

Transnational parenting practices of Chinese immigrant families in New Zealand

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Abstract

This article advocates for fluid pedagogies that align with the transnational parenting practices of immigrant families. New Zealand is now considered to be a superdiverse country with a large population of immigrants. This superdiversity phenomenon can therefore also be found in its early childhood education settings. Research has indicated that many contemporary immigrants are transnationals who maintain close connections with their home countries and frequently engage in border-crossing activities. Transnational immigrants are mobile, and their parenting strategies may be similarly fluid. This article uses findings from a research project which involved Chinese immigrant families to illustrate transnational perspectives of early childhood education and parenting practices. Narrative excerpts are presented and analysed using key theoretical constructs of transnationalism to illustrate the participants' cultural dilemmas in their parenting, their preparedness to adapt their heritage practices and to adopt early childhood education discourses of the host country, and their agency in choosing parenting strategies that they believed best support their children's learning. It highlights the importance of parent–teacher dialogue and of enacting a curriculum with fluid pedagogies that are responsive to heterogeneous parental aspirations.

Keywords

Chinese immigrants, fluidity, parenting practices, pedagogies, transnational

Introduction

The notion of transnationalism has been used widely in contemporary immigrant studies (Bartley and Spoonley, 2008; González Bareaa et al., 2010; Huang and Yeoh, 2005, Levitt, 2001; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007; Waters, 2005; Zhang and Guo, 2015), and it has strong implications for pedagogical approaches. In her book *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Ong (1999: 4) explains that '*trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as

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changing the nature of something'. Transnationalism conceptualises a new form of migration and practices. It contests previous understandings of migration which involve permanent settlement and ultimate assimilation. Instead, it suggests that contemporary immigrants resist assimilation; they engage often in border-crossing, and their practices are fluid and hybrid (Bartley, 2003). Over recent decades, there has been an influx of transnational immigrants into New Zealand (Bartley and Spoonley, 2008; Ip, 2002, 2003; Spoonley and Bedford, 2012), and their children may very well be enrolled in early childhood education (ECE) settings.

The New Zealand ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), expects teachers to work collaboratively with families to enhance the learning and development of children; yet teachers may not be familiar with practices of transnational families. This article, therefore, argues that it is crucial for teachers to be aware of and consider aligning pedagogies with transnational parenting practices in order to enact the aspirations of *Te Whāriki*. Findings from a research project which involved a group of transnational Chinese immigrant parents whose children were enrolled in New Zealand ECE are used to support this argument. This article will first explain the contexts of ECE and Chinese immigrant families in New Zealand, and utilise several seminal pieces on transnationalism (e.g. Goldberg, 2002; Levitt, 2003; Ong, 1999; Vertovec, 1999; Yeoh, 2006) to conceptualise the identities and practices of these families. The methodology of the study will then be described before findings are presented. Implications of the findings will be analysed, and a fluid pedagogical approach will be recommended at the end of this article.

Contextualising the study

New Zealand has a large population of immigrants, and it is now described as a superdiverse country (Royal Society of New Zealand, 2013; Spoonley, 2015). According to the most recent census, New Zealand is home to more than 200 ethnic groups and 160 different languages; one in four people were born overseas; around 4% of its population identified as being Chinese; and immigrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) have become the second-largest immigrant group in the country (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Auckland is the most popular destination for immigrants, and 40% of its residents were not born in New Zealand (Spoonley and Bedford, 2012). The census further shows that 23.1% of Aucklanders identified with an 'Asian' ethnic group (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).¹

Chinese immigrants have a long history in New Zealand. They first arrived as gold miners in the mid-1800s and later as vegetable gardeners (Spoonley and Bedford, 2012). They were considered a 'model minority' who were prepared to give up their Chinese heritage in order to integrate and become 'good' New Zealand citizens (Ip, 2003). Yet Chinese immigrants who have come to New Zealand in the last two to three decades are transnationals who maintain close contact with their homeland and frequently engage in border-crossing activities (Bartley and Spoonley, 2008; Ip, 2002, 2003; Spoonley and Bedford, 2012). For these transnational Chinese immigrants in New Zealand, 'commuting is the norm, and [it is likely] that they will remain bi-local or multi-local, never forfeiting their options of maintaining frequent contact with both their country of origin and their country of adoption' (Ip, 2000: 4).

Statistics provided by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2014) indicate that the enrolment of 'Asian' children in ECE settings which cater for children from birth to five years old has increased significantly in the last decade, and that 'Asian' has become one of the largest ethnic groups represented. The national ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), promotes many discourses, such as parent-teacher partnership, independence, and child-oriented and play-based pedagogy, which shape the practices of ECE teachers. Since different countries embrace and practise different discourses, immigrants who are new to New Zealand may not be familiar

with these dominant ECE discourses (Chan, 2011). A national survey found that ECE teachers in New Zealand are mainly 'second- or third-generation New Zealanders' who have 'limited international experiences' (Cherrington and Shuker, 2012: 87). These ECE teachers may lack an understanding of transnational parenting practices. Possible differences and misunderstandings may create 'them' and 'us' binaries (Arzubiaga et al., 2009; Ní Laoire et al., 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007) between teachers and immigrant families, which may inhibit collaboration.

Conceptualising transnational identities and practices

Transnationalism refers to 'multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states' (Vertovec, 1999: 447). Many contemporary immigrants engage in frequent border-crossing or transnational activities, and some have their homes and families established concurrently in both sending and receiving countries (Bartley, 2003; Levitt, 2003). This mode of migration has introduced a new form of identity – that of transnationality. Transnational individuals have nuanced motivations underlying their identity choices because of their connection with at least two cultural settings, and because they are maintaining and creating their futures in two or more places (Bartley, 2003; Levitt, 2003). Their dual or even multiple identities, when used instrumentally, allow them simultaneously to integrate and remain transnational (Levitt, 2003). Transnational individuals, therefore, often have a repertoire of identities, shifting memberships and ethnicities, and their transnational practices are similarly fluid and flexible (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). Research further shows that transnationals are active agents in utilising their experiences and knowledge from their home and host countries to extend their 'cultural repertoire' by combining their old and new capital in order to 'get ahead' (Levitt, 2001: 57).

Transnationals can be considered a threat to 'stable' nations, which traditionally were considered as the base for building collective identity, ideology and security (Yeoh, 2006). Nations, however, have become increasingly dynamic and heterogeneous, comprising members of communities who engage in ongoing movement between countries and cultures (Goldberg, 2002). The sense of stability is potentially challenged by these hypermobile transnationals and their 'unstable' practices (Yeoh, 2006), destabilising the national identity and collective heritage of both receiving and sending nations (Goldberg, 2002; Spoonley and Bedford, 2012). Hence, transnational immigrants can be perceived by people from both receiving and sending countries as disloyal, and they can become marginalised and excluded when they identify themselves, respectively, with the adopted country and their ancestral homeland (Goldberg, 2002). It should be noted, however, that some transnational individuals who engage in frequent border-crossings do not necessarily have fluid and flexible identities. They simply maintain a strong identification with the sending country because of their intention to return (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007).

Contemporary Chinese immigrants' transnational practices

For many Chinese transnational immigrants, migration 'is not necessarily an irrevocable step' (Ip, 2000: 6), and some of them have 'flexible citizenship' (Ong, 1999: 6) with multiple passports and/or identities. For example, after obtaining their New Zealand citizenship and passport, Chinese transnationals may leave New Zealand for another country or return to their home country for better job opportunities. This is particularly likely if they are unable to gain satisfactory employment in the host country or when life in the new country does not unfold as planned, and they have had to engage in transnational activities 'by necessity' (Ip, 2000: 8), making them 'reluctant transnationals' (Bartley, 2003: 71).

Contemporary Chinese transnationals are sometimes characterised as ‘astronauts’, who are often educated business entrepreneurs and professionals (Ong, 1999; Waters, 2005). Ip (2000) explains that the term ‘astronaut’ was originally coined to describe the Hong Kong-Chinese immigrants who commuted frequently between their host and home countries. The astronaut is, typically, ‘the chief breadwinner of the family, usually the man, who flies periodically back to his wife and children left at the new destination, while he continues with his business in Hong Kong’ (Ip, 2000: 4), because he is unable to gain satisfactory employment in the host country. Reunions for these transnational families are sporadic. Previous research findings show that these astronaut strategies were commonly employed by many recent Chinese immigrants to New Zealand (Henderson, 2003; Ip, 2000).

Furthermore, Chinese astronauts often ‘drop off’ their ‘parachute kids’ (Ong, 1999: 19) or ‘satellite kids’ (Waters, 2005: 365) with relatives in English-speaking host countries to experience a ‘Western’ education. Research shows that many Chinese immigrants come to New Zealand to seek a better education for their children (Ip, 2002; Spoonley and Bedford, 2012), and it is common for immigrants to use education as a form of capital for upward social mobility (Dandy and Nettelbeck, 2002; Levitt, 2001; Ong, 1999; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Waters, 2005; Wu and Singh, 2004). Through engaging in transnational activities, Chinese immigrants ‘acquire a range of symbolic capital to facilitate their positioning, economic negotiation, and cultural acceptance in different geographical sites’ (Ong, 1999: 18), and they may commit to and have a sense of belonging in more than one country simultaneously (Chan, 2003; Ong, 1999).

Transnational activities are more than mere geographical border-crossings. They also include sustaining emotional connections with the home country (Dreby, 2010) and continual references to home cultures and practices (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007). The learning and development of immigrants’ children are highly likely to be influenced by their parents’ transnational activities. Even if these children are not directly involved in as many transnational activities as their parents, they are exposed continuously to their parents’ transnational perspectives and practices (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007), with which ECE teachers may be unfamiliar.

Several studies have examined Chinese immigrant families in New Zealand ECE (Guo, 2010; Wu, 2011; Zhang, 2012), but none have been conceptualised with transnationalism theorising, running the risk of presenting a fixed form of Chinese parenting. This article uses key notions of transnationalism, such as fluid practices and agency, to analyse how parental aspirations and practices of contemporary Chinese immigrants are shaped and reshaped by their transnational activities, highlighting the importance of responsive and non-static ECE pedagogies to align with fluid transnational parenting practices.

Methodology

A life-story methodological approach (Atkinson, 2004, 2007; Miller, 2000; Plummer, 2001) was applied in this research project to investigate Chinese immigrants’ involvement in their children’s ECE in New Zealand. Ethical approvals were granted by the relevant institutional committees. Several ECE centres situated in Auckland suburbs with a high population of Chinese residents were approached to request access to potential participants. Ten PRC-Chinese immigrant mothers were successfully recruited from three different ECE settings, even though invitations were also extended to fathers. The participants took part in two phases of individual interviews over a period of 18 months.

Key notions of transnationalism shaped the research design of this project. Since the identities and practices of Chinese transnational immigrants are complex and fluid, as informed by the literature examined earlier, life-story semi-structured interviews were used to provide opportunities for

Table 1. Backgrounds of the participants.

Name	Highest educational qualification	Immediate family members in New Zealand	Spoken language/s used at home
Anita	High school – Hong Kong	Husband, son and daughter	Cantonese
Ella	Tertiary – China and New Zealand	Husband and two daughters	Cantonese and English
Jan	Tertiary – China and New Zealand	Husband and two sons	Mandarin
Jean	Tertiary – China and New Zealand	Daughter and son (Jean is a single parent)	Mandarin
Katie	Tertiary – New Zealand	Husband, daughter and son	Mandarin
Lian	High school – China	Husband and two sons	Mandarin
Mei	Tertiary – China	Husband and two sons	Mandarin
Nan	Tertiary – China	Husband, son and daughter	Mandarin
Sonia	Tertiary – China and New Zealand	Husband, son and daughter	Cantonese
Vicky	Tertiary – New Zealand	Two daughters (Vicky's husband works in China long term)	Mandarin

the participants to share their narratives in an in-depth and open manner, and questions in the second-phase interviews were developed only after the findings of the first-phase interviews had been analysed. Each participant, therefore, was asked slightly varied questions that were specific to each individual's experiences. While the interviews mainly focused on the participants' perspectives and experiences of their children's ECE, many spontaneous topics emerged and were also discussed. The names of the participants in this article have been changed. In order to be culturally respectful, English pseudonyms represent those participants who identified themselves with English names, whereas Chinese-sounding pseudonyms are used for those who have maintained their Chinese names. Brief backgrounds of the participants are provided in Table 1.

As an immigrant from Hong Kong, I share to some extent a similar cultural and linguistic background with the participants. There was no language barrier and the interviews were conducted in a mix of English, Mandarin and/or Cantonese, as chosen by each participant. The narratives collected were translated, transcribed, coded using NVivo software and analysed. As the project was conceptualised utilising theoretical constructs of transnationalism, the findings were interpreted and coded with open-mindedness rather than being fitted into predetermined categories, such as any preconceived or fixed ideas of Chinese parenting practices. The findings were then analysed in the light of key concepts of transnationalism and previous research findings.

While detailed life stories were shared during the interviews, for the purpose of this article, only the participants' transnational perspectives of parenting and ECE, and their repertoire of parenting strategies, will be discussed in the next section. It is important to emphasise that the narratives presented are the participants' 'subjective realities' (Atkinson, 2007: 239) and reflect their perceptions of ECE in New Zealand and China. Furthermore, since the notion of reflexivity is a key component in research (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012), it is equally important to acknowledge that my cultural background and migration experience might have inevitably influenced aspects of this study.

Findings and analysis

The findings of this study show that although only the family of one participant, Vicky, had adopted astronaut strategies, all of the participants engaged in different sorts of transnational activities. As described by Dreby (2010: 5), transnational families are those 'who maintain significant emotional

and economic ties in two countries'. All of the participants matched this description, and hence can be considered as transnationals. They had strong ties with their homeland because most of their extended family members were still in China, and telecommunications with them were frequent and regular, as was travel between China and New Zealand.

Transnational practices, aspirations and perspectives

Although it has already been established in this article that the participants of this study were transnationals, it is useful to highlight that Chinese immigrants from the PRC are said to be more likely to settle and commit themselves to New Zealand (Ip, 2002). Most of the participants were prepared to remain in New Zealand, at least until their children finished university. Yet two of the participants were considering moving to Australia at the time of the interviews, while three mentioned their desire to spend their retirement in China. These participants therefore illustrated the contemporary modes of fluid, revocable and pendulum migration (González Bareaa et al., 2010; Ip, 2000).

Unlike their 'model-minority' predecessors who were prepared to give up their Chinese heritage in order to integrate (Ip, 2003), all of the participants insisted on maintaining their Chinese language and culture. Nonetheless, the narratives show that the participants were also eager for their children to acquire and develop perceived traits of being New Zealanders, particularly English language and linguistic abilities, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Vicky: Within Chinese immigrant families, we, on the one hand, pay more attention to traditional Chinese virtues; on the other hand, we will also consider the 'Kiwi' virtues,² such as respect the children and encourage them to be independent ... I hope her English becomes her mother tongue when she starts primary and it is as good as 'Kiwi' children. But, of course, she can't forget her Chinese.

The narratives collected show that all of the participants were keen for their children to develop dual heritage, which could be useful for their transnational activities. For example, they emphasised that their children needed to maintain Chinese linguistic ability to communicate with extended family members in China.

PRC immigrants in New Zealand engage in a range of transnational activities, including frequent telecommunication and travel, in order to maintain connections with family, friends and business networks (Ip, 2002). The findings in this study show that the participants engaged actively in many of these activities. Communication and connections with friends and siblings in China whose children were attending kindergarten, and their own children's kindergarten experiences in China, provided the participants with up-to-date knowledge of ECE practices in their home country. Their emotional connections with their homeland were particularly evident when they frequently compared parenting and education practices in China and New Zealand, thereby providing transnational perspectives on ECE:

Ella: When I went back to China ... I noticed that my good friends' children who were of Catherine's [her daughter's] age knew so much more, like 1 to 100, and additions ... yet Catherine knew nothing. I was very concerned.

Katie: I have not compared ECE services of the two countries, but since my sister's children went to childcare in China, I know a little bit. ECE centres in China taught a lot more than the centres here [in New Zealand]. The 'communication' between parents and teachers is also a lot more than here. The teachers in China give homework every day. They text the parents to let them know and remind them about the homework ... Here,

it seems that parents participate a lot in the centres ... whereas in China, you send your child to childcare and then you leave. We have different beliefs.

Nan: My elder son attended kindergarten there [in China] when he was two-and-half years old until four. Kindergartens in China teach a lot of things, and it's teacher-oriented, whereas it's child-oriented here [in New Zealand].

The above narratives suggest that the participants were aware of some of the dominant ECE discourses in New Zealand, such as parent participation and 'child-oriented' pedagogy (Chan, 2011), but they were also determined for their children to maintain certain heritage practices.

Some heritage practices are worth maintaining

Although their transnational experiences gave the participants exposure to cultural practices of both their home and host countries, they had no intention of giving up those heritage practices that they perceived as beneficial to their children's academic achievement. Their perception of Chinese children's achievement in mathematics is an example. They seemed to be particularly proud of what they regarded as 'Chinese-specific' mathematics learning styles, and they expected their children to outperform their local peers in this specific learning area:

Ella: I believe the Chinese ways of learning mathematics are more effective ... I am not saying they [New Zealanders] are not good [at mathematics]. But ... the mathematics ability of many people is not as good as the Chinese ... We do not use calculators in China; we have to work it out ourselves, no matter how big the numbers are.

Mei: I told my elder son that I don't expect a lot from him ... but his mathematics has to be good.

Vicky: [I]n mathematics, we [the Chinese] are in an advantageous position ... because we are Chinese.

Previous studies have found that by providing their preschool children with formal and informal mathematics instruction at home, including specific mathematics knowledge, and by promoting a positive attitude towards learning mathematics, Chinese parents offer their children a solid foundation in mathematics, thereby contributing towards their children's positive performance (Huntsinger et al., 1997; Pan et al., 2006). The participants in this current study also regarded the Chinese way of teaching and learning of mathematics as more effective, and essentialised Chinese children as mathematics 'whizz-kids'. They believed that certain Chinese ways of learning contributed towards academic success, and were therefore worth maintaining, but they were also prepared for the fact that their children would inevitably lose some of their Chinese heritage.

Realistic stocktake of practices and cultural adaptation

Some of the participants seemed to be realistic, or even pessimistic, regarding the likelihood of maintaining Chinese language and cultures in their children's generation:

Ella: You can't expect that children who grow up here and go to 'kindy',³ where they use only English, can maintain a 'perfect' spoken Chinese ... I feel that their Chinese will gradually deteriorate.

Sonia: [T]hey [her children] live here and gradually they will 'lose their [Chinese] cultures'.

The participants all understood that New Zealand did not provide the same learning environment as China, and that many common practices embraced in China may not necessarily be applicable in, or comparable to, New Zealand. Some were particularly critical of certain traditional Chinese beliefs and ways of learning and teaching, such as the excessive amount of homework and an over-emphasis on rote learning, and they challenged the value of these expectations:

Lian: In China, young children are expected to memorise 200 to 300 唐诗/Tang shi,⁴ but when they grow up, they forget them all ... I can hardly remember any ... Our lives here are completely different from China ... We should adapt to the lifestyle here. That's why it doesn't matter and I won't compare.

Katie: I had lots of pressure [when I was back in China]. I felt that how could our children here [in New Zealand] learn so little whereas children in China have to learn so much. My children play with sand and bring sand home every day, whereas their cousin in China brings work home daily ... When I was in China, I thought I must do this and that with my children when I went back to New Zealand. Yet, once we are back here, where everyone else is so relaxed, I relax as well ... We also do not have the right environment, unlike in China where all parents push their children to study. Here, everyone is so relaxed.

It is common for immigrants to experience cultural dilemmas and acculturative stress, such as the pressure to maintain their traditions and home languages, as well as to integrate and adopt the host country's practices (Patel and Agbenyega, 2013; Poureslami et al., 2013; Sanagavarapu, 2010). Within this study, while some of the participants expressed concern about the Chinese cultural and linguistic ability of their children, others experienced ongoing tension between whether to allow their children to have a "relaxed" attitude towards education or to insist that their children go through a regimented Chinese style of learning. Nevertheless, the participants were active agents in deciding their childrearing practices. Cultural flexibility was demonstrated as they navigated and negotiated between the cultural expectations of the two countries. Their parenting practices continued to evolve through learning and adopting new practices from the host country, balanced with relinquishing certain traditional expectations that were perceived to be no longer practical and applicable. Three of the participants in particular were keen to change their practices and adopt the advice given by teachers in New Zealand:

Lian: The teachers told me not to force him [her son] – just let him write anything that he's interested in. That's why I don't force him to write.

Jean: The teachers explained to me that children learn a lot through playing in the sandpit and with water. So, I thought, 'Okay, just let them play with water then'.

Anita: My son said what we told him was different from what the teachers said. I told him to trust the teachers, not us.

Since most of the participants had decided to remain in New Zealand long term, they were aware of the need to adjust and adapt their parenting practices, and to adopt certain discourses of the host country. Previous studies have shown that immigrant families, including Chinese parents, are prepared to adapt to the cultures of host countries (González Barea et al., 2010; Patel and Agbenyega, 2013; Poureslami et al., 2013). The participants in the present study were also prepared to accept that children growing up in New Zealand would unavoidably lose a certain degree of their Chinese heritage, and they understood the need for cultural adaptation. Yet, as highlighted earlier, they were also determined to encourage their children to maintain certain traditional Chinese ways of

learning. These processes give rise to new, fluid and hybridised parenting practices (Sanagavarapu, 2010), which do not necessarily represent any specific ethnic group, and which ECE teachers need to be aware of. Transnational parenting practices, therefore, have implications for pedagogy.

Implications and recommendations

The participants' frequent transnational comparison of the parenting and ECE practices of New Zealand and China seems to have placed these practices in binary opposition. Much of the literature has highlighted the limitations of creating static and opposing binaries between 'them' and 'us' (Arzubiaga et al., 2009; Ní Laoire et al., 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007). Prior research also claims that immigrants' constant referral to practices in their home country might be seen as a threat to the stability of the host country's collective heritage (Goldberg, 2002; Spoonley and Bedford, 2012) and interpreted as a refusal to integrate (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007).

This article argues that although the participants often engaged in transnational comparison of ECE, most of the time they did not intend to evaluate which discourse or practice was better, nor was the comparison an indication of their refusal to integrate. Instead, the findings show that they were committed to adapting to practices in New Zealand. The participants mainly used ECE practices in China as terms of reference in order to highlight cultural differences. Teachers need to understand that these references are inevitable for most transnational immigrants, as they stay connected with their families and friends in their home countries. The practices and perspectives of these immigrants are likely to evolve and remain fluid as they continue to be influenced by experiences gained from both countries. Imagined binaries, perceived differences and possible misunderstandings between parents and teachers highlight the importance of parent-teacher dialogue.

Additionally, the participants' children were also frequently engaged in transnational activities, experiencing a combination of cultural expectations from their peers, teachers, parents and extended family members. Children's experiences as practised in private settings are usually invisible to teachers, but they reflect valuable familial and community knowledge that should be considered and included in ECE settings. *Te Whāriki* states that teachers should invite diverse families and communities to share their cultural experiences, stories and symbols in ECE centres, and highlights that 'the families of all children should feel that they belong and are able to participate in the ECE programme and in decision making' (Ministry of Education, 1996: 54). This aspiration of *Te Whāriki* requires teachers to recognise communication and relationship-building with families as their professional responsibilities, and to schedule and allocate time for dialogue to happen. When teachers encourage immigrant families with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and knowledge to engage in dialogue and collaborative decision-making regarding institutional matters and policies, it transforms and enriches programme planning and pedagogy.

Most immigrants come to New Zealand voluntarily for the 'New Zealand way of life', whatever this may mean, and particularly for its education system (Ip, 2002; Spoonley and Bedford, 2012). International studies have established that immigrant parents often use their children's academic success as a strategy to enhance the family's upward social mobility (Dandy and Nettelbeck, 2002; Feliciano, 2006; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Wu and Singh, 2004). They are willing to adjust their traditional cultural practices if they perceive that the new practice learned from the host country is 'positive and beneficial to their children and family members' (Yamamoto and Li, 2012: 5). The findings of this study show that the participants fit into the category of 'purposeful innovators' (Levitt, 2001: 57), who utilised their transnational knowledge, such as their understanding and experience of Chinese and New Zealand education systems and practices, to develop a repertoire of strategies to cope with cultural and structural restrictions and expectations (Ali, 2008), as well as to expand their children's cultural and linguistic capital (Levitt, 2001). This article, therefore,

argues that it is crucial for teachers to initiate dialogue with immigrant parents in order to understand their transnational practices and to enact fluid pedagogies that are responsive to non-static parental aspirations (Poureslami et al., 2013). Children's well-being and learning benefit immensely from such dialogue and responsive pedagogies (Chan and Ritchie, 2016).

Conclusion

The findings presented in this article indicate that as the immigrant participants continued to engage in transnational activities, they developed a mix of transnational practices to best support their children's learning. While the narrative excerpts reveal that the participants often felt torn between choices of parenting practices, they accepted the importance of their children acquiring dual heritage while growing up in New Zealand. They were active agents in deciding on their fluid parenting practices. They evaluated the value and practicality of maintaining specific traditional learning styles of their home country, and the benefits of adopting certain practices of the host country. Their parenting strategies were the combined outcome of aspirations and pragmatic and/or realistic considerations, and they utilised these strategies to maximise their children's learning achievement as they saw it. As a result, their knowledge repertoire expanded and their parenting strategies continued to remain fluid and strategic.

During this current era of mass migration, (super)diverse immigrant communities have significantly transformed the demographic make-up of some countries. New Zealand is one of these countries, and its ECE settings are enrolling an increasing number of transnational families whose practices are fluid and often different from the host country's dominant discourses. It is, therefore, imperative for ECE teachers to be aware of diverse parental aspirations and expectations, to critique any fixed and essentialised understandings of parenting and teaching practices, and to embrace unpredictability, new possibilities and fluid pedagogies.

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Notes

1. While this is a widely used collective descriptor, it collapses important cultural and linguistic differences. The use of inverted commas in this article signals the author's uneasiness with specific terms/phrases.
2. The interviews were conducted in a mix of Mandarin, Cantonese and English. The speech marks around terms such as 'Kiwi', as in this excerpt, indicate that the participants, in this instance, used the English term. 'Kiwi' is a colloquial term to describe a New Zealander. However, it was often broadly used by the participants to refer to any 'white' people of European descent.
3. The term 'kindy' was used loosely by the participants when making reference to any ECE centres.
4. 唐诗/Tang shi are ancient Chinese poems from the Tang Dynasty.

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