cultural differences as opportunities to enrich her teaching. Zara invited Chinese parents to share special cultural stories and experiences that she was not knowledgeable about. For example, Zara often invited Chinese parents to share their experiences after they had a holiday in China.

Emily and Zara showed different understandings of partnerships. Both Emily and Zara acknowledged that the basis of constructing partnerships is mutual respect (Mitchell et al., 2006; Ministry of Education, 1996). However, to make the best use of partnerships to foster children's learning, teachers need to have a deeper understanding of the concept of partnership. Partnership is not only about mutual respect, but also about seizing learning opportunities embedded in partnerships, and empowering, engaging, and involving Chinese parents.

#### 4.2.1.2 Perceived benefits of effective partnerships

Effective partnerships between teachers and Chinese immigrant parents contributed benefits to all parties, including children, parents, and teachers (Mitchell et al., 2006; Rouse, 2012; Zhang, 2012).

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#### 4.2.1.2.1 Effective partnerships benefit adults

Discourses offered by Sun and Zara suggested that teachers indeed perceived the benefits of effective partnerships to teachers and parents. An effective partnership between teachers and Chinese parents makes teachers daily work easier. Additionally, effective partnerships foster a sense of trust in Chinese parents towards teachers (Loveridge et al., 2012).

比如说有些时候和中国家长关系比较好的话，当别的家长不理解你的时候，他（中国父母）可能会过去解释几句，会帮你一下。[Sun]

*For example, if I have a good partnership with one Chinese parent, when some other Chinese parents do not understand my work, this parent would help me to explain to those parents.* [Translation of Sun]

This discourse offered by Sun indicates that an effective teacher-parent partnership does benefit teachers. Chinese parents were willing to help teachers and other parents. It is reasonable to assume that teachers' daily practices became easier when there were Chinese parents assisting teachers to establish partnerships with other Chinese parents who might not have spoken English or understood the centre's curriculum.

*Like, what is happening at home. When one family comes to visit after they have been on a holiday in China, they give us feedback. They love to have this conversation going, this constant communication, they are very open to it. Also, one particular mum often takes the courage to speak to me in terms of her child's behaviour at home, and she often asks for guidance. I appreciate the trust she has in me.* [Zara]

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Zara recognized that effective partnerships generated a sense of trust in Chinese parents towards teachers. The effective partnership between Zara and that particular Chinese mother encouraged the mother to initiate communication with Zara to seek assistance.

#### 4.2.1.2.2 Effective partnerships offer children's learning a continuity

An effective teacher-parent partnership offers children's learning a continuity between home and centre settings (Mitchell et al., 2006; Ministry of Education, 1996; Ogbu, 1982; Yang, 2011). An example provided by Zara suggests that she understood that partnership benefits children's continuous learning.

*Just to give an example, if they have received the learning story, and it matches, you know, coincidentally, with what is happening at home, they would give us feedback and say, "wow."*

*Like, the one where a child was drawing traffic signs. I wrote the learning story, and gave the mum the learning story. She said, it was interesting because he was looking out of the window (at the traffic signs) when they were driving and he would say, what is this, what is that, you know. This is the collaboration which took place, the conversation is going back and forth. So, often, parents do that, give us feedback. [Zara]*

Zara perceived that her partnership with Chinese parents offered Chinese children's learning a continuity. It was through constant communication, which was a product of effective partnerships, that teachers and parents collaboratively supported and expanded children's learning. In addition, the constant teacher-parent communication enabled shared understanding and knowledge of children's learning between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents to be developed.

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Effective teacher-parent partnerships benefitted children, teachers, and parents. They fostered communication between teachers and Chinese parents, which enabled teachers and parents to know more about children's learning in homes and at centres, in order to support children's continuous learning. In addition, effective partnerships encouraged Chinese parents to seek professional advice from teachers. Moreover, effective partnerships invited and stimulated parental involvement.

#### 4.2.1.3 Cultural differences and language barriers hinder partnership construction

Discourses offered by the three early childhood teachers confirmed that they indeed faced difficulties when working with Chinese immigrant parents due to cultural and language issues (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2006). For example, Emily expressed that Chinese parents were generally quite shy when working with teachers, and this shyness hindered effective teacher-parent communication that fosters partnership construction. All the three teachers indicated that language barriers made their work with Chinese parents challenging. However, the ways in which the three teachers perceived language barriers and cultural differences varied.

我觉得大部分的中国人还都是本着一个合作的这样一个关系（观念）。尤其是那种能说英文的父母，他们是非常愿意和幼儿园，和其他的孩子以及其他的家长来参与活动的。但是有一些孩子的家长呢，是爷爷奶奶类的，他们是以‘看’孩子为主的这种，他们就觉得无所谓啦，不要搞这么多事情，反正我们也听不懂。[Sun]

*I think that most Chinese parents are willing to cooperate with teachers. Especially those who speak English, they are very eager*

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*to collaborate with teachers and participate in activities and events organized by the centre. However, for grandparents, they are reluctant to attend activities as they do not know any English at all.*

[Translation of Sun]

Sun indicated that Chinese immigrant parents were willing to build partnerships with teachers and participate in activities and events as long as their English language ability allowed it. Thus, when asked to give suggestions to Chinese parents, Sun suggested Chinese parents improve their English language proficiency so that they could conduct more meaningful communication with teachers.

*I think it is important that we understand each other, and that's a big part of partnership. And it is important to communicate together as much as we can. We find that is a bit of a struggle here, to communicate, especially with the grandparents that drop them off.*

[Emily]

Emily also acknowledged the importance of communication for the construction of effective partnerships. Based on her working experiences, Emily found that Chinese parents were generally quite shy and that Chinese parents did not speak much to teachers. Therefore, she suggested that Chinese parents need to take the courage to speak to teachers.

Zara's view on Chinese parents was different from Emily's.

*I often think, it is a language barrier. It could be a time factor as well, as many of our Chinese parents work.*

*They [Chinese parents] are doing awesome. They are very friendly, they love to have conversations as far as their English language, you know, allows it. And I definitely know that, when we arrange for*

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*events to take place, they will come. They are very committed; they want to be involved.*

*Give us more feedback when they get a learning story. However, if there is a language barrier, we have to solve this issue. Because if there is a language barrier, they are not gonna be able to give us feedback, you know. [Zara]*

Zara also considered that language barriers had impeded the communication between teachers and Chinese parents. However, Zara believed that Chinese parents were very committed, friendly, and willing to work with teachers. Instead of suggesting parents improve their English, Zara believed that it was the teachers' responsibility to work with language barriers.

Results of this study confirm findings of previous research indicating that language barriers and cultural differences hinder the development of effective partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2006; Huang, 2013; Wu, 2009; Yang, 2011; Zhang, 2012).

All three teachers acknowledged that their daily work was challenging in terms of building partnerships with Chinese families. However, Zara suggested that language barriers and cultural differences were manageable; Chinese parents would become very committed, involved, and willing partners once teachers found ways to effectively work with language barriers. To achieve this goal, teachers need to undertake more intentional actions to invite parental involvement from Chinese parents (Duncan et al., 2012; Guo, 2005; Yang, 2011).

#### 4.2.2 Intentionality

Duncan et al. (2012) suggest that teachers' intentional actions contribute to the construction of effective teacher-parent partnerships. This study found that all three teachers undertook

intentional actions to invite Chinese parents to take part in partnership construction. However, the ways in which intentional actions were carried out were different. Additionally, it was found that teachers' understanding of partnership influenced the intentional actions they undertook that affected effective partnership construction.

#### 4.2.2.1 Three teachers undertook different intentional actions

Table 1 below shows the intentional actions undertaken by each teacher.

Table 1. Intentional actions undertaken by the three participating early childhood teachers.

Teacher Sun	Teacher Emily	Teacher Zara
Greetings	Greetings	Greetings
Learning stories	Learning stories	Learning stories (write a short sentence in Chinese in learning stories)
Flyers (before events)	Flyers (before events)	Sending out newsletters regularly (upcoming events, friendly reminders, and educational information)
Chinese New Year events	Chinese New Year events	Chinese New Year events
Learn some basic Chinese words	Learn some basic Chinese words	Learn some basic Chinese words
Inviting parents to do voluntary work	Parent evening	Inviting parents to do voluntary work
		Parent evening
		Offering opportunities for different families to communicate
		Inviting parents to share cultural food, stories, and clothing
		Knowing parents by their first names

The table above clearly shows that the three teachers carried out different purposeful actions to

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invite and involve Chinese parents in partnership construction. Five commonly adopted methods were using “greetings,” “learning stories”, “flyers”, “Chinese New Year events,” and “learn basic Chinese words.” Additionally, it is obvious from the results that Zara undertook more intentional actions in involving Chinese parents in children’s learning compared with the other two teachers. This was possibly because that Zara had deeper understanding of the concept of partnership than Sun and Emily.

#### 4.2.2.2 Understanding of partnership influences intentional actions

Three teachers held different levels of understanding of partnership, which influenced the intentional actions they undertook when working with Chinese parents (Duncan et al., 2012; Guo, 2005).

Zara was the only teacher who clearly expressed her willingness to try getting Chinese parents to be more involved.

*And the one thing that definitely stands out for me is that I want the parents to get involved. It is important, they have to get involved.*

[Zara]

*Also the fact that we really put in an effort to know parents by their first names makes a huge difference. They feel welcome. Often some parents came in with gifts such as scarves, chocolates, cakes, and flowers to thank the teachers for their efforts. [Zara]*

The two discourses above show that Zara had a strong desire to involve Chinese parents in children’s learning at the centre as well as in partnership construction. This strong desire is possibly a result of Zara’s deep understanding of the importance of teacher-parent partnerships



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(Duncan et al., 2012; Malle, 2010). Zara made purposeful and skillful efforts to build an inclusive community wherein parents could feel that they were respected and welcomed (see table 1).

In contrast, although the other two teachers expressed that they carried out intentional actions, the discourses they provided indicated that their purposeful actions generated very limited benefits to the construction of effective partnerships.

*We learn the greetings, we learn some basic words, especially when the child is new, so like, toilets, food, eating, hello, and goodbye. So we are trying to use that with the child at first, so they know what we mean, so they feel welcome, and they feel part of it. So, we always try to learn some basic words for the children, and we always greet the children and of course the parents. [Emily]*

The discourse above offered by Emily indicates that she purposefully learned some Chinese words to help newcomer Chinese children. However, there was little evidence suggesting her efforts in inviting the involvement of Chinese parents.

Sun indicated that teachers would normally build relationships with Chinese parents through daily verbal communication. However, no further actions were undertaken when language barriers hindered the communication between teachers and Chinese parents.

他们也是第一会主动的攀谈，但是因为有一些孩子的家长和爷爷奶奶就是完全都不会（英语）。这种情况下，如果说这件事情很严重，很重要，通知这些家长的话，洋人老师会来找我们中国老师帮忙。但是如果要是并不是那么重要的话，就是不懂也就不懂了。[Sun]

*Firstly, they [kiwi teachers] would initiate conversations with Chinese parents. However, they cannot communicate with the grandparents. In this situation, if there is something important and*

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*the parents have to know that, kiwi teachers would ask for assistance from Chinese-speaking staff members. If it is not that important, the teacher would just let the grandparents go.*

[Translation of Sun]

Sun expressed that teachers conducted intentional actions to clearly inform Chinese parents of crucial information. For instance, one example offered by Sun suggests that teachers would intentionally seek assistance from Chinese-speaking staff members to communicate with Chinese parents when children got hurt at the centre. However, no extra effort was undertaken to break language barriers when the information was perceived as less crucial. For example, when the centre organized events that parental participation was not compulsory, teachers did not deliver this message to parents who did not speak English.

In summary, different processes of intentionality were undertaken by the three early childhood teachers for the purpose of fostering effective partnerships with Chinese parents. It is suspected that Zara's deeper understanding of partnerships enabled her to conduct more intentional actions to involve Chinese parents, which resulted in relatively collaborative partnerships between Zara and the parents (Duncan et al., 2012; Malle, 2010). The insufficient intentional actions undertaken by Sun and Emily resulted in the difficulties that they faced when building partnerships with Chinese parents. Teachers' understanding of the concept of partnership might influence the intentional actions they undertake when developing effective partnerships.

#### 4.2.3 Knowledge of diversity

The early childhood education sector is becoming increasingly multicultural as children from diverse cultural and language backgrounds are attending early childhood services in New

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Zealand (Burke, 2008; Singham, 2006). To work with diversity, *Te Whāriki*, New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, claims that the languages and cultures of minority children should be promoted and protected by early childhood services (Ministry of Education, 1996). The diversity of the early childhood education sector in New Zealand has brought both benefits and challenges to early childhood teachers. Diversity affords opportunities for teachers to enrich the early childhood education sector by integrating diverse cultural and language elements into their daily practices (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2013). On the other hand, this diversity has presented challenges to teachers' daily practices in terms of building inclusive learning communities and working in partnerships with parents and families that come from diverse cultural backgrounds (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005; Liao, 2007; Zhang, 2012).

This study found that the three teachers held different knowledge of cultural diversity in New Zealand's early childhood education environment. All three teachers acknowledged that the early childhood education field was becoming increasingly diverse in terms of the cultures embedded in it. However, the three teachers understood cultural diversity from different angles. Sun and Emily perceived the diversity had benefits for children's learning, while Zara identified that the cultural diversity brought challenges early childhood teachers.

我觉得因为本身新西兰和奥克兰的文化就是 **multiculture**。

**Multiculture** 本身是好的，让小孩从小就接触不同的文化。因为从不同的文化里他们能体会到，比如说衣食住行啊，各个方面，尤其是我们 **preschool** 老师，就会从衣食住行各个方面去让他们有不同的体验，这样他们就有不同的 **hands-on** 的 **activity**。[Sun]

*I think that the culture of Auckland and New Zealand is a*

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*multiculture. Multiculture is a good thing, it provides children with opportunities to know different cultures at the beginning of their lives. In a multicultural context, children get to know all aspects of other cultures. For our preschool teachers, we design the curriculum to offer children diverse hands-on cultural activities.*

[Translation of Sun]

Sun recognized the significance of cultural diversity in early childhood centres for children's learning, explaining that diverse cultures existing in the early childhood environments represent the current multicultural society of New Zealand. Specifically, cultural diversity in early childhood centres enables children to experience different cultures in aspects of eating habit, clothing, and so forth. Likewise, Emily also expressed that cultural diversity was crucial for children's learning.

*I think it is really good for children to see the different cultures and different practices that the children bring to centre, and the different languages. And I think learning a second language is just so amazing for the children to do when they are younger, it expands their minds. Lots of different kinds of creative play with different types of cultures.* [Emily]

Emily added that learning another language was beneficial for children, and that different cultures offered children more opportunities to engage in different kinds of activities that were embedded in diverse cultures. For example, Emily would introduce the animal in the Chinese New Year to children when organizing Chinese New Year events. Compared with Emily and Sun, Zara expressed her knowledge of diversity from another angle.

*I think that it is great to have different cultures incorporated in the early childhood practice. I do think that when you are working in the early childhood field you have to consider different cultures, and be aware [of cultural differences]. And I think that it is good if we learn about different backgrounds, you know, where parents are coming*

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*from, where children come from, there are so many things we have to consider. Language is a big thing, you know.*

*We do celebrate the special days, like Chinese New Year, and that sort of thing.*

*Different cultures are very important to us, we acknowledge them.*

*We know that, you know, people are different, but in some way, we are all the same. We definitely celebrate the differences. [Zara]*

In these discourses above, Zara showed that she believed that teachers needed to develop cultural awareness and be knowledgeable about the cultural backgrounds of parents and children in order to work with cultural minority families (Grey, 2013; Guo & Dalli, 2012).

The benefits and significance of cultural diversity for children's learning were commonly acknowledged by the three early childhood teachers. To work with cultural diversity in the early childhood field, the teachers acknowledged that it was the teachers' responsibility to gain an awareness of different cultures and to acquire knowledge about different backgrounds of cultural minority families.

#### 4.2.4 Communication methods

Teacher-parent communication contributes positively to the construction of effective partnerships. It enables sharing of knowledge and negotiation of educational aspirations for children's learning, assists Chinese immigrant parents to obtain information about New Zealand's mainstream educational system, and increases the level of parental involvement in children's learning (Broström, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2006; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012).

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Discourse offered by the three teachers indicate that they utilized both verbal communication (spontaneous daily face to face conversations) and written communication (learning stories and flyers) to deliver information to Chinese parents. It was believed that teacher-parent communication should be conducted bidirectional, and that the content of communication should be about children's learning.

#### 4.2.4.1 Spontaneous daily face to face conversations

Verbal communication was believed by all three teachers to be a significant method of constructing effective partnerships with Chinese parents. Daily verbal communication was conducted by all three teachers when working with Chinese parents. However, each of the three teachers showed distinct views on verbal communication.

在和中国父母工作的时候，那最重要的就是和他们搞好关系，多交流吧，多聊天。还是要以孩子为主要话题的。[Sun]

*It is very important to build a close relationship when working with Chinese parents. This requires teachers to conduct more verbal communication with Chinese parents with regard to their children's learning.* [Translation of Sun]

The discourse above suggests that Sun believed verbal communication was an effective strategy when working with Chinese parents. Sun also proposed that the content of verbal communication should be about children's learning. However, there was little evidence showing that Sun perceived communication to be a two-way endeavour. Sun expressed that she believed that teachers need to lead the conversation. It was Emily who suggested that Chinese parents needed to initiate communication as well.

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*It [communication] has to be two-ways. They need to communicate with us, and we need to communicate with them, but I think we [the teachers] have to start it off that way, to be the communicator. And I think Chinese people are quite shy. I think their job is to communicate—be communicators as well. [Emily]*

Emily believed that both teachers and parents need to be communicators. She believed that teachers should take the leadership role first in partnership construction, inviting parents to engage in and start communication with teachers. Nevertheless, discourses offered by Emily did not indicate that she was putting purposeful efforts into encouraging Chinese parents to initiate communication. Zara, on the other hand, appeared to be doing a much better job of engaging Chinese parents in communication.

*Involve them [Chinese parents] in our centre, you know, if they have something to share from home, they need to come and show us, whether it is special clothing, special food. If they have a visit, a holiday in China, you know, just come to share these things with us. If they have special cultural stories, we would love to hear that, you know. Also the fact that we really put in an effort to know parents by their first names makes a huge difference. It is important that they sit together here so that we can hear what they want, hear their feelings, hear their hearts' desires, and give them a chance to mingle with other parents. [Zara]*

Zara put thoughtful efforts towards inviting Chinese parents into conversations with her. She invited Chinese parents to share special food, clothing, stories, and experiences with her. Furthermore, knowing parents by their first names enables Chinese parents to feel that they belong, which in turn empowers Chinese parents to express their feelings and desires.

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Verbal communication was shown to be an effective way of engaging Chinese parents in partnership construction. Teachers need to be aware that the communication between teachers and Chinese parents should be relevant to children's learning, and that teachers should undertake intentional actions to invite Chinese parents to initiate conversation. Results also suggested that the communication between teachers and Chinese parents is best when it is bidirectional.

#### 4.2.4.2 Written Communication

Diverse types of written communication were utilized by the three teachers to deliver information to Chinese parents and involve them in partnership construction, including learning stories, flyers, and newsletters. All three teachers expressed that they were not receiving much feedback from Chinese parents. However, compared with Sun and Emily, Zara did receive more feedback from Chinese parents. This was probably a result of Zara's intentional efforts in regularly providing Chinese parents with educational information in newsletters and including some Chinese words in the learning stories of children. It was Zara's intentional actions that positively contributed to teacher-parent partnership construction.

##### 4.2.4.2.1 Learning stories

All three teachers used learning stories to deliver information regarding children's learning to parents. Three teachers similarly indicated that they did not have the resources to provide bilingual learning stories. However, three teachers put different efforts in writing learning stories of Chinese children.



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我们的 portfolio 之前都是纸质的,现在都是用 online 的,叫 educare。

那家长就会写 feedback, 但是因为现在刚开始, 没有那么多

(feedback)。[Sun]

*Previously, children's portfolios were written on papers. We are now providing online portfolios using "educare." This makes it possible for parents to give feedback. However, as we just started using "educare" now, we are not receiving much feedback.* [Translation of Sun]

*We have learning stories and portfolios; we write the learning story, and they can see pictures of their children doing work. That is one form of communicating what the children have been learning. And we do ask for feedback.* [Emily]

Sun and Emily similarly indicated that they did deliver written information to Chinese parents.

However, not much feedback was received from the parents. Although Zara expressed that she did not receive as much feedback as she expected, she did identify some effective, engaging strategies when working with Chinese parents.

*I think, we are also very open to suggestions from the parents, you know. If they would look at the learning stories, which is another way of communication. They can give us feedback, we also would like to hear the parents' voice after they have read the learning stories, the portfolio, which happens once a month. Once a month, we send the portfolio home, and we invite the parents give us feedback. That happens.* [Zara]

From Zara's point of view, partnership was also about two-way communication and constant feedback. She believed that this feedback benefitted both parties. By conducting communication

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and inviting suggestions and feedback, teachers were enabled to change their practices to better meet parents' wishes. Simultaneously, parents were provided with information regarding their children's learning at the centre so that they were empowered to conduct meaningful conversations with teachers and to wisely support children's learning in their home environment. Apart from inviting suggestions and feedback, integrating Chinese words or sentences in learning stories was identified by Zara as another effective strategy when working with Chinese parents.

*What I will do, is often to put in a short sentence or a word in Chinese, within my learning stories, when a child has had a birthday, or came back from a holiday. And when the parent read it, I would check again with him/her that it is the correct word/sentence. I can see that they really appreciate that. [Zara]*

The discourse above suggests that Zara indeed put deliberate efforts in enriching the meaningfulness of learning stories offered to Chinese parents. For example, instead of writing the learning stories all in English, Zara wrote a short sentence or a word in Chinese. This Chinese element was possibly the reason why Zara received more feedback from Chinese parents.

#### 4.2.4.2.2 Flyers and newsletters

Another commonly utilized method of delivering written information was flyers or newsletters. All three teachers used flyers (Zara called them as newsletters) to inform Chinese parents the upcoming events organized by centres. However, the richness of the information contained in flyers differed.

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Sun and Emily expressed that they would send out flyers to inform Chinese parents the upcoming events that they will organize. The information contained in flyers sent out by Sun and Emily was less rich than it contained in newsletters sent out by Zara.

*The newsletter will cover what the children are currently learning about (it will be about the project, animals, or something like that), and then we have lots of photos, so the parents can see what their children are doing.*

*We also let them know about staff going on holiday, or an event that will come up such as a Teddy Bear Picnic Day.*

*And then, often, I try to put some educational pieces of information, maybe about behaviour, you know, how to help your child learning positive behaviour, or whatever, something like that. We also let parents know that we have an open-door policy and that they are always welcome to come talk to us during the day.*

*It is also important to give parents feedback when a centre has had reviews and ERO visits. Positive relationships with parents of children with special needs build partnerships too!*

[Zara]

The above discourses offered by Zara clearly showed that the written information provided by her was much more meaningful and informative compared with the information provided by Sun and Emily. Zara indicated that Chinese parents did appreciate her efforts in increasing the richness of written information.

Although the three teachers adopted similar written communication methods, the content of their written communication differed. The richness of information Chinese parents received influenced

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their involvement in partnership construction. Chinese parents were more likely to collaborate and communicate with teachers when meaningful and informative information was delivered to them. Therefore, when utilizing verbal and written communication to foster partnerships with Chinese parents, it is suggested that teachers need to undertake intentional efforts in delivering rich information (Meade et al., 2012; New Zealand Teachers Council, 2004).

### 4.3 Parents

#### 4.3.1 Partnership

This study found that three participating Chinese immigrant parents' understanding of partnership in relation to early childhood education to be insufficient, and to a large extent, influenced by traditional Chinese culture. Chinese parents commonly perceived partnerships as parents being responsible for educating children at home while teachers being responsible for teaching children at centres (Wu, 2009).

##### 4.3.1.1 Insufficient understanding of partnerships

Previous research investigating partnerships between New Zealand early childhood teachers and Chinese immigrant parents has identified that the construction of partnerships between those two parties is problematic due to cultural differences and language barriers (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2006; Huang, 2013; Liao, 2007; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012). This study confirmed this finding. This research found that the concept of the teacher-parent partnership is foreign to Chinese parents.

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The three Chinese parents who participated showed insufficient understanding of the concept of partnership, which was deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture.

我还是比较赞同家园共育这个理念的。因为他（小朋友）有一半的时间是在幼儿园一半的时间是在家里。 [Zhang]

*I agree with the idea of educating children in partnership between families and centres because he (the child) spends half of the time at the centre and half of the time at home. [Translation of Zhang]*

有些习惯的话，在学校可能会养成一些比较好的学习习惯，然后家长再加以督促的话会更好。 [Zhang]

*For example...some habits...children might form some positive learning habits at centres. In this regard, it is good for children if the parents enforce these habits at home accordingly. [Translation of Zhang]*

Zhang's understanding of partnerships was that teachers and parents should take their responsibilities respectively; teachers are responsible for the child when he/she is attending early childhood service at the centre, while parents need to take care of and educate the child at home. Although Zhang perceived the significance of offering children's learning a continuity between centre and home settings, she did not indicate any understanding of the importance of participating in her child's learning at centres. Her understanding of partnerships was that parents continue to support and expand children's learning in the home environment. Discourses offered by Zhang indicated limited understanding of the concept of partnership. Similar discourses were offered by Wang and Li who believed that parents' role was to support children's learning at home. All three Chinese mothers considered that families should work together with centres to foster children's learning. However, not much effort was made by them to actively participate in their children's learning at early childhood centres.

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#### 4.3.1.2 Factors that impede the construction of partnership

Apart from language barriers and cultural differences, Chinese parents indicated two other factors that they believed had negatively affected the construction of effective teacher-parent partnerships, namely, the absence of a formal parent's committee and the frequency of parents visiting centres.

##### 4.3.1.2.1 Parent committee

Chinese mother Zhang expressed her interest in having a parent committee when she was asked to suggest things that could improve teacher-parent partnerships.

这边也没有家委会（家长委员会），国内是有这个的，家长有什么意见可以通过家委会提。 [Zhang]

*They (early childhood centres in New Zealand) do not have a parent committee. Kindergartens (the most popular type of early childhood services in China is kindergarten) in China normally have a parent committee, and parents can make suggestions if they want to. [Translation of Zhang]*

Based on her experiences in China, Zhang believed that a parent committee was helpful in facilitating the communication and negotiation between parents and teachers or centres. Mitchell et al. (2006) suggest that many kindergartens in New Zealand do use parent committees to involve and engage parents in children's learning at kindergartens. This fact was not perceived by Zhang, which was possible caused by her insufficient knowledge of the educational system in New Zealand.

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#### 4.3.1.2.2 Frequency of parents visiting centres

Another factor believed by Li and Wang to be influential in fostering effective teacher-parent partnerships was the frequency of parents visiting centres.

Chinese mother Li considered that her work influenced her partnership with teachers.

我可能和女儿在一起的时间太少了。因为我当时很忙。所以大部分时候是爷爷奶奶在接送小朋友。如果我能有时间接送她的话，可能会能更多的和老师交流。[Li]

*I think I spent too little time with my daughter because I was too busy. My daughter was mostly picked up and dropped off by her grandparents. If I had time to pick her up and drop her off, I would have more opportunities to communicate with teachers.*

[Translation of Li]

Li regretted that she did not spend much time with her daughter. She thought that the partnership between her and teachers would be closer and more collaborative if she could have picked up her daughter and met with the teachers more often. Her idea was supported by Chinese mother Wang.

Wang expressed that her partnership with teachers was not close due to the fact that her child only attended the centre two days a week.

我觉得就是因为我家孩子去的时间太少了。我现在也在排队嘛，想让孩子多去几天。我觉得，比如说，咱们俩一周就见一次面，那肯定不熟。如果能达到每天都去幼儿园的话，和老师慢慢熟了之后可能沟通就会多一些。[Wang]

*I think it is because the time that my child spends at the centre is too short. I want my child to go to the centre more often; he is on the*

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*waiting list now. I think, for example, you and I, only meet once a week, we definitely cannot have a close relationship. I will get to know teachers and communicate more with them if my child goes to the centre every day.* [Translation of Wang]

Wang considered that the low frequency of her child attending the centre influenced the communication between her and teachers, which in turn influenced the construction of effective partnerships.

In summary, all the three Chinese parents believed that the insufficient communication between themselves and the teachers impeded partnership construction. One Chinese parent expected the centre to provide a parent committee offering parents a place to have their voices heard, while the other two parents believed that they needed to meet more with the teachers so as to work collaboratively in terms of supporting children's learning.

#### 4.3.2 Intentionality

Chinese immigrant parents did undertake intentional actions to communicate their concerns with early childhood teachers. However, the intentional actions that the three Chinese mothers carried out were found to be specifically related to their children's safety and learning of English language (Mitchell et al., 2006; Yang, 2011). The only process of intentionality Chinese parents undertook was verbal communication.

##### 4.3.2.1 Three parents undertook similar intentional actions

Table 2 below shows the intentional actions undertaken by each participating parent.

Table 2. Intentional actions undertaken by the three participating Chinese immigrant parents.



Mother Zhang	Mother Wang	Mother Li
Initiated verbal communication (about her child's learning of English language)	Initiated verbal communication (about her child's safety)	Initiated verbal communication (about her child's learning of English language)

The table above shows that three Chinese parents undertook similar intentional actions to build partnerships with teachers. It also suggests that three Chinese parents undertook intentional efforts only when they had concerns either about children's safety or learning of English language.

#### 4.3.2.2 Content specific intentional efforts

When asked to articulate the intentional actions that they undertook to communicate with teachers, the three Chinese mothers offered similar scenarios. They carried out intentional actions when they were concerned with either their children's English language proficiency or their children's safety.

比如说一开始的时候我女儿的英文不是很好，我就请老师教她一些简单的英语。 [Li]

*For example, my daughter's English was not very good when she first started at that centre. So, I asked the teacher to teach her some simple English words.* [Translation of Li]

现在比较忧虑的就是我孩子的语言。虽然在国内也有学了一些，但是在这边，英语语言上可能还是有点跟不上。

我和老师沟通过，老师说不用担心，说我们家孩子的英语进步的很快。老师和其他小朋友也在帮助和引导他进行过渡。 [Zhang]

*What I am worrying about now is my child's English proficiency. Although he learned some English in China, he is still having*

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*language problems here in New Zealand.*

*I did communicate this concern with the teachers. The teacher told me not to worry. Teachers and other children will help my child with his English.* [Translation of Zhang]

Li and Zhang expressed their concerns regarding their children's English language issues to teachers. However, other concerns they had were not communicated. For example, both Li and Zhang were hoping to get more feedback regarding their children's learning experiences at centres; all three Chinese mothers were concerned with teachers' attentiveness, as they considered that teachers were not giving enough attention to the children. These concerns were not communicated to the teachers.

One other concern that invited Chinese parents' intentional actions was children's safety.

回家之后我就发现他的脸被小朋友抓了。回来我就和老师说了，老师就认为这是小朋友之间玩导致的，他们认为这种很正常。[Wang]

*I found that my son's face was scratched by others and I talked to the teacher about it. The teacher told me that was normal as it happens when children play with each other.* [Translation of Wang]

Wang started communicating with teachers because she was concerned about her child's safety. However, she was silent about her other concerns, such as her concerns that her child was not playing with other children, she was not receiving enough information from the centre, and her child was not learning much at the centre.

One example offered by one of the teachers, Sun, similarly illustrated that Chinese parents would start communication when they were concerned with their children's safety.

曾经出过一次事故，就是一个孩子在操场玩，他头都流血了，但是他

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也没有哭，他的老师也没有看到。这个事故发生了，家长来接孩子的时候一下就发现了，他就会问为什么没人告诉我。在这种情况下，中国家长就会主动引导合作关系来解决问题。[Sun]

*There was an accident once. One child was playing on the ground and he accidentally got his head hit somewhere, and he was bleeding. The teacher did not notice it. The parent found it as soon as she picked the child up. She asked us why nobody told her that. In this situation, Chinese parents would lead the partnerships and try to solve problems.* [Translation of Sun]

Through analysing the discourses offered by the teacher, Sun, and the three Chinese parents, it can be concluded that intentional actions undertaken by Chinese parents were content specific. Chinese parents were generally quiet unless they were concerned with their children's learning of English and physical safety. The only process of intentionality that three Chinese parents undertook was spontaneous verbal communication, and it was conducted when they were picking up or dropping off their children. This was possibly because of that three Chinese mothers considered that they should not intervene teachers who are regarded as authority figures in traditional Chinese culture (Mitchell et al., 2006; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012).

#### 4.3.3 Knowledge of curriculum and play

Discourses offered by Chinese parents indicated that parents had little knowledge of the centre's curriculum and a rather traditional view on learning. They expressed their expectations and hope that teachers conduct more structured and formal teaching activities to assist their children with learning of numeracy and literacy (Bai, 2005; Guo, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2006; Yang, 2011).

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#### 4.3.3.1 Little knowledge of curriculum

Discourses offered by three Chinese parents indicated that they possessed little knowledge of centre's curriculum. The three Chinese mothers similarly expressed that early childhood education services in New Zealand only offered children a place to play, rather than a place to study.

对于学校教育课程来讲，我倒是没什么了解。我觉得孩子们每天就是玩。因为我家孩子每天就是在外边玩沙子，他很少在屋里做些什么。他上了一年的幼儿园，只画过一幅画。再其他的什么都没有了。[Wang]

*In terms of the curriculum, I do not have much knowledge about it. I think that children only play at early childhood centres. Based on my observation, all my child does at the centre is play with sand every day; he seldom stays inside. He has been to that early childhood centre for a year, but he only drew one picture, nothing else. [Translation of Wang]*

The discourse above suggests that Wang had little knowledge of the curriculum. The only learning she saw was her child playing sand. Little educational benefits of children's play were perceived by Wang as she believed that learning happens inside the classroom where teachers engage children in formal learning activities rather than outside on the playground. The above discourse also indicates that Wang regarded drawing as a means of learning. However, she was not aware that her child drew much in the centre. Similar to Wang, Zhang also had little knowledge of the curriculum.

这边的我具体也不太了解，但是估计也就是孩子自己玩玩，玩沙子啊。

[Zhang]

*I do not know much about the curriculum of early childhood centres in New Zealand. But I guess it would be just play, play sand, or*

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*something like that. [Translation of Zhang]*

Zhang's knowledge of the curriculum was that children only played at centres. Her expression showed that she did not have much knowledge about the educational benefits of play.

Li exhibited some knowledge of the centre's curriculum.

新西兰这边的幼儿园呢，没有注重强调孩子去学什么，而是更强调和同学以及和老师之间的互动。这点是蛮好的。我女儿和小朋友相处的能力挺好的。 [Li]

*Early childhood education in New Zealand does not emphasize learning particular knowledge, it focuses on the communication and interaction between children and children, and teachers and children. I think this focus is good; my daughter's ability to get along with other children is quite good. [Translation of Li]*

This discourse indicates how Li's knowledge of the centre's curriculum enabled her to appreciate the teachers' efforts in cultivating children's abilities in terms of socializing. Nevertheless, her view on learning was still similar to that of the other two Chinese mothers who expected teachers to engage children more in learning of numeracy and literacy.

#### 4.3.3.2 A traditional view on learning

Discourses offered by these three Chinese mothers clearly indicated that they expected early childhood teachers to put extra efforts into fostering children's learning of literacy and numeracy.

就文化课的学习，我看他们好像都不像中国学汉字什么的。国内我们孩子上的幼儿园是有一套教材。 [Zhang]

*In terms of academic study, as far as I can tell, they (children) do not learn literacy like children in China do. There was a set of*

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*teaching materials when my child was attending kindergarten in China.* [Translation of Zhang]

Zhang expressed her desire for the centre to teach children more knowledge in terms of literacy.

Zhang did not perceive much learning of literacy happening at centre. This traditional view on learning was supported by Li who similar expressed that she expects teachers to put more efforts in assisting her daughter's learning of English language and numeracy.

我的想法可能还是有一些普遍的中国家长的影子。可能孩子在幼儿园学的东西不是很多

我女儿在幼儿园期间，4岁半以后有一个 pre-school，到那时候她也就是会 10 以内的数字，其他的什么都不会。但是感觉做手工方面还是挺擅长的。我也有国内的那种想法，就是觉得在幼儿园学的东西少了点。好像每天在幼儿园半年才学会了 26 个英文字母。 [Li]

*My opinion is probably still influenced by Chinese culture. I think that children do not learn much at early childhood centres in New Zealand.*

*When my daughter was attending the early childhood centre, there was a preschool group, which was offered for children who were over 4.5 years. By the time my daughter attended preschool, she only knew the numbers under 10, nothing else. However, she was good at handcrafting. My thinking is the same as most Chinese parents; I think that children learn too few things at early childhood centres. My daughter only learned 26 English letters in six months.*

[Translation of Li]

The discourse above demonstrates that Li's understanding of learning is similar to Zhang. Li also believed that early childhood education services put limited efforts into teaching children in terms of literacy and numeracy. Although she perceived the fact that her daughter learnt the numbers under 10, she believed that the child could have learnt more with teachers' intentional efforts in

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facilitating children's learning of numeracy.

All three Chinese parents expressed an expectation that early childhood teachers should teach children "serious things" (Bai, 2005; Huang, 2013; Parmar et al., 2004; Yang, 2011). This involved engaging children in more traditional, structured, or formal experiences. For example, they expected teachers to focus more on teaching children literacy and numeracy. There was very little indication that they valued what might be understood as the value of art or science in early childhood education.

#### 4.3.4 Communication methods

The three Chinese parents similarly expressed that the communication between themselves and the teachers needed to be improved. Chinese parents expected teachers to deliver more information to them regarding their children's learning at centres (Meade et al., 2012; Wu, 2009). Two types of communication methods were commonly perceived by Chinese parents, namely, verbal communication and written communication. Verbal communication refers to spontaneous daily face to face conversations. Written communication refers to learning stories.

##### 4.3.4.1 Spontaneous daily face to face conversations

Two of the three mothers had difficulty communicating in English. They perceived the significance of having a Chinese-speaking staff member at the centre. The other Chinese mother who spoke English suggested that the verbal information that teachers provided to parents through spontaneous daily face to face conversations was too vague.

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Zhang and Wang were reluctant to engage in any situation that demanded that they might speak English. Most communication they engaged in was with Chinese-speaking teachers. Zhang and Wang considered that it was helpful to have Chinese-speaking staff at centres.

他们学校有讲中文的老师，一般我有什么重要的问题都是和中文老师交流。

我觉得有一个中文老师还是挺好的。我们有什么问题的话可以和她交流。 [Zhang]

*There is a Chinese-speaking teacher at that centre, I normally talk to that teacher when I have concerns or there is something important I want to say.*

*I think it is good to have a Chinese-speaking teacher. We [Chinese parents] can talk to her/him if we have concerns.* [Translation of Zhang]

Zhang indicated that she appreciated the centre for having a Chinese-speaking staff member who could listen to her. This appreciation was similarly expressed by Wang, who also suggested teachers provide more information regarding children's learning at centres.

幼儿园如果能多传达些信息给家长的话，可能会好一些。比如说你教给孩子认识一些小动物，你可以告诉家长，这样家长再家里也可以教孩子一些。 [Wang]

*It would be good if teachers could provide parents with more information. For example, if teachers teach children to recognize animals, they can tell the parents, so that parents can teach children accordingly at home.* [Translation of Wang]

Zhang expected teachers to inform her about her child's learning at the centre. She wanted to know what her child had been studying at the centre during the day, so that she could teach her child similar things at home. This expectation Wang held implies that the continuity of her child's learning was impeded by insufficient communication between parent and teacher.



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Li, who was able to communicate in English, expressed that the verbal information she received from teachers was too vague.

但是我觉得我每次问老师（孩子在学校的表现），老师都是说很好。

[Li]

*Every time I ask the teachers about my child's performance at the centre, he/she would tell me that my child was doing well.*

[Translation of Li]

Li indicated that she was eager to know her daughter's performance at the centre so that she could identify her child's shortcomings and correct her daughter's misbehaviours or undesirable habits. However, she got confused when the teacher always told her that the child was doing well.

Li expected teachers to give parents more accurate and meaningful information so that they could support their children's learning and development at home.

#### 4.3.4.2 Learning stories

Two of the three Chinese participants perceived the fact that centres utilized learning stories to deliver written information to parents. However, they believed that they were not receiving enough written information from centres. The frequency of Chinese parents receiving written information from their children's centres needed to be improved, as these two Chinese mothers expressed that learning stories were only written once a month. Additionally, one particular Chinese mother suggested that the information contained in learning stories was uninformative.

然后学校有一个软件，相当于 facebook 那种，老师会一个月写一篇文章（关于我们家宝宝的表现）。我就是根据这些来了解的。[Zhang]

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*The centre had a software, like facebook. Once a month, the teachers would write a learning story about my child's performance at the centre. I got to know the child's learning experiences at the centre through reading the learning stories. [Translation of Zhang]*

Zhang denoted that she was not satisfied with the amount of information she was receiving as she only had the opportunity to read her child's learning stories once a month. Likewise, Wang also believed that she received too little information from the centre.

可能一个月有一次吧，幼儿园会给我一张纸，上面会有我孩子的照片，然后有一些文字的东西。但是文字的东西只是讲的某一件事，不是说每天的学习都有体现。只是解释某一天的一件事。比如说某天他搭了一个积木，或者说某天他说了一个英文单词。 [Wang]

*Like, once a month, the centre would give me one page of paper. It contained some pictures of my child and some written stuff.*

*However, the written message was only about one particular thing that happened during one particular day. It was not about the child's everyday experiences. For example, it might be the child playing building blocks, or the child speaking a certain English word.*

[Translation of Wang]

Wang illustrated that she only received written information from the centre once a month, and the information was uninformative. She indirectly expressed that teachers needed to make the documentation of children's learning more specific and informative.

Although language was an issue for some Chinese parents, they could still communicate with teachers with the assistance of Chinese-speaking staff members. The contribution of Chinese-speaking teachers was widely acknowledged and appreciated by Chinese parents. However, Chinese parents expected more meaningful information from teachers. They were

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eager to know about their children's learning at the centre, and they were willing to support their children's learning at home. Therefore, Chinese parents expected teachers to deliver more informative and relevant information to them. When utilizing spontaneous daily face to face conversations to inform Chinese parents their children's learning, teachers should ensure that they provide detailed and specific information. In terms of the utilization of learning stories, teachers are suggested to write the learning stories more frequently so as to offer rich information to parents.

#### 4.4 Summary

The results of this study confirm findings of previous research that propose cultural differences and language barriers impede the construction of effective partnerships between teachers and Chinese immigrant parents (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2006; Huang, 2013; Liao, 2007; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012). This research investigated cultural differences and language barriers on a deeper level. It identified that cultural differences and language barriers have influenced both teachers and Chinese parents in terms of their comprehension of partnerships, intentionality, knowledge of diversity and curriculum, and communication.

Teachers held different levels of understanding of the concept of partnership. Some teachers understood partnerships on a surface level. It was suggested that partnership is best understood in the context of a community of learners; partnership is not only about working together, but also about mutual respect, seizing learning opportunities embedded in partnerships, constant collaboration, and empowering, engaging, and involving Chinese parents (Montuori & Conti, 1995; Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 2010). Chinese parents typically showed a misunderstanding of

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partnerships, believing that teachers and parents should take responsibility at the centre and at home, respectively (Wu, 2009).

Teachers and Chinese immigrant parents did undertake intentional actions when working with each other. Teachers, carried out different intentional actions, and it was found that the more intentional actions teachers undertook, the better partnerships their partnerships with Chinese parents (Duncan et al., 2012). Chinese parents only carried out deliberate actions when they were concerned with their children's safety and learning of literacy. This finding upholds the finding of Huang (2013) and Yang (2011), which suggest that Chinese parents highly valued children's academic learning highly.

Teachers perceived the cultural diversity embedded in the early childhood education field differently. The benefits that diversity has brought to children's learning were commonly acknowledged. However, not many teachers recognized the developmental potential that diversity offered to their own daily practices on a deeper level (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2013; Ministry of Education, 1996; Nagel & Wells, 2009). This was probably caused by teachers having little understanding and knowledge of cultural differences. Chinese immigrant parents held limited understanding and knowledge of the play-based curriculum. They expected teachers to design more formal and structured teaching activities to support children's learning.

To enrich and deepen teachers' knowledge of cultural diversity and Chinese parents' knowledge of curriculum, a deeper level of teacher-parent communication is needed (Broström, 2003; Meade et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2006). This study found that clear and informative

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communication contributed positively towards partnership construction, and that Chinese-speaking teachers played a crucial role in facilitating the communication between centres and Chinese families.

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## Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

Some findings of this research are congruent with previous studies. For example, cultural differences and language barriers were perceived by all six participants as main factors that hindered the construction of collaborative partnerships between teachers and Chinese immigrant parents (Chan, 2011; Gunn, 2003; Guo, 2006; Loveridge et al., 2012; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012). Additionally, Chinese parents emphasized children's learning of literacy and numeracy, considering these to be academic learning, which enables their children to have a head start (Huang, 2013; Wu, 2009). This study investigated teacher-parent partnerships between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents on a deeper level and generated a conceptual framework for studying partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents. This conceptual framework is comprised of four theoretical concepts, believed to have crucial influences on partnership construction: comprehension of partnerships, intentionality, knowledge of cultural diversity, and teacher-parent communication. This chapter presents discussion about these four theoretical concepts and provides practical suggestions for early childhood practitioners and Chinese immigrant families to develop more desirable, meaningful, and collaborative partnerships.

### 5.2 Comprehension of partnerships needs to be improved

In New Zealand's early childhood education field, "Family and Community" is one of the four principles of the national curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). The Ministry of Education states that "the wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood education curriculum" (p. 14). This statement implies that parents/families of children attending early childhood education services should be involved in children's learning at centres

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(Ministry of Education, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2006). To achieve this, a collaborative teacher-parent partnership is necessary and significant.

The meaning and significance of teacher-parent partnerships is perceived differently by teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents. Early childhood teachers in New Zealand, under the guidance of *Te Whāriki*, do perceive the importance of working in collaboration with Chinese parents and families. However, in terms of the meaning of partnership, the three teachers in this study expressed different levels of understanding. This study found that the concept of partnership was foreign to Chinese parents. Chinese parents typically did not have a clear understanding of partnerships, which hindered their engagement in the construction of partnerships with teachers. This finding accords with Chan (2011), Guo (2006), Grey (2013), Mitchell et al. (2006), Parmar et al. (2004), and Wu (2009), which suggest that Chinese parents are deeply influenced by the traditional Chinese ways of teaching and learning that regard teachers as authority figures who should not be questioned.

To enhance the construction of partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents, both parties need to put deliberate efforts into enriching and deepening their comprehension of the concept of partnership (Duncan et al., 2012). It is suggested that early childhood centres should provide teachers with opportunities for professional learning so that they can understand the core meaning of the concept of partnership. Furthermore, teachers need to be reflective so as to constantly examine their beliefs and teaching practices; this enables teachers to identify strategies that are desirable and effective when building partnerships with Chinese parents (Guo, 2005).

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It is suggested that Chinese parents adapt their educational beliefs, which are deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture, so as to embrace the idea of fostering and expanding children's early learning experiences in partnerships between teachers/centres and parents/families (Ministry of Education, 1996). Moreover, Chinese parents should make the time for communicating with teachers to develop shared responsibilities and common goals for children's learning.

### 5.3 Processes of intentionality benefit partnership construction

Duncan et al. (2012) suggest that intentionality is a key concept when investigating teacher-parent partnerships in New Zealand's early childhood education field. Duncan et al. (2012) present that teachers' intentional actions invite and maintain parental participation, which contributes significantly to all parties, including children, parents, teachers, and the wider community. Malle (2010) identifies five key elements of intentionality, namely, desire, belief, intention, skill, and awareness.

This study suggests that early childhood teachers need to be deliberate, purposeful, and skillful when working with Chinese immigrant parents so as to increase the level of their parental involvement. This increased parental involvement in children's learning will in turn foster the construction of collaborative teacher-parent partnerships as well as community wellness (Duncan et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2006; Zhang, 2012). Intentional actions undertaken by parents positively influence the construction of partnerships (Gottlieb, Feeley, & Dalton, 2006; Zhang, 2012), and thus, Chinese parents also need to put deliberate efforts into enriching their



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understanding of partnerships, conducting more communication with teachers, and providing teachers with more feedback.

Although previous research had identified that teachers' intentional actions improve the effectiveness of partnerships between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents, only one of the three teachers in this study put deliberate efforts in collaborating with Chinese parents (Duncan et al., 2012; Guo, 2005). This situation calls for a need for teachers to improve their skills in empowering Chinese parents to be more involved in their children's learning at both home and centre settings.

This study found that new immigrant Chinese parents were rather passive when working with early childhood teachers. Chinese parents did not normally undertake intentional actions unless they were concerned with children's safety and academic learning. To encourage Chinese parents to be more active and intentional, it is suggested that teachers put purposeful efforts into inviting and empowering Chinese parents to express their feelings and desires and into properly utilizing parents' knowledge (Zhang, 2012). Hughes and MacNaughton (1999) investigate parental involvement in the early childhood education field; they find that many studies report concerns associated with teacher-parent relationships. Hughes and MacNaughton conclude that three key issues may impede the construction of effective teacher-parent partnerships: "parental knowledge being seen as inadequate; parental knowledge as supplementing and being of secondary importance to staff knowledge; and parental knowledge being unimportant" (as cited in Mitchell et al., 2006, p. 10). These issues shed light on the need for teachers to undertake deliberate efforts in constructing a community of learners wherein knowledge and contributions

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of parents are respected and valued (Rogoff, 1994). This study upholds the findings of Hughes and MacNaughton (1999); parents' knowledge was not being wisely used by early childhood teachers in this study. Therefore, it is suggested that early childhood teachers put purposeful efforts into inviting Chinese parents to share their knowledge so as to enrich teachers' understanding and knowledge of cultural differences.

#### 5.4 Knowledge of cultural differences

##### 5.4.1 Developing intercultural competence

Cultural diversity is a double-edged sword; it brings both benefits and challenges to teachers' daily practices. To work with cultural diversity, it is suggested that teachers develop a cultural awareness and acquire knowledge of Chinese parents' unique cultural backgrounds. An awareness of cultural diversity and the knowledge of different cultures assist teachers to develop intercultural competence that helps them enormously in integrating culture-related activities into their daily curricula (Grey, 2013; Nagel & Wells, 2009). Underpinned by *Te Whāriki*, early childhood education services in New Zealand aim at providing a sociocultural context for children's learning and development (Ministry of Education, 1996). This goal can only be achieved when early childhood services are capable of representing the sociocultural context of the current society in early childhood centres, which requires teachers to design learning activities that are relevant to children's diverse cultural and language backgrounds. Thus, in order to provide meaningful learning experiences for children from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, teachers must be deeply knowledgeable about the cultural origin of each child so as to become intercultural competent (Nagel & Wells, 2009; Grey, 2013).

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A cultural awareness enables teachers to integrate Chinese cultural elements into their daily practices, which not only increases Chinese families' sense of belonging, but also offers all children opportunities to sense the flavour of multiculturalism and globalization. Guo (2005) suggests that the increasing number of Asian children entering early childhood settings in New Zealand means that teachers cannot "ignore the need to develop an understanding of Asian cultures and practices that support working collaboratively with Asian families" (p. 125). Guo's (2005) suggestion accords with the national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, which presents that children's families and the communities in which they belong to are an integral part of the early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996). Furthermore, Guo (2013) suggests that contemporary early childhood education provisions should be adaptable so as to capture the ever-changing social and cultural contexts. Specifically, in New Zealand, integrating Chinese culture into the early childhood education curriculum will not only benefit Chinese children, but will also have positive effects on children from other cultural backgrounds. The reasons being, the trend of globalization is irreversible, and it is inevitable that children will live in a globalized world within which many cultures and languages are present when they grow up. Thus, it is significant for children to sense the flavour of multiculturalism and globalization at the very beginning of their lives (Singham, 2006; Guo, 2013).

Teachers' intercultural competence contributes to the construction of an inclusive and responsive community (Grey, 2013). Early childhood education centres should work towards the goal of building an inclusive community within which all members feel they belong and know that they can make a difference by their contributions (Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 2010). To build such a community, it is essential to develop a social and cultural context in early childhood education

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settings (Ministry of Education, 1996). This requires teachers to “acknowledge, respect, and value individuals and groups, thereby nurturing a positive sense of identity” (Gunn, 2003, p. 135). This is to say, early childhood teachers should support the construction of cultural identities of all children, as well as embrace and celebrate cultural differences so as to assist children in gaining an awareness of their own culture and others’ cultures (Ministry of Education, 1996). Guo and Dalli (2012) support the idea of building an inclusive community, but they also add that the community should be culturally responsive. Therefore, to involve and include new immigrant Chinese parents in centre-related activities, teachers should develop intercultural competence (Grey, 2013).

#### 5.4.2 Assisting Chinese parents to recognize the value of play

New immigrant Chinese parents need teachers’ assistance in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the educational benefits of children’s play. This study confirms Guo (2006) and Huang (2013), which present that Chinese parents typically do not perceive the value of children’s play. Therefore, they need teachers’ professional assistance to recognize and acknowledge the educational benefits that play offers children. Chinese parents believe that early childhood centres are places for children to study rather than play (Guo, 2006). Huang (2013) finds one Chinese parent participant felt that there was no point in sending her child to early childhood centres to play when she can play with her child at home herself. This mother’s expression illustrates that some Chinese parents hold the view that the function of early childhood centres should be educating children rather than providing them with a place to play (Huang, 2013). Huang suggests that early childhood teachers work closely with Chinese parents so as to effectively communicate to them about the value of play for children’s learning. In doing

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so, Chinese parents are enabled to recognize the educational benefits of children's play so that they become willing supporters of the play that simultaneously fosters children's learning (Mitchell et al., 2006).

Chinese parents expect teachers to justify the play-based curriculum of early childhood centres. In order to maximize the opportunity for their children to obtain educational benefits in the social and cultural context of New Zealand, Chinese immigrant parents normally adjust their educational beliefs and aspirations for their children's early learning (Wu, 2009; Yang, 2011). For example, Chinese parents in New Zealand start valuing children's emotional well-being and communication skills instead of focusing solely on children's academic performance (Liao, 2007; Yang, 2011). However, due to their insufficient knowledge of the educational system in New Zealand, Chinese parents sometimes do not perceive the outcomes of children's learning at centres (Zhang, 2012). Many Chinese parents challenge the pedagogy of utilizing play to foster children's learning (Yang, 2011). Chinese parents are more likely to agree to the value of play when they know that play activities have positive influences on their children's learning and cognitive development (Liao, 2007). Thus, teachers should justify the play-based curriculum utilized in centres.

A clear explanation of the centre's curriculum enables Chinese parents to recognize the value of play, which in turn contributes to the development of shared understanding between teachers and Chinese parents. Chinese parents and early childhood teachers hold different views on children's early learning. Educational goals and aspirations for children's learning should be shared and discussed between teachers and Chinese parents (Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999).

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A clear explanation of curriculum benefits both teachers and Chinese parents. It offers Chinese parents rich information about what their children learn and how learning happens at centres, which invites Chinese parents to share their knowledge with teachers.

## 5.5 Communication

### 5.5.1 More communication is needed

This study suggests that more communication regarding children's learning and teachers' practices should be conducted between teachers and Chinese immigrant parents. Although many Chinese parents agree that early childhood education services in New Zealand offer better education for their children compared with kindergartens in China, they have difficulty in understanding the value and purpose of the unstructured, child-focused, and play-based early childhood curriculum (Mitchell et al., 2006). This difficulty is caused by insufficient teacher-parent communication, which is a consequence of language and cultural differences (Chan, 2011; Loveridge et al., 2012). It is reasonable to conclude that the insufficient communication between teachers and Chinese parents has resulted in parents' limited knowledge of the value of play and the curriculum of early childhood centres in New Zealand (Guo, 2006; Zhang, 2012).

Discussions around the area of children's learning and teachers' practices between teachers and Chinese parents will generate a great sense of shared endeavour that will further contribute to the development of a community of learners in which all members are active participants and learners whose learning occurs simultaneously when they participate in community activities (Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 2010). Once parents become active and willing community members, it is likely that a collaborative teacher-parent partnership will start burgeoning. When

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communicating with Chinese parents, teachers need to ensure that the information they deliver is accurate and meaningful. It is suggested that teachers communicate more with Chinese parents in terms of curriculum design and the educational benefits of children's play (Yang, 2011).

Teacher-parent communication should be conducted bidirectionally by both parents and teachers (Mitchell et al., 2006). Specifically, Chinese parents should actively ask teachers for information about their children's learning at centres so they can support their children's learning at home, bearing the centres' practices and curricula in mind. In the meantime, teachers should willingly seek information from Chinese parents about children's home learning experiences, and subsequently reflect on their daily practices to reform, redirect, or reconstruct their practices and curricula for the purpose of offering meaningful and continuous learning experiences for children (Mitchell et al., 2006). In doing so, teachers and Chinese parents work collaboratively towards a negotiated shared goal to provide children with a challenging, stimulating, and continuous learning environment, in both home and centre environments (Mitchell et al., 2006). This study identified that Chinese-speaking teachers contribute significantly to inviting Chinese parents to initiate communication (Guo, 2005).

Chinese parents are generally quiet when working with teachers, and this silence in teacher-parent partnerships leads to a discontinuity in their children's learning. This finding supports Wu (2009), which indicates that most Chinese immigrant parents would not communicate their concerns with teachers or centres. Wu (2009) considers that the reason Chinese parents were silent was that they believed their children should be learning ways of

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living in New Zealand, and teachers were trained in teaching children to live in New Zealand's mainstream society. This consideration implies that Chinese children may experience a discontinuity in learning between centre and home settings. To illustrate, although Chinese parents believe that their children should learn to live in the mainstream society of New Zealand, they do not see themselves as being capable of giving this type of education to their children (Wu, 2009). In their family settings, Chinese parents mostly educate children in their own ways, which may not be congruent and sometimes conflict with teaching practices at centres. Therefore, it is highly likely that Chinese children experience a discontinuity in learning between home and early childhood centre settings. In this sense, for the purpose of offering children's learning a continuity, it is crucial to increase the level of parental involvement and commitment of Chinese parents in their children's learning at centres by building collaborative teacher-parent partnerships (Zhang, 2012). Increased parental involvement and commitments enable Chinese parents to obtain more information about their children's learning at centres so that they are empowered to support children's learning at home accordingly (Ministry of Education, 1996).

#### 5.5.2 Communication offers children's learning a centre-home continuity

Cultural differences make Chinese children's learning discontinuous. In New Zealand, Chinese children are normally educated at home by their parents, whose beliefs and values about education are largely influenced by Chinese culture, while they also attend mainstream early childhood education services that are dominated by Western culture (Liao, 2007). This situation has led to a discontinuity of Chinese children's learning when they move between the home and the centre. Li (2006) considers that this discontinuity may have negative impacts on children's learning. This study confirms findings of Liao (2007) and Li (2006), as all three participant



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mothers expressed their willingness to support their children's learning at home. However, the education they provided for their children was inconsistent with the education that the children received at centres. To offer children's learning a continuity, teachers need to gain an understanding of children's home learning activities, which will facilitate ongoing teacher-parent communication that further assists adults to support children's ongoing and continuous learning (Yang, 2011).

The communication of aspirations for children's learning and the sharing of knowledge between teachers and Chinese parents assist adults to provide a continuity for children's learning. Sharing and communicating perspectives and knowledge about children's education from different views and from different settings can assist both teachers and parents to expand and better support children's learning at home as well as in early childhood centres (Mitchell et al., 2006). This study suggests teachers to adopt an interculturalist stance. Interculturalism is "the sharing and learning across cultures that promotes understanding, equality, harmony, and justice in a diverse society" (Loyola Marymount University, 1990, cited in Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012, p. 23). In early childhood settings, interculturalism means that teachers and parents work closely to share knowledge and information about their cultures to collaboratively foster children's learning (Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012). When teachers adopt an interculturalist stance, it has the potential to enrich both teachers' and Chinese parents' knowledge and understanding of children's learning. This interculturalist stance adopted by teachers would enable them to develop intercultural competence and understanding that assist teachers to work more collaboratively with Chinese parents (Grey, 2013).

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### 5.5.3 Clear and informative documentation of children's learning

Utilizing learning stories as a means of providing parents with information about children's learning at centres has brought both benefits and challenges to new immigrant Chinese parents (Wu, 2009). On the one hand, having a chance to read their children's learning stories affords Chinese parents opportunities to better understand their children's learning and the curriculum of the early childhood centre. The reason being, due to their limited English proficiency, it is better for Chinese parents to obtain information about their children's learning by reading written learning stories rather than through verbal communication with teachers (Guo, 2005).

Nevertheless, utilizing learning stories to foster parental involvement is sometimes problematic when it comes to practice (Wu, 2009). Although Chinese parents were frequently invited and encouraged to write comments about their children's learning, the centre's practice, or any concerns they may have had when they were provided with their children's learning stories, some Chinese parents did not know what to write, while others, who put considerable efforts into writing comments, did not receive any feedback or response from teachers.

To make the best use children's learning stories in fostering partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents, stories should be clear and informative so that parents can follow them. The Ministry of Education (2009) claims that parents from diverse social and cultural backgrounds show different preferences for particular types of communication and interaction manners. For example, Chinese parents might be more comfortable with receiving information in written form from teachers (Wu, 2009). The findings of this study show that the three Chinese mothers were not satisfied with their children's learning stories, as the information contained in learning stories

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was limited. Thus, Chinese parents expect teachers to clearly document children's learning experiences in early childhood centres.

## 5.6 Summary

This chapter presented discussions regarding the concepts of comprehension of partnerships, intentionality, knowledge of cultural diversity, and communication, which are believed to have crucial impacts on partnership construction between early childhood education teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents.

It is suggested that both teachers and Chinese parents improve and enrich their comprehension of partnerships. Early childhood education centres need to provide opportunities to teachers for professional learning so that teachers obtain the core meaning of partnerships, which involves mutual respect, constant collaboration, shared understanding, empowering, and engaging (Gottlieb et al., 2006; Montuori & Conti, 1995). Chinese parents need to break their stereotyped comprehension of partnerships resulting from the traditional Chinese ways of learning and teaching, and they need to adapt their educational beliefs to embrace the idea that children learn through play. Parents and teachers need to work in collaboration to foster and expand children's early learning.

Teachers are suggested to develop a cultural awareness and acquire knowledge of Chinese families' specific cultural backgrounds, so that they can skillfully build a community of learners that enables Chinese parents to feel they are respected and valued. A community of learners enables shared understanding between teachers and Chinese parents to be developed, as it

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fosters meaningful and informative teacher-parent communication that is found to be limited.

This study found the communication between teachers and Chinese parents to be problematic. Both teachers and Chinese parents perceived the fact that there was not enough communication being conducted between them. Thus, this study suggests that teachers and Chinese parents need to communicate more with each other. The content of communication should focus on things like children's centre-based and home-based learning experiences, centres' curricula, and teachers' daily practices. Furthermore, as the main way of written communication, learning stories need to be utilized wisely by teachers. This study found that Chinese parents believed that the information contained in learning stories was too limited. Thus, teachers need to ensure that the content of learning stories is informative and meaningful.

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## Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

### 6.1 Introduction

This research investigated the perceptions of a number of New Zealand early childhood teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents regarding the concept of partnership and regarding the intentional actions they undertake when creating collaborative partnerships. It developed a theoretical and conceptual framework for examining partnerships, specifically between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents, in the early childhood education sector of New Zealand. This chapter presents the key findings, implications, limitations, and contributions of this research.

### 6.2 Summary of key findings

This study found that the understanding of partnerships of both New Zealand early childhood teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents needs to be improved and enriched. Specifically, early childhood teachers hold different levels of understanding of partnerships. Some teachers understand partnership on a surface level, believing that partnerships with new immigrant Chinese parents are about working with the Chinese community and respecting Chinese parents, while other teachers hold deeper understanding, considering that partnership involves constant collaboration, communication, shared understanding, empowering, and involvement. Chinese parents typically showed a misunderstanding of partnerships, believing that parents and teachers should take the responsibility for children in the home environment and the centre setting, respectively. This view on partnership is possibly influenced by the traditional Chinese ways of learning and teaching, which regard teachers as authority figures, not to be intervened with or questioned.

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This study also found that teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents do indeed undertake intentional actions in the process of building effective partnerships. However, Chinese parents only undertook intentional actions in certain situations. For example, Chinese parents would initiate communication with teachers when they were concerned with their children's safety and academic learning (see table 2). The ways through which early childhood teachers carried out intentional actions differed significantly; one teacher took 4 types, another took 5 types, and the third took 10 types of intentional actions when working with Chinese immigrant parents (see table 1).

This study found that Chinese parents' knowledge of the play-based curriculum was limited. Chinese parents commonly held a narrow view on learning, having difficulty in recognizing the value of play for children's early learning. Chinese parents typically showed a preference for a formal, structured, and organized approach to teaching and learning.

Teachers' knowledge of cultural diversity differed. Some teachers perceived the potential benefits that cultural diversity offered to children's early experiences in terms of learning of another language and sensing the flavour of globalization. Other teachers believed that cultural diversity was a double-edged sword, bringing both benefits and challenges to their daily practices. Cultural differences, on the one hand, made many teachers' daily practices difficult when developing partnerships with cultural minority families. On the other hand, it offered teachers learning opportunities to acquire knowledge of diverse cultures so as to enrich the curricula of centres.

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The study also found communication between teachers and Chinese parents to be problematic. Both teachers and Chinese parents acknowledged the fact that there was little communication going on between them. Chinese parents expected teachers to provide them with clear, informative, and lively information, but the information teachers delivered to parents was sometimes found to be irrelevant or vague. Discourses offered by one particular teacher participant indicated that the richness and relevance of the information that teachers offer parents influenced the effectiveness of teacher-parent partnerships.

### 6.3 Implications

The findings of this research have significant implications for early childhood education provisions, for teachers, and for new immigrant Chinese parents. To enrich teachers' understanding of the concept of partnership, it is suggested that early childhood centres offer teachers opportunities for professional learning so that teachers can understand the concept of partnership fully and deeply, develop an awareness of diverse cultures, and acquire knowledge of Chinese families' unique cultural backgrounds (Grey, 2013). In addition, teachers should engage in self-reflection regularly to examine their beliefs and practices (Guo, 2005); in doing so, teachers are enabled to identify effective and practical strategies for working with Chinese parents and to reconstruct and redesign their practices where necessary.

Chinese parents should adapt their educational beliefs, deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture, so as to embrace the idea of fostering and expanding children's early learning experiences through partnerships between teachers/centres and parents/families (Ministry of

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Education, 1996). In other words, Chinese parents need to put deliberate efforts into enriching their knowledge of New Zealand early childhood centres' curricula and philosophies. For example, Chinese parents should take the courage to initiate communication and negotiation with teachers; this enables the development of a shared understanding of children's learning and a shared responsibility for children's learning between parents and teachers.

Chinese parents need assistance from teachers in gaining knowledge of the play-based curriculum in early childhood centres. Play is widely used in the early childhood education field in New Zealand as a vehicle for fostering children's learning. It enables children to lead their own learning and offers children the freedom to explore. However, many Chinese parents do not perceive the educational benefits of children's play and they expect teachers to involve children in more structured and formal learning activities. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers develop culturally-appropriate strategies to deliver informative and meaningful information to Chinese parents. For instance, teachers could utilize the identified effective intentional strategies to work with Chinese parents. Specifically, having a Chinese speaking staff member to communicate to Chinese parents regarding centres' practices and children's learning is desirable. Moreover, documenting children's learning stories clearly and informative could provide Chinese parents with meaningful information. These strategies have been found to be particularly effective and engaging when building partnerships with Chinese parents. Chinese parents' knowledge of the early childhood education in New Zealand is enriched when these strategies are utilized.

#### 6.4 Limitations

Two main limitations of this study need to be addressed. Firstly, the small sample size of this



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research limits the generalizability of the findings of this research. Data was collected from only six participants: three qualified New Zealand early childhood teachers and three new immigrant Chinese parents. It would be unwise to generalize the findings of this research to develop a statement on the construction of partnerships between all teachers and Chinese parents in the early childhood education field in New Zealand. Future research on this topic might need to involve a larger sample size to develop a fuller picture of how teachers and Chinese parents intentionally develop partnerships with each other. Secondly, the selection of participants for this research was random, which meant that the participant teachers and Chinese parents were not actually in the same partnerships. Thus, the findings of this research could not provide evidence of how teachers and Chinese parents perceived their partnerships differently. To investigate how the two parties perceive the same teacher-parent partnership, further research should involve teacher-parent pairs.

## 6.5 Contributions and conclusions

This qualitative research set out to investigate both New Zealand early childhood teachers' and new immigrant Chinese parents' perceptions of partnerships and the intentional actions they undertook when building effective partnerships. This research built upon previous research that sought to ascertain the dynamics that contribute to teacher-parent partnerships between Chinese immigrant parents and New Zealand early childhood teachers. Previous research identified that cultural differences and language barriers are the two main factors hindering the construction of effective partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2005; Gunn, 2003; Loveridge et al., 2012; Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2012). This research investigated these two main factors on a deeper level. It explored how cultural and language issues influence

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teacher-parent partnerships in aspects of comprehension of partnerships, intentionality, knowledge of cultural diversity, and communication.

This study makes three significant contributions to New Zealand's early childhood education field.

Firstly, this study provides a specific conceptual framework for investigating partnerships between early childhood teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents. This framework contains four key concepts, namely, comprehension of partnerships, intentionality, knowledge of cultural diversity, and communication. Secondly, it offers practical suggestions for intentional actions both teachers and Chinese parents can undertake to improve the effectiveness of their partnerships. Thirdly, this research provides evidence of how a number of teachers and Chinese parents perceive the concept of partnership and the intentional actions they carry out in the process of constructing collaborative partnerships.

The construction of partnerships between teachers and Chinese parents is influenced by both parties' comprehension of partnerships, intentionality, knowledge of cultural diversity, and communication. To foster an effective partnership between teachers and new immigrant Chinese parents, both parties need to undertake intentional actions to enrich their comprehension of partnerships so that they can work together collaboratively to support and expand children's learning. Additionally, teachers and Chinese parents need to engage in meaningful and informative communication so as to develop a shared responsibility for children's learning and a shared understanding of cultural diversity and centres' curricula. The more processes of intentionality teachers and Chinese parents undertake, the better their partnerships will be.

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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet.

Participant Information Sheet for teacher participant



# Participant Information Sheet

## Date Information Sheet Produced:

30/06/2015

## Project Title

Intentionality and partnership: Building effective partnerships between Chinese immigrant parents and early childhood educators in New Zealand

## An Invitation

Kia ora Sir/Madam,

I am Guangming (Kevin) Zhong and I am currently doing Master of Education at AUT. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project which will contribute to my master degree. You can withdraw from this research at any time without any consequences.

## What is the purpose of this research?

This research is to be undertaken in the field of early childhood education. It will investigate intentional actions undertaken by early childhood educators and Chinese immigrant parents when building effective partnerships. The findings of this study are designed to help Chinese immigrant parents and New Zealand early childhood educators to work together more effectively, efficiently, and collaboratively to foster children's learning.

## How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You are invited to participate in this research because you are a qualified New Zealand early childhood teacher who is working with Chinese immigrant parents (or have experiences of working with them) in Auckland, New Zealand. You were given the Participant Information Sheet by an early childhood colleague

## What will happen in this research?

You will participate in an interview which will last 40 to 60 minutes. The time and place for the interview will be discussed between us. The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed into hard copy. The hard copy will then be sent to you so that you can make any change if you want to. Subsequently, I will analyse the hard copy and use it as research data in my thesis. Your identity will not be mentioned in the thesis. You will be sent a summary of this study if you wish after this research is completed.

## What are the discomforts and risks?



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During the interview, you might be asked questions regarding the policies of centre you are working at (or worked at) in terms of building partnerships with cultural minority parents. You might experience discomfort when being asked this type of questions.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If you do experience any physical, emotional, or psychological discomforts during the interviews, you can ask the researcher to stop the interview at any time. Or, you can refuse to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

**What are the benefits?**

Your participation will be highly appreciated as it will contribute enormously to my master degree. Additionally, the findings of this study may help yourself and other early childhood teachers to work more collaboratively with Chinese immigrant parents.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

You will not be identified in the final thesis. Pseudonyms will be used.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There is no cost for you to participate in this research except the time you spend attending the interview.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

If you would like to participate in this research project, please get in touch with the researcher within **2 weeks** after receiving this Participant Information Sheet. Please feel free to ask me any questions regarding this research.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

Once you have expressed an interest in participation, the researcher will send you a Consent Form. After signing and returning the Consent Form to the researcher, you will have agreed to participate in this research.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You will receive a summary of the final thesis if you wish.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Janita Craw: [janita.craw@aut.ac.nz](mailto:janita.craw@aut.ac.nz), 09 921 9999 ext 7325.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTC, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

***Researcher Contact Details:***

Guangming Zhong: [azgmi@163.com](mailto:azgmi@163.com)

***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

Janita Craw: [janita.craw@aut.ac.nz](mailto:janita.craw@aut.ac.nz), 09 921 9999 ext 7325

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 19/08/2015, AUTC Reference number 15/298.

# Participant Information Sheet



## **Date Information Sheet Produced:**

30/06/2015

## **Project Title**

Intentionality and partnership: Building effective partnerships between Chinese immigrant parents and early childhood educators in New Zealand

## **An Invitation**

Kia ora Sir/Madam,

I am Guangming (Kevin) Zhong and I am currently doing Master of Education at AUT. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project which will contribute to my master degree. You can withdraw from this research at any time without any consequences.

## **What is the purpose of this research?**

This research is to be undertaken in the field of early childhood education. It will investigate intentional actions undertaken by early childhood educators and Chinese immigrant parents when building effective partnerships. The findings of this study are designed to help Chinese immigrant parents and New Zealand early childhood educators to work together more effectively, efficiently, and collaboratively to foster children's learning.

## **How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

You are invited to participate in this research because you are China-born Chinese who has or has had at least one child attending early childhood services in Auckland, New Zealand.

## **What will happen in this research?**

You will participate in an interview which will last 40 to 60 minutes. The time and place for the interview will be discussed between us. The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed into hard copy. The hard copy will then be sent to you so that you can make any change if you want to. Subsequently, I will analyse the hard copy and use it as research data in my thesis. Your identity will not be mentioned in the thesis. You will be sent a summary of this study if you wish after this research is completed.

## **What are the discomforts and risks?**

During the interview, you might be asked questions regarding your perceptions about early childhood education in New Zealand. You might feel uncomfortable about this kind of questions as you might not agree with the idea of using Chinese language, and using play as a method of learning at early childhood centres.

## **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

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If you do experience any physical, emotional, or psychological discomforts during the interviews, you can ask the researcher to stop the interview at any time. Or, you can refuse to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

**What are the benefits?**

Your participation will be highly appreciated as it will contribute enormously to my master degree. Additionally, the findings of this study may help yourself and other early childhood teachers to work more collaboratively with Chinese immigrant parents.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

None of your identity features will be mentioned in the thesis so that you will not be identified. The information provided by you will only be used in the final thesis of this research or other academic publications or presentations regarding this study.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There is no cost for you to participate in this research except the time you spend attending the interview.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

If you would like to participate in this research project, please get in touch with the researcher within **2 weeks** after receiving this Participant Information Sheet. Please feel free to ask me any questions regarding this research.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

Once you have expressed an interest in participation, the researcher will send you a Consent Form. After signing and returning the Consent Form to the researcher, you will have agreed to participate in this research.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You will receive a copy of the summary of the final thesis if you wish.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Janita Craw: [janita.craw@aut.ac.nz](mailto:janita.craw@aut.ac.nz), 09 921 9999 ext 7325.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTC, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

***Researcher Contact Details:***

Guangming Zhong: [azgmi@163.com](mailto:azgmi@163.com)

***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

Janita Craw: [janita.craw@aut.ac.nz](mailto:janita.craw@aut.ac.nz), 09 921 9999 ext 7325

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 19/08/2015, AUTC Reference number 15/298.

# 研究参与者需知



日期:

30/06/2015

研究课题名称:

意向性与合作关系：在中国移民父母和学前教育教师之间建立有效的合作关系

研究邀请

亲爱的家长，您好，

我叫仲光明，目前在奥克兰理工大学就读教育学硕士。我想邀请您参与到我的研究课题中来，您的参与将帮助我完成我的硕士学位论文。在研究过程中，您可以在任何时间选择退出，您的退出不会对您造成任何损失和影响。

本课题的宗旨和目标

此课题的目的是要探究在学前教育领域中中国移民父母和新西兰教师在建立合作关系时采取的意向性的行为。此课题的研究结果将帮助中国移民父母和新西兰学前教育老师建立更有效的合作关系，从而让中国儿童在新西兰能得到更优质的学前教育。

我是怎样被选中并邀请参与这个研究计划的

您被选中并邀请参与这个研究计划是因为您是出生在中国的华人；同时，您有孩子正在（或者曾经在）奥克兰参加过学前教育。

研究过程中会发生什么

您将参加一个 40 到 60 分钟的访谈。时间和地点将由我们共同讨论决定。我将对我们之间的访谈进行录音，然后我会把录音转录成文字形式。转录完成后我会把复印件发给您，您可以对我理解错误的地方进行更改。之后，我会分析我们的访谈内容，并且把访谈内容写在我的论文里面。您的个人信息不会在论文中出现。我的论文完成后，如果您希望，您将收到一份本课题研究结果的复印件。

访谈会不会让我感到不适或者产生风险

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访谈过程中，研究者可能会问您关于您对新西兰学前教育看法的问题。您可能对这类问题感到不舒服，因为您可能对在幼儿园使用中文，和对小朋友在幼儿园玩的太多感到不舒服。

### **如何降低风险和不适的感觉**

在访谈过程中，如果您有任何的身体、情感和心理上的不适，您可以随时要求结束这次访谈。同时，如果某个问题让您感到不适，您可以拒绝回答这个问题。

### **这项研究课题的益处**

非常感谢您的参与，您的参与将帮助我完成我的硕士论文。同时，此研究课题的结果将帮助中国移民父母和新西兰学前教育教师更好的合作，从而给中国儿童提供更优质的学前教育。

### **我的隐私怎样被保护**

您的个人信息不会在论文中出现。您提供的信息只会在本课题的论文中，或者有关本课题的出版物或演讲中出现。

### **参与这个课题我需要付出什么**

参与此课题您不需要支付任何费用，唯一需要的就是 40 到 60 分钟的访谈时间。

### **我有多长时间来考虑是否参加这个课题**

如果您想参加我的课题，请您在收到这个研究参与者需知**两周内**与我取得联系。如果您有什么问题请随时和我联系。

### **我需要做什么来同意参加这个课题**

如果您对这个课题感兴趣，我将发送给您一份研究访问同意书，请您在上面签字之后交还给我。这样您将成为一名研究课题参与者。

### **我可以了解到研究结果吗**

如果您感兴趣，我将发送给您一份此课题的研究结果的复印件。

### **如果我对这个课题有疑虑应该怎么办**

如果您对此研究课题有任何疑虑，请联系本课题的监督指导者，Janita Crow: janita.crow@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 ext 7325。

如果您对此课题的研究过程有任何不满，请联系奥克兰理工大学研究委员会，Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038。

### **我应该联系谁如果我需要更多的关于此课题的信息**

**研究者本人：**

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仲光明: azgmi@163.com

**研究监督指导者:**

*Janita Crow:* janita.craw@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 ext 7325

感谢您的支持。

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 19/08/2015, AUTECH Reference number 15/298.**

Consent Form for teacher participant

# Consent Form



Project title: Intentionality and partnership: Building effective partnerships between Chinese immigrant parents and early childhood educators in New Zealand

Project Supervisor: Janita Craw

Researcher: Guangming Zhong

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the **Information Sheet** dated 30/06/2015
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 19/08/2015**  
**AUTEC Reference number 15/298**

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

# 研究访问同意书



课题名称: 意向性与合作关系:  
在中国移民父母和学前教育教师之间建立有效的合作关系  
指导教师: Janita Craw  
研究者: Guangming Zhong (仲光明)

- ☐ 我已经通过阅读 **研究参与者需知 (30/06/2015)** 了解到此课题的信息。
- ☐ 我已经获得机会去问关于此课题的问题, 并且已经得到回答。
- ☐ 我知道在访谈过程中研究者将做记录, 并且访谈过程将被录音而后由研究者转录成文字形式。
- ☐ 我知道在研究资料收集完成之前, 我可以在任何时候选择退出, 并且不会造成任何后果。
- ☐ 如果我选择退出, 我知道所有的关于我的资料将被摧毁。
- ☐ 我同意参加这项研究课题
- ☐ 我想要得到一份研究报告 (请选择一项): 是 ☐ 否 ☐

参与者签字:

.....

参与者姓名:

.....

参与者联系方式 (如果可以提供):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

日期:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 19/08/2015**

**AUTEC Reference number 15/298**

请注意: 研究参与者需保留一份此文件



**Indicative Interview Questions for interviewing parents (Chinese translation is put in the bracket):**

1. What do you know about early childhood education in New Zealand? (关于新西兰的学前教育您有哪些理解?)
2. By what methods do you get information about your child's learning at centre? (您是听过什么途径了解到您的孩子在学校的学习状况的?)
3. How do you describe your partnership with the teachers? (您怎样描述您和孩子老师之间的合作关系?)
4. How do you see the importance of teacher-parent partnerships for children's learning? (您怎样看待父母老师的合作关系在孩子学习中的重要性?)
5. How has your partnership with the teachers been formed and sustained? (您和老师的合作关系是怎么建立的?)
6. What benefits have you got from teacher-parent partnership? (您从和老师的合作关系中获得了什么?)
7. Is there anything else you can tell me about building effective teacher-parent partnerships? (关于老师和家长的合作关系您还有其它想和我分享的吗?)

**Indicative Interview Questions for interviewing teachers:**

1. How do you see the cultural diversity in the early childhood education sector in New Zealand?
2. How do you think about the importance of teacher-parent partnerships, for teachers, parents, children, and the community?
3. Specifically, how do you see the importance of working together with Chinese parents?
4. How would you describe your partnerships with Chinese parents?
5. What intentional actions do you undertake to foster and sustain the partnerships between you and Chinese parents?
6. Have you found any strategies that are particularly effective when working with Chinese parents?
7. Is there anything else you can tell me about building effective teacher-parent partnerships?

Invitation Letter for teacher participant

# Invitation For Participation



Kia ora Madam/Sir,

My name is Guangming (Kevin) Zhong and I am doing Master of Education at Auckland University of Technology under the supervision of senior lecturer Janita Craw. I am currently undertaking a research project named **“Intentionality and partnership: Building effective partnerships between Chinese immigrant parents and early childhood educators in New Zealand”**. I am looking for three qualified New Zealand early childhood teachers to participate in my research.

To participate in this research, you firstly need to be qualified teacher in the early childhood education field of New Zealand; moreover, you need to be working or have experience(s) of working with Chinese immigrant parents. Being a participant of this research means that you will be invited to attend an interview that will last 40-60 minutes. **If you are interested in my research project or wanting to be one of my research participants, please contact:**

Student Researcher: Guangming (Kevin) Zhong

Email: [azgmi@163.com](mailto:azgmi@163.com)

Supervisor of the research: Janita Craw

Email: [janita.craw@aut.ac.nz](mailto:janita.craw@aut.ac.nz)

Phone: 09 921 9999 ext 7325

Your interest and participation will be highly appreciated. You will be sent a copy of the final findings of this research project if you wish.

# Invitation For Participation



Kia ora Madam/Sir,

My name is Guangming (Kevin) Zhong and I am doing Master of Education at Auckland University of Technology under the supervision of Janita Craw. I am currently undertaking a research project named **“Intentionality and partnership: Building effective partnerships between Chinese immigrant parents and early childhood educators in New Zealand”**. I am looking for three parents of Chinese immigrant children to participate in my research.

To participate in this research, you firstly need to be China-born Chinese; moreover, you need to have or have had at least one child attending early childhood service(s) in Auckland, New Zealand. Being a participant of this research means that you will be invited to attend an interview that will last 40-60 minutes. **If you are interested in my research project or wanting to be one of my research participants, please contact:**

Student Researcher: Guangming (Kevin) Zhong

Email: [azgmi@163.com](mailto:azgmi@163.com)

Supervisor of the research: Janita Craw

Email: [janita.craw@aut.ac.nz](mailto:janita.craw@aut.ac.nz)

Phone: 09 921 9999 ext 7325

Your interest and participation will be highly appreciated. You will be sent a copy of the final findings of this research project if you wish.

# 诚征研究 课题参与者



您好，

我叫仲光明，我是奥克兰理工大学的教育学硕士在读的学生，我的导师是 Janita Crow。我现在在做  
一个研究课题，题目是：“意向性和合作关系：在中国移民孩子父母和学前教育教师之间建立有  
效的合作关系”。现在，我在寻找三位中国儿童的父母来参加我的研究课题。

参与这个课题，您首先需要是在中国出生的华人；此外，您需要有（或者有过）最少一个小孩在  
奥克兰接受学前教育。作为一个课题参与者，您将被邀请参加一个 40 到 60 分钟的访谈。如果您  
对我的研究计划有兴趣或者想要参与到我的研究计划当中来，请您联系：

研究发起人： 仲光明 (Kevin)

Email: [azgmi@163.com](mailto:azgmi@163.com)

本课题导师： Janita Crow

Email: [janita.craw@aut.ac.nz](mailto:janita.craw@aut.ac.nz)

Phone: 09 921 9999 ext 7325

非常感谢您的参与。如果您希望，我将在课题完成之后发送给您一份本课题的主要发现。