Critical multiculturalism: Supporting early childhood teachers to work with diverse immigrant families

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Abstract

As early childhood settings in many English speaking countries are becoming increasingly multi-ethnic due to global migration, this poses challenges for many early childhood teachers who work with diverse immigrant children and families. In an effort to include all families, curriculum developers and teachers often suggest and incorporate teaching strategies that are commonly considered as culturally inclusive. While these strategies may be well intended, they may be promoting and reinforcing essentialist views of immigrants and their ethnicities, and also perpetuating social inequity. This article applies theoretical perspectives and research findings from literature relating to immigrant families' parental practices and expectations to problematise some of the dominant discourses that prevail in New Zealand early childhood education. It discusses the possible application of some theoretical concepts from the domains of critical multiculturalism to assist early childhood teachers to develop better understandings of the needs of immigrant children and families, and to generate critical pedagogies that are culturally sensitive and equitable.

Introduction

Global migration has led to the growth of ethnic diversity in many English speaking countries, such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, which are popular destinations for immigrants who possess valuable cultural and language repertoires and contribute diverse skills and various forms of capital to host countries. Literature reveals that immigrant children and families display distinct learning, parenting and socialization patterns different from the 'norms' that most teachers are familiar with (Chan, 2006; Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; Guo, 2004; Obeng, 2007). Hence, global migration also introduces new challenges for early childhood teachers who work with immigrant children and families with diverse cultural and language backgrounds.

Within New Zealand, in response to the increasing number of families with diverse cultural and language backgrounds in early childhood services, the national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō nga mokopuna o Aotearoa,* supports cultural diversity and promotes culturally responsive pedagogies to include *all* families (Ministry of Education, 1996). Yet, many discourses promoted in this curriculum reflect the values and beliefs of the dominant social group, and they may directly or indirectly exclude immigrant families from the New Zealand early childhood education landscape. This article reviews research findings and theoretical perspectives from recent relevant literature around immigrant families to highlight and explain some of these problematic discourses. It also evaluates some of the 'multicultural' and 'inclusive' strategies that are commonly used by early childhood teachers, and examines their role in perpetuating ethnic and cultural homogeneity and essentialism, and in marginalising and excluding immigrant families. It argues for a critical form of multiculturalism and a transformative curriculum to address issues related to hybridity of cultures and identities, segmented assimilation, power imbalances between teachers and families (immigrant families in particular), and social equity. Practical strategies are

suggested to support early childhood teachers to work more effectively with immigrant children and families.

Contextual definitions

Immigrant and *migrant* are terminologies often used interchangeably in literature. Immigrants have been defined as those who "move to a country to seek permanent residence" and migrants as those who "move to find itinerant work" (Arzubiaga, Nogueròn & Sullivan, 2009, p. 246). This article examines issues related to *immigrants* who seek residency in the adopted countries. *Race* and *ethnicity* are also frequently used in a conflated manner in literature, with authors/researchers, most of the time, not explaining how immigrants are categorized into groups (Arzubiaga et al, 2009). This article prefers to use *ethnic groups* and *ethnicity* to identify and describe immigrant families with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Immigrants are not homogenous, and the author is particularly aware that each ethnicity is a heterogeneous group. For example, using the terms Asian and/or Chinese runs the risk of lumping together diverse ethnic groups and neglecting specific and hyphenated-identities, such as Mainland-Chinese, Hong Kong-Chinese, Taiwanese, Singaporean-Chinese. Unfortunately, most previous research which involved participants of different ethnic groups does not provide participants' specific ethnic originalities, but simply applies a general ethnic category, like 'Asian', to represent participants with diverse ethnicities. This article respects and aligns the way in which ethnic group categories have been previously applied in specific literature when citing research findings.

The New Zealand context and *Te Whāriki*

Within New Zealand, in honouring the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, Māori, the indigenous people, and the British Crown, the co-signatory of the Treaty, were to govern New Zealand in equal partnership. Māori as the tangata whenua (people of this land), are entitled to the same rights as Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent). As a result, New Zealand is committed to biculturalism which acknowledges the cultural heritages of both partners to the Treaty. For example, *Te Whāriki* is a bicultural curriculum that provides guidelines for bicultural (Māori and Pākehā) practices in all early childhood services in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996); and English and te reo Māori (Māori language), along with New Zealand sign language are the three official languages of New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Over the last few decades, as global migration has increased and New Zealand continues to open its door to diverse immigrants, big cities like Auckland are becoming increasingly multi-ethnic. Census statistics show that 37% of the Auckland population were born overseas (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). Big cultural events are organised in the city to provide opportunities for all 'New Zealanders' to co-celebrate festivals such as the Chinese New Year and Diwali Festival.

Within early childhood education, according to statistics, 83% of children enrolled in licensed early childhood services are European/ Pākehā and Māori, the rest are children of "Asian, Pasifika and other" ethnicities (Education Counts, 2010). In acknowledging the multicultural heritage and the identities and cultural beliefs of diverse immigrants in New Zealand, *Te Whāriki* states that "each early childhood education service should ensure that programme and resources are sensitive and responsive to the different cultures and heritages among the families of the children attending that service" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.18). This statement reflects the socio-cultural nature of the curriculum.

Te Whāriki is underpinned by four theoretical frameworks: the stage/age developmental theories of Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, and the sociocultural theories of Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner (Carr & May, 1996). It recognises the increasing cultural diversity of New Zealand, and applies Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to emphasise the social and cultural influences on young children's learning and development (Ministry of Education, 1996). The four principles (empowerment/whakamana, holistic development/kotahitanga, family and community/whānau tangata, and relationships/ngā hononga) and five strands (well-being/mana atua, belonging/mana whenua, contribution/mana tangata, communication/mana reo, and exploration/mana aotūroa) interweave within *Te Whāriki*, literally 'the woven mat'. Examples of learning experiences to meet the learning outcomes of each strand and goal are categorised into three stages of children's growth and development: infants, toddlers and young children (Ministry of Education, 1996), reflecting the developmental paradigm of the curriculum.

While *Te Whāriki* claims it "actively contributes towards countering racism and other forms of prejudice" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 18), it has been argued that it supports mainly the values and beliefs of the dominant social groups in New Zealand and does not do enough to advocate for children and families with diverse ethnicities (Duhn, 2006; Rhedding-Jones, 2002). The following sections identify some of the dominant discourses suggested in *Te Whāriki*, including how they are translated into common teaching practices in early childhood centres. Following the outlining of each discourse, research findings around immigrant families and theoretical perspectives are employed to problematise each of these discourses and practices which continue to perpetuate the status quo and social inequity.

Dominant discourse: Exploration and play in New Zealand early childhood education

The value of play towards children's learning and development is widely recognised in many western countries and in New Zealand (Dockett & Fleer, 2002; Frost, 2010; Hill, 2006; Klien, Wirth, & Linas, 2004; Oliver & Klugman, 2002; White & Rockel, 2008). As *Te Whāriki* is underpinned by Piagetian perspectives, it stresses that learning and development are to be integrated through "opportunities for open-ended exploration and play" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 41). Children are considered as explorers who learn through play and active exploration, and they need to "experience an environment where their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 82).

Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) believes that children should be encouraged to "participate and take risks without fear of harm" (p. 52) and to learn "by doing, by asking questions, by interacting with others, by setting up theories or ideas of how things work and trying them out, and by the purposeful use of resources" (p. 82). The significance of providing play opportunities and play materials is emphasised throughout the document (Ministry of Education, 1996). Consequently, the concept of learning through self-directed exploration and play is favourably applied by early childhood practitioners in New Zealand. Whereas the pedagogy of play remains a dominant practice in many western countries, including New Zealand, the value of play and active exploration may not be agreeable to some immigrant parents (Chan, 2006, 2009; Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; Guo 2004, 2005; Parmar, 2008).

Problem: Immigrant parents' perspectives of children's early learning and play

Education as a means towards future success and its importance are highlighted by diverse immigrant groups in a range of research (Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; Li, 2001; Wu & Singh, 2004). It

seems that most immigrant families are education-oriented and very concerned for the future success of their children. Furthermore, many immigrant parents view preschool as preparation for formal schooling (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000), and some Asian immigrant parents believe "children are ready for school-related learning at a very early age" (Parmar, 2008, p. 173). As a result, many immigrant parents expect young children to engage in academic learning from early childhood and disagree with the idea of learning through play. This expectation is reflected in a range of research which involved immigrant parents in different English speaking countries. These include African immigrant parents in the United States (Obeng, 2007), Mexican, Central American and the Caribbean immigrants in New York City (Adair & Tobin, 2008; Tobin, Arzubiaga, Mantovani & The Children Crossing Borders Project, 2007), Cambodian families in Australia (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000), and Asian/Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2004). It appears that these parents would prefer their children to have less play and more structured academic learning in early childhood centres. Parma (2008) further finds that in the United States, Asian immigrant and Euro-American parents do not share the same beliefs and practices when participating in their young children's daily activities at home. Asian parents engage in more constructive play with their children while the American parents in more pretend play. Asian parents also tend to provide fewer toys, except those with academic value, and their children are also involved significantly more in pre-academic activities (over 3 hours per week) than their Euro-American counterparts (20 minutes per week).

Those immigrant children who have limited opportunity to experience self-directed play at home and are used to skill-based activities directed by adults may find it challenging to engage in exploration and to initiate spontaneous play which are common expectations of early childhood teachers. They may be perceived as struggling to settle and to learn. Their parents, at the same time, may struggle to understand what their children are 'learning' at the centres because 'learning through play' is an alien concept to them, with which they do not agree. Disagreement in values and beliefs between teachers and parents may also discourage parents from being involved in their children's early childhood centres.

Dominant discourse: Parent-teacher partnership/Parental involvement in children's early childhood education

In many English-speaking countries, parental participation in their children's early childhood education is widely believed to be beneficial towards children's learning and development (Billman, Geddes & Hedges, 2005; Blanc, Clausier & Murcier, 2004; Grey & Horgan, 2003), and research findings indicate that most early childhood teachers believe parents should directly participate in the centres by working with their child or helping with daily routines and activities (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000; Obeng, 2007). Within New Zealand, "Family and Community" is one of the principles of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). This principle emphasises the importance of parental participation and the interdependence among teachers, families and local communities. It states that "families should be part of the assessment and evaluation of the curriculum as well as of children's learning and development (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 30), and all families "should feel that they belong and are able to participate in the early childhood programme and in decision making" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 54).

Te Whāriki also acknowledges that "different cultures have different child-rearing patterns, beliefs, and traditions and may place value on different knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 42) and culturally appropriate ways of communication and participation of families should be promoted. As the importance of partnership between early childhood settings

and families is highly emphasised in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the notion of parent-teacher partnership becomes a socially-constructed dominant early childhood education discourse in New Zealand that expects parents to be active participants in their children's early childhood centres and to work in partnership with teachers.

Problem: Immigrant parents' perspectives of participation

International cross-cultural investigations indicate that unlike the local parents, many immigrant parents in the host countries prefer not to be involved in their children's early childhood settings (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007; Tobin et al, 2007). Previous New Zealand studies that look at Asian and/or Chinese (from various countries) immigrant parents' involvement in early childhood education yield similar results, that these parents avoid participation in early childhood centres (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2005).

Some immigrant parents express different perspectives of parental involvement. While some believe they should be strongly involved in decision making in the early childhood centres, they may disagree that parents should be working with their child in the centres because of their "perceptions of prolonged dependence by the child" (Ebbeck & Glover, 2000, p. 244). Other immigrant parents simply may not understand the expectation of parental involvement. For example, previous research indicates that many Chinese immigrants, from varied countries, are used to the traditional Chinese ways of teaching and learning which is highly teacher-oriented, and consider teachers as the authority with the source of wisdom who are not to be challenged (Chan, 2006, 2009; Cheng, 2001; Woodrow & Sham, 2001). Working in partnership with teachers is a foreign concept to these Chinese immigrant parents who perceive teachers as authoritative figures.

Tobin et al (2007) further claim that although many immigrant parents want teachers to listen to them and understand their needs, "they do not expect or want to tell their children's teachers what to do" (p. 38). Research around Asian immigrant families also suggests that instead of sharing their discontent and disagreement with teachers, Asian parents prefer to work with their children in their own way at home (Guo, 2005; Lahman & Park, 2004; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005; Wu & Singh, 2004). Some Asian immigrant parents in New Zealand who are themselves highly educated and have a high regard for education choose not to become involved in their children's early childhood centres due to lack of confidence (Chan, 2006; Guo, 2005). While some immigrant parents consider themselves as outsiders with no sense of belonging in their children's childcare centres (Pacini-Ketchabaw's, 2007), others find coming to the child's learning institutions to meet the teachers or other parents too intimidating (Tobin et al, 2007), not to mention the possible language barriers. Research also indicates that parents' involvement at home, hence *unobserved* by teachers, may compensate for their lack of involvement in childcare settings; and that in terms of supporting children's learning, this form of indirect involvement is as valid as frequent participation in centres or communication with teachers (Harper & Pelletier, 2010).

Indirect participation in children's early childhood education seems to be the preferred strategy for most Asian immigrant parents. Research indicates despite the fact that, on average, Asian children continue to excel academically in the United States, Asian parents participate less directly in children's school activities than European-American parents. They tend to intervene or involve themselves indirectly in their child's learning by controlling home activities, such as ensuring that children spend an appropriate amount of time in homework and television (Okagaki & Bojczyk, 2002; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005). Supporting and assigning their children to out-of-school skill-based

development activities is another popular indirect strategy used by Asian parents (Parmar, 2008; Sy & Schulenberg, 2005).

Parents who fail to participate actively in their children's learning have often been considered by teachers as ignorant, neglectful and non-interested (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000; Huss-Keeler, 1997), even though they *are* actively involved in their children's learning, but in a hidden and indirect manner that teachers are unaware of. Instead of seeing it as a core professional responsibility to proactively engage with these parents or investigate the non-participation of some, in order to support them to become involved in the early childhood settings, some educators may simply attribute responsibility for the lack of involvement to parents.

Dominant discourse: An inclusive multicultural early childhood curriculum

As discussed earlier, *Te Whāriki* acknowledges the multicultural heritage of New Zealand and the diverse values and beliefs of its immigrants; it promotes culturally responsive teaching strategies to work with immigrant families and their children attending early childhood services (Ministry of Education, 1996). Multicultural education comprises an inclusive curriculum that stresses equal learning opportunities for all, despite individual differences in ethnicity, gender, and social class (Banks, 2010), and *Te Whāriki* also stresses the importance of "providing equal educational opportunities for all" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 40) within its principle of "Empowerment". In an effort to demonstrate their commitment to including all families with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it is not uncommon for teachers to set up a mini corner of the 'United Nations' by displaying a world map, a list of greetings in different languages, and a range of cultural artefacts. Sometimes, teachers will even invite parents from different ethnic groups to share their native legends/stories at mat time and/or to prepare their 'traditional' food, such as dumplings, sushi and roti with the children. The celebrations of Chinese New Year and Diwali Festival are also common 'multicultural strategies' in early childhood centres.

Problem: Uncritical approach of inclusive strategies, fluidity of cultures and identities, and heterogeneous needs of diverse immigrant families

While the above 'multicultural strategies' may be well-intended and appear as part of an inclusive curriculum, they also run the risk of perpetuating stereotypical views of ethnic groups and ignoring individual differences. An approach of uncritical celebrations of cultural and ethnic difference and diversity can be critiqued as promoting cultural essentialism and ethnocentrism, assuming culture remains static and unchanged, and therefore perpetuating stereotypical and universal representation of individual members of an ethnic group (May, Modood & Squires, 2004; May, 1999, 2000; Rhedding-Jones, 2002). Multicultural education recognises the benefits of ethnic and cultural diversity to a nation and of allowing citizens to increase their experience of and exposure to other cultures (Banks, 2002), yet a tourist or additive form of multicultural education that simply focuses on lifestyle and cultural differences, ethnic celebrations and festivals, or stories of ethnic heroes and heroines is doomed to fail (Banks, 2009, 2010; Derman-Sparks, 2004; Jones & Mules, 2001; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

The theory of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) can be used to highlight the fluidity of culture, identity and ethnicity. Hybridity theory counters universalism, traditionalism, and essentialism of ethnicity and identity. It argues that each individual experiences an ongoing negotiation between gender, class, and culture, and hence each identity is complex, fluid, and always in transition and transformation within the intersection of time and space (Bhabha, 1994). Therefore it is actually the norm for

individuals to have multiple and shifting identities (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; May, 2000, 2008) that are shaped by an individual's gender, socio-economic status, religion and political preferences, and there are therefore "significant intraethnic differences evident within any given ethnic group" (May et al, 2004, p. 9). For example, recent Chinese immigrants from the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and other South East Asian countries who have experienced different social and political backgrounds from their home countries may have heterogeneous world views which have been impacted by their diverse life experiences. There are also second and third generation Chinese immigrants who have assimilated or acculturated, and their epistemology will be vastly different from the first generation Chinese immigrants. Multicultural education that supports essentialism and aims at including homogenised practices of ethnic groups does not allow teachers to respond in culturally-specific-appropriate ways to diverse individual needs within the group.

Essentialism encourages teachers to believe that children of an ethnic group have similar learning needs (Chan, 2009). Asian children, for example, are often considered as one undifferentiated group: the "model minority" who does well academically (Yang, 2004). The "model minority" paradigm is often used to stereotype and generalise Asian students as a homogenous group of learners, ignoring an individual's difficulties and struggles, including "limited English language skills; discrimination; systematic miscommunication between students, parents, and teachers; and widespread feelings of alienation from mainstream schools" (Yang, 2004, p.128).

Finally, the notion of "providing equal educational opportunities for all" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 40) fails to consider the constraints of resources that individuals may experience. The theory of segmented assimilation argues that the success of second generation immigrants in upward social mobility depends to a large extent upon the resources and support that their parents can provide, including parental educational level and income and their social status before migration (Hibel, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Not all immigrant families have the same socio-economic and cultural capital to support their children. Simply providing 'equal' learning opportunities for all children does not allow those who are disadvantaged in the first place to have a fair go. How do early childhood teachers ensure that all children, including those with no or limited English, have a turn at 'show and tell' so that they are also able to share their weekend experiences and have the opportunity to develop their confidence to speak in front of the group, just like the English-speaking children? How do early childhood teachers ensure that all parents, including immigrant parents who have limited English and understanding of common practices in early childhood centres, feel comfortable and confident to discuss their children's learning and development? Accepting diversity and difference amongst ethnic groups and within ethnic groups means recognizing the differential socio-economic and cultural capital that each possesses and the reality of unequal power relations. Multicultural education that aims at including the 'others' to give equal opportunity to all children and families fails to consider each individual's limitation of resources and choices.

Critical multiculturalism and transformative curriculum

A critical form of multicultural education that begins with examination of power imbalances and social inequity may serve as more meaningful and effective in including diverse immigrant families. In fact, critical pedagogy and multicultural education complement each other; when merged, they become an attitude or ideology that helps teachers "to confront and engage the world critically and challenge power relations" (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995, p. 7). Early childhood teachers need to deconstruct cultural or ethnic essentialism and to "engage critically with all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including their own" (May, 1999, p. 33) in order to recognize and explore the differing

social status of each ethnic and cultural identity, and how some cultures and identities enjoy more privileges than the others.

Critical pedagogy is grounded in social justice and equality, and critical teachers need to realise that education is a political site for power struggles and that the educational curriculum is a political document (Banks, 2004; Kincheloe, 2004; Wink, 2005). Within a society, the dominant social group who exercises the most power legitimizes dominant knowledge, values, beliefs and practices. Other forms of knowledge that belong to the subordinated groups are not valued and are dismissed, and the voices of those marginalised who try to challenge the status quo may not even be heard (Banks, 2004; Kincheloe, 2004).

Within early childhood education, parental knowledge is often subordinated by professional knowledge in a hierarchical manner. Previous research indicates that the parenting practices of immigrants when measured against the 'norms' are often perceived negatively by teachers as deficient (Reiff, Neuharth-Pritchett & Pearson, 2000), and some dominant discourses identify immigrant parents collectively as deficient in educating their children (Arzubiaga et al, 2009), discouraging early childhood teachers to see the value of including immigrant parents. For example, the common belief that a stable and secure family environment is essential to children and childhood (Ni Laoire, Carpena-Méndez, Tyrell & White, 2010), and the expectation of parental involvement and parent-teacher partnership, all contribute towards identifying immigrant parents negatively as mobile, unsettled, different from the 'norm', non-interested and uninvolved.

A 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum does not do justice to all ethnic groups within a multi-ethnic society, as it privileges the dominant social, cultural and language group. Educators therefore need to reform and transform the curriculum to address social inequity, and the power imbalance between the high-status of western knowledge and the consequential consigning into insignificance of the knowledge and practice of the 'others'. A transformative curriculum promotes critical thinking, and challenges and changes basic assumptions of the existing curriculum, enabling children and teachers to use multiple and diverse multi-ethnic perspectives, rather than a mainstream-centric perspective, to view concepts, events, issues, and problems (Banks, 2002, 2006, 2010). It is important to include in the curriculum epistemologies that differ from the mainstream ideologies and to construct transformative knowledge to challenge dominant and institutionalized discourses. For example, the focus on free play within the centre programme can be supplemented with some teacher-structured activities in order to look after those immigrant families who are unfamiliar with the 'learning through play' ideology.

A curriculum that embraces diverse means of parenting, socialization, teaching and learning is essential for a genuine multicultural education. *Te Whāriki* provides a broad recognition of cultural diversity and multiplicity of being and knowing. This recognition, however, simply becomes the espoused value of the curriculum. How the value is translated into practice relies on the commitment of the frontline early childhood teachers. It is therefore extremely important for early childhood teachers to critically reflect upon their daily conventional practices which so often turn into unchallenged and taken-for-granted routines, to widen their worldviews by actively engage in national and international social and political issues, and to dialogue and connect with families to learn about their personal stories and aspirations of their children's education. Most importantly, early childhood teachers need to be willing to share power with families in decision making, such as involving the families in assessment and curriculum planning, in order to develop a programme and teaching strategies that are genuinely responsive to the needs of different individuals and ethnic groups.

Strategies to work with diverse immigrant families

In order for multiple voices to be heard and legitimized in a transformative curriculum, Banks suggests including in the curriculum "positive and personalized stories and narratives" (2006, p. 609) and also content regarding the differing cultural and language characteristics, values and ideologies, historical and current social development and problems of different ethnic groups (Banks, 2009). Family members with diverse language and cultural repertoires can be invited to share their personal experiences and social problems or new initiatives of other countries with which most children and teachers from the host country are unfamiliar. They will, however, only be willing to be involved if they feel that their values and practices are respected and share equal status with the 'mainstream' values. Hence, children who are reluctant to participate in play or display different styles of learning should not be considered as less capable or be deprived of any learning opportunity. Parents who prefer indirect participation in their children's education and do not feel confident enough to be actively involved in early childhood centres should not be dismissed as uninterested (Harper & Pelletier, 2010). Teaching strategies that entail more than a play-based pedagogy and go beyond a singular understanding of parental involvement should be applied to break down differences and to accommodate diverse needs of immigrant families. Furthermore, while most centres have resources like books and posters that reflect diverse cultures, these culturally inclusive strategies need to be ongoing and integrated into the curriculum, not as an ad hoc approach during festive celebrations, or as a dormant and permanent display on the wall with contents that are not discussed with children.

Critical multicultural educators need to connect with people who are oppressed by issues of power, and make sure that supports are provided to those who are marginalised (McLaren, 1995). Therefore early childhood teachers should consider providing *extra* support for immigrant families and children. For example, teachers might direct the families to the local community services and health care providers, provide translation options in parent-teacher meeting and newsletters if there is a language barrier, and investigate possibilities for extra funding for additional resources to support these families. Centre managers may even want to consider employing immigrant teachers with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, not only to bridge gaps, but also to send a message that diversity is truly embraced in the centres.

Immigrants who are new to the country and those who do not have family and social networks are likely to feel isolated. Early childhood centres which are in comparison much smaller in scale and offer more opportunity for family participation than schools are ideal places for immigrants to begin social networking and experiencing the cultures of the host country. Parent-teacher evenings/breakfasts, family activities organised by the centres at the weekends, excursions that involve parent support, routines that invite parent participation are excellent opportunities for teachers to engage with immigrant parents and find out their issues and concerns related to their children's learning and development in order to provide the appropriate and relevant support. However, participation has to be voluntary and as discussed earlier, parents who prefer indirect involvement should not be judged as uncooperative and uninterested. Teachers may simply need to spend extra time in explaining the nature and value of these activities to immigrant families so they feel comfortable to participate.

Conclusion

Although immigrant children and their families may pose challenges for early childhood teachers, they bring with them diverse cultural and language repertoires that can enrich the early childhood

community as well as the society. Most early childhood teachers are keen to recognise and include all families and children. Yet, simply being inclusive and providing 'equal' opportunity for all immigrant families is not enough. An approach of critical multicultural education helps early childhood teachers to address issues related to diversity and difference in a genuinely fair and just manner.   However, it is important that relationships between teachers and parents are non-hierarchical and that teachers maintain non-judgemental and open interpretations of parental values and practices. Teachers need to make sure that they are not imposing their values and practices onto parents, and that families' values and practices are respected and not judged as inferior. Otherwise families will simply withdraw from participation or from forming partnerships with early childhood teachers and will remain unable to contribute their valuable cultural and linguistic knowledge and practices to the early childhood community.

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