



**MONASH** University

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**ENGAGING INDIAN PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD  
CENTRES IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA**

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**B.Ed., M.Sc., Dip in Teaching (Early Childhood), PG Dip in Education**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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### *Notice 1*

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## **Abstract**

Australia is a multicultural nation whose early childhood education is framed by federal and state policies that acknowledge cultural, racial and social differences through inclusive play pedagogy. The implementation of inclusive cultural competency policy by early childhood educators, their critical dispositions, and their interpretation of multiculturalism in early childhood centres indicate that the educational aspirations of culturally and linguistically diverse families (CALD) have encountered multiple barriers from early childhood centres.

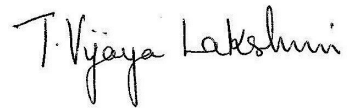
In this study, the research aims included the understanding of the social and cultural practices and perceptions of learning for Indian parents, and how educators implement teaching and learning strategies and work in partnership with immigrant Indian parents. The literature review undertaken for this study revealed there were gaps in communication and collaboration between Indian parents and educators, which led to the adoption of a multicultural umbrella model (MUM) as a conceptual framework and a constructivist methodology was used to analyse the data. Using an exploratory case study, Indian parents and early childhood educators were profiled to demonstrate the rich cultural diversity of the participants. Semi-structured interviews helped to elicit the social and cultural teaching and learning provided by Indian parents and early childhood educators for Indian children.

The findings have revealed that the cultural and educational aspirations of Indian parents are often not in alignment with the play pedagogy used in early childhood centres. Educators regularly confront communication problems with Indian immigrant parents and their children that affect collaboration in creating more inclusive learning communities. Similarly, parents participating in the study expressed difficulties and anxiety in approaching teachers in relation to the transition and integration of their children into the kindergarten community. The MUM content was redesigned for the educators to reflect on their practice and use it as a working model for creating effective partnerships with Indian parents/CALD families that encourage communication and collaboration. The reflective MUM framework also encourages the use of other ways of teaching and learning that benefit Indian and other CALD children.

## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "T. Vijaya Lakshmi". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T'.

Print Name: Vijaya Tatineni

Date: 31.08.2019

## **Publications During Enrolment**

Tatineni, V., & Belford, N. (in press). Understanding the implementation of early childhood policies around cultural competencies: Teacher and Indian parent partnership in engaging young children. *International Journal of Early Childhood* (WORK ID 70814, accepted 8 August 2019).

Tatineni, V. (in preparation). Narrative multiculturalism aptly describing where I am today as an early childhood educator. In N. Belford & R. Lahiri-Roy (Eds.), *Transnational women of Indian origin/heritage: Educational and migration experiences in (Re) negotiating identities*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

## **Conference Presentations**

Tatineni, V., & Belford, N. (2018, July). Understanding the implementation of early childhood policies around cultural competencies: Teacher and Indian parent partnership in engaging young children. Presented at the Learners Conference, University of Athens, Greece.

Burke, J., & Tatineni, V. (2018, July). *Having productive dialogues as a transformative classroom management technique in teacher education*. Presented at the World Federation Association of Teacher Education (WFATE) Fifth Biennial Conferences Melbourne. (Paper is being written soon)

## **Conference Attendance**

Early Ed Asia (12-14, Feb 2019), The City Palace, Jaipur, India- Early Childhood Association India.

## **Preamble**

I have worked for 30 years in the early childhood sector in India, New Zealand and Australia. In India, I was the teacher, leader and manager of my own preschool. Children as young as two and half years of age were enrolled in preschools so they can start learning to read and write. There was no curriculum or regulation in the early childhood sector in India 30 years ago.

In New Zealand (NZ), my roles were that of a teacher and lead teacher in the early year's settings of childcare and kindergarten. Later, I became an early childhood education lecturer in the tertiary sector in NZ. Another issue that continued to preoccupy me in my career was what supports were in place for Indian parents and their children in early childhood centres and whose responsibility was it to tend to their transitional needs. In NZ, I observed Indian parents struggle to continue feeding their children in the same tender way they did at home. As a teacher and lead teacher, I struggled to navigate between the needs of the Indian parents and children and the principles of the governing early childhood curriculum and policy. Was I to view the learning of Indian parents and their children through a deficit model lens, or was I to teach them how to assimilate into the current system of early childhood education? The time spent by families at the early childhood centres was too brief for the Indian parents and their children to adjust and understand their own agency before the children entered into the school system.

As an Indian immigrant myself, I struggled through two education systems of teaching and learning, which resulted in me having to make numerous adjustments to my identity and being in order to endure the changes. Yet I had many advantages to help me adjust to these changes: I spoke fluent English, I had an English Medium master's degree and I retrained in order to obtain a New Zealand teaching diploma. Most Indian parents, uprooted from their country in search of a better life to a foreign land, are unlikely to have these advantages initially.

In Australia, working as a lecturer in the tertiary sector teaching undergraduate students, I began to realise the need for research into the topic of multicultural education, especially in the early childhood sector, as it relates to the Indian community. Thus, my research journey commenced with a strong desire to find culturally appropriate solutions to assist early childhood educators better understand and interact with the Indian children and their families.



## Acknowledgements

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On the professional and work front, I thank my colleagues for tolerating and answering my often annoying and sometimes overthought questions, which helped me develop insights into my research work. Their advice and expertise in their own fields prompted me to stop limiting myself, to look beyond one's own field of knowledge, and to expand one's thinking.

In particular, I want to thank the SEA writing group, whose support during my toughest, darkest and hopeless days in research helped me to complete my thesis. This research study may not even have commenced without the cooperation of the two early childhood education leaders from the Frankston and Wyndham councils whose foresight and compassionate views for CALD communities made the data collection possible. For the process of collecting the data, I was fortunate to have the assistance of an Indian cultural advisor to review the research proposal to ensure that the Indian community would not be culturally offended in any way. I thank him for his open mindedness and advice that this research was needed for the Indian community as much as it was for the early childhood sector.

Thank you also to editor Brenton Thomas, from Fresh Eyes Australia, who provided editing assistance in accordance with the requirements of the university-endorsed *Guidelines for Editing of Research Theses*, which form part of the Australian Standards for Editing Practices.

The above acknowledgements are for the people closest to my work; however, countless others also assisted me in one way or another to help me learn, grow and become the early childhood education researcher I am today. Thank you.

## **List of Abbreviations**

ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics

CALD – Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

EC – Early Childhood

ECC – Early Childhood Centre

ECCs – Early Childhood Centres

ECE – Early Childhood Educator

ECEs – Early Childhood Educators

EYLF – Early Years Learning Framework

DEECD – Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

DEEWR – Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

DET – Department of Education and Training

IP – Indian Parent

IPs – Indian Parents

IC – Indian Children

NQF – National Quality Framework

NQS – National Quality Standard

NZ – New Zealand

VEYLDF – Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction: Crossing the Seven Seas**

### **1.1 Changing the Multicultural Context in Australia**

Australia is comprised of many cultures, with more than seven million migrants and people from 270 different ancestries (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2014). In addition, UNESCO (n. d.) advocates for the empowerment of children from various cultural and social backgrounds that promotes active and productive citizenship. Watkins, Lean, and Noble (2015) contend that:

while there is substantial literature on multicultural education—what it should be and shouldn't be—there is much that is left unexplored in research in the area not least of which is the characteristics of the teaching labour force. (p. 46)

The concept and research of multicultural education (ME) in early childhood education is barely adequate to create programs of inclusivity. Australia, like many other countries, makes informed decisions on how it will educate and blend its national idealism with the cultural values of an ever-increasing diverse population of overseas-born citizens.

National idealism in the Australian context is linked to an understanding of other cultures and about promoting acceptance, or at the least, a tolerance of various cultures amongst its citizens (Zilliacus & Holms, 2009). National idealism and education are interrelated and therefore it is intentional that teaching does not exist in a social vacuum (Bruner, 1996). Education and teaching reflect the ideals of the social beliefs and everyday lives of practising teachers (Horenczyk & Tartar, 2002), which can be far removed from the lived experiences of the immigrants. This encourages argumentative consideration that “citizenship education should reflect the home cultures of and languages from diverse groups to attain structural equality” (Banks, 2008, p. 129). Reflecting the voice of many cultures in today's multicultural classrooms is a complex task for teachers in early childhood centres (ECCs).

Working as an early childhood teacher in the Indian and New Zealand childhood sectors, I understand the complexity of multicultural classrooms. My own journey through an early childhood career is detailed here, revealing my interest in multicultural education that developed into a passion for understanding the complexity in the learning and teaching of Indian children who had migrated to Australia. Equipped with a master's degree in child development and

family relationships, I started my journey as a preschool teacher in India in 1978. I worked in India as an early childhood teacher for 18 years.

I commenced my career working at a preschool, where I taught the “3Rs” (reading, writing and arithmetic), which was the accepted method of teaching in India as a result of the education system that the British had bequeathed to the Indian culture. Disillusioned with a curriculum that forced children as young as 2½ years to read and write, I began my own preschool, and for nine years taught children through songs and English rhymes and used some methods from the Montessori curriculum. Maria Montessori left a legacy of her system after she had worked in India, and there remain preschools today that continue to follow her system of education. I also managed the preschool’s operations, marketing and recruitment of teachers. However, I became disappointed with how the children were being taught as the untrained teachers did not implement the curriculum I had designed in the way it was intended.

I migrated to New Zealand (NZ) in 1996. I enrolled at university to retrain and improve my teaching skills to suit the NZ curriculum. When I first read Te Whaariki, the early childhood curriculum, I knew this was the curriculum that I wanted to teach children back in India. Subsequently, I enrolled to study for a diploma in teaching in early childhood. After graduating in NZ, I accepted a position in a childcare centre and later in a kindergarten, where I worked as an early childhood teacher and a head teacher for the next nine years. During this time, I was also studying for a master’s degree in education and going through the trials and tribulations of being a team member in a culture that was new to me. The political pressures from management and my own inability to teach Indian children through play in kindergartens left me frustrated as I was trying to impose aspects of pedagogy that meant nothing to the diasporic Indian communities. Indian children were misunderstood and it was likely that the teachers’ limited knowledge of cultural backgrounds led to these children being ignored. Later, I resigned and reflected on my life and career for one year. I then applied to become an early childhood tertiary lecturer in a distance education institution. Teaching adults from a different culture had its challenges.

One of the challenges in teaching adults from another culture was their limited exposure to other ethnicities and my lack of understanding of their ways of learning. It was during this time that I went to supervise a student teacher at the local childcare centre. An unhappy Indian child held my hand and followed me for the entire three hours that I was at the centre. In another social situation, I met his parents and they told me that he was not eating at the centre as he was used to being fed by his mother at home. The mother had tried to make the child eat

independently at home; however, the child then stopped eating altogether. This naturally upset the parents and they sought my help. Unfortunately, I was not in a position to advocate for the child at the centre given it was not my role and, consequently, the parents felt powerless in this matter. Since experiencing that situation with that family, I have read and improved myself through further study in another master's degree but was unable to develop solutions for that child's situation. I migrated to Australia in 2013 and continued my journey as a researcher looking for solutions that would help Indian parents prepare their children for the cultural environment of Australian early childhood centres.

Many things have changed since 1978 and 1996, the dates of my migration; however, in my opinion the work with multicultural children in the early childhood centres has not changed that much in that time given my observations when I have visited centres to supervise student teachers in my current role as a lecturer. These observations led to the formulation of my research questions on the socio-political positioning of early childhood educators and the cultural expectations and aspirations of Indian parents in Australian early childhood centres.

The focus of my study was to recognise the interactions between Indian parents and early childhood educators as both of them influence the development of a child's learning in becoming a participating citizen. To comprehend the interactions, I also needed to contextualise the backgrounds of Indian parents and early childhood educators. Therefore, I first explored multicultural education and its political positioning in Australia to understand the socio-political background of the educators and the early childhood centres. Later, I explored the history of education in India. Growing up in India, I developed a detailed understanding of its culture, but for others of a non-Indian background to understand Indian culture and the nature of its nationalism, I explain this in further sections. Once the context is described, I then present the research literature review undertaken for this study.

## **1.2 History of Multicultural Education in Australia and Its Influence on Shaping Early Childhood Education Policies**

There is no simple definition of multicultural education in the Australian context. The complexity of defining the term is contained within Australia's varied history of introducing multicultural ideology into the country. After World War 2, there was a strong requirement for Australia to grow in population to increase the country's economic growth, and that could be achieved by allowing migrants from Europe and Asia to live and work in Australia. As speaking English was essential for the migrants to successfully settle in the country, learning the language

was viewed as a multicultural program for migrants and refugees (Lo Bianco, 2016). However, as time progressed, Australian trade shifted towards the Asian countries and therefore political and economic needs compelled the teaching of foreign languages, which became an essential part of the school curricula. “These years also saw the beginnings of the community languages movement as a central element in multicultural education and the most tangible of all policy interventions in multiculturalism” (Lo Bianco, 2016, p. 19).

Later, multicultural education and the use of the term was expanded to include the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community as a cohort in the common citizenship discussions. The other cultures were viewed as minority groups. At this point, the term “multicultural” shifted from a social class identification to a cultural vision of a society, and according to Lo Bianco (2016):

disadvantages faced by minority populations were to be sought in individual and cultural explanations and not in socio-economic positioning. This, then, was the second, and also lasting, a stream of ideologizing about minority populations. (p. 20)

It was also the beginning of the term “multicultural education”, which was viewed through the lenses of inclusivity, learning and teaching. When examined through the prism of the current system, which includes education as part of the economic investment sector (Theobald, Cobb-Moore, & Irvine, 2013), one wonders where the cultural positioning sits with investors and Australia’s politicians.

During the Whitlam/Fraser period of government, both the language reforms and the inclusion of cultures as a part of teaching and learning were divided into six focus areas of multicultural education. The first three areas were concerned with language acquisition; the other three aspects included the implementation of cultural perspectives across all subject areas, parent participation, and the active rebuttal of negative racist comments levelled at minority groups (Lo Bianco, 2016). For this study “parent partnerships/participation” was the key ME area of research.

### **1.3 Situating the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and Cultural Competence Policy in the Early Childhood Context**

Theobald, Cobb-Moore, and Irvine (2013) have traced the history of early childhood care and education over 40 years from 1972-2012 when the *Child Care Act 1972* was introduced. One

aspect of the main content of their article reveals that this Act was introduced to assist women returning to the workforce as well as facilitating the introduction of early childhood education and care (ECEC) not-for-profit centres by the federal government. Later, the introduction of federal government subsidies for ECEC centres also encouraged the establishment of private for-profit early childhood care centres.

Following the advent of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia was a signatory, government policymakers were concerned with child rights issues and the child's presence in the development of early childhood education and care policy. Up until that time, the relevant policy was concerned with quality and risk management. The allocation of more resources to EC occurred after a comparative study undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development revealed that Australia had performed poorly in the area of children's health, learning and development (Theobald, Cobb-Moore, & Irvine, 2013).

Similarly, key reforms included universal preschool provision by 2013 and the introduction of the National Quality Framework (Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2018). The national early childhood curriculum – *Belonging, Being and Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) – was introduced in 2009 (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009). Subsequently, this document was updated by the Department of Education and Training (DET [Clth], 2019). Cultural competency is a policy statement in the EYLF and the National Quality Standard (NQS). In order to provide a better understanding of these documents, some detail relevant to this study is outlined in the following sections.

**National Quality Framework (NQF):** “The National Quality Framework provides a national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement for early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services” (ACECQA, n. d., para. 1). This framework includes the National Quality Standard (NQS), which consists of seven quality areas for the early care and development of children. In addition to the NQF, the EYLF is the early childhood curriculum, which early childhood educators (ECEs) use as a guide for teaching and learning in the early childhood centres.

**Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF):** The Early Years Learning Framework is the early years development curriculum document that guided the educators, parents and children who participated in this study. The EYLF emphasises the significance of the cultural competency component of the document. The EYLF has a theoretical base from which I explain the Piaget,

Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner theories. Piaget, a developmental theorist, regarded “learning as a process – evolving as a result of children interacting with the environment and moving through certain stages of cognitive development” (Nolan & Raban, 2015, p. 17). Vygotsky was a socio-cultural theorist who studied child development and believed “higher mental functions developed through interactions as children were initiated into the culture of their family and wider community” (Nolan & Raban, 2015, p. 31). The EYLF also includes in their curriculum the ecological theorist Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) whose focus was on a “large number of environmental and societal influences” such as family and the early childhood centres the child attends (Nolan & Raban, 2015, p. 36). One of the major outcomes of this ecological theory is that relationships between the stakeholders have significant value in the functioning of the ECC as they benefit the child through the creation of a conducive learning environment.

In addition to the influence of national idealism on multicultural education, international child rights and Australian policies, such as the NQF, the NQS, the EYLF, as well as the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), have also shaped and dictated the way ME is perceived and implemented in the early childhood sector.

#### **1.4 Early Years Learning Framework and Cultural Competence Policy in Australia**

The relevance of the EYLF to this study requires a greater knowledge of the framework’s evolution and the implications it has for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children in the early childhood sector in Australia. In the EYLF, working with CALD communities was given prominence as late as 2009, that is, when the early childhood sector was transferred from the services section to the education sector. Up until that time, the integration of CALD families in early childhood centres was considered a process of assimilation (Buchori & Dobinson, 2012) and changes in this attitude were slow given there was very little support from policy perspective until 2009 when the EYLF was introduced. Cultural competence, as part of the EYLF, was introduced to assist CALD children find a place for themselves and feel comfortable in the early childhood centres.

Cultural competence is described as “much more than being aware of cultural differences. It is the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 1). The cultural competence framework emphasises being conscious of one’s own worldview and building positive attitudes towards cultural practices and values. The cultural competence policy statement encourages teachers (educators): (1) to self-reflect on their own



culture thus enabling them to understand other cultures; (2) develop a positive outlook on other cultures – positivity is conducive to teaching and learning; (3) develop a different set of skills that is needed to communicate and interact with CALD families. While the policy implies inclusiveness, the implementation of these policies has been less than satisfactory due to various reasons as detailed in the following paragraphs.

The EYLF is a relatively new guideline when compared to other early years curriculum guidelines as indicated by the following quote from Ortlipp, Arthur, and Woodrow (2011):

When the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the EYLF for immediate implementation in all prior-to-school early childhood settings in July 2009, Australia joined the ranks of other nations that have, over the past 20 years or so, regulated the early childhood curriculum through the introduction of a set of curriculum guidelines. (p. 1)

This late set-up of curriculum documents has implications for educating and updating teachers in establishing learning environments that are conducive to the optimal education of CALD children when compared to other countries. Other factors, such as difficulties in the unpacking of education complexities of CALD for teachers, are evident during the development of the policy. According to Sumison et al. (2009), the committee established to design the EYLF in 2008–09 had the objective of introducing diversity into early years education and care policy without it appearing tokenistic and superficial within the curriculum guidelines.

The committee's intention was to expand on an anti-bias curriculum and work with equity issues. However, the government's media releases at the time indicated that it considered the committee's intention was too contentious and hence reworded the diversity aspect of the policy as "learning to respect diversity". Sumison et al. (2009) further suggest that this inclusion meant that children need to appreciate the differences and the dilemmas that may arise in relation to diversity. Children also needed to develop critical thinking and question stereotypical bias. While political risks were constraining the versatile learning framework document, the intent of the document was not lost but modified. Sumison et al. (2009) also suggest that members of the committee claimed that:

wherever possible, we used words that we thought would appear innocuous to political risk detectors while speaking powerfully 'in code' to practitioners seeking legitimate ways to push boundaries of what might currently be considered possible. (p. 8)

However, the visions referred to raise questions regarding the clarity and effectiveness of cultural competence policy. The misinterpretation of this policy and its implications for children, when implemented by unqualified and inexperienced teachers in today's childcare and early childhood centres, has proven to be substantially damaging (Jalongo et al. 2004; Raban, Ure, & Waniganayake, 2003).

In their research study, Sumsion and Wong (2011) discuss "Belonging" in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and its contribution to learning and teaching children in the early years. In adopting a critical stance and being sensitive to the political constraints prevalent at the time the EYLF was written, their study used a cartography methodology to understand the contextual use of the word "belonging" in the framework. Sumsion and Wong (2011) questioned belonging in terms of which practices contribute to belonging and which narratives of belonging do everyday practices enact. They also questioned what resources were available and who accessed these resources and what tactics did educators use to create a sense of belonging in early years education.

Moreover, belonging was understood as something that people could "belong in many different ways" and to many different objects of attachments and that any perception of belonging "must recognise its many diffuse elements and be contextually relevant" (Sumsion & Wong, 2011, p. 32). Belonging has a political and a cultural stance, and by removing the political agenda of intervention, marketisation and the cultural attitude of creating boundaries or boundary protectors, belonging creates alternatives. These alternatives embrace the wider possibilities of how people make their place in the world and how they open up their places to others, especially with CALD families. Such clarity is easy to doubt in inexperienced and underqualified staff in early childhood centres.

Sumsion and Wong (2011) suggest that there is room to understand CALD families in pedagogy and curriculum:

Put colloquially, we contend that belonging is coded in ways that enabled it to fly below the political radar while inviting from practitioners a much more radical response than the words themselves might suggest. (p. 38)

While the EYLF is framed within a political context, it also allows for a present-day multicultural context, but in a "coded" and implicit way – a difficult proposition for a new or inexperienced teacher unless they were mentored by experienced and qualified early childhood teachers (ECTs) in their jobs (Nolan, Morrissey, & Dumenden, 2013). Even if teachers were able

to decode this message and collaborate with CALD families, finding pathways for such collaboration would once again become a difficult and complex proposition for teachers. It would also raise a series of questions regarding how teachers could decode these messages, who would be accountable for the messages –teachers or employers – and what should a teacher do to address these issues concerning CALD education. These gaps in research have implications for CALD learning and teaching programs in early childhood centres.

When the education policy was considered part of social policy and economic policy (Theobald et al., 2013), it is questionable whether the wellbeing and the sense of belonging for CALD families transitioned successfully to these new policy areas. This transition raised further questions regarding the current policy and the acknowledgement of the ethnic status of CALD parents and their children within the wider socio-political and educational frameworks of the nation.

Most policies that exist for CALD families are concerned with access, early intervention and prevention programs (Benevolent Society, 2012). For example, intervention is implicit in the formulation of policy for CALD teaching and learning. However, the criteria for selection, according to Cheeseman (2007), is that:

(1) a problem needs to be recognised (data); (2) a potential solution needs to be identified within a policy framework (evidence-based strategies); and (3) a political imperative needs to exist, with a potential for commitment and no severe constraints. (p. 249)

For teaching and learning innovation, the child's education need not be influenced by the status they have in society nor on the political choices their family makes for their child. Irrespective of the social milieu the child was born into, it is the child's birthright to have their educational needs met by providers and related stakeholders. Consequently, this proposition also raises questions regarding the policy requirement to teach CALD and the use of intervention as the only method for teaching CALD.

The EYLF is also constrained by political risks (Sumsion et al., 2009). It is considered that CALD children and their teaching and learning require intervention because there is a lack of evidence-based studies and a body of research to support CALD education. To influence the learning and teaching policy decisions for CALD children at the Victorian state level, migrants' lived realities were the subject of this research study. In exploring migrants' aspirations and the values of their children, this study specifically explored the lived realities of Indian parents (IPs)

and the interaction with ECTs' teaching methods in ECC. It is imperative to resolve the gap in this area of programming for CALD families in order to effectively implement cultural competence policies.

The problematic issue of CALD teaching and learning has only been recently recognised in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF; DET [Vic], 2016). An extensive survey was conducted with early years teachers in relation to teaching and learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, who are considered the first citizens of the nation, (nevertheless culturally and linguistically diverse to Australian culture) before the VEYLDF was produced. The acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and their teaching and learning strategies has been a recent amendment to the VEYLDF however, there is no similar acknowledgement of CALD children and their families from various other countries in the VEYLDF. Very little research has been undertaken to support CALD inclusion in the framework. CALD children are only acknowledged in the VEYLDF as students who need special attention because of cultural differences and require intervention (which is not recommended).

Although CALD children are as culturally diverse as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, they are not specifically mentioned in teaching and learning programs as are the first people of Australia. Such a situation leads to speculation as to whether so many variations in culture can be accommodated in a single monocultural and hegemonic curriculum. There are few evidenced-based strategies that address Australia's culturally diverse cohort of immigrants and refugees and the integration of so many variations in culture are proving to be problematic in a hegemonic curriculum. Moreover, the political status of immigrants and other cultures in Australia is not the same as this country's first peoples (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2016). The lack of research and the ethnic status of immigrants is likely to impact on the educational programs for the CALD child.

Consequently, this study is timely in addressing some of the key issues that have been mentioned. To add to this urgency, the fact that current policy generally disregards CALD children and only mentions them in the context of intervention, highlights the significant research questions that have been addressed in this study. This study has examined the social and cultural lived realities of Indian parents and their journey with educators to help educate their child.

## **1.5 Situating Cultural Competence Policy in the Research Genres in Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education spans a range of educational issues faced by minority ethnic groups. Bennett (2001) has conceptualised a framework of the “multidisciplinary roots of multicultural education” (p. 171), which was used to clarify the context of multicultural education for this study. Bennett (2001) presents four clusters in her framework and each cluster has a set of assumptions. These assumptions are further related to three multicultural genres. Cluster 2, the most relevant to this study, is referred to as the “Equity Pedagogy”.

Drawing on Assumption 1 under Cluster 2 is the statement “all children have special talents and the capacity to learn” (Bennett, 2001, p 172). This statement, however, does not cater for the specificity of a child’s culture and where they come from (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, 1996). This assumption resonates with the principles of the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009); however, this assumption raises questions regarding the value placed on learning for every child in relation to specific cultures and cultural needs. Hence, it can be argued that there is a requirement for further acknowledgement of the culturally specific needs of each child within different CALD-related policies.

Assumption 2 of Cluster 2 states “the major goal of public education is to enable all children to reach their fullest potential” (Bennett, 2001, p 172). This statement is similar to the citizen rights stipulated in Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that Australia has adopted, where all citizens are treated equally before the law (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1996). This assumption raises questions relating to the public education system’s ability to cater for different cultures; however, the current emphasis is on maintaining the authenticity of the Australian culture. This assumption also raises concerns regarding the accreditation of other cultures within the Australian public education system and other issues related to accountability and equity.

The third and final assumption Bennett (2001) draws on is the “cultural socialisation and a sense of ethnic identity in influencing the learning process”. While the cultural competence policy implies this and encourages early educators to be culturally responsive, the process of achieving this objective is left to the discretion and knowledge of the educators. These three assumptions also align with the learning goals of the EYLF, including the cultural competence policy (DEEWR, 2009).

Bennett (2001) claims that in Cluster 2 “theory and research (in this cluster) argue that low-income and ethnic minority students often experience mismatches between home and school cultural expectations that may impair school success” (p. 183). Cluster 2 articulates three genres under “equity pedagogy”, which are classroom climate; student achievement; and cultural styles of learning and teaching. To understand these genres in depth means that teachers need to understand their own teaching contexts as educators and the cultural background of their students to contextualise their teaching and learning.

Bennett (2001) also states that to understand the various genres of multicultural education under these assumptions, it is necessary that one understands the cultural background of the participants in an ME classroom. Consequently, the next sections detail a brief history of multicultural thinking in Australia and outline education in the Indian context, which facilitates the contextualisation of the cultural background of the parents who participated in this research study.

## **1.6 History of Early Years Education in India**

Indian parents and their backgrounds provide the context necessary for this study in situating participants in early childhood centres. In this section, I briefly delve into the history of education in India in order to provide an overview of those aspects that are engrained into the Indian parent and influence their educational values and aspirations.

India is a vast nation that has 29 states and 200 official languages, which means the task of defining what or how a regular preschool operates in different states of India is a complex one. However, studies from India show that in ancient and pre-independent India, children were treated with love and care in family and community life. Venugopal (2014) traces the history of early years education in India and she posits:

A look into the country’s past cultural heritage indicates that traditionally early childhood years were considered to lay the foundation for the inculcation of basic values and social skills in children. It was believed that these values are imbibed from the family as “sanskaras” and the scriptures advocate an attitude of “lalayat” [cajoling] or indulgence, as the desirable mode of child rearing at this stage, as compared to the more disciplinary approach for the older child! (p. 127)

Grandparents and other relatives were largely responsible for the early care and education of Indian children. Children spent more time listening to stories, lullabies, and folklore about traditional infant games that were passed down through the generations. Other than this practice,

there was no specific early years social and political construct of childhood in India. What has been highlighted from these studies is that the construct of a child below five years is seen through the lens of a love for human development rather than an economic investment in Australia as suggested by Greishaber (2000). Moreover, Western cultures adopted child rights and neo-liberal policies (Millei, 2011), unlike India, which had embedded in its culture a different view of the child.

When the British colonisation of India commenced in 1824, preschools were introduced. Prochner, Kaur, and May (2009) trace the history of preschools in three countries, one of which was India. Kaur undertook the research of the Indian preschools. In India, the British established an infant school in Calcutta, which they named “The Calcutta Infant School Society” with the British Bishop of Calcutta as the head. The objectives of the society were to intervene in the education of the Indian child who the British believed needed civilisation. They failed to appreciate the different culture of India, and in comparing it to their own, deemed Indian children needed intervention in their upbringing and education.

In the eastern part of India, preschools came about only after the 1890s. “The extra-familial institutional history of ECE in India dates back only to the 1890s, when the first kindergarten was started by a Scottish missionary” (Swaminathan, 1996, as cited in Sharma, Sen, & Gulati, 2008, p. 69). Later in the 1920s, preschools started to appear in various parts of the country, which were based on the educational philosophies of Gijubhai Badhekar, Tarabari Modak and Annie Besant who were inspired and influenced by the work of Montessori. Subsequently, “Indian thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Zakir Hussain were also influential in the development of preschool curriculum” (Sharma, Sen, & Gulati, 2008, p. 690). Gupta (2010) details further that Gandhi advocated for a “basic education approach”, which included learning through play that was constructive and creative.

After independence, the state assumed responsibility for the welfare of children and provided preschool education through the Integrated Child Development Service for a “total of about 41 million children – about 18 million below 3 years and about 23 million in the 3–6 age group” (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2006, as cited in Sharma, Sen, & Gulati, 2008, p. 690). With these large numbers, children’s nutrition, welfare and health, rather than their education, became the focus of preschools or “anganwadis” (known as “terrace school” programs for factory workers’ children). Other services provided were crèches for working mothers, factory employees and daily wagedworkers. The aim of these preschools, in addition to

tending to children's health and welfare, was to instruct them in the 3 Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic.

As urbanisation and the demands from the more elite and the wealthy developed, most private preschools began to teach children how to read and write so that the latter could gain admission to good primary schools. Parents were never a part of these programs and the teachers were deemed to be the experts. As Cleghorn and Prochner (2003) point out, “one had the impression that whole-group, teacher-led activity was culturally more familiar for the teachers to carry out, and that free play possibly left them feeling that they were not fulfilling their roles as teachers” (p. 149). While there are many different state and educational laws that are applicable to the diverse cultures in each state, there remains “...some common themes that mark the experiences of an Indian child” (Joshi, 2009, p. 286). Socialisation is the responsibility of the family and children are expected to behave in accordance with the norms of the family elders (Anandalakshmy, 1998, as cited in Joshi, 2009; Kakar, 1978;). Parental partnerships and the involvement of parents are unheard in the previously mentioned research studies.

Driven by Indian educational philosophy, the priorities of a densely populated nation vary greatly from a Western system of education. The first priority for Indians is that education reflects the Indian worldview; the second is developing the intellect according to Indian philosophy. The third priority is having a system that gives prominence to exams, school admission procedures and policy. The fourth and last priority “is not only promoted by the belief systems underlying Indian philosophy but is also mandated by the Constitution of India” (Gupta, 2004, p. 363). These Indian educational priorities should not be surprising given that education is contextual and rooted in the country's communities, its national thinking and its various lifestyles (Bruner, 1996). As mentioned previously, in the Australian context, national idealism is at the root of ME in Australia, and, therefore, it is not surprising that Indian participants' sense of national idealism likewise is influenced by an Indian philosophy, which is mandatory in their constitution and embedded in this system is the Indian parents' educational aspirations for their children.

Göncü, Mistry, and Mosier (2000) conducted a study that surveyed four communities from Guatemala, Turkey, India and the United States in relation to their child-rearing patterns and beliefs, and state that “...children's play reflects adults' belief of children's development and the social structure of the community in which children develop” (p. 328). Such observations also support the impact of history, the political milieu and the population pressure on Indian pedagogy for children and emphasises the contrast in relation to Australian play pedagogy.



Prominent researchers examining Indian education systems and the influence of colonisation on Indian education have been Viruru and Cannella (1997); Cleghorn and Prochner (2003); Gupta (2004, 2009, 2015); Mohite and Bhatt (2008); Prochner, May, and Kaur (2009); Kaur, May, and Prochner (2014). They have researched the educational values Indian parents bestow on their children. A forensic examination of the Indian education is beyond the scope of this research.

## **1.7 Positioning the Researcher in this Study**

My experiences of interacting with New Zealand, Australian and Indian parents, and the teamwork I have participated in with early childhood educators in these three countries as well as staff at all levels of the EC sector, have provided me with a rich portfolio of practices to draw on as a researcher. Teaching in the tertiary sector as a lecturer and university mentor for pre-service teachers in New Zealand for five years also equipped me with the experience of teaching adults. Later in Australia, my lecturing role at university and mentoring students in placements has also given me many contacts and skills to understand and network with the early childhood educator and the research community.

These experiences have provided the researcher with an insider's perspective on IPs' and ECE's aspirations, motivations and beliefs regarding the education of children in their care. A possible disadvantage of these insider views is the risk of the researcher's bias in the analysis and interpretation of the data collected; however, the added advantage of bonding with the interviewee and eliciting authentic data from the participants outweighs the risk of bias and extreme subjectivity of the researcher. The possible bias is also mitigated by the generational gap that exists between the researcher and the Indian parent participants. This generational gap explains the differences in various values and aspirations of Indians born in the 1950s (researcher) and those born in the 1990s (the IP participants in the study).

While the researcher can relate to the "Indianness" of the migrant Indian parents, the experience of relating to the current generation of Indian parents and their aspirations is a new experience for the researcher. Such an experience can be related to other researcher's relationship and interaction with participants in their study – for example, Ruby with the Bangladeshi grandmothers who participated in Gregory, Ruby, and Kenner's study (2010). Ruby comments that as a Bangladeshi researcher, she was able to exercise insider access to this migrant community. At the same time, however, she had to "constantly [be] aware of the need to treat the familiar setting as 'anthropologically strange' in order to make explicit presuppositions

taken for granted as a member of the culture studied” (Hamersley & Atkinson, 1993, as cited in Gregory, Ruby, & Kenner, 2010, p. 167). The other researchers working with Ruby, Gregory and Kenner, (also supported her position as a researcher with the families:

as “insider/outsider” and her awareness of this dilemma helped the grandmothers, who on the one hand felt very familiar and comfortable with the researcher’s presence, yet on the other hand were happy to be seen as “expert” with Ruby in the role of novice or stranger. (Gregory, Ruby, & Kenner, 2010, p. 167)

My own position as a researcher is parallel to that of Ruby’s insider and outsider position. The Indian parents (IPs) who participated in my study were the “experts” in the relation to current child-rearing practices; as I was from another generation of Indians, I was considered the novice or stranger to the Indian experience. As a researcher studying IPs and early childhood educators (ECEs) in Melbourne, I was both an insider and outsider in this research, which gave me an advantage over many other researchers who were not culturally a part of this Indian community of learners. Moreover, I am familiar with three of the Indian languages and their cultures as an experienced and well-travelled Indian.

My position as a researcher with the ECE participants was that of a colleague who was familiar with the curriculum and operations of the preschool and one who could empathise with their teaching profession. Some of the terminology used in the early childhood sector was familiar to me as a researcher and therefore the ECE participants did not have to explain terms to me. Moreover, although I had the experience of interacting with Indian parents in the early childhood sectors of New Zealand and India, I did not have any experience at that point, with Australian-based Indians and this situation conferred the role of “expert” on the ECE participants, which empowered them to give genuine answers and, in the process, teach me the Australian way. Wearing the hat of an Indian researcher who has worked as an early childhood educator for over two decades in India, NZ and Australia as well as being a migrant from India like the participants in my study, I am able to have what I regard as a 270 degree outlook on this research. To complete the full circle of 360 degrees, I am short of 90 degree, which to me is Australian ECEs’ perception of cultural inclusiveness of migrant Indian families in early childhood centres.

Now that I have outlined my background and experience as a teacher educator, head teacher and a tertiary teacher in both the Indian and Australian education systems, I explore the research literature available on Indian migrant families and children in the early childhood sector in Australia in the next chapter. In this chapter, I have also reviewed literature from related research

in other countries given that this research area is relatively new to Australia and therefore there is only a limited amount of research that has been undertaken in this country to explore my topic of Indian children and families.

## **1.8 Structure of the Thesis**

The organisation of the thesis follows the traditional format for theses, but there are some variations as well. Each chapter heading has a description that indicates the direction and progress of the research study. For example Chapter 1, the introductory chapter, is described as “Crossing the Seven Seas”, which details the story of an immigrant travelling from India and entering another continent and culture, and Chapter 2 – “Exploring the Continent” – is the history of multicultural education in Australia. The other chapters also examine the situation of Indian parents (IPs) negotiating the early childhood education system in Australia and being perceived by early childhood educators (ECEs) as a cohort that may not necessarily understand the system. Each chapter has an introduction that could be described as a “route map”, which outlines the information contained in the chapter. More details on each chapter are as follows:

Chapter 1 is concerned with leaving India to come to Australia. Indian parents in my study are not categorised as refugees or asylum seekers but were exploring the possibilities of seeking a better lifestyle in other countries. Hence the title “Exploring the Seven Seas”. The chapter also presents the multicultural context in Australia.

Chapter 2 – “Exploring the Continent” – is an examination of the research literature that has been produced regarding Indian parents and their children living in various countries and also details the research literature relating to early childhood education not only in Australia (very sparse) but also in other countries where there is an Indian diaspora.

Chapter 3 – “Working in a New Culture” – introduces a conceptual framework that encourages ECEs to develop effective partnerships with families from ethnic cultures such as Indian parents and their children. The particular framework that was selected was the MUM framework and it is explained, together with other models, how it can be used to facilitate partnerships between ECEs and CALD families.

Chapter 4 – “Who am I?” – discusses the methodology adopted for this research study and presents case studies of the IPs and the ECEs who participated in this study. It reveals the rich and varying backgrounds of the participants. A pilot study was conducted to better understand the research design. Once the questions were modified to fit the purpose of study, the main study was conducted. Since the research design and the other tools used for the pilot study and the

main study were the same, the presentation format is slightly different to the traditional way of presenting the pilot study first and then the main study. Instead, the results of the pilot study were presented later and this makes sense once the presentation is read. This chapter also explains the tools used for collecting the data and the thematic analysis used to present the findings.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the findings of the ECEs and then the IPs respectively. In Chapter 5 – “Who am I (IPs) to the ECEs?” – the views of the ECE participants regarding the Indian community and their interactions with Indian parents and their children are presented. In Chapter 6 – “What am I (IPs) Looking for in Early Childhood Centres?” the IP participants explain their experiences of interacting with Australian early childhood centres (ECCs) and their expectations for their children in the centres.

Chapter 7 – “It Is No Longer about the Dancers, but the Dance” – is the discussion chapter that presents the evidence from the findings that indicates that for children to benefit from the learning they receive in ECCs, it is more about the partnerships (dance) and how they develop.

Chapter 8 – “New Thinking, New Wings, New Beginning” – discusses the point that there needs to be a move away from dichotomous thinking to develop collaborative partnerships that will benefit Indian and other CALD children.

Quotes from Authors and Dialogue from participants:

The quotes from authors of research articles are in plain text as compared to the dialogues from participants presented in italics.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review: Exploring the Continent**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Early childhood education in Australia is not compulsory and is delivered to children through a variety of settings, including childcare centres and pre-schools (also referred to as kindergartens in some parts of Australia) in the year before full-time schooling (Australian Government, n. d.). There are a variety of early childhood centres that Australian children can choose to attend and these include long day care services, family day care services, kindergartens and outside school hours care services.

All childhood services are regulated under the National Quality Framework which “provides a national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement for early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services across Australia” (ACECQA, 2019 p. 1). A number of other childhood care services are regulated under state law called the Victorian Children’s services Act 1996 such as the occasional care services, mobile services, and budget services not funded for Child Care Benefit or school holiday care programs. As my sample data is from community and council kindergartens, I have given details of kindergarten services only. Details of other early childhood services are out of scope of this study. The details of the sample kindergartens are similar to the community and council kindergartens as described in the following paragraphs (Department of Education and Training [Vic], 2019).

There are three types of kindergartens including, Four year old kindergartens, three old kindergartens and Koorie Kids Shine program. Four year kindergartens cater to children the year before they enrol in schools, and are also called the ‘funded kindergarten’. As the name suggests children are funded for the entire attendance to these kindergartens. My sample comes under this type of funded kindergartens.

Then there are various types of the three year old kindergartens: Early start kindergartens affords 15 hours of free kindergarten types for three year olds. Apart from the child being three years of age in the month of April in a calendar year other conditions apply to this funding. The second type of three year old kindergartens include programs offered by community groups and city councils and are not funded by the government but subsidised over the time as the three old kindergarten reforms take shape in the near future. The third type of kindergartens is where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (first citizens of Australia) children can access free

kindergarten through the Koorie Kids Shine program (Department of Education and Training [Vic], 2019).

### **ECEs' credentialing/licensing**

Credentialing and licensing of early childhood educators is governed by the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), which “provides national leadership in promoting quality and continuous improvement in early childhood education and care and school age care in Australia. [It also] guides the implementation of the National Quality Framework and ensures consistency in delivery” (Australian Government, n. d.). ACECQA is an independent national authority that supports governments in managing the National Quality Framework (NQF) for children's care and education (ACECQA, n. d.).

In 2013, an early childhood teacher needed:

- a primary teaching qualification including at least a focus on children five to 8 years or 5 to 12 years. Early childhood had no particular teaching degree qualification and teachers required to have a teaching degree otherwise any early childhood qualifications meant they were carers and not teachers.
- *and* a Victorian Institute of Teacher (VIT) registration. Registration is not a requirement for early childhood teachers under the National Quality Framework (NQF) but it is a requirement under some state and territory legislation.
- *and* an ACECQA approved diploma level (or higher) education and care qualification (ACECQA, 2019)

In 2019, the ACECQA review board decided that this will remain until 2021 after which this transitional measure will cease. “It is also important to note that individual employers may specify higher qualification requirements (for example, a four-year early childhood teachers degree) as part of their employment policy” (ACECQA, 2019, p. 1).

When Indian migrant families are settling into their new host country, it involves educating their children in environments with which they are not familiar. The educational policy, different types of early year centres are very unlike the preschool education in India. For many Indian parents, it is likely that the first social space in their new home country that they access is the early childhood centre where their children have been enrolled. To work with the centre's early childhood educator and settle their children into the new environment is a complex procedure, and as stated in the previous chapter, the socio-political and historical backgrounds of the Indian

parents (IPs) and the early childhood educators (ECEs) will influence their interactions with each other. These interactions will lead to partnerships developing that will benefit children in their learning. In order to conform to cultural competence policy, these partnerships will also necessarily include relationships between ECEs and CALD parents.

The commitment of educators to engage in partnerships with parents is a vital element of early childhood education (Billman, Geddes, & Hedges, 2005). The collaboration between parents and ECEs has become an essential theme for ECEs and researchers as effective partnerships promote optimal learning in the child (Epstein, 2010; Rouse, 2014; Stonehouse, 2012; Tayler, 2006). Over the years, the nature of these partnerships has become increasingly difficult for parents due to changing economic times and the increasing complexity in child-rearing practices and demands put on the parents' financial capacities and time (Hujala, Turja, Gaspar, Veisson, & Waniganayake, 2009). Moreover, the partnerships with CALD parents is an essential and complex area that needs to be addressed as well because of the increasing enrolment of children from various cultural backgrounds in the early childhood centres (ECCs). There is a growing acknowledgement of an increasing cultural distance (Chan & Ritchie, 2016) between the ECEs, who are usually from the dominant culture, and the ethnic minority in today's classrooms.

Effective partnerships between parents and ECEs provide a secure base for children to learn and develop in ECCs. Tayler (2006) believes that the building of partnerships for teachers is aimed at "collaborating to build jointly a deep knowledge of the child's development and learning" (p. 250). Tayler also comments that the views and values between parents and teachers can vary widely. These differences are very prominent in CALD families and teacher partnership building is often hindered by the language and diversity of the parental values and/or reluctance of CALD parents to participate in this relationship.

The study that is the subject of this thesis focused particularly on the Indian child and parent in ECCs. However, as finding research studies that related to Indians living in Australia proved to be difficult, I widened my search of literature on CALD and Indian parents/children to include other countries such as the United States of America (USA) and Canada. The research literature discussed in this chapter uses terms like CALD, Indian parents (IPs) and Indian children (IC) in relevant places. The USA and Canada have a considerable amount of literature pertaining to a large population of Indian migrants. However, the early childhood curricula are varied and differ from the Australian curriculum and the EYLF. This chapter presents and discusses research that has been undertaken in the areas of partnerships between

IPs and ECEs and how IPs engage their children in social and cultural ways at home. In addition, this chapter explores the gaps in research that relate to how ECEs engage with CALD families/IPs and children/IC in ECCs.

## **2.2 Indian Parents Engaging in Partnerships with Early Childhood Educators**

In Indian cultures, the word “teacher” or “guru” is elevated to the same rank of respect as to one’s own mother and father (Gupta, 2017). In India, neither children nor other members of the family question parents’ decisions regarding their children, which are believed to be made in the best interests of the child who needs guidance during their developing years. Indian parents also trust their children’s teachers to act like a parent and keep the best interests of their child at heart during the child’s formative years. This total trust in the teacher means the parents are quietly attentive to every word the teacher says (Gupta, 2013a). As a collective culture, one of India’s customs is to be obedient to one’s elders (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). Indians are not the only nationality to have this view of teachers. Chinese parents (considered as the collective cultures by Tamis-LeMonda et al.) also have similar views and consider that questioning a teacher is tantamount to accusing the teacher of incompetency, thereby incurring the teacher’s displeasure, which is likely to affect the child (Guo, 2005). Chan and Ritchie (2016) comment that “...parents with cultural backgrounds where teachers are respected as authority figures tend to view the idea of working alongside teachers as inappropriate, considering this to be intervening and disrespectful” (p. 291). Equal partnerships with educators is therefore a difficult proposition for Indian parents. There are, however, few research studies that have examined whether the current cohort of IP immigrants in Australia are continuing to express the values of their homeland or have begun to adopt the values of their host country. Indian parents who have moved away from their home country to other nations are in transition and may no longer hold the same values as their compatriots who continue to live in India.

Indian immigrants are often in a state of transition from their own cultural thinking in an environment that permits certain freedoms that their own country would forbid (Nayar, 2009). How they choose to relive their new-found realities is a factor that families themselves are rediscovering. This cultural transition was evident in a research study relating to Indian mothers and daughters in Canberra: “Indians have cause to re-evaluate their traditional roles as practised in India and the socio-cultural adjustments that may be required in their new homeland” (Manuelrayan, 2011, p. 120). This awareness of culture being dynamic and ever changing authenticates research on partnerships, which also includes elements of the transition that



immigrants undergo in their daily lives. This new view, Arndt (2014) suggests, involves thinking critically:

While some knowledge can give valuable insights into developing relationships with new immigrants, claiming to know another is perhaps not as important as it is for the other to feel accepted and acknowledged in all his or her unknown complexity. (p. 64)

ECEs need to understand that there will be aspects of immigrants' cultures that they will not be familiar with, and by moving away from owning the other culture's experience (Arndt, 2014), or in other words understanding that this knowledge will be incomplete or outdated; teachers will be more responsive to immigrant stories and lives. There are few studies examining the adjustment process of Indian parents and their children to their new cultural and learning environments. Without research being undertaken of the lived reality of Indian parents in partnerships with ECEs, one cannot assume that Indian parents respect teachers and therefore will not partner with them; partnerships are a two-way process and are more complex in the case of CALD families.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) argue that partnerships and child learning are often interconnected; however, sometimes it is necessary not to judge parents: "Many parents, particularly those from ethnic minorities or those facing an economic challenge, find engagement with schools difficult, but still, have a strong desire to be involved in their children's learning and education" (p. 400). Sometimes monetary reasons can prevent the parents from attending meetings with teachers or full-time employment can deter a parent from being involved in the early years settings. Moreover, the messages ECCs often convey to the community are that parent involvement is concerned with helping with the operations of the centres such as cleaning (Stonehouse, 1991). These messages can discourage IPs from being involved due to their busy lives, where there is no room for a voluntary contribution of their time and energy.

Epstein (2010) emphasises the importance of partnerships between parents and teachers as they benefit children's learning; however, Daniel (2015) believes that parent involvement is "privileging middle-class values, parenting styles and ways of being, and thus represents a restricted view that fails to account for diversity in parent involvement practices" (p. 120). For IPs, their own schooling did not involve partnerships between their parents and their teachers (Gupta, 2006/2013a) on an equal basis and consequently there appears to be a reluctance from the IPs to partner with teachers. Moreover, family dynamics have changed over the years (Knof

& Swick, 2006) and there is more stress due to work and managing the family. Forming partnerships with ECEs are often the least of concerns for most parents.

As mentioned, given the complex situation of partnering with ECEs, the government has attempted to facilitate these partnerships with CALD parents by presenting by translating ECC information into 21 other languages including Hindi (Indian language) (DET [Clth], 2018). However, translating EYLF documents into other languages does not necessarily translate the cultural implications of Australian early childhood educational aspirations, as language and conceptual thinking are interrelated and conceptual thinking for minority groups might not be in alignment with English early childhood concepts (Brown, 1994, as cited in Jiang, 2000). Moreover, Hindi is limited to Indians from northern India, and other Indians are likely to interpret the English versions through their own cultural lenses. The support these strategies suggest might not necessarily encourage Indian parents to participate in their children's education at the kindergarten level. Moreover, even after reading the EYLF, IPs may not necessarily be able to partner with the ECCs as this is a two-way process and requires time and a deeper understanding between the ECCs and IPs.

The educational charter of early childhood services and organisations implement Quality Area 6 (QA6) in the National Quality Standard (NQS). This measure emphasises collaborative partnerships with families and communities; however, Rouse and O'Brien (2017) contend that:

while the teacher was meeting identified performance standards, that a true partnership underpinned by mutuality and reciprocity was not evident in the relationships between the teacher and the families. (p. 44)

True partnerships between parents and the ECCs work towards providing the support parents need, which can be different for the diverse range of CALD parents with their varying cultures. Effective partnerships are possible if the IPs and ECEs share conversations regarding the child in their care. However, the cultural differences between the ECEs and IPs can make it difficult to build a rapport. Another communication difficulty can be the ECC program, which is play based and, therefore, not necessarily understood by the Indian parent.

Play-based pedagogy is central to the EYLF curriculum and the learning communicated to IPs is concerned with child assessment and how children socialise or develop within this play pedagogy. Policies, research, and early childhood stakeholders are the supporters of this pedagogy (Ortlipp, Arthur, & Woodrow, 2011). However, play and learning are generally viewed as two different activities by IPs. In Indian education, teaching and learning are

synonymous with books, activities and knowledge, whereas play is regarded as an activity that comes naturally to the child and is not considered educative (Gupta, 2010). Play and its manifestations are considered differently by many other cultures (Brooker, 2003; Gonzalez-Mena, 2008; Gupta, 2010; Rogoff, 2003). Play activity in Indian cultures is usually considered an activity that occurs outside of school time. Indian researchers, Roopnarine, Hossain, and Brophy (1994), contend that Indian parents do not consider play to be an intellectual activity because:

in a country where child-rearing practices are moulded by tradition and not by information generated from child development research, how cognizant are parents of the value of play in early cognitive and social development? (p. 18)

Indian parents arrive in Australia with a traditional Indian interpretation of educational values, which according to Gupta (2004), in the order of priority are “the teaching of values and correct attitudes; developing the intellect and the ability to think; developing academic proficiency; and encouraging cultural and religious diversity” (p. 363). In a country like India, where education is competitive and priorities in education are different to the educational outcomes of an Australian early childhood curriculum, IPs fail to understand the holistic education systems practised in Australian ECCs (McInnes & Nichols, 2011). There are two other reasons why discussing play and its goals with ECEs is difficult for IPs. The first is that IPs in general would seldom read the EYLF curriculum document (Hadley, 2014). Consequently, their lack of knowledge of how play is interpreted by the curriculum is minimal, and mean that the ECEs’ attempts to explain the importance of play would prove to be ineffective. The second reason is that an important aspect of play-based methods is the “child’s agency”, which is a new and unknown concept to IPs.

In the NQS document, teachers are encouraged to promote child agency, which is stated as “enabling them [children] to make choices and decisions and influence events and their world” (ACECQA, 2017, element 1.2.3). This means the child is enabled to make its own choices, decisions, and taking initiatives in play and social interactions. Child agency, as defined by the NQS, has its roots in Western independent societies and child rearing. Child agency is unremarked in the eastern cultures or the interdependent/collectivist societies where the child is expected to follow the lead of the older member of the group rather than make independent choices (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). Keyes (2002) indicates effective partnerships “include the degree of match between a teacher’s and a parent’s culture and values” (p. 177) Partnerships are difficult when these matches are not found. How these different cultural values are interpreted by

separate cultures is often overlooked and most cultures are clustered into one national identity, for example, all Chinese cultures are clustered as Chinese although there is a vast difference between the Hong Kong Chinese and Malaysian Chinese.

Ebbeck (2001) investigated 101 immigrant families from Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, China and the Philippines and 100 early childhood teachers from South Australia. One of the research questions related to child-rearing practices in these communities. In her findings, Ebbeck states that:

while cultures do have representative attributes, not all people from a particular culture embrace all its attributes. Families within the same cultural group differ. It would be inaccurate to claim that all Vietnamese families, for example, have similar views about child rearing. The same can be said of Cambodians and others. (p. 42)

Indian immigrants come from different states, each of which has distinct cultural habits, child-rearing practices and learning abilities; consequently, classifying all IPs as having come from one India can prove to be a barrier to developing productive partnerships with ECEs. For example there are very distinct differences between a North Indian and a South Indian. Many ECCs will have children enrolled from different cohorts of Indian cultures and each context needs to be appreciated separately acknowledging the lived realities of the particular IPs so that effective relationships can be fostered between the ECE and the parents.

To understand how ineffective partnerships develop and the difficulties they present for IPs and their families, as well as the strategies that could be implemented to improve the situation, is an area that has not been researched to date.

Other reasons for ineffective partnering with ECEs are, as parents have mentioned, “linguistic barriers, lack of time, fatigue, and many meeting topics that were perceived as irrelevant to them” (Bernhard, Lefebvre, Murphy Kilbride, Chud, & Lange, 1998, p. 12). One parent was tired of always being the one to initiate conversation, while another said the reports the teachers gave of their child did not show any academic progress, but only detailed a one-off learning event held in the childcare centre. The scenarios presented in the paper were examples of barriers that had developed due to cultural beliefs that designated the teacher to be the authoritative figure. These barriers were also compounded by the fact that the IPs were likely to be uneducated, have a lack of self-confidence, not be fluent in English, have a low socio-economic status, and did not articulate their different child-rearing practices (Chan, 2011; Tobin,

Arzubiaga, & Mantovani, 2007). Some parents reject the idea of play-based learning and their non-involvement in the early childhood centre is not necessarily an indication of neglect or a lack of knowledge regarding their children. The research gap that has been alluded to is indicative of the information needed by ECEs to appreciate the fact that the socio-cultural activities of an Indian child are different from the activities of a child from the dominant culture in the ECC.

Parents have their own views on what preparation for school requires (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). This belief is deep-rooted in parents generally, and particularly in Indian parents (Gupta, 2013b; Subramanian, 2015.), and teachers need to acknowledge the parents' educational views. Consequently, the non-participation of IPs in partnership with ECCs makes it difficult for cultural competence to be practised by the ECEs (McInnes & Nichols, 2011).

In summary, the literature review has indicated that for IPs to work in partnership with ECEs, they not only need the language to communicate but also need to share their belief of how an Indian child should be educated. Individual cultural aspirations for their children are dependent on their cultural values, which are in transition for some families. When building relationships, two-way communication is necessary (Elliot, 2005). As an experienced teacher in early childhood settings for over two decades, I believe there are hidden barriers, such as communication and collaboration skills, that may help or hinder the building of successful partnerships between IPs and ECEs. Teaching is concerned with communication skills as well as building bridges with parents and making connections with their cultures. Although ECEs encounter issues with communication, language and cultural barriers when collaborating with CALD parents (a partnership that is often placed by ECEs in the too-hard basket), creating such relationships is important as they affect a child's learning outcomes (Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012).

### **2.3 Indian Parents Engaging with Their Children at Home**

Research has revealed that parents play an important role in their children's lives (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Jeynes, 2003; Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Parental involvement with their children's schools is very different to parental engagement with their children (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). How parents involve their children at home enhances or restricts the latter's participation, which affects their social and cognitive development (Parmar, Harkness, & Super, 2008). Parental involvement and engagement can encompass activities at home with their children such as inculcating manners, cultural and family values,

family holidays and festivities (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Asian Indian groups are known to “selectively acculturate by holding onto core values (for example, family, food preferences, and religion) at home” (Inman, Howard, Beaumont, & Walker, 2007, p. 93). Often the traditional values of the immigrant parents’ culture are integrated into the activities they have with their children (Guo, 2005; Wise & da Silva, 2007).

There are many ways an IC learns at home (Riojas-Cortez, 2001) and this can change due to the globalisation of the parent. “Immigrant parents, therefore, experience acculturative stress arising from issues with maintaining their home language, cultural values, norms and practices in their host country” (Sanagavarapu, 2010, p. 39). There is likely to be a cultural hybridisation during immigration due to globalisation (Singh, 2005). The exposure to Western society and the need to fit in to early childhood contexts means parents are teaching their children English at the expense of losing their first language and other cultural customs (Adair & Tobin, 2008).

Traditional habits for feeding an Indian child is a typical cultural value and is taught to the IC during the interaction between the Indian parent and their child. Many studies have examined the health of an IC in relation to the consumption of food; however, there is a paucity of studies that have investigated the relationship between an IC’s wellbeing and their eating habits and the consequence of not adhering to cultural patterns of food consumption. Most studies in the area of the health and wellbeing of children have focused on the effects of consuming “junk” food and the resulting obesity that occurs in young children (Delormier, Frohlich, & Potvin, 2009; Green et al., 2003; Thomson & McFeeter, 2016). A review of the literature has revealed that there are no studies that have examined the effect of handfeeding children during meal times. Within Indian culture, it is common for IPs to handfeed their preschool children and sometimes continue handfeeding them even when they have reached school age. It is a practice that is intended to endorse “interdependence” in a collectivist society (Gonzalez, 2008, p. 68). Reid, Kagan, and Scott-Little (2019) further explain this concept of interdependence:

Cultural psychologists argue that evidence from multi-ethnic communities indicates that children in collectivist cultures exercise personal autonomy in ways that serve communal pursuits and that social harmony is a controlling value that negates personal autonomy is a decidedly Western bias. (p. 6)

In a study of immigrants and their health in Australia, Jatrana (2014) quotes:

Migrant health over the long term could be impacted by the adoption of Australian habits relating to diet, physical activity, smoking and alcohol, as well

as the stress of migrating, adjusting to a new culture, and discrimination. (Deakin University media release, 2014).

In the new cultural environment of an ECC, it is crucial that immigrant children are assisted in their transition to a new culture of language, learning and food-related routines. Given the major differences in the food routines that Indian children are used to compared to those practised in ECCs, there is a need for research in this area to devise strategies that can accommodate the interdependence and the independence of children from different cultural backgrounds in multicultural classrooms (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). The food routines in early childhood centres encourage independent eating and are in alignment with the EYLF and NQS (McCormilla, 2012) regulations that promote the independence of the child in an early childhood setting. Independent eating is also encouraged in Australian homes, which is in contrast to eating habits in most Indian homes.

IPs come to Australia after having been educated in environments like the ones that Prochner (2002) succinctly describes: “there tends to be a high proportion of teacher-directed activities in Indian preschools, including whole-group games, in which children follow a leader” (p. 441). Conversely, in the Australian system, play pedagogy and child agency (DET [Clth], 2018) are the norm and IPs’ understanding of this is limited. While the neo-liberal thinking in India encourages women to oversee their children’s education (Donner, 2018; Gupta, 2018), for immigrant Indian parents in Australia, the new education system disempowers them from retaining control of their children’s education because of these new concepts to them such as child agency and play. Indian parents spending time with ECEs would likely result in the parents understanding the concept of child agency that is embedded in the teaching and learning that is practised in Australian ECCs, however, time is sparse for the busy IPs. Although ECCs provide information through newsletters and one-off information sessions, these communication methods are insufficient to promote effective cultural teaching and learning relationships between ECEs and IPs and can leave the IPs confused as to what to teach their children at home (Broadhead & Armistead, 2007; Epstein, 2010; Rouse, 2012b, 2014; Wise & da Silva, 2007).

Indian parents’ personal early experiences in India have taught them to regard play pedagogy as just play and not as a learning and teaching method (Gupta 2010; Tobin, Arzubigaa, & Adair, 2013). The lack of research in the area of how IPs are involved with their children at home has widened the gap the research required to inform early childhood policies. Through the examination of IPs’ involvement with their children at home, this study has revealed the lived reality of IPs who are either constrained or empowered by their culture and that ECEs are likely

to acknowledge the related conceptual thinking that comes with language and culture. To date, there has been no research undertaken in relation to developing strategies to assist IPs understand the play-based education system in Australia, which might put things into perspective for IPs.

One of the main barriers to Indian parents and children communicating effectively with ECEs and others in the early childhood centres is their lack of proficiency in the English language (as mentioned earlier in this chapter). Ulich and Mayr (2002) also found that because of poor English language skills, there were “lower involvement rates of ethnic minority children especially in language-related activities, [and] comparatively low involvement rates in most activities for young children in age-mixed groups” (p. 127). English can, however, be a priority for IPs to teach their children at home and their involvement in their child’s education can result in the child being successful at school (Durand, 2011; Gillanders, Mc Kinney, & Ritchie, 2012; Gregg, Rugg, & Stoneman, 2012; Tobin, Arzubaiaga, & Adair 2013; Whitmarsh, 2011).

IPs prioritise the English language over the home language, not understanding that culture and conceptual thinking are all interrelated (DET [Clth], 2019; Jiang, 2000), and therefore they could lose their traditional cultural thinking as well. While diversity and home languages are celebrated in ECCs, monolingualism still prevails in the centres (Ball, 2010; Conteh & Brock, 2011), which makes it difficult for the IP to continue with their home language. However, learning English, together with their home language, influences the outcomes for the child, and bilingualism and multilingualism provide advantages over monolingualism. Bilingual children are likely to do well in learning due to their ability to move from one language to another and such skills will no doubt later benefit their ability to obtain employment in a globalised world (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). However, Ball (2010) highlights that there are not enough studies to support CALD families in deciding whether to learn other languages:

Few empirical studies or well-documented programs promote the family’s role as a child’s first teacher in learning their first, and often more than one primary language, or the role of early childhood educators in supporting mother tongue development or bi/multilingual learning in programs that serve very young, linguistically diverse populations. (p. 1)

There are also no specific research studies to assist IPs to negotiate the decision-making process with ECEs and help them preserve their heritage language as well. My study’s examination of the social and cultural life of IPs will benefit ECEs in their attempts to understand the complexities involved in negotiating language learning, communicating and engaging with IPs and their children. While the research literature to date regarding the social



and cultural habits of Indian families has occurred as part of general CALD studies, I proposed that Indian parents should be studied to specifically understand their social and cultural habits and their lived realities. Flear (2003) suggests that by knowing the values of the culture and “understanding the resources available to individuals (IPs) is important for knowing how institutional practices can support and afford cognition” (p. 193). There is a growing Indian population in the western part of Melbourne and my study is likely to be useful for the ECEs teaching in that area. Moreover, “the cultural tools available to a particular community also shape the way they think about, and act within, a particular sociocultural context” (Flear, 2003, p. 193). This study has highlighted that the processes that were previously considered to be intrinsic behaviour in IPs are now in a state of flux due to recent developments in immigration and globalisation.

## **2.4 Early Childhood Educators in Partnership with Indian Parents**

In Section 2.2, the difficulties in partnerships between IPs and ECEs due to language communications, differing child-rearing practices and the sociocultural learning environments of IPs were alluded to. Specific research literature relating to partnerships between ECEs and IPs is presented in this section. A partnership, as defined by Dunlap and Fox (2007), is as follows:

A partnership entails a clear and strong commitment by both parties, a shared vision, trust and open communication, mutual respect, and an understanding of each party’s circumstances and roles. (p. 277)

The reasons that partnerships between ECEs and CALD parents develop superficially with no “shared vision” as mentioned by Dunlap and Fox can be due to a variety of factors as indicated by the early childhood literature. These can be the early childhood educators lack of time to understand CALD families; their lack of professional development in cultural diversity and reflections on teaching; the political environment; and/or policy accountability (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2007). Rouse (2017) suggests that when partnerships are defined by policy documents, there is “an ambiguity in the way teachers and educators are engaging in partnerships” (p. 45). Janssen and Vandenbroeck (2018), in their research study of 14 early childhood curricula state that “as this cross-national analysis revealed that perspectives on parental involvement are often intertwined with curricular and pedagogical traditions, the actual diversity in (alternative) approaches remains largely invisible for practitioners” (p. 827).

Apart from obligatory and ill-defined partnerships, Knopf and Swick (2006) note that relationships between teachers and parents are promoted by trust and the respect shown to

parental interests and their cultural values and practices. The approachability of ECEs from monocultures can be intimidating for the CALD parents (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000a, 2000b); the fear of offending the unknown culture is likely to stop the ECEs from interacting with the CALD parents. Hand and Wise (2006) report from a study conducted to evaluate teacher views on working with CALD parents, where one teacher articulates that “it is not always easy to do what parents would like due to the nature of childcare. Parents’ ways are not always appropriate to accreditation standards” (p. 22).

When working in multicultural classroom contexts, certain terms, such as intercultural teaching and pluralism, are worth mentioning to bring clarity to a variety of pedagogical approaches. Todd (2010) mentions that the term *diversity*, as used in European documents promoting intercultural education, denotes the democratic vehicle for overcoming social conflict between different cultural groups. However, she argues that education should not be restricted to just cultures being respectful of each other’s presence instead they need to interact with each other to achieve pluralism, which is not a given but needs to be achieved. To achieve this pluralistic thinking, the conflicts and contentions that the term intercultural education and diversity provoke need to be managed. Todd (2010) believes that when pluralism is understood in its right form, it can achieve the interacting of various cultures with each other, and not just living harmoniously side by side. Unless pluralistic education is promoted, the members/families in a community will not engage with each other. It would be interesting to see if families and educators in this study engage with each other in the learning community of kindergartens. I believe the literature review indicates many gaps in the engagement of families in partnership with early childhood educators.

For ECEs, CALD families are considered as elements in the curriculum rather than as a blend embedded in the curriculum (Nāone & Au, 2010). It is often relatively straightforward for ECEs to help CALD parents and children adjust to an existing sociocultural setting (Fleet, 2006; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2009) but in doing so the message to parents is that familial cultures are not valued (Buchori & Dobinson, 2015). When the ideas of child-rearing and teaching-learning concepts are quite diverse (Gupta 2004, 2010; Rogoff, 1990; Sriprakash, 2012), partnerships and relationships between ECEs and parents can become problematic. Research indicates that families are rarely studied in relation to the development of curriculum and pedagogy (Sriprakash, 2012).

With Western pedagogies unable to meet the needs of Indian parent and child, and Western values of education struggling to meet multicultural policy demands, it is worth exploring the third-space pedagogies wherein researcher Gupta (2015) explains:

In order to have a discussion on the third space it is first necessary to believe that it does exist, and to recognize and accept the multiple realities that act within this third space. It requires us to move away from adopting a stance of ‘one right way’ and becoming more accepting of thinking and working within grey areas replete with ambiguities (p.268).

The ambiguities for Australian teachers implementing child-centred pedagogies lies in the dilemmas of how to work with non-Western interdependence or collective cultures (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). In the Indian context, Gupta (2015) comments that “the debate about an academic versus child-centred pedagogy and curriculum has been ongoing for a long time and remains unresolved” (p. 269). This debate is unresolved in the Australian context as well between the homegrown Australian pedagogies and socio-political, cultural and educational backgrounds of immigrants/Indian families. My study is also about how to work with these gaps and ambiguities that ECEs face every day when teaching multicultural children/Indian children and families. No doubt that there is a gap in research and my study will be useful in the Australian context.

To date there are few research studies that contain strategies for teaching, learning, and creating effective partnerships with CALD parents (Hadley, 2012). Joshi, Eberly, and Konzal (2005) conducted a study with teachers, specialists and administrators in New Jersey, USA. Half of the teacher respondents identified the lack of parent involvement was due to time constraints; other reasons included difficulty in comprehending the language and the educational limitations of parents in understanding the school culture. A similar result occurred when Australian ECEs were surveyed in a study by Buchori and Dobinson (2015), where “there was also a sense that teachers felt students and their families were ignorant of how to integrate into Australian society” (p. 75). It is noted, however, that developing partnerships with parents is an obligation of the teaching profession (DET [Clth], 2018; Keyes, 2002) but not necessarily that of the parent who has a child enrolled in the ECC. It is the ECE’s responsibility to ascertain why the parent is unable or reluctant to develop a relationship with the ECE. Singham (2006) also demonstrated the desire of the ECEs for the CALD parents to assimilate into the ECC culture; however, the CALD parents were unable to contribute to the work of the ECCs because of the monoculture thinking of the ECEs.

Singham (2006) believes that the Sri Lankan parents who participated in his study had plenty of skills they could contribute – for example, their knowledge of sustainable living. Yet as Singham (2006) notes, the ECEs did not consider such contributions from CALD families as relevant to the ECC. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) also contend that “the power of parents and families” when acknowledged “creates empowerment strategies where they can use their skills and talents in diverse and culturally responsive modes” (p. 188). However, the message that was usually sent out to parents was they could contribute their time to cleaning jobs and helping with the operations of the ECC (Stonehouse, 1991).

Stonehouse (1991) discusses the various misconceptions that teachers have towards collaborating with parents from diverse cultures. CALD parents often want to work with teachers if there is a strong connection to members of the community. When the teachers do not acknowledge this community connection, it is likely to produce confusion for the CALD families. Hopkins, Lorains, Issaka, and Podbury (2017), in their place-based community study that included Indian families, elucidate the benefits of involving the community to enhance “child development outcomes” (p. 14). Hopkins et al. (2017) see a “circular nature of trust, culture, community and communication” (p. 13) amongst CALD families from common religious and cultural configurations.

In a study by Bernhard et al. (1998), one CALD parent says “the teacher always smiled but when I saw her at the market, she hardly said ‘hello’ to us” (p. 13). The expectation of this Indian parent is a traditional value based on respecting teachers (Gupta, 2013b). It is about acknowledging/greeting teachers when seen in their communities. Hopkins et al. (2017) mention that early childhood services can make connections with cultures through gaining the support of trusted CALD community leaders. When positive relations are created, researchers believe that governments and services “may use existing community connections to improve access to early childhood services and enhance child development outcomes across all communities” (Hopkins et al., 2017, p. 14).

A factor that creates a barrier to building communities with CALD parents is when the teacher displays more confidence and enthusiasm for parents whose child-rearing practices and teaching ideas align with their own (Powell, 2008; Rich, 1998, as cited in Keyes, 2002). Arndt (2014) suggests that teachers need to reflect and critically think about being more receptive to other cultures. Creating learning communities through teacher partnerships with CALD parents is complex; however, if ECEs are provided with information on the cultural values of the IPs whose children are enrolled in their ECC, they are in a better position to understand the lived

reality of IPs and create learning communities with the various CALD families associated with the ECC.

In addition to policy requirements, Hadley (2014) proposes that “working with diverse families in early childhood settings requires teachers to rethink how these families are heard and listened to” (p. 91). Listening is an important skill in communications, and if this is lacking, then effective partnerships are difficult to create (Elliot, 2005; Joshi, Eberly, & Konzal, 2005). To implement a partnership policy with CALD communities means providing new spaces (Hadley, 2014). Until teachers reposition this partnership building for CALD families, current discourses will remain unchanged (Leeman & Reid, 2006; Wong & Turner, 2014) and the cultural connections that Quillien, Theis, and Quillien, (2014) explain will become necessary to implement. Behind every connection made with other cultures there are four tools that Quillien, Theis, and Quillien, have proposed in their research and these are communication, collaboration, community and comparison, and the model is called the Multicultural Umbrella Model or the MUM framework.

Understanding the sociocultural contexts of Indian parents and their ways of communicating or not communicating is seen as central to the information provided to ECEs on creating effective partnerships with CALD families. The context for ECEs also differs, depending on their professional qualifications and their understanding of CALD families. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) posit that teachers with experience will validate family and child strengths, their linguistic and cultural appreciation will produce an inclusive approach to partnerships, they will have adopted a lifelong learning approach alongside families; they will build trust through implementing collaborative schemes, and they will recognise “multiple family involvement” definitions and paradigms.

## **2.5 Early Childhood Educators Engaging Indian Children in the Early Childhood Centre**

Goldspink, Winter, and Foster (2008) conducted a study that examined how student engagement operates in schools in South Australia. They adopted Akey’s (2006) definition of engagement, which is:

the level of participation and intrinsic interest that a student shows in school.  
Engagement in schoolwork involves both behaviours (such as persistence, effort, attention) and attitudes (such as motivation, positive learning values, enthusiasm,

interest, pride in success) They (children) also display curiosity, a desire to know more, and positive emotional responses to learning and school. (p. 6)

The child's involvement and wellbeing determine how well the learning environment meets the needs of the child. Wellbeing involves children developing trust, confidence, and good emotional health that facilitates their full participation in the curriculum. A child's wellbeing is paramount in early childhood education (Goldspink, Winter, & Foster, 2008). However, when parents' expectations "appear to be contrary to the principles and practices set out in regulatory frameworks such as the NQS and the EYLF" (Hu, Torr, & Whiteman, 2014, p. 257), or there is no communication from home regarding the child's learning, the ECE's assessment of the IC is likely to be affected.

Play-based pedagogy is the prevailing practice in early childhood education (DET [Clth], 2018). "Whilst researchers have different views about what they value in early learning, there is little research on the views of parents and preschool staff" (Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2017, p. 244). Rogers (2010) contends that "young children demonstrate an inherent capacity to play and that it appears to be central to their early learning" (p. 5); however, she also says that:

how such insights are to be translated into pedagogical practices across diverse social and cultural contexts has presented the international early childhood field with some of its most enduring challenges. (p. 5)

How children play in different cultures (Gupta, 2011) and the value cultures confer on child's play (Roopnarine et al., 1994) varies in each culture. As observed by Roopnarine et al. (1994), most play in "Indian children demonstrating their cultural themes of filial piety, socio-cultural rituals and rites of passage, traditional celebrations and folk tales in their play" (Sanagavarapu & Wong, 2004, p. 303). There is a possibility that the traditional play of Indian children has changed due to immigration, which makes it unclear what play represents for IC currently enrolled in ECCs. The presence of multicultural children in the ECC further complicates the ambiguity of play-based learning for ECEs. Moreover, for play to be truly valuable and beneficial, a child needs to be able to play without the restrictions of a routine (Rogers, 2010) and routines are visible in early childhood care and education centres in Australia. If play and not an activity is to be valuable to children, Powell (2008) contends that "this may mean relinquishing some control over what, where, why and how children are playing" (p. 41).

To understand how play from children from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) is perceived by ECEs, Sanagavarapu and Wong (2004) observed in their research that "teachers

reported that NESB children are more likely to be involved in solitary play and less in co-operative, pretend, and messy play than English-speaking background (ESB) children” (p. 305). It was interesting to note that the teacher participants in this research study attributed the differences in play to the lack of English in communicating rather than the differences in play being due to cultural backgrounds. To better understand how NESB/CALD children play and communicate in an ECC, the ECC’s management would often hire educators from ethnic backgrounds. However, the research literature indicates that the immigrant voice is marginalised in the early childhood sector (Adair & Tobin, 2008; Delpit, 1995/2006; Kurban & Tobin, 2009; Tobin, Arzubiaga, & Mantovani, 2007).

ECEs from an ethnic background fear having an individualised opinion on cultural responsiveness to their communities and frequently “experience a dilemma that prevents them from applying their full expertise to the education and care of children of recent immigrants” (Adair, Tobin, & Arzubiaga, 2012, p. 2). An additional fear of supporting their communities is that ethnic teachers feel accountable to the curriculum and any differing opinion they might have could be viewed as antithetical to the ECC’s culture. Nayar’s (2009) research posits that being accepted into the teacher community is highly significant for an ethnic ECE. Such sentiments are another example of IC being disadvantaged in their learning despite the hiring of ethnic ECEs in ECCs or in the larger management of EC councils. It would be intriguing to study what ECEs think regarding CALD play in current early childhood education in Australia.

In engaging IC in the practices of ECCs, Buchori and Dobinson (2015) assert that ECEs are seemingly responsive to cultures; however, at times they unintentionally have lapses. One example they cite is the case of a Chinese child eating noodles in the ECC. Teachers gently reminded the child to bring food like that of the other children; this suggestion contains the implicit message that it would be easier for the child to eat alongside others. However, it is an unintentional statement that undervalues the cultural tradition of eating noodles. In the Buchori and Dobinson (2015) study, “comments from teachers revealed their lack of confidence and knowledge in this (cultural) area” (p. 77). Understanding a child’s customs and learning practices at home, also called the “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2005), facilitates the building of bridges and develops cultural connections between the two areas of activity (ECC and home). In addition, the child’s culture is able to be linked to the curricula (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018). In order to acquire these funds of knowledge, ECEs need to communicate and collaborate with CALD parents and include other cultural traditions into ECC programs.

## **2.6 Summary**

An examination of the research literature has revealed there is a lack of communication and collaboration between early childhood educators and Indian parents. The invisibility of the ECCs' social and cultural structures to the IPs and the imperceptibility of CALD cultural values to the ECEs creates an environment that is not conducive to congenial relationships between the two groups. A variety of reasons were cited that created barriers to effective partnerships between ECEs and IPs: lack of time; not understanding the learning and language difficulties of CALD families, including the eating and learning practices at home; and the invisibility of ECC cultures to the IPs.

Given the gaps in research revealed by the literature review regarding the differences in the understanding of the socio-cultural life of Indian families by ECEs and the teaching and learning philosophies of ECEs by IPs, I propose the following research questions.

## **2.7 Research Questions**

### **Main Question**

How do Indian parents and early childhood educators engage in partnerships for Indian children in early childhood contexts in Melbourne, Australia?

### **Sub questions**

What are Indian parents' practices and perceptions in engaging with their children at home and with early childhood educators?

What are early childhood educators' perspectives in engaging with Indian parents and their children?

The creation of cultural connections between IPs and their respective ECCs – which will enable IPs and ECEs to compare the differences between their respective cultures and appreciate the gap in cultural thinking – is likely to create communities of learning. In working towards a successful bridging of the gap in research and the various cultures present within the early childhood sector, I first explored developing a suitable and workable model to use in the early childhood setting that I could later use as a conceptual model for my study.



In the next chapter on a conceptual framework, I explore some of the prominent educational models of partnerships, bearing in mind that in this study, Indian parents' cultural differences are important in leading the discussion of what culture means to a community.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Conceptual Framework: Working in a New Culture**

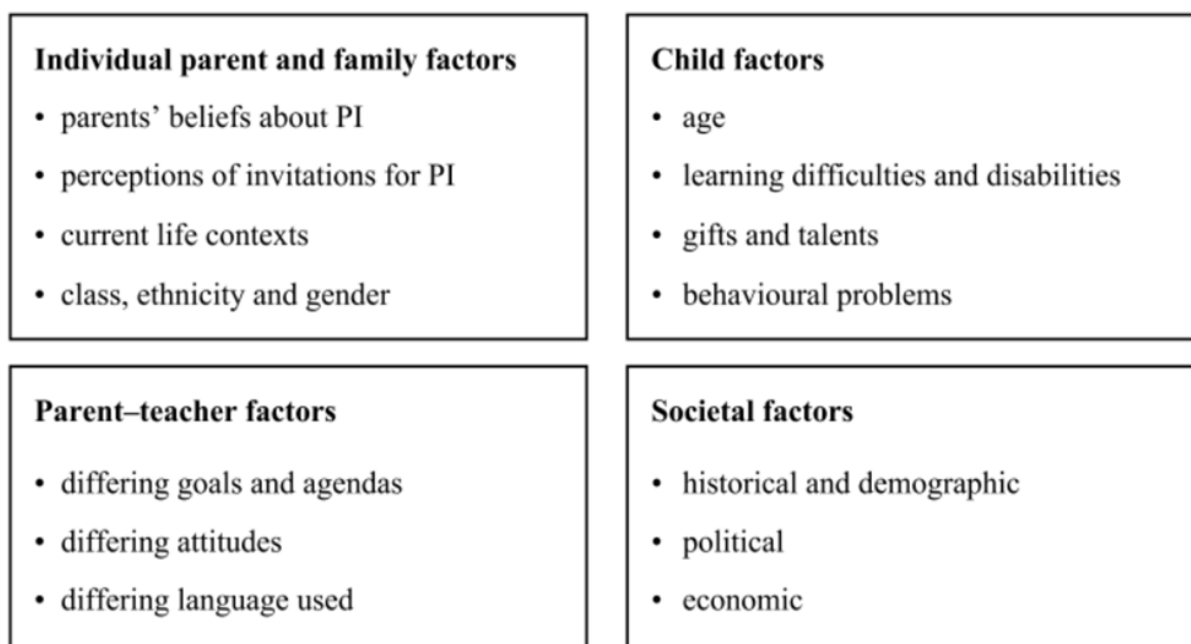
#### **3.1 Introduction**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was important to develop a conceptual framework, which would later serve as a workable model to make cultural connections with IPs. There is a large body of research on parent–teacher partnerships in the early childhood setting, which has underpinned the development of workable models for encouraging partnerships in schools and early childhood centres. However, there are fewer studies and workable partnership models that have been developed in relation to parent–teacher partnerships involving IPs/CALD families.

In this chapter, I present some educational partnership models that have been developed by other researchers, reflect on the suitability of these models for CALD parents, and then explain the suitability of the workable model I chose as a conceptual framework for partnerships between Indian parents and early childhood educators. The concept of culture and its specific definition for the purposes my study is also presented.

#### **3.2 Available Models for Partnerships in Schools**

The first model discussed is the Parent Involvement (PI) model, developed by Hornby and Lafaele (2011), which was derived from the concept of parent involvement and the corresponding barriers it can present to partnerships with educators. In the previous chapter, the literature review revealed that Indian parent involvement, and CALD parent involvement generally, in educational settings can inhibit the development of productive partnerships with teachers and other education professionals, hence it was apposite that this model be reviewed. Hornby and Lafaele believe there are four factors that discourage parents from being involved in school activities: individual parent and family factors, child factors, parent–teacher factors and societal factors (see Figure 3.1). Their model is a combination of models that creates a framework consisting of eight elements of parent involvement: communication, liaison, education, support, information, collaboration, resource, and policy.



*Figure 3.1. Model of factors acting as barriers to PI. Reprinted from “Barriers to Parental Involvement in Education: An Explanatory Model,” by G. Hornby and R. Lafaele, 2011, *Educational Review*, 63, p. 39.*

Hornby and Lafaele further explain each of the factors featured in the model but do not specifically mention culture. However, examples of cultural diversity is detailed in each of the factors in the above model. Some of the factors they outline are common to all parents who want to be involved or not involved in their child’s schooling – for example, if a parent’s experiences were unpleasant in their own schooling, they are likely to shy away from PI.

The PI model is useful when seeking to understand parental non-involvement in a child’s school learning. Most Indian parents are likely to be involved in their child’s schooling rather than their early childhood education in light of the aspirations they have for their children. However, this model does not take into account educators’ obligations to enter into partnerships with parents notwithstanding the fact that they may have some resistance to interacting with the parents. In addition, the parents may also refuse to enter into a partnership with the ECE, the educator is obliged to work with the parents as the child needs the support of both parents and educator to learn in the early childhood environment.

This PI model assists early childhood educators to understand the barriers that parents may present to entering into partnerships and can be particularly useful to understand the non-participation of Indian parents/CALD, but it is not a suitable model for early childhood partnerships because it does not elucidate the barriers that ECEs may present.

### **3.3 Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement**

Epstein (1995), after many years of work with educators and families in schools, devised a framework that has six types of involvement and sample practices. The six types of parent involvement was geared towards school children and included involving parents in their children's homework; communications from home to school and from school to home; parent help and support at school; decision-making in relation to schoolwork; and collaborating with community. These six types of parent partnerships are not conducive to the Australian early childhood educational context as the teaching and learning cultures in early years learning centres is very different to that of schools.

The types of involvement Epstein (1995) suggests are already embedded in the early years centre as a part of the Early Years Learning Framework care and education and/or in the operations of the early childhood centres. Partnership in early childhood does not seem to require an outside model to help with partnerships. Epstein's model is, however, useful for families as the child gets older and goes to school. Families tend to lose that communication with school as they get familiar with the school system and are not involved as they were in early years of the child; now they need a model to help teachers and families re-establish their relationships for the shared care of the child. Often in schools it is believed that schools are the experts in education and the families are the clients/consumers (Epstein, 2010). In situations like this, Epstein's model works to balance the power teachers have over the families by involving and collaborating with parents holistically as described in the model. Hence, this model was not adopted for this study instead it became necessary to work with a model that was conducive to early childhood education centres using the EYLF.

### **3.4 Keyes' Model of Parent-Teacher Partnerships**

Although Keyes' (2002) model is older than Hornby and Lafaelle's (2011) model and is based on Epstein's (2010) work on family and teacher partnerships, it was nevertheless chosen for review because the model's emphasis on communications between teachers and parents was important to my study. Keyes' (2002) complete model includes the ecology of the teacher and parent being influenced by cultural values, role understanding and personality characteristics, and the child as situated in this partnership. Keyes also includes in his model the teacher and parent in the social system and then highlights the importance of communication. I have particularly examined the communication part of the model, in contrast to the Hornby and Lafaelle PI model, as presented in Figure 3.2

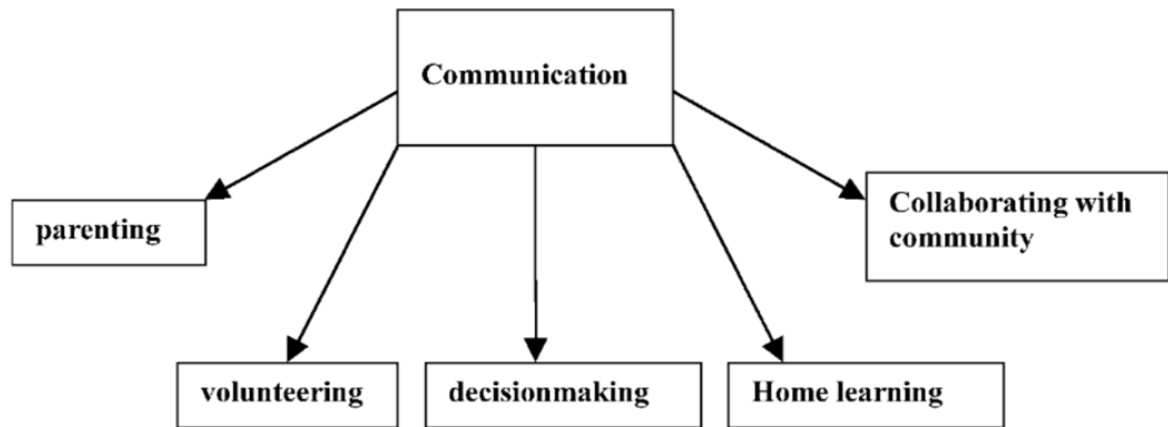


Figure 3.2. Keyes' take on communication. Reprinted from "A Way of Thinking about Parent/Teacher Partnerships for Teachers," by C. M. Keyes, 2002, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 10(3), p. 187. The teachers are not provided with any guidance in their attempts to understand how communications work with CALD parents despite the barriers outlined in the PI model. In the Keyes' model, communication is one of the significant components of a good partnership; however, this model does not consider the communication barrier that can occur due to language and cultural thinking, which is a central concept of my study.

### 3.5 The Communication Accretion Spiral

Unlike the previous two models discussed, which are used in school settings, I chose one from the early childhood sector and reviewed it to ascertain its suitability as a conceptual framework in relation to making connections with cultures in an ECC. Figure 3.3 outlines the communication model used by Elliott (2005) in the framework she created in 2003. This model takes into consideration the parents' comfort zone in their level of communication with educators, beginning with the essential physiological needs of the child at Stage 1 and increasing in levels of sophistication to Stage 5 that involves reciprocal engagement. The intervening levels progress slowly from communicating physiological needs to those of belonging and esteem to knowing and understanding and finally to self-actualisation. These stages are based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs.



Figure 3.3. Model of Communication Accretion Spiral. Reprinted from “Engaging Families: Building Strong Communication,” by R. Elliott, 2005, *Research in Practice Series*, 12(2), p. 4.

Elliott (2005) says that this model is helpful:

given that parents generally want to contribute to discussions but may be unaware how to initiate such interactions, the communication cycle provides a step-by-step process to achieve the desired reciprocal engagement. (p. 4)

However, CALD parents’ reluctance to be articulate beyond the Stage 1 spiral in response to the educator’s communication is likely to be a barrier, or they have no intention of communicating because they have different views on belonging, esteem and the aspects of Stages 4 and 5 (both these positions of CALD parents were evident in the literature review).

The cultural connections that educators needed to make were not evident in the models that I had examined to this point. The criteria I had been using to assess the suitability of models that could be applied to ECEs connecting with CALD families led me to examine the Multicultural Umbrella Model.

### 3.6 The Multicultural Umbrella Model

This model considers the underlying factors of any multicultural partnership, which is concerned with making *connections* with the *cultures* (IPs/CALD families) through effective

*communication, collaboration, articulating comparative education and creating learning communities* with CALD families. Since the italicized terms all begin with the letter C, I refer to these terms as the six Cs, as do Quillien, Theis, and Quillien (2014) in the Multicultural Umbrella Model (MUM) framework they developed. In my review of the relevant research literature, I realised that the six Cs were essential to creating effective partnerships between early childhood educators and Indian parents.

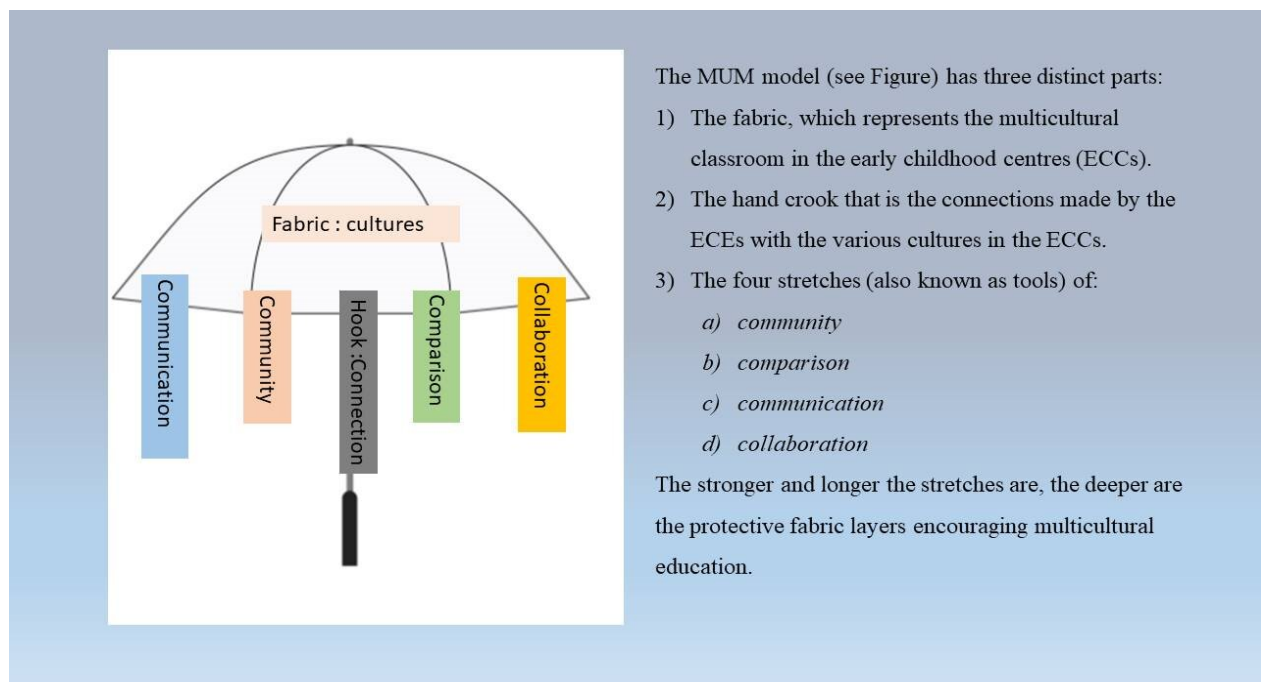
To answer the research questions I formulated, I used the MUM framework, which is a constructivist model. Social constructivist theorists believe that much of the child's development takes place by the interactions the child has with adults and peers in its socio-cultural environment. In particular the cognitive development of the child is the result of their interactions in socio-cultural environments. Language becomes a tool used in these interactions. Vygotsky proposed that socially mediated activities generate higher forms of human consciousness and stressed the mediation of semiotic tools, and especially language, through which human beings' external social activities are transformed into internal psychological functions. Child's culture shapes cognitive development by determining what and how the child will learn about the world (Woolfolk & Margaretts, 2013).

When the child is growing up in environments where the main language is different to their home language, understanding the unfamiliar environment becomes difficult for the child to function and learn from it. In such circumstances it is necessitated that ECEs and Indian parents come together and form partnerships as advocated by the cultural competence policy in the EYLF and the MUM framework, which suggest communication, collaboration, community and comparison tools to help connect to various cultures in the classroom environment. Moreover, the MUM was developed as a language model to help connect with the CALD students/families. When ECEs use these tools to help connect with CALD parents, it is likely to benefit the child in their shared custody. Using this sociocultural and constructivist MUM framework is at par with the interpretive philosophy where the constructivist paradigm fits to allow for the understanding that people are constantly changing and, in turn, are constantly interpreting their ever changing worlds (Williamson, 2006). Using this sociocultural and constructivist model helps ECEs move away from stereotyping of cultures towards interpreting the lived realities for CALD families and child in the early year centres. This conceptual framework was essential for this research study as it "reflects the need for the use of multiple theoretical frameworks in many studies that create new knowledge, and the process of personal conceptualization" (Berman, 2013, p. 2). To further understand the appropriate application of the MUM model, I outline its origins and adaptations.

### 3.6.1 The origins and adaptations of the MUM framework.

Quillien, Theis, and Quillien (2014) define the MUM model as “the six Cs for success”. This framework was developed by these authors from a language acquisition model, The National Standards in Foreign Language Education project, (2013; American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2013). The five Cs used by the MUM framework were adapted from this project; a sixth C (collaboration) was added by the authors to assist educators and policymakers work with adult CALD students in a multicultural classroom. In the authors’ words, “Cultural identity is expressed and passed on to future generations through language” (Quillien, Theis, & Quillien, 2014, p. 151).

Figure 3.4 is a visual representation of the adapted version of the MUM framework:



*Figure 3.4.* The adapted version of the MUM framework. Adapted from “Multicultural Umbrella Model: Six Cs for Successful Integration,” by J-B. Quillien, G. M. Theis, and V. R. Quillien, in S. Dimitriadi (Ed.), *Diversity, Special Needs and Inclusion in Early Years Education* (p. 152), 2014, New Delhi, India: Sage Publications Pty Ltd.

In their adapted version of the MUM framework, Quillien, Theis, and Quillien, (2014) define the six Cs as the following:

**Culture:** Taking into consideration the child’s culture gives them a source to identify themselves with and have a sense of ownership within the program.



**Connections:** Connecting between families, staff and educators. This connection can occur when similarities and differences are well understood by all those who are involved with a child's education.

**Community:** Outreach to businesses, educational institutions and diverse staff by early childhood centres.

**Collaboration:** Working collectively towards the same goal for the rights of the child by taking into account relevant policies, the centre's programs and CALD parents' aspirations for their children.

**Comparison:** Finding cultural resources, including human talent.

**Communication:** Between centres, universities, and research bodies to help understand and implement multicultural education.

**3.6.2 Rethinking the MUM framework to suit the early childhood settings.** I modified the six Cs to accord with the context of my study into early childhood centres in Australia as follows:

**Culture:** The fabric represents the learning environment and the child's culture, giving them a source with which to identify. This fabric, when stretched, includes not one but many cultures under the one multicultural umbrella. This stretched fabric gives security and a feeling of belonging to CALD children.

**Connections:** ECEs and IPs collaborating with each other in spaces that are sensitive to the needs of CALD families, IC and ECEs, and to the similarities and differences in educating the children of CALD families.

**Community:** ECEs empower IPs and CALD-ECEs to contribute to and make visible the ECC's program, pedagogies and teaching strategies, and encourage IPs and CALD-ECEs to be involved with the wider community. Stakeholders are encouraged to form a community of learners.

**Comparison:** ECEs and IPs are able to meet face to face or online regularly and compare the differences in educational values/aspirations as well as sociocultural and conceptual thinking that is related to language and culture.

**Communication:** Communication is not confined to ECEs and IPs on the aforementioned matters. It also includes ECEs making contact with professionals in universities, other ECCs and

related CALD communities. During their communication, ECEs and IPs learn from each other's knowledge of the child and the child's development in the early childhood setting.

**Collaboration:** When good communication is in place, there is collaboration between all the stakeholders to help children belong to the learning environment. Collaboration encourages engagement of the IP/IC in the ECC learning environment.

Figure 3.5 is a visual representation of the modified definitions for the MUM framework.

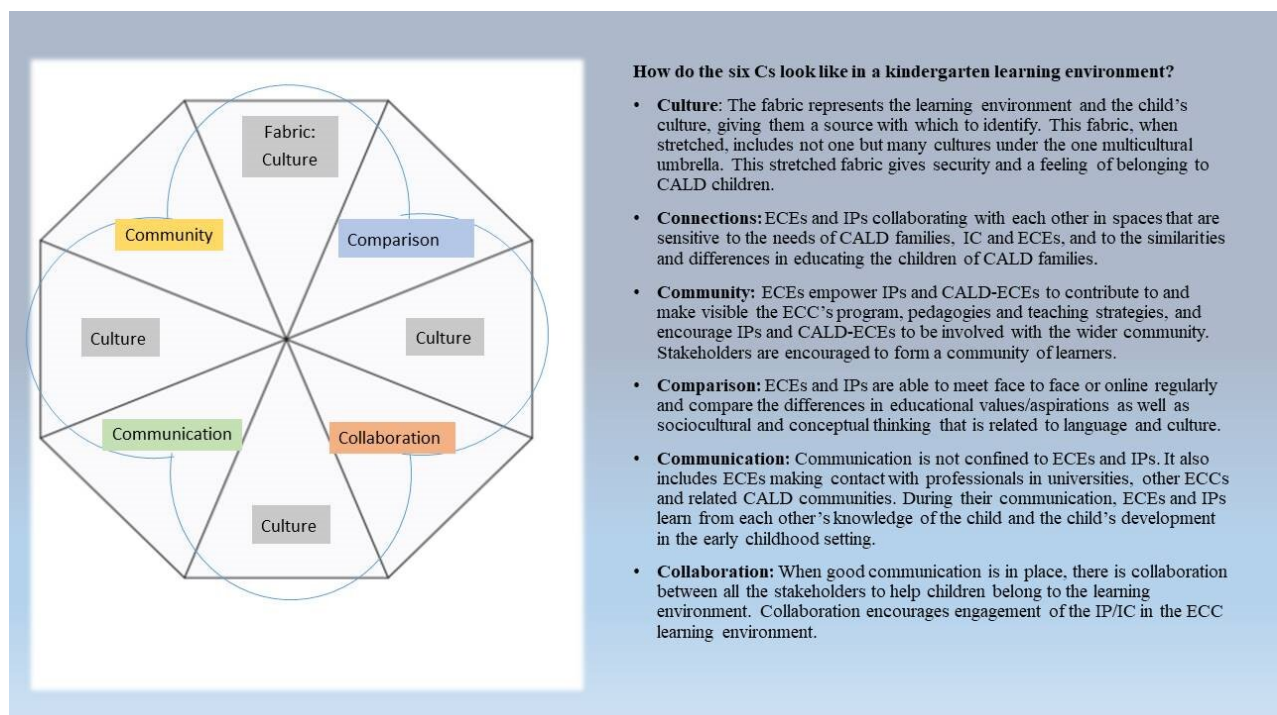


Figure 3.5. The MUM framework adapted to ECC contexts.

The original MUM framework operates at two levels: first, the operational level, that is, the day-to-day routines of the early childhood settings; and the second is the learning level, which is evident in the relationship building between stakeholders – specifically, IPs and children and ECEs. While my research study focused on the learning level, the operational level was not totally disregarded but used in contexts when it was deemed appropriate.

When a social constructionist conceptual model was applied to my research, the MUM framework facilitated the development of understanding through language, cultures and contextual factors. Often sociological theories are meta-theories and do not include specific models; however, the MUM framework provides details of how the conceptualised Cs can be achieved. In addition, the MUM provides not only an appropriate framework to address the

research questions of this study – as in how are cultural habits communicated, or, indeed, are they being communicated at all – but it also allows for the identification and the bridging of the gaps in the context of this particular research, where the six Cs were missing from the partnerships between CALD parents and educators. The MUM framework also provides ECEs with a method of working with CALD children in today’s multicultural classrooms. It helps them to widen the circle of the child-learning environment, inviting the different stakeholders to have dialogue and eliminate the barriers to effective partnerships and cultural connections.

The research undertaken to determine the contexts to which this model had been applied previously revealed that the framework had, in the main, been used in the aged-care sector and strategic planning areas of research, with little application to the area of partnerships in early childhood education.

### **3.6.3 The concept of culture and the MUM framework.**

It was important to envisage how culture would be framed in this study. The description of culture in the MUM framework is also not a fixed reality, but dynamic and ever changing. For this study, when culture was incorporated into the MUM framework, Spencer-Oatey’s (2012) definition was used. She argues that:

culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the “meaning” of other people’s behaviour. (p. 3)

Using Spencer-Oatley’s (2012) structure, culture is concerned with creating depth by differentiating and influencing biological processes and being both etic and emic. Culture is a social construct. The following are some values of culture pertinent to this study:

1. Culture as having *depth*: Three of these fundamental levels of cultural depth are presented: artefacts, values and underlying assumptions.
2. Culture as being *differentiated*: Culture is learned and is thus either confined to a certain behaviour and/or an overlying value on other behaviours. Personality is viewed as specific to each individual and is both learned and inherited (Spencer-Oatey, 2012).
3. Culture influences *biological processes*: Everyone needs food, but how it is eaten and when it is eaten are defined by culture. The associated protocols regarding eating differ from culture to culture and influence the biological processes of the individual.

4. *Etic* (universal) and *emic* (distinctive) aspects of culture: Etic is the universal value common to all cultures – for example, sounds are universal, but how a culture arranges those sounds is unique. Emic is the distinctive value of cultures, which forms the various languages of expression. Spencer-Oatey (2012) suggests:

when we study cultures for their own sake, we may as well focus on emic elements, and when we compare cultures, we have to work with the etic cultural elements. (p. 11)

Spencer-Oatey's view of culture was used in this study.

### **3.7 Summary**

I examined a number of different models of partnership in order to ascertain one that would be appropriate for the formulation of this study's conceptual framework, which would determine the process for data collection and analysis and the discussion of the findings. The most suitable model was deemed to be the multicultural umbrella model, with its comprehensive method of investigating cultural connections between IPs/CALD and ECEs in early childhood settings. These connections are vital for a child to learn and succeed in early childhood.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology: Who Am I?**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The MUM conceptual framework, which was explained in the previous chapter, was used to explore the making of cultural connections between ECEs and IPs. This chapter outlines the methods and methodology employed to elicit the responses from ECE and IP participants regarding their interactions with each other. It also describes the research tools that were used to facilitate the disclosures from the IPs and ECEs regarding the child in their care and their roles and responsibilities in the child's learning in early childhood settings.

This methodology chapter describes the research design, the tools of investigation, and the case study approach, which is both a methodology and a method. The first section of the research design consists of the sampling methods, participants' profiles, data collection and analysis, and the pilot study followed by the determination of the validity and reliability of these methods and the relevant ethics forms. I present the methods for both the main and pilot studies initially and then later explain the pilot study in detail. The participants, whose data is analysed and briefly presented in the pilot study section, are also included in findings section of the main study.

#### **4.2 Research Design**

The case study method adopted as the research design for this research project was used to investigate what Yin (2009) calls "a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context" (p. 18). Figure 4.2 illustrates the real-life contexts of IPs and ECEs, which are complex and not easily measured. A case study design was used to research the social and cultural contexts of ECEs and IPs of 3- to 5-year old Indian children (IC) enrolled in early childhood centres (ECCs) in Australia. The focus of this study was to explore the ways in which ECEs engaged with IPs in relation to IC, with both participant cohorts approaching the engagement from markedly different social and cultural contexts.

The case study approach is explained in various sections within this chapter. The methods section indicates how cases were developed from the semi-structured interviews conducted with ECEs and IPs. The analysis section presents the MUM framework as a basis for extracting codes and themes from the transcripts of ECEs and IPs using the NVivo software (QSR International, 2012). Relevant extracts from the policy documents were used to convey the analysis and

context of the ECE data. Figure 4.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the research design of this study.

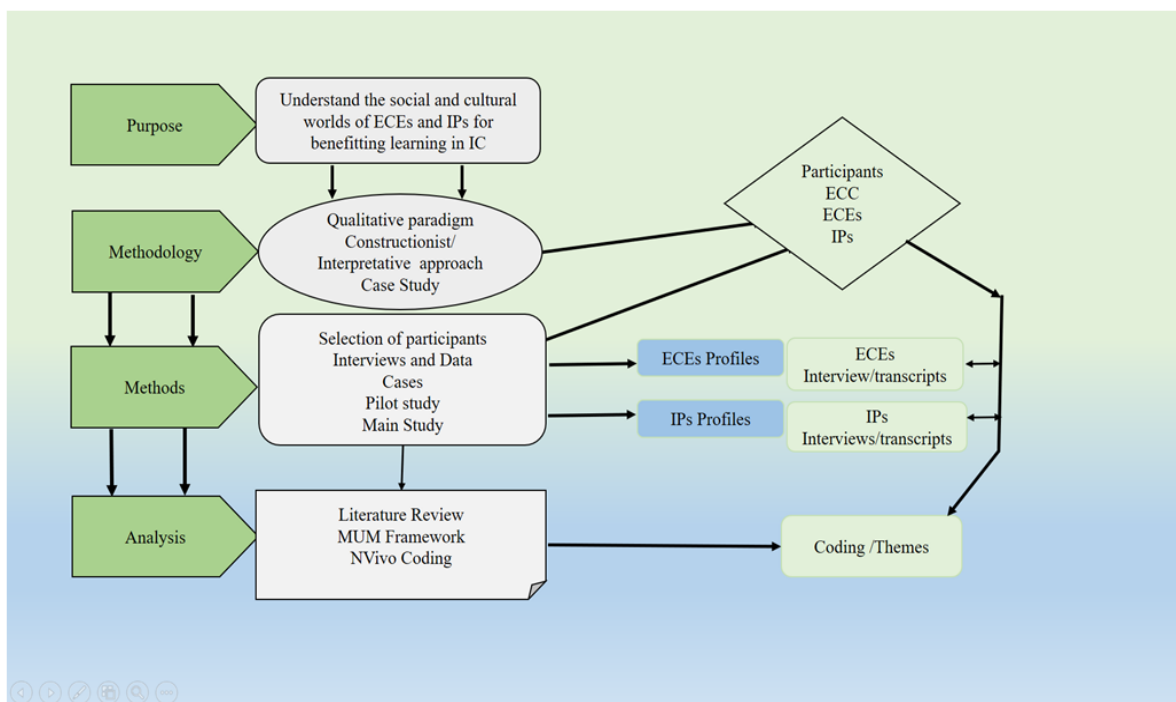


Figure 4.1. Research design.

The components of the research design are discussed in the next sections.

### 4.3 Case Study as a Design Frame

Primarily, my research design was to facilitate the exploration of the social and cultural values of ECEs and IPs in an ECC, which is the multicultural learning environment for IC. I wanted to understand the interactions between ECEs and IPs in relation to early childhood development programs immigrant children. In addition, an objective of my study was to examine differences between the experiences of IPs and their children in the learning environment of their home and at the ECC. As this research project involved the participation of people, it was considered appropriate to use a case study method. I believed that by studying the key protagonists' interactions with each other, effective relationships could be developed that would benefit the CALD child's learning, which is in line with Simons' (2009) thinking: "the need to understand programs and policies through the perspectives of those who enact them" (p. 69). The second reason for using the case study method was that much of the research for this study was based on social interaction:

particularly with an orientation to be educative, is an interactive social process. Study of transactions and the relationships individuals create in the field is essential to document the “lived experience” of the program. (Simons, 2009, p. 75)

Capturing the lived experience of IPs involved in early childhood settings, where limited research literature has been undertaken in the Australian context, would benefit ECEs in their creation of inclusive learning development programs. Similarly, given there is little research of IPs’ understanding of the experiences of ECEs and their beliefs regarding the education of children in ECCs, a case study method that examined the lived realities of IPs and ECEs would be an important contribution to early childhood education research.

IP immigrants’ experience of early childhood education in Australia is different to that of their compatriots in the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom(UK) or Canada and a case study method would capture “the individual’s experience of a program or aspects of their lives in specific socio-political contexts” (Simons, 2009, p. 69). The participants’ socio-political contexts, which influenced the policies and programs of their particular ECC, was an important part of my study. Another important aspect was to appreciate that the migrant participants were in a state of transition, and that, consequently, influences the partnerships between IPs and ECEs was a complex phenomenon.

Yin (2009) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not evident. Yin’s representation of phenomena also promotes a structural design and implementation that is inclined towards a more positivist view and does not allow for flexibility during the study investigation. However, flexibility was necessary in my study’s investigation as the IP migrants were from a range of Indian subcultures that had varying views on early childhood education. The positivist view of Yin’s case study method was, in some cases, deemed unsuitable for a cohort of cultural participants from various subcultures. In this study, “one-size fits all” was not applicable.

Stake (1995), on the other hand, presents in his case study design a flexibility during the design implementation where “there are multiple perspectives of the case that need to be represented, but there is no way to establish, beyond contention, the best view” (p. 108). Given the various Indian subcultures, it was difficult to develop a best view of an IP’s data. In investigating the various IPs’ and ECEs’ viewpoints regarding early childhood education in Australia, the purpose was to ascertain the differences rather than develop a best viewpoint;

hence, Stake's (2005) view was used extensively in the design of the case study method although the Yin's take on phenomena is not totally discarded.

Stake (1995) has a constructivist view that aligned with the theoretical framework of this research study, where units of interests were best understood in relation to the wider range of processes that surrounded them. The processes included the socio-political and educational environments in which the IPs participated. As well as using Yin's perspective to expose the phenomena embedded in the context, my research project also used Stake's case study method to build in the necessary flexibility for collecting the data from the Indian community, thus making this design more pertinent to this research study.

#### **4.3.1 The exploratory case study.**

Given the multiplicity of ways for collecting, analysing and presenting data in a case study, the exploratory case study method was selected because of its versatility and applicability to answer this study's research questions (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2009). It was deemed to be a good fit for my research design because of the "particularity" of this study (Thomas, 2011).

Of the many different types of qualitative case studies used in research, an exploratory case study is often used to explore a phenomenon that has not been widely researched and is evaluative in its outcome. Moreover, exploratory case studies research particular knowledge in relation to the context, milieu and learning environment in which the research participants are interacting with each other. The exploratory case study method was also useful when researching how IPs and children are engaged in the learning environment of early childhood.

In his case study, Thomas (2011) postulates that cases could be studied with a "completeness and looking from all angles" (p. 23), which assisted in arriving at a deeper and better understanding of the interactive conversations between the IPs and the ECEs. In this study, data was gathered from several sources that concerned the interactions between ECEs and IPs (and their various cultural backgrounds). To meet the criteria of completeness that Thomas (2011) proposes, other factors such as the early childhood curriculum policies, the socio-political and educational environments, including the teaching philosophies, were explored in relation to the participant early childhood centres.

#### **4.3.2 Each case study in context.**

IPs have a unique socio-political background as do ECEs from Australia or from other ethnic backgrounds. Each case is represented in Figure 4.2 and displays aspects of their socio-cultural



backgrounds that have influenced their world views. ECEs and IPs interact with each other at the service level (operational) and at the teaching and learning level regarding the IC in their care. Each case would be influenced by the myriad of policies and regulations at the socio-political level as well as the ECC's settings at the service and learning levels.

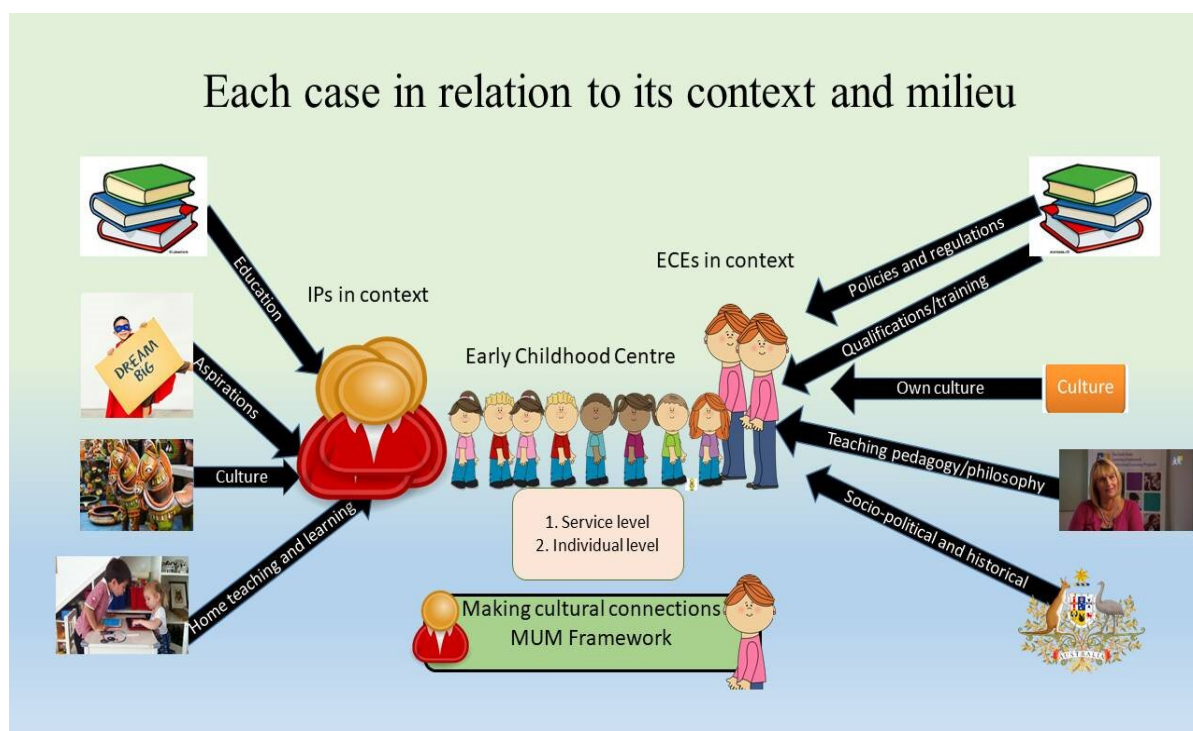


Figure 4.2. Each case in relation to its context and milieu.

In this study, the MUM model framework's various tools – communication, community, collaboration and understanding comparative education – were applied to understand the interactions between the ECEs and the IPs who were from two distinctly different cultures.

In the research design and exploratory case study, the MUM framework was instrumental in forming the case when the interactive nature of participants (teachers and IPs) were being elicited. The body of data produced facilitated the development of a teaching learning model for CALD families in the latter stages of the research study. The MUM framework was described as part of the conceptual framework section in Chapter 3.

### 4.3.3 Early childhood policy documents.

Early childhood education is not compulsory in Australia. There are many incarnations of early childhood centres, such as early learning centres, childcare centres, family day care, preschools and kindergartens, that form the components of the early childhood sector (DET [Clth], 2018).

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009) formally introduced the EYLF in 2009. This document contains the overarching mandatory national curriculum for Australian early childhood care and the associated education centres. However, different states have their own curricula that relates to early years philosophies and pedagogies. For example, Queensland has its specific Early Years Curriculum Guidelines and Victoria, has the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. However, before these state-based curricula could be implemented, they needed approval from the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. The concept of cultural competence in early childhood education is still in its infancy in Australia. However, Miller and Petriwskyj (2013) have demonstrated the importance of Australia learning from other countries who have incorporated cultural competence into their models in order for it be more effectively implemented in Australia's early childhood settings.

Sumison et al. (2009) state that one of the aims of the EYLF when it was introduced in 2008 was to include the concept of diversity into the policy without it being considered tokenistic or superficial within the curriculum guidelines. The intentions of the committee that designed the EYLF was to create an anti-bias curriculum and work with equity issues. However, these intentions were deemed too controversial by the government and hence it reframed them into the more anodyne phrase "learning to respect diversity". Sumison et al. (2009) further suggest that the inclusion of diversity was to be interpreted to mean that children needed to learn to appreciate the differences and the dilemmas that can arise with multiculturalism. Children also needed to learn to be critical and question stereotypical bias. Although political imperatives were constraining the versatile learning framework, the intent of the document was only modified, not totally negated. Sumison et al. (2009) also assert that the EYLF committee members claimed that:

wherever possible, we used words that we thought would appear innocuous to political risk detectors while speaking powerfully "in code" to practitioners seeking legitimate ways to push boundaries of what might currently be considered possible. (p. 8)

This was invaluable information in understanding the context in which ECEs taught and this helped build their cases.

The cultural competence policy advocates varied teaching methods for children from CALD backgrounds who are enrolled in the ECE sector. Cultural competence is described as "much

more than awareness of cultural differences. It is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 1). A cultural competence framework places particular emphasis on being conscious of one’s own worldview and building positive attitudes towards cultural practices and values. The cultural competence policy statement encourages teachers to:

- self-reflect on their own culture, which enables them to understand other cultures.
- build a positive outlook on other cultures – positivity is conducive to teaching and learning.
- develop a different set of skills to effectively communicate and interact with CALD families. One of the aims of this study was to investigate how “communication and interaction across cultures”, as stipulated in the EYLF (DET [Clth], 2014, 2016), is implemented in ECCs.

The cultural competence and the partnerships with parents were the two main areas of the policy documents the National Quality Framework and the Early Years Learning and Development Framework that were referred to in the application of the MUM framework in this study. The detail and the specific criteria that were selected from the NQF and the EYLF was used in this research project. These policies were not subject to any data analysis but were used to frame the context and be reference points for the analysis of the data and the discussion.

#### **4.4 Data Collection Strategy and the Selection of Participants**

Purposive sampling was used to record experiential endeavours that were particular to a culture, an individual or a community. At the outset, the methodology adopted specified that suitable participants from the target population, the IPs, needed to be identified and then from that group, possible interviewees. Once the potential participants had been identified, invitations were sent to them asking if they would like to participate in the study (Vogt, Gardener, & Haeffele, 2006). I opted for naming this section of the research study as the “selection of the participants” rather than “samples”, which was suggested by Thomas (2011) who emphasises that humans are not samples as they have rich and complex experiences in their lives that are unique to their circumstances. This approach also does not require that the selection of the participants be an exact representation of the larger Indian population. Participants were immigrants from a number of Indian states and would not be able to meet the criteria of an exact representation of India. The number of participants was constrained due to the lack of interest

displayed by the kindergarten lead teachers. The reason for this was at the time that most of the kindergartens were approached to participate in the study, many were preoccupied with a number of fundraising and other research projects and had little time to spare for this research study on engaging Indian parents and children.

Although the sample was chosen more for the availability of the participants rather than it being representative or objective, Diefenbach (2008) suggests that such samples are “suitable if they can provide objects of reasoning as well as all relevant criteria and circumstances” (p. 879). As part of the selection process, the profiles of the participants and the ECC are also presented to make clear the criteria and circumstances mentioned by Diefenbach. The purposive sampling methods used facilitated the eliciting of answers from the immigrant Indian parents and the teachers from the early childhood centres. The variation in the Indian population occurs as a result of its diverse number of subcultures and in their ancestral heritage from India and other Indian diasporas such as Fiji Indians, South African Indians and Bangladeshi Indians as well as Indians born and raised in India and labelled as Indians in the Australian context.

Participants were selected from two suburban regions of Melbourne, Australia. Although the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (2011) indicated that 12.2% of the suburb of Dandenong’s population were Indians, too few of them consented to participate in this research to meet the target for this study (see Figure 4.3). I also approached councils in the Clayton area (another area with an Indian population of 10.3%) as well. However, only Frankston City Council demonstrated some interest in my research and, consequently, its kindergartens were chosen for the selection of the first group of participants. It is interesting to note that most local government kindergartens in the suburbs of Melbourne where there was a growing Indian population were not interested in participating in this research.

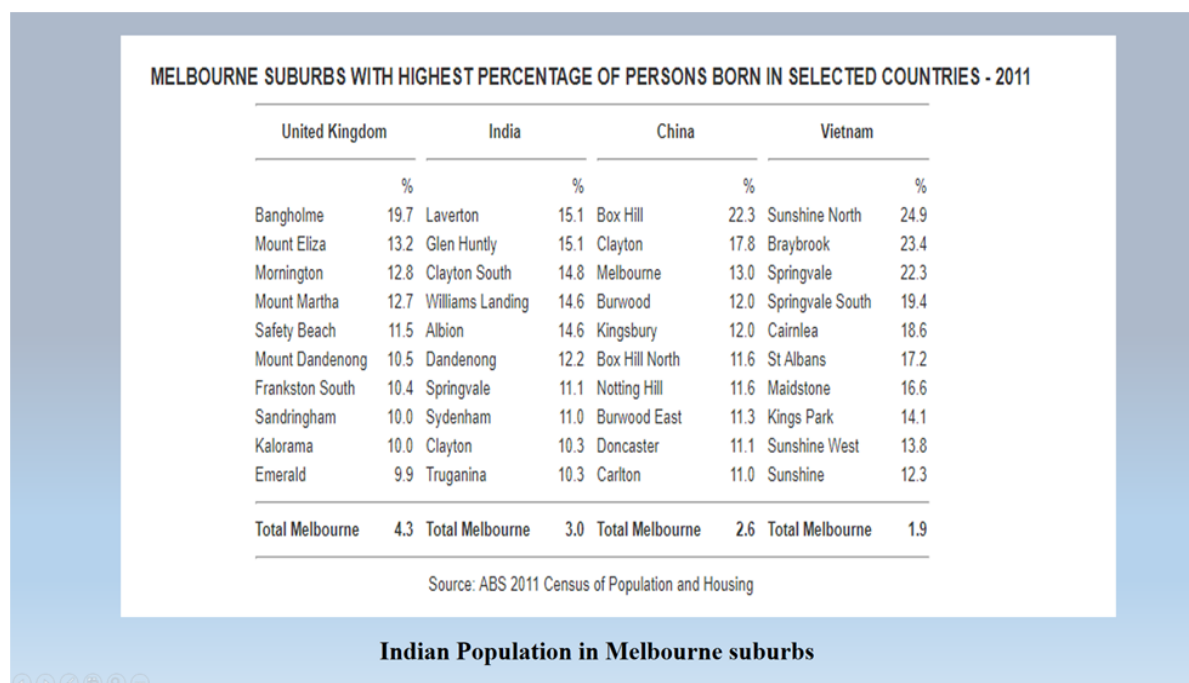


Figure 4.3. Census of population and housing. From *Australian Social Trends, 2014*, by ABS, 2014, No. 4102.0. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0main+features102014#MELBOURNE>

The second group of participants were selected from the Wyndham City Council's kindergartens. This western region of Melbourne was chosen because of the large growth in the Indian population that had occurred there in the past decade as indicated in Figure 4.4.

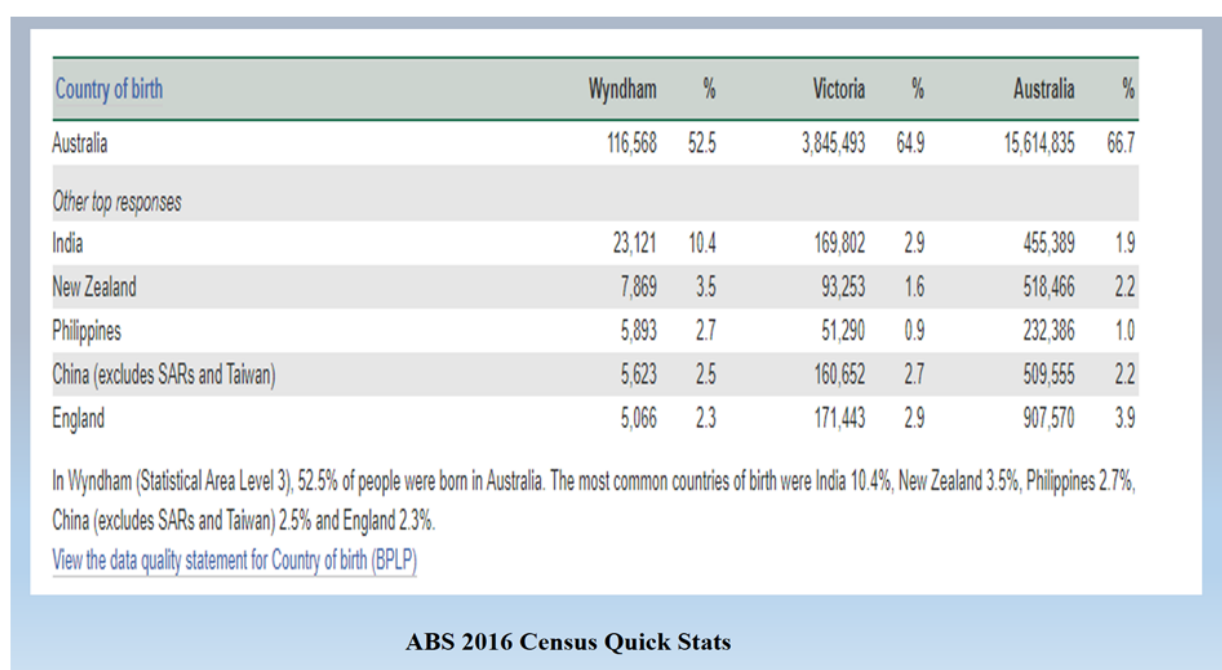


Figure 4.4. Census quick stats. Reprinted from *Census Quick Stats: People – Cultural & Language Diversity*, by ABS, 2016, Retrieved from

After completing the selection of participants from Frankston for the pilot study, the search for participants from the Indian communities in the west of Melbourne commenced. A statistical report from the ABS (2016) indicated that there was a large population of young Indian couples with three- to four-year-old children enrolled in Wyndham City Council's kindergartens. Interested centres were then approached to help identify IPs and their children for voluntary participation in this study. IPs were given plain language statement (PLS) sheets that explained the purpose, aim and conditions for participating in this study together with consent forms to complete.

#### **4.5 Selection of Participants and Profiles of the Participating Kindergartens in the Pilot Study**

In the early childhood sector, the care and education of three- to five-year-olds occurs in a variety of childcare and kindergarten centres. There are community-based and private for-profit kindergartens as well as long day child care centres that provide sessional kindergarten (DET [Clth], 2009). Each early childhood setting has its own set of charters, teaching philosophies and staffing structures. When my invitation with the details of the research proposal was sent to the early childhood clusters and management councils, together with the Monash University Human Ethics Certificate of Approval (see Appendix A) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) approval letter (see Appendix B), positive responses were received from the kindergarten councils. After receiving permission from the councils, invitations to participate in the research study were sent to individual early childhood centres and subsequently to the ECEs working in the kindergartens who decided to participate. Although the participant councils had community kindergartens as well as childcare centres that provided sessional kindergarten, participants were selected from the community kindergartens for the following reasons:

- Most IPs enrolled their children at local community kindergartens that were close to their homes due to the family's lack of transport or the kindergarten was close to the rail station where they could drop their children off and then catch the train to their workplace.
- Kindergartens were within walking distance of home, so the parents were close by for any emergency.

- Most new Indian migrants could not afford to send their children to private kindergartens so they chose community kindergartens.
- It was more convenient for the researcher to conduct daytime interviews mostly with a stay-at-home parents.

Frankston, in the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne, was selected for recruiting participants for this research study due to it having a relatively high percentage of Indians in its population. However, each ECC had only one or two Indian families enrolled in centres that were widespread throughout the municipality, which made it difficult to recruit the required number of participants.

The management and head of Frankston City Council's kindergartens was approached and the research study details were explained using a PowerPoint presentation. She then gave permission for the study to be conducted (see Appendix C). The head/lead teacher then approached her leadership team who agreed to pass on the research information to the kindergartens they managed. The advice from Council was to approach Kindergartens A and B individually. After reading the study's explanatory statements (Appendix D and Appendix E), the ECEs and IPs associated with Kindergarten A immediately gave their consent (Appendix F and Appendix G). For Kindergarten B, invited participants were slow to agree, which delayed the data collection process by a few months. For Kindergarten B only the IPs gave interviews; its ECEs initially consented to being interviewed but declined just before the interviews were to commence. The reasons offered for declining were that the prospective ECEs were either absent during the agreed time or that they had unexpectedly changed their minds. While Council's management team responsible for children's services encouraged Kindergarten B's staff to participate in the study, they eventually declined to do so.

After the pilot study was completed in Frankston, the Wyndham kindergartens were approached. Again, a PowerPoint presentation was used to explain my research study at a meeting of the early childhood centres operating in the municipality. The coordinator of Wyndham Council's kindergarten services signed the consent form to conduct the study (see Appendix H). The leadership team suggested sampling kindergartens with three-teacher teams rather than those with just two-teacher teams because they were likely to have more IPs who could be potential participants. However, management suggested I wait for the kindergartens to respond to my invitation before I approached them. After a long wait of a couple of months, I spoke to the manager again and this time I was given a lead teacher's name and the meeting was

arranged by the management. This meeting enabled me to make contact with the lead teachers' network within the local kindergartens cluster. These kindergartens operated in communities that had relatively high proportions of Indian families and the ECEs were consequently interested in learning more regarding the Indian community. I was given permission (Appendix I) to interview IPs and ECEs. Table 4.1 details the distribution of the ECE and IP participants from the various kindergartens.

Table 4.1

*Participants' Details*

<b>Council</b>	<b>Kindergarten</b>	<b>ECE</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>IP</b>	<b>Culture</b>
<b>Frankston</b>	(A)	Amy	Australian	Gauri	Punjabi
		Jill	Australian	Roveena	Fiji Indian
	(B)	—	—	Anusuya	Telegu
		—	—	Jincy	Malayalam
<b>Wyndham</b>	(C)	—	—	Krupa	Gujarati
		Ilona	Australian	Viji	Tamilian
		Jo	Middle Eastern	Aditi	Hindi
		Mandeep	Punjabi	Deepthi	Hindi
		—	—	Rachel	Fiji Indian
		—	—	Miteleswari	Tamilian
	(D)	—	—	Lana	Fiji Indian
		Diane	Australian	Chandima	Srilankan Indian
		Maxine	Australian	—	—
		Heather	Australian	—	—
		Sandra	Australian	—	—
		Jacqui	Australian	—	—
	(E)	Dawn	Australian	—	—
		Christine	Australian	Mandeep	Punjabi
		Jenny	Australian	Prabhjyoth	Punjabi
		Saranya	Indonesian	James	Tamil
	(F)	Kate	Australian	—	—



## 4.5.1 Profiles of kindergartens A-F.

### 4.5.1.1 Kindergarten A.

Kindergarten A includes the following statement on its website:




























“Kindergarten A is committed to assisting your family in the growth and development of your children. With a fully equipped playground on site, Kindergarten A has a full range of educational games and toys for indoors and outdoors. The educational programming revolves around “play-based learning”, where the child learns while they play, guided by caring, qualified teachers.

This two-teacher kindergarten offers online resources to parents, which includes the following activity sheets and a video explaining the play-way method.

Everyday Learning



ACTIVITY SHEETS

-  Teaching a New Skill
-  Activities to Develop Cause and Effect
-  Learning Body Parts
-  Learning to Count
-  Active Play
-  Construction Play
-  Fun with Boxes
-  Nature Play
-  Hands Doing Different Tasks
-  Manipulation Activities
-  Using the Pointer Finger
-  Drawing and Writing Fun
-  Tips for Cutting
-  Activities for Upper Body Strength
-  Getting Ready to Learn (Heavy Work Activities)
-  Helping Your Child Concentrate
-  Learning Through Copying
-  Learning to Problem Solve
-  Learning to Ride a Bike
-  Functional Play
-  Fun with Plastic Containers
-  Using Hands Together
-  Reaching Across the Body
-  Using a Pinching (Pincer) Grasp
-  Learning to Hold a Pencil
-  Learning to Cut
-  Activities for Hand Strength

This kindergarten had won awards for leadership in the early childhood education sector.

### 4.5.1.2 Kindergarten B.

Kindergarten B’s website presents the following on the nature of its clientele and the programs offered:

We embrace diversity and are proud of the wide variety of cultures that are represented in our centre. We value all families and children and the wide range of abilities and interests they bring to our centre. We incorporate these influences and ideas into our planning for programs that are fun, engaging and extend the children’s learning and development.

Since this kindergarten is also managed by Frankston City Council, the resources offered on its website for parents is the same as for Kindergarten A.

#### **4.5.1.3    *Kindergarten C.***

Kindergarten C belongs to the second group of kindergartens, which is operated by Wyndham City Council, and the general information for parents online is as follows:

Kindergarten C is a fun, play-based environment that encourages learning through experimenting, trial and error, watching, listening and participating. Kindergarten C's programs are designed to improve your child's development in the following key areas:

- independence and self-confidence
- social skills, like how to play with other children in a calm, sharing and rewarding way
- self-awareness and respect for others
- emotional skills, such as understanding their own feelings and those of others
- language, literacy and numeracy skills, such as reading stories and counting objects
- a joy for learning and group activities, such as talking, singing, dancing, drawing and making things together with other children their own age
- ability to make new friends
- exposure to new ideas and concepts.

Kindergarten C (as do Wyndham's Kindergartens D, E and F) has the following educational goal:

Kindergarten programs are planned and implemented by a trained early childhood teacher with the support of qualified co-workers. The centre-based kindergarten program aims to extend the child's development and education, using routines and play-based experiences appropriate for children's unique and holistic development.

#### **4.5.1.4 Kindergarten D.**

Kindergarten D also belongs to the second set of participant kindergartens. It is a large kindergarten with many ECEs of whom six participated in this study. Together with Kindergartens C, E, and F, Kindergarten D also shares Wyndham's common resource page for parents. These resources include videos and fact sheets for parents that outline the kindergartens' educational philosophies and values.

These philosophies include an explanation of the eight vital skills that children are encouraged to develop in early learning and care settings that operate in Wyndham.

- Confidence
- Problem-solving
- Communication and language skills
- Resilience
- Relationships
- Empathy
- Emotional regulation
- Participation and contribution

#### **4.5.1.5 Kindergarten E.**

Kindergarten E is also one of the second set of kindergartens. Along with its two permanent teachers, it also had a temporary teacher who was interviewed for this study. In the past five years, this kindergarten had experienced an increase in the number of IPs enrolling their children. This growth was unique to this kindergarten and it had a ECE who was very experienced in teaching in multicultural settings as well as in other countries. It shares the philosophies and values of the other Wyndham kindergartens who participated in this study.

#### **4.5.1.6 Kindergarten F.**

This kindergarten belongs to the second set of Wyndham Council kindergartens and is a three-teacher kindergarten that had some Indian children enrolled, but at the time the research

study was conducted, it had a new lead teacher who had little experience in working with CALD families.

#### **4.5.2 Profiles of the participating early childhood educators.**

Not all participant kindergartens had fully trained teachers. The requirement for qualified teachers depended on the particular licence issued for the kindergarten, its teacher–child ratios and its recruitment procedures. The selection parameters for ECEs to participate in my research study had to be flexible due to the variability in the kindergartens’ recruitment processes. ECEs who met the kindergarten umbrella organisation’s stipulations and Frankston and Wyndham councils’ criteria for teaching in its ECCs were selected. The justification for the flexibility in the ECE recruitment process was that an ECE may have a number of different roles within the ECC such as a being a lead teacher as well as a part-time administrator. In addition, there are the diploma-qualified assistants who help the lead teacher and other non-qualified teachers, but have educative roles under the guidance of the lead teacher. For my study, I decided to classify those who had contact with children and interacted with IPs as being eligible to participate in the study. I interviewed those who had given their consent to participate.

The ECEs who consented to participate in my research study were from various cultures with English as their main language and they had all completed their teacher training in Australia. For two teachers English was their second language. One of the ECEs was Indian and spoke Hindi as her first language and another was from a Middle-Eastern background. The input from these two ethnic ECEs provided an insider’s view of IPs’ interactions with teachers. However, examining the cultural identities of ECEs was beyond the scope of this qualitative case study and this project was not a post-structural study to explore identity and its complexities.

The pilot study was conducted with the Frankston kindergartens. The main study had participants from Frankston as well as the Wyndham kindergartens. The kindergartens were identified by letters and the participants’ names were pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of those involved in the study. The profiles of the participating ECEs from Kindergartens A to F are as follows:

##### **4.5.2.1 ECE Amy.**

Amy had been teaching in the early childhood sector for the past 10 years, four of which had been spent working in the Kindergarten A. She is the nominated supervisor and is the only qualified educator in her kindergarten trained to plan programs for the children she teaches. She

has a colleague who is responsible for the operational side of the kindergarten. In her previous positions, Amy had had no experience of other cultures.

In this multicultural kindergarten, her teaching philosophy includes play-based learning and she favours an unstructured routine and provides multicultural resources. Amy believes she is not tokenistic in her practice of teaching children from other cultures. Her perceptions of Indian children are that they are quieter and prefer to undertake desktop activities rather than run around and play like other children. She believes this is the result of the children's cultural home life. She collects information from parents at the beginning of each enrolment year and tries to include the children's cultural needs into her program. For Amy, speaking English is the top priority and she advocated to the Frankston Kindergarten Association for English to be taught as a second language to CALD children. She had an Indian part-time teacher assist her to understand Indian cultural traditions, which proved useful when she was programming the curriculum.

#### **4.5.2.2 ECE Jill.**

Jill had worked in Kindergarten A for over 26 years in various positions as a part-time and a full-time teacher as well as a volunteer. She did not initiate the teaching program but followed the lead teacher's instructions on delivering it to the children. She had seen many changes in the early childhood sector, from moving away from structured teaching to teaching through play. Play had been introduced in the latter part of the decade in the early childhood sector. Her teaching philosophy had changed from a structured one to a non-structured method of teaching. She believed Indian families emphasised the importance of reading and writing to their children. Indian parents do not like to see their children get messy. The kindergarten celebrates Harmony Day to bring all the cultures together. She could not remember any particular activities that had been specifically targeted at Indian children; they were included as part of the whole group teaching. Jill believed that the Indian children's level of interaction with the other children depended on the confidence level of the children themselves.

#### **4.5.2.3 ECE Ilona.**

Ilona was the new lead teacher at Kindergarten C and was very much open to an interview at the time of the introductions. Her career had included working at other kindergartens where she had been a teacher and a lead teacher. She had been in the position at Kindergarten C for the past 12 months. Ilona enjoyed working at the multicultural kindergarten and was collegial and consultative with her staff. On the day scheduled for her interview she was not able to attend but

sent written answers to the interview questions. In her answers, she mentioned policy and how it directed that ECCs should be inclusive of all cultures. At Kindergarten C they celebrated the various Indian cultural festivals to make the children feel comfortable in that environment. The teaching and learning practices were the same for all children, with some allowance given for individual learning styles.

#### **4.5.2.4 ECE Jo.**

Jo had been working in the early childhood sector for 13 years. She had graduated from RMIT and had a diploma in childcare. She had been working in Kindergarten C for three years. Jo believes that early childhood education assists children to be prepared for school, so parents need to know that this is the system in Australia; however, she knows that other cultures have their own systems and she accepts this difference. Over the years that Jo has taught in this kindergarten, she has encountered parents from non-English speaking backgrounds as well as parents who are fluent English speakers.

Some of the Indian children attending Kindergarten C spoke English while others did not. Children who had grown up with their Indian grandparents and then enrolled at the kindergarten after returning from India, struggled to understand the English spoken in the ECC. Jo was cognisant of Wyndham's early childhood policies and would attend professional development conferences. She could not recall any activities that had been specifically introduced for Indian children apart from the festivals they celebrated. She believed Indian children were quick learners and from a young age their parents would teach them and encourage them to be their best.

#### **4.5.2.5 ECE Mandeep.**

Mandeep had previously been a teacher in India. She had been a resident in Australia for the past six years. She had a Certificate 3 online diploma and had worked in childcare. At the time of the research study, Mandeep had only been in the current job for four weeks. As working in childcare had been stressful for her, she decided to transfer to kindergarten teaching. In multicultural Kindergarten C, she found the teachers were professional and she enjoyed working there.

Mandeep attempted to inform IPs of the play-based teaching that was practised in Kindergarten C and encouraged them to undertake the same at home. However, despite her attempts, some of the IPs continued to insist on teaching their children to read and write. She

believed that these parents were unable to envisage how play could assist their children with reading and writing and would not consider deviating from the comfort of their long-held Indian thinking.

Mandeep believed that IPs were generally knowledgeable of Australian early childhood programs through word of mouth and by accessing the internet. They are armed with this information before they attend the kindergarten. Mandeep also believed that IPs could teach their children at home in the traditional Indian way, but they also needed to take advantage of a system that is more practical and allows the child to learn in a free environment. For example, spelling could be taught using flashcards and other visual techniques, not just by the rote method of learning that is customary to the Indian culture.

#### **4.5.2.6 ECE Diane.**

Diane had a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, had been working in the sector for 15 years, and was currently a team leader and a teacher at Kindergarten D. In her role as a teacher, her time was divided between 0.75 teaching and leading load and 0.25 in operations.

She explained the play-based teaching method to the IPs in response to their questions on reading and writing. She also explained that if children only did reading and writing, they would miss other aspects of their development that are necessary to help them with the preparatory process of reading and writing.

Diane spoke of her previous experience in the same kindergarten, when some Indian parents, who were neither educated nor employed, and had been quite involved in making cultural contributions to the kindergarten. However, with the present cohort of working IPs, this continued involvement had not occurred due to the parents' work commitments and lack of interest. Nevertheless, there was the rudimentary beginnings of a community within the kindergarten when two Indian parents, who had met at the kindergarten, exchanged phone numbers. Diane believed that kindergarten could provide a space for parents to form a community. She adheres to the inclusivity policy and provides opportunities for IPs to talk about family traditions and their child rearing practices; however, the parents are not forthcoming with the information she wants.

#### **4.5.2.7 ECE Maxine.**

Maxine, having been a teacher at Kindergarten D for the past six years, was aware that there was a growing population in the area. Her previous experience at another kindergarten that had a

larger Indian population had also introduced her to the various festivals that Indians celebrate and she was interested in talking to the IPs at her kindergarten. Most of her conversations with them were similar to the ones she had with other parents, where they discussed appropriate clothing for the weather conditions and of the play the children participated in at the kindergarten. However, when it was time for festival celebrations, her conversations would focus on what was required and the IPs' involvement in these events.

Maxine said she would like to know more about the Indian culture; however, the opportunities only arose when the IC returned from holidays to India and they would talk of their time away. Apart from the occasions of the festivals, there was no IP involvement in the programs of the kindergarten. Her views on activities for IC are presented in the findings and discussion sections of this thesis.

#### **4.5.2.8 ECE Heather.**

Heather had been working in Kindergarten D for the past three years and in the early childhood sector for the past 16 years. Heather assisted in teaching and learning generally; however, she was not the lead teacher. Although she practised the play-based learning technique, she did not believe it helped children when they commenced school.

Her understanding from preparatory teachers in school was that it would take six to seven months to settle children into school routines and the fixed timings of classroom activities. Heather's personal philosophy was that there should be structured learning environments; she was not comfortable with the current kindergarten teaching practices. Her observation was that Indian children played quietly amongst themselves and when approached to extend their play, moved away and generally did not discuss what they had been working on. She had attended professional development sessions on learning how to manage difficult behaviour in children but did not find anything useful to introduce into her practice.

#### **4.5.2.9 ECE Sandra.**

Sandra had worked in the forty-year-old Kindergarten D for the past eight years. She was the lead teacher and the educator in charge of the kindergarten operations and the learning and teaching program.

She believed that community was concerned with who they were as teachers sharing knowledge with parents and their beliefs and values. She had seen many children from the same families enrolled in this kindergarten. Community was also about the kindergarten being part of



a larger community that was associated with care services and intervention services and generally helping others in their lives.

Sandra would explain the kindergarten's various policies when parents asked. For example, she would discuss how the behavioural policy was implemented when parents wanted to know how teachers dealt with conflict between children. Sandra had worked in the early childhood sector for 17 years and believed that not only children but also their parents should feel comfortable being in the kindergarten. Sandra would eat with the Indian children to teach them the skills to become independent eaters like the other children.

#### ***4.5.2.10 ECE Jacqui.***

Jacqui had worked at Kindergarten D for past two years and in the early childhood sector for the past four years. She was the diploma-qualified assistant to the lead teacher. Before her current posting, Jacqui had commenced her involvement with the kindergarten as a parent committee president. She developed her experience from studying the teachers' reports that were discussed during the committee meetings she chaired as president as well as from her volunteer activities in the kindergarten.

Jacqui was not involved in the planning of Kindergarten D's education program. She said that some of the concerns of the IPs were that their children were not eating in the kindergarten. Jacqui respected the Indian cultural food habits, but was not willing to force feed the IC and believed that they brought too much food with them. She would, however, heat the food that they did bring. Jacqui believed that parents needed to provide her with profiles of their children so she could appreciate their backgrounds – for example, that cultural activities, such as food sharing and festivals, are celebrated. Regarding the transition from home to kindergarten, Jacqui believed that language was not a problem for the Indian families. During this transition, the teachers would adhere to procedures that applied to all the children.

#### ***4.5.2.11 ECE Dawn.***

Dawn had worked as a teacher in Kindergarten D for the past six years. Previous to this position, she had been an integration aide in a secondary school. She then retrained to be an early childhood teacher. She believed that the change in her jobs was major and did not agree with the play-based teaching method. She thought that some facets of the philosophy regarding play were beneficial but, overall, it did not assist in developing children's concentration levels. In addition, the policy could confuse teachers because there were aspects that mollycoddled children in terms

of safety procedures and yet it also encouraged children to play barefoot in outdoor activities such as bush kinder.

In Dawn's opinion, early childhood policy was too vague; it needed to be more precise in its presentation of teaching practices so as not leave teachers confused. She was concerned that future generations may not value practical and realistic common sense. She was also worried that children entering secondary school without having developed some form of stamina would find it difficult to succeed in many activities. In her previous job as an integration aide, Dawn observed that children who had a short attention span often failed to succeed and did not become engaged with society. She believed that developing children's perseverance with activities should begin early in their time at kindergarten; however, it was not advocated in the policy documents nor practised as part of the kindergarten programs.

#### ***4.5.2.12 ECE Christine.***

Christine had been working in Kindergarten E for the past eight years. She worked three days a week. Her previous job had been in childcare where she had worked for 15 years. Christine was about to retire and was not interested in upgrading her certificate in childcare qualifications. She had observed many changes in the operations of Kindergarten E and believed they had improved the kindergarten's services. She thinks change is good because she enjoys the process of thinking and discussing prospective changes with her colleagues.

Christine believed that ethnic cultures could be appreciated from CALD parents through their celebrations of the different festivals and the cultural values they observed. When Indian parents asked about reading and writing, the ECEs would give them a copy of the kindergarten's newsletter, which explained play-based teaching. Christine believed that today homes are built around community settings such as health services and other facilities so children experience growing up in communities. In her time there was the kindergarten and home, but now children learn so many things within the community apart from home and kinder.

#### ***4.5.2.13 ECE Jenny.***

Jenny had been working as a lead teacher for the past 10 years in Kindergarten E and had observed a number of changes in the community, particularly the increase in the number of Indian families that had enrolled their children at the kindergarten over the past five years. Earlier in her teaching career, Jenny had worked as a teacher in Thailand at a school that taught a British-based curriculum to children from 45 different nationalities. After Thailand, she worked

in a Caulfield pre-prep school before commencing work at Kindergarten E. Jenny said that her experiences had made her realise that each curriculum is about teaching in context and that she had adapted to the changes that had been introduced to the present curriculum. Jenny had been a key motivator to encourage other teachers in the Wyndham kindergartens to participate in this research study.

When a child was adjusting to the transition away from home, Jenny would collaborate with the parents to settle the child into the kindergarten. She had encountered many Indian children who would refuse to listen carefully to the teachers, while others were quite knowledgeable regarding the kindergarten's activities. Jenny assists Indian children with their language skills and uses other resources made available by Wyndham Council's children's services unit. Online resources also assist when she uses a particular software program with the parents help build partnerships. This program promotes partnerships and community sharing with grandparents overseas through the internet, which widens the child's community and helps with their learning.

#### ***4.5.2.14 ECE Saranya.***

Saranya, who was originally from Thailand, had been living in Australia for the past 10 years. She had worked in childcare for the past four years and had been working as a relief teacher at Kindergarten E for the past 4 weeks. She had a diploma in student services and was working for a recruiting agency who would place her in different kindergartens as a casual worker.

Saranya believed Indian parents to be generous and approachable people. She added that Indian children were particularly close to their families and were often shy. She considered that being amicable towards them during their transition from home to kindergarten was particularly important. At lunchtime, she would attempt to assist Indian children to become independent in their eating habits. By using Bollywood dancing, Saranya also felt she could get closer to the IPs. Saranya had many questions for me regarding children's eating routines and culture in India.

#### ***4.5.2.15 ECE Kate.***

Kate had just been recruited at Kindergarten F at the time this research study was being undertaken. She was the lead ECE and was responsible for the teaching program and the operations of the kindergarten. At the time, she was familiarising herself with the kindergarten and the local community. Another teacher and a casual worker assisted Kate in her duties as an ECE.

Kate said that her teaching philosophy was the play-based teaching method and believed that it was inclusive of every child in the kindergarten. Some cultural demands were accommodated by the kindergarten; however, Kate and her fellow teachers made these decisions only after considering the benefits for the child's development. Kate believed it was important to educate the IPs on the benefits of free play. Parents needed to appreciate that participating in messy play or sand play would assist their children to learn. Playing in the sandpit with other children, was a way for the child to develop a sense of belonging to the kindergarten. Kate believed that IPs could send extra clothing with their children if they wanted them to remain tidy and clean.

#### **4.5.3 Selection of Indian parent participants.**

In the case study method, screening of participants is important. During the recruitment phase of the IP participants, a number of different configurations developed within each of the six kindergartens regarding the ratios of IP to ECE participants. For example, Kindergartens B and C had more IPs than ECEs participate in the interview process; whereas, conversely, Kindergartens D and F had more ECEs than IPs available for interview. To mitigate the inconsistency in the sampling process and the difficulty of availability of IPs for interviews, the recruitment of IPs was not dependent on ECEs also being recruited from the same kindergarten. However, for IPs to be selected as participants, the following criteria had to be met:

1. Either one or both parents had to have been born in India or had Indian ancestry and to have migrated to Australia in the past two to five years.
2. Parents had to be able to speak a native Indian language. The ability to speak English was not a necessity.
3. Indian parents could be of any nationality – for example, Bangladeshi, Fijian, or South African – and be in any age group or be of any socioeconomic status.

Indian parents were from the various states of India or from other nations such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Fiji. In all these countries, there are large Indian populations who follow Indian cultural traditions. IP participants had emigrated from India to these nations some time before they then migrated to Australia. Indian parents and their children were from first- or second-generation Indian immigrants. As mentioned previously, a criterion for participation in this study was that either one of the parents was expected to speak an Indian native language. If either parent was unable to speak English, I was willing to speak to them in Hindi, Telugu or Tamil and I could write in these languages as well so interpreters were not required for the interview process. The profiles of the IPs who participated in this study are as follows:.

#### **4.5.3.1 IP Gauri.**

Born in Ludhiana, in the Punjab state of India, Gauri came to Australia in 2006 on a spousal visa. Gauri's husband had a postgraduate degree and was self-employed while Gauri was a housewife with a bachelor's degree. She spoke Hindi and Punjabi along with English.

Gauri's daughter was four years old and spoke Hindi and English but did not like to speak in Punjabi; however, Gauri continued to speak to her in Punjabi to keep up the culture and language. Gauri's brother and sister and her husband's cousins lived in Australia. Gauri had family support during pregnancy and had family members who visited them often. Gauri encouraged her daughter to be outgoing and confident and develop good moral and cultural values, which were the only expectations she had from a kindergarten education for her daughter. She did not want to interfere with the teachers and their systems, but as a mother, it was important to her that she was involved in her daughter's school life. She wanted her daughter to graduate because "studies" matter in life and then secure an easy job. She expected her daughter to be self-sufficient and not be short of time like many working women were currently. Gauri believed that girls needed to look after their house and have an easy life.

#### **4.5.3.2 IP Roveena.**

Roveena was a Fiji Indian who had been living in Australia. Her husband was a second-generation Australian-born Fiji Indian who had family in Melbourne. He had a paint business and Roveena was a homemaker. Roveena spoke Fiji Hindi and English, her husband could speak Fiji Hindi but preferred to speak mainly in English. Roveena had two children – an older daughter and a four-year-old son named Arian. She sent her daughter to the speech therapist whose advice was that she should speak only English at home. Consequently, Roveena used only one language at home – English – and now both her children only spoke that language; they cannot speak Hindi.

Roveena was familiar with Kindergarten A's practices and activities as her daughter had attended there and now Arian was enrolled there. She was very happy with the kindergarten, its program and its teachers. Roveena did not have the same level of ambition for her children as most of her friends had for theirs; she only wanted her children to try their best to succeed, whether it was in Arian's father's business or her son's dream of becoming a police officer.

#### **4.5.3.3 IP Anusuya.**

Anusuya was born in Andhra Pradesh, a southern Indian state where Telegu was its official language. She had a bachelor's degree in engineering and was currently studying for her master's degree in Australia. Her husband had a diploma in engineering from India, had worked in Singapore and later came to Australia. He completed his degree and postgraduate degree in engineering in Australia. She taught English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) and was a life skills coach. Both worked full time. They had one son, Avinash, who was four years old.

My conversation with Anusuya and her husband revealed that they were not happy with the education system as it had not acknowledged Avinash's intelligence – he was extremely good at mathematics and knew complex terms that were not expected in a child of his age. Anusuya attempted to access the accelerated program for Avinash, but it was too far away from home and given that both parents had full-time jobs, they did not have the time to take him there. She also tried to enrol him in the four-year-old kindergarten program when he was just three and half, but Frankston City Council did not give her permission because of the long waiting lists. This meant that in the next enrolment cycle Avinash would have been older than the other children, and at school the following year he would also be older than his fellow pupils because of his date of birth.

ECEs had complained about Avinash's restlessness but Anusuya realised that that was because he was not being cognitively stimulated at Kindergarten A. Both parents believed that their son was quite bored in kindergarten. They anticipated that his schooling would also be a problem because of his abilities at such a young age. Avinash would have to interact with students who were younger than him. Anusuya's husband joined the interview to state that there needed to be programs available for his son to reach his full potential. Avinash needed to be challenged within a stimulating educational environment.

Both parents were keen for Avinash to continue speaking Telegu at home as they had a large family in India that did not encourage English to be spoken at home. During their seven years in Australia, Anusuya, her husband and Avinash had visited India nine times. They had strong cultural connections with their homeland; visiting India was a way of maintaining those connections. One issue that Anusuya was particularly concerned about was Kindergarten A's food-eating practices. Avinash had not adjusted well to the eating routines that had been introduced to him at the ECC, and Anusuya had to consequently compromise her own cultural ways of feeding him.

Avinash's early childhood education improved when a mature teacher from another childcare setting paid particular attention to him. The teacher had previously been a nurse and had three adult children. Avinash remembered the woman with affection.

#### **4.5.3.4 IP Jincy.**

Jincy and her husband came to Melbourne to seek a better life. Both were trained nurses and worked in the same field. She had to complete a refresher course and later retrained at the Australian Academy of Nurses before she could start her job. She spoke Malayalam, Hindi and English. Her husband spoke Telegu, Tamil, Malayalam and English. At home they spoke Malayalam with their children and her daughter was just learning to speak English.

Both Jincy's parents and parents-in-law came to Australia to assist when she was having her babies. Her family would visit India on a regular basis so the her children could remain connected to their Indian culture. Her sister-in-law lived in Canberra and was a regular visitor to their home. Her children were born in Australia and were 3½ years and 6½ months and the older one had many friends at church. Jincy's older child ate vegetables and fruits so there were never any issues regarding her child's eating habits at Kindergarten B. She would like to volunteer at the kindergarten but had not done so at the time of her interview. Given her children's ages, the resources provided by the kindergarten were adequate for her children. She would like her children to read and write but was not sure if it was practical for children to sit in one place; however, she still advocated for children to learn to read and write at a young age.

#### **4.5.3.5 IP Krupa.**

Krupa's husband came to live in Australia when he was a student and she later arrived on a spousal visa after marrying him. Both of them speak Gujarati, Hindi and English. She was a graduate but was not currently employed.

Her husband was a chemical engineer and worked in a water treatment plant. Every three or four years the couple's parents would come to visit them in Australia for a holiday. She chose to send her child to Kindergarten B because of its proximity to their home. Although generally satisfied with the kindergarten's program, she did wish they could provide more activities for her child. She often asked the teachers to help her child interact with other children. Her child had family and friends to socialise with at home but needed help in the kindergarten as they spoke little English.

When asked about the food habits of her child, Krupa said they did not eat much at the kindergarten and would bring home the snack box that they had taken to the kindergarten with the food largely untouched. However, Krupa was not particularly concerned as she believed the children were busy playing and would not pay much attention to food. She also did not think it was the ECEs' responsibility to feed her child, although it had been the responsibility of the childcare teacher when her child was attending a childcare center a few months ago. Jincy believed that her child needed to learn to read, write, and not just play in the kindergarten.

#### **4.5.3.6 IP Viji.**

Born in southern India, Viji came to Australia on a spousal visa with her husband who is Indian and also an Australian citizen and settled in Bendigo and then moved to Melbourne. Both Viji and her husband were educated and he was a full-time IT employee; Viji did seasonal work as a tax consultant but was not working at the time of the interview. Roshan was her only child and he was four years of age at the time.

Roshan was born in India. Viji was quite conservative in her approach to living and raising her son and never felt comfortable in Bendigo. Only after she had moved to Melbourne did she feel more at ease. Viji spoke Tamil at home and was protective of Roshan because he was ill much of the time. She said she should would have liked to have exposed him to a social life in Bendigo, which was not possible. In Melbourne, she had a community and learnt from her peers how to rear her child in the Australian context, which proved to be very liberating in contrast to her conservative Indian thinking and her time living in Bendigo.

Viji was happy for Roshan to be social and learn to be independent, and this was her only expectation from Kindergarten C. She was not particularly aware of the kindergarten's programs except that her son learnt rhymes and was playing with toys. She believed that if there were no complaints from the teachers regarding Roshan's behaviour, then there was no need for her to talk to the ECEs. She did not know that upon request she could play with her child at the kindergarten. Viji hoped her son would study well and, like all Indian parents, wanted him to have a good career; however, she would not steer him in a particular direction with his educational choices – his choice of career would be his decision. She had compared the Indian and Australian education systems and felt that India only emphasised the development of academic skills whereas in Australia the development of social skills was also considered important. Her opinion was that each generation aspired to provide a better life for their children



but because the parents lacked the necessary skills to educate them, they depended on the schools to undertake that vital role. (The interview was conducted in Tamil.)

#### **4.5.3.7 IP Aditi.**

Aditi was born in northern India. Aditi's husband was sponsored on a work visa and came to Australia in. He was a full-time wall and floor tiler. Aditi arrived on a spousal visa and worked as a full-time manager at Caltex. Both of them had master's degrees in business administration (MBA) from India. She had two children: Vernika, a 4.5-year-old girl, and a 10-month-old boy. Vernika had been in childcare since she was one and a half years old. Both parents spoke Hindi at home with their children, and Vernika was fluent in Hindi and English. (The interview was conducted in both English and Hindi).

Aditi believed that she spent too little time with her children and that they would remember more of their time with their grandparents rather than with her and her husband. Aditi is of the opinion that there is not enough "pressure" on children in Australian kindergartens and schools. Aditi tried to teach her daughter at home using traditional Indian methods but they did not work. As Vernika appeared not to be capable of learning in the traditional way, Aditi attempted to teach her daughter using the online Apple lessons but without success. Ultimately, Aditi trusted the schools to teach Vernika to read and write. Maybe her daughter will learn according to the kindergarten's methods of teaching – in her own time – she said.

Aditi did say that she would teach Vernika to write in Hindi when her daughter is ready. She will send her to the Durga temple at Rockbank (a western suburb of Melbourne) where Hindi is taught to Indian children. Aditi said that when Vernika goes to India, she will have to use Hindi and therefore needs to learn it. Aditi was worried that her daughter was only socialising with other Indian children with whom she was comfortable; other children refused to play with her. Vernika's career choices will be a decision for her child to take, although Aditi believed that playing sport would be a healthy thing to do.

#### **4.5.3.8 IP Deepthi.**

Born in southern India, Deepthi had a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering. She came to Australia on a spousal visa in. Her husband had a master's in accounting and was a credit controller in DFL. She was not employed at the time because of family responsibilities. Both Deepthi and her husband are Australian citizens.

Deepthi's son, Advaith, was born in Australia and is four years old. Deepthi believed that her son was intelligent and was learning well in Kindergarten C. She was also teaching him to read and write. Deepthi was generally satisfied with the Australian system of education; however, she did have one issue and that was that as Advaith could not eat independently, she would ask for help from the teachers. Advaith preferred to eat only Indian food. Deepthi consulted with her peers to know what foods to send to the kindergarten. This had been happening since his days in childcare as well. Deepthi took Advaith to India for his holidays and he was so busy there with his cousins and friends that he did not want his mother's attention; he is a very happy boy in India Deepthi claimed. When they returned from India, Advaith continually wanted his mother's attention and Deepthi said that he would get very lonely.

#### **4.5.3.9 IP Rachel.**

Born in Bombay in western India, Rachel and her husband had been Australian citizens since. They had two children – a son aged eight and a daughter, Somalia, aged four.

At home, Rachel and her husband spoke Kanada (a southern Indian language); her children could understand Kanada, however, they would reply to questions in English. Her husband came from a very large Indian family in Australia who would meet often to catch up on family news.

Rachel had worked as a relief teacher in kindergartens; however, her busy schedule did not provide enough time for her to talk to Somalia's teachers at Kindergarten C. However, she was happy with the teaching her daughter was receiving as the teachers would often ask about Somalia and were aware of her needs. Somalia enjoyed learning in the kindergarten's large outdoor area and knew the names of many of the plants there. When not at kindergarten, Somalia would learn from her brother and other family members who would often meet together. She had requested that the teachers help Somalia socialise with the other children from different cultures and expected nothing more from Kindergarten C. She believed that early childhood education helped children to find their voices.

#### **4.5.3.10 IP Miteleswari.**

Born in southern India and married to a Punjabi, Miteleswari came to Australia in 2010. She had two boys and one girl – Sienna, her daughter was four years old and was attending Kindergarten C. Miteleswari had a master's degree in professional accounting and her husband had a bachelor's degree in IT. Because of her varied cultural family background, Miteleswari spoke Tamil, Hindi and Punjabi. Her children received plenty of support from family members.

She continued to maintain the cultural traditions of prayer and attended the Wyndham community cultural festivals such as Diwali and Holi. She also would set an example for her children by undertaking the seven-day fasting custom as part of the Pooja Festival, which she contended was to demonstrate respect for women in the world. Miteleswari said that she and her husband would support whatever decisions their children made in relation to their education and careers. The family recently went to India and Miteleswari took her children to the famous science museum there. Her children came back feeling confident in knowing their cultural heritage and had developed a healthy sense of self-esteem. Moving to this country had presented opportunities for her children. She was happy with their education.

#### **4.5.3.11 IP Lana.**

Born in Fiji, Lana had emigrated to Australia with her parents; she was a second-generation Australian–Fiji Indian. She had a certificate and a diploma in hotel management. She was a divorced single mother who was being supported by her own mother in raising her only son, Jayden, who was four and half years old. Both Lana and her mother (secondary carer) spoke Hindi at home and, consequently, so did Jayden. Lana believed that Jayden’s challenging behaviour was the result of the divorce and she had engaged professional support for him. Jayden was bonded strongly to his grandmother.

Together, Lana and her mother took Jayden to family gatherings to maintain the cultural bond. Lana believed there was too much pressure on Indian children to achieve academically; however, she and her mother did not apply that pressure to Jayden and had no particular ambitions for his future. She was concerned, nevertheless at Jayden’s hyperactivity and wanted him to calm down so he could learn to read and write. She thought childcare and kindergarten teaching should be separate. She believed that Indian children were generally quite intelligent and strived for high academic achievement.

#### **4.5.3.12 IP Chandima.**

Born in Sri Lanka, Chandima and her husband came to Australia on a permanent residency visa in 2013. Chandima was a homemaker with three children; her middle son was four-year-old Rasindu and was enrolled in Kindergarten D. Her husband had a master’s degree in accountancy from India and worked for an IT company. Chandima and her husband spoke Sinhalese at home with their sons as she spoke little English. Previously, her husband transported the boys to kindergarten, but then she had learnt to drive and now took her sons to kindergarten and school.

Chandima did not have many interactions with the teachers due to the language barrier. Her understanding of the teaching practised at Kindergarten D was that Rasindu would go there to play and would learn to read and write when he went to school. Chandima would first assess how well Rasindu is performing in school, and then, depending on his talent and abilities, would allow him choose his further education options and his career path. Chandima said that she missed her life in Sri Lanka, but believed that her children were fortunate to be educated in Australia; she has no doubt that her children will perform well in other areas of their lives. (The interview was conducted in English.)

#### **4.5.3.13 IP Mandeep.**

Born in Punjab in northern India, both Mandeep and her husband came to Melbourne on student visas in 2008. At the time, they had work visas. Her husband worked as a truck driver and she worked as a chef in an Indian restaurant. Initially, her husband sang Bhajans in the Melbourne Gurudwara temple and was paid for this skill. Although Mandeep had been trained as a nurse in India, her low International English Language Testing System score precluded her from entering the nursing profession in Australia. Consequently, the initial struggle was for Mandeep and her husband to find jobs.

Both her children – one girl, Ashpreet, aged four years and a boy aged six months – were born in Australia. When Mandeep was pregnant with Ashpreet, her mother's visa was rejected so her parents-in-law came to her aid. Mandeep and her husband found it difficult to raise Ashpreet on their own with no jobs and no money, so their daughter was sent to India to Mandeep's mother when she was three months old. Ashpreet returned to Melbourne when she was two years old. Ashpreet could speak fluent Punjabi and had learnt to speak English as well. Mandeep said Ashpreet was always active at Kindergarten E but at home she drew pictures of her family and could sing like her father; however, her teachers were not made aware of these skills Ashpreet possessed.

Mandeep's family continued to speak in Punjabi to Ashpreet because they did not want her to lose her language nor culture. Mandeep and her husband wanted Ashpreet to attend a private school at the cost of \$7000 per year and become a doctor. In coming to Australia, both parents had made many sacrifices for their children's future. Mandeep and her husband expected Ashpreet to graduate as a physician (The interview was conducted in Hindi.)

#### **4.5.3.14 IP Prabhjyoth.**

Born in northern India, Prabhjyoth was married to an Indian automotive technician in Melbourne and came to Australia on a spousal visa in 2010. Prabhjyoth had a diploma in early childhood education and worked as a childcare teacher. She had trained in Melbourne and therefore had a detailed understanding of the many complexities of the early childhood sector in Australia. She had two boys – one was aged four and the other was eight months old. After the birth of her second son, she stopped working. Prabhjyoth's husband came to Australia as a student in 2000 and his friends were mostly from non-Indian background. He immersed himself into the Australian culture and spoke with a strong Australian accent.

Having working in the childcare sector, Prabhjyoth said there was insufficient information regarding the Australian early childhood education system for Indian parents and she was concerned regarding the transition process for Indian children moving from homecare to kindergarten and later to school. As an ECE, she was anxious for parents who had migrated from India with no English language skills and had no comprehensive understanding of the early childhood teaching philosophies. As an educated parent and a trained ECE, she understood the teaching was practised in early childhood centres; however, she wondered how the relatively uneducated and ESOL parents grasped the early childhood education practices in the Australian system. Although Prabhjyoth was generally satisfied with the learning her son received in Kindergarten E, she did home-school him in reading and writing in order to prepare him for his school years and was concerned for his future integration into the school community.

#### **4.5.3.15 IP James.**

James was born in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. He migrated to Melbourne in 2014 with a bachelor's degree in the hospitality management. His Indian dream of earning money overseas came true through sheer luck and blessings as he calls it.

In India, he worked as an assistant manager in a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet and one day he got a phone call asking him to call someone in Melbourne. Thinking it was a hoax, he did not reply that day. Later, out of curiosity, he replied the agent's call. To his surprise, he was interviewed for a job in a Melbourne motel that provided him with a 457 working visa, accommodation and a decent pay check. He was selected because of his proficiency in English. All he had to pay for was his airfare, which he did, and four years later, he had saved the equivalent of a lifetime's income in India. Later, his wife was sponsored and now has a job in the same motel.

His son was performing well at Kindergarten and he believed that his own leadership skills and confidence had nurtured his son and with the support of the kindergarten his son had become confident. James, however, had no time to pick up and drop off his son – a paid carer was his only connection to Kindergarten and his son's learning. James's wife had been a Tamil language teacher in India. She now taught her son to read and write Tamil at home.

James was concerned for the safety of his son in the kindergarten amongst children from so many unfamiliar cultures. He also did not want his son to lose his ability to speak Tamil. James compared the contexts of child rearing in India and Australia with some apprehension and believed his son would be exposed to too many Western vices. The idea of losing his own cultural values was a constant consternation for him.

James was happy with the education practices of Kindergarten except for one. His son's fifth birthday was not celebrated in the kindergarten program. There were other birthdays on the same day and they were all given a farewell but his son's was overlooked, and James never had the opportunity to discuss this matter with the teachers. He became quite upset when the matter was relayed to him. He believed that it was an example of casual racism occurring in the kindergarten.

## **4.6 Data Collection Tools**

Interviews were conducted in the exploratory case studies in an attempt to understand the lived experiences of people and the meaning they make of it (Seidman, 2013). The interview process includes the flexibility to integrate research questions in a conversational mode that avoids the formality of written responses, which can be difficult for CALD participants and could easily be misinterpreted by the researcher. Face-to-face interviews are useful in building individual rapport with participants while ensuring that conversations are confidential and interviewees have an opportunity to clarify and interpret questions immediately, which assists with memory. This rapport cannot be developed when only using questionnaires or online surveys.

### **4.6.1 Semi-structured interviews.**

From the different types of interviewing techniques practised, semi-structured interviews are used for their versatility in using language that is conversational with respondents. Structuring the interview questions to be simple and open-ended eases the expectations on participants who may not have the skills to provide particularly articulate answers to the questions. However,

although such skills may not be possessed by an interviewee, the researcher (the interviewer) is able to rephrase the questions in order to produce greater clarity and thereby achieving suitably reliable data. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher “...to explore for subjective meanings that respondents give to concepts or events” (Gray, 2014, p. 386). The semi-structured interviewing technique enables respondents to reflect on their aspirations and thoughts, which in turn benefits the researcher’s aim of eliciting more insightful responses to the interview questions.

To ensure the interview questions were credible, I initially used a rubric for each interview question and I prepared strategies to manage any unaccounted variables that occurred. After conducting a number of interviews in the pilot study, the rubrics became second in nature, so I subsequently ceased using them when I was more confident with the participants. Designing a sound interviewing methodology is not only concerned with the interview process and the selection of the relevant participants and the sample size but also the credibility of the questions and ensuring the data collected is valid and reliable. To comply with these criteria, evidence was taken from the pilot study to eliminate any questions that elicited information that had already been produced from responses to previous interview questions.

#### **4.6.2 The validity of interviews.**

To ensure the validity of the interview process, a session should be an optimal 30 minutes in length and at least 12 interviews conducted, or six to eight interviews held each of at least one hour’s duration (Rowley, 2012).

This study consisted of 12 interviews, where each of one of them was timed for 30 minutes to one hour. The objective of the interview was to discuss the expected cultural differences and languages and other contextual factors in understanding Indian parents’ perspectives on early childhood education in particular. After transcribing the interview data, the transcripts were read in the presence of the respondents to elicit their broader perspectives. This exercise helped in reiterating the questions from different perspectives with the next interviewee. Field notes were also made during the interviews.

From a data collection perspective, when the parents reached the saturation point – that is the parents kept repeating themselves or had nothing else to say, the interviews were referred to as complete and valid. Another factor considered was the researcher’s bias, which can often put the validity of the data at risk. However, in this study, I was open to contradictory responses, took a more subjective stand in response to the data interpretation, while at the same time applied rigour

throughout the process of the inquiry. I invested in delivering a truthful interpretation of the data; however, absolute truth or authenticity cannot be declared as qualitative research involves elements of subjectivity that can include the researcher's inherent bias, which Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest needs to be acknowledged and identified in the analysis process.

#### **4.6.3 Reliability of interviews.**

The research tool is reliable if it can facilitate the production of consistent results (Gray, 2014). In the research design for this study, the interview questions were constantly examined and refined while ensuring that the main intent of the questions was maintained. Although the context of the questions remained the same, they were reset in response to the participant's particular understanding of the aspect being discussed.

Gray (2014) also suggests that to elicit optimal responses when interviewing multiethnic participants, it is beneficial if the researcher is from the same culture. As an Indian, I understood the four Indian languages used by the participants – Telegu, Hindi, Tamil and Kannada – and spoke the first three fluently. These linguistic skills were instrumental in eliciting more detailed responses from the IPs.

Although my teaching experience in the early childhood sector in Australia was relatively new, I had worked for over a decade in the New Zealand EC sector, so it was not difficult to engage with the context and detail of policies, and the teaching and learning practices in the Australian sector. From my positioning as a researcher, I was able to design the interview questions to ensure they were contextual and that the interview process would be reliable and productive. Interview bias could be mitigated using professionalism and altruism to ensure the data collected was reliable and sound. Moreover, I was in a position to accurately interpret the non-verbal cues and expressions typical of the Indian culture. Language and cultural empowerment are also interrelated (Ball, 2010) and the deeper cultural understanding possessed by the researcher authenticated the interview responses from the participants who were from the same cultural background as the researcher.

#### **4.6.4 Bias.**

The cultural positioning of the researcher was another factor that required scrutiny. As I, the researcher, am also from an Indian background, the interpretation of the results could be questioned due to possible bias. However, provided the researcher in such a situation applies a professional lens to their investigations, their interpretation can reveal more profound insights



that can be more accurately described than possibly a researcher who is not from the same cultural background as the participants.

Gregory, Ruby, and Kenner (2010), in their study of Bangladeshi children, used the insider/outsider approach wherein Ruby (author/researcher) was from the same culture as the participants. In adopting this approach, Ruby had to view her own culture as “anthropologically strange” (p. 167) to clear her path of cultural understandings and assumptions. For then Ruby can explicate the understandings of participants from their perspective. The insider/outsider approach empowered the participants as they were deemed the experts (not the researcher). Similarly, in my study as an Indian researcher, I am an immigrant from an older generation and a novice to the newer, younger generation of the immigrant Indian participants, and therefore could be considered to have an outsider perspective and my own culture was anthropologically strange during the interviews. However, my own Indian experiences have provided me with an insider perspective as well. Having this insider/outsider perspective is important to allay any claims of bias that could be levelled at the interpretation of the results of the research. Moreover, I disclosed some information of my Indian background to the IPs in order to make them feel more comfortable participating in the project and at the same time affirmed to them that having not lived in India for a long time made me the novice and not the expert regarding current cultural trends.

## **4.7 Data Collection Methods for the Pilot Study and the Main Study**

Please note that the data collection methods were the same for the pilot study as well as for the main study in this research project.

### **4.7.1 Parent interviews.**

The data collection procedure used to obtain information from the Indian parents was the semi-structured interview technique, which was employed for both the pilot study and the main study. Permission was requested from the participant kindergartens to interview IPs in the respective kindergarten’s premises, provided the parents were comfortable with this arrangement.

This location was selected for research convenience and the safety of the researcher; however, if the parents asked for the interview to be conducted in their home, the researcher’s university supervisor was informed of the time and the address of the parents’ home. Each interview was on average 30 to 45 minutes in duration with a maximum of one hour allowed. The photographs

taken by parents of their children playing at home were also discussed at length during the interview. It is important to note here, that I was flexible in arranging a time for the interview in order to not disrupt the schedule of the parents. Some IPs were interviewed face to face while others were spoken to on phone audio or videotaped via Skype. The questions that were repeated in the pilot study were removed from the main study. See Appendix J and Appendix K for details of the pilot study interview questions for the ECE and IPs respectively, and Appendix L and Appendix M for details of the main study interview questions for the ECEs and IPs.

#### **4.7.2 Teacher interviews.**

As it was anticipated that the ECEs would be hard pressed for time, the questions for them to consider beforehand in order to streamline their interviews. However, the ECE participants would often want to discuss at length their practice with the children, digressing from the question at hand, so strategies were employed to return the ECE's attention to the original interview question. If the teacher was unable to complete the conversation within time, she was given extra time to answer the questions. I, as the interviewer, also ensured there was sufficient time for the ECEs to feel comfortable in answering the questions as some ECEs were articulate and passionate in discussing their roles and could take longer to complete the interview. All the ECEs' interviews were recorded on audio tape.

### **4.8 Data Analysis for the Pilot Study and the Main Study**

The same data analysis method was used for the pilot study and the main study. The data from the interviews with the ECEs and the IPs was transcribed. The transcriptions were then uploaded onto NVivo software and coded. The codes were categorised broadly according to participants' biodata, which included their age, the visa status and the employment qualifications of the IPs and for the ECEs the additional criteria of their number of years of employment years. (see Figure 4.5). Other categories included parental perceptions of learning at home and kindergarten, aspirations for their children, cultural values and immigration issues. The ECEs' transcripts were coded according to their partnerships with the IPs, the dissemination of program information and child-teaching practices.

The extent of EYLF knowledge perceptions of learning, and the ECEs' partnership interactions with the IPs and the children were used as variables to scrutinise and code the raw data. Coding related to the research sub-questions. The modified MUM model was not used in the pilot study. This was because the pilot study was used to eliminate repeat questions and answers in preparation for the main study. The MUM framework was used as the conceptual

framework for the main study and as a reference point to determine if the six Cs featured in the interactions. Data analysis, however, was not complete without including the interpretation of these codes according to my theoretical lens as the researcher. The need to identify the significance of the responses to the interview questions and to find the interconnections between the codes and the interview questions was important for the coding process (Bryman, 2008).

The process of coding and reducing the number of codes to fit the broader common themes was repeated to ensure clarity when checking for any important data that may have been overlooked (Bryman, 2008). The common themes, such as cultural competence and parent partnerships, were established in accordance with the themes revealed from the literature review and the policy documents. The outlier themes that emerged were classified as “surprise” themes because they did not relate to any of the anticipated themes. Examples of such themes were racism and the transition to school. Although these surprise themes were not considered to belong to the main themes, the findings and discussion sections of the study include the perspectives of the surprise themes.

The many codes that emerged were grouped under four main themes – time spent in the kindergarten by ECEs and IPs to build partnerships; learning as seen by ECEs and IPs for the children in their care; language and learning in IC; and food habits and the social wellbeing of IC. The EYLF policies and the MUM framework were used as reference points to frame the discussion of the findings. Figure 4.5 represents the process of analysis for the main study. The analysis process for the pilot study did not continue beyond the point of transcribing and developing themes that would be appropriate for the main study.

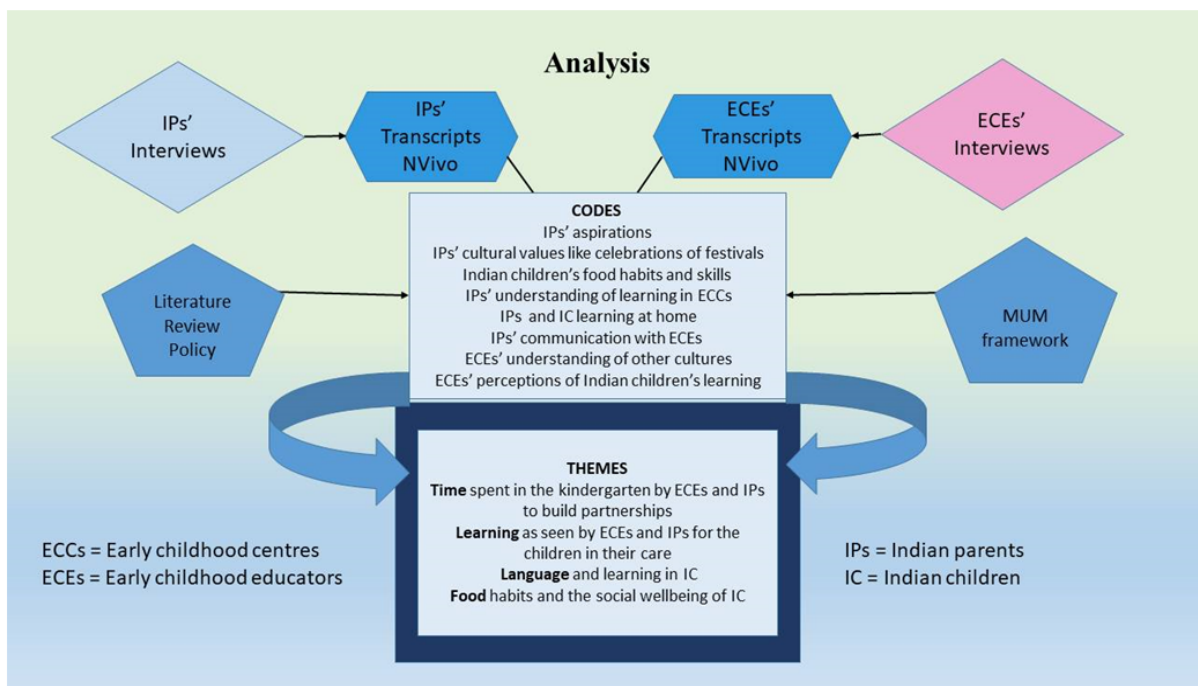


Figure 4.5. Data analysis.

#### 4.8.1 Policy documents and analysis.

The primary educational policies –such as the NQS, the NQF and the EYLF –that underpin kindergartens’ day-to-day operations and learning and teaching programs were examined to determine their level of alignment with the MUM framework.

The NQS policy document indicates alignment at the service level whereas the alignment of the NQF and EYLF policies is at the individual level. The distinction between the service level and individual level is that the NQS is concerned more with the operations and day-to-day routines practised in ECCs, whereas the two frameworks NQF and EYLF are more concerned with the relationships and collaboration between the stakeholders in ECCs. While this research study was largely focused at the individual level, examining relationships and the teaching and learning practices within the ECCs, the operational level was not completely ignored because at that level significant data could be extracted regarding ECCs’ general level of empathy towards CALD families.

#### 4.9 Thematic Analysis

Themes were extracted from the various codes using Ryan and Bernard’s (2003) method of identifying:

- Repetitions in data – for example, both IPs and ECEs mentioned a lack of time to understand the systems in the kindergarten for IPs and the different cultures of the children for ECEs.
- Similarities and differences in data – for example, in the social and cultural practices of IPs.
- Metaphors and analogies in the data – for example, the commonalities and differences in the education systems of Australia and India.

## **4.10 Triangulation of Data**

The triangulation of data refers to analysing data from various perspectives. For example, IPs might think that English is taught in the ECC. ECEs might have a different perspective, believing that English needs to be taught by IPs at home to ease the transition of their child to the ECC. The triangulation of data was an important aspect of analysis in this study.

### **4.10.1 Data presentation.**

The findings are presented in two sections. The first section profiles the IPs and the ECEs to demonstrate the complexity and diversity of participants. The second section presents the findings under the different themes.

### **4.10.2 Strengths and limitations of the research design.**

The number of participants could have been smaller and the case studies more detailed. As an in-depth study, it could have been clearer and more concise. With more participants, the complexity of a diverse number of participants could dilute the results, when there too many variables in each case.

## **4.11 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were included throughout the participant recruitment process, the data collection and data analysis phases, and the triangulation of data process. In seeking permission to conduct the research in the selected kindergartens, all participants were presented information about the study using a PLS. The leadership teams from the councils waited for the kindergarten managers to respond in writing before committing to this research project. In the pilot study, there were many delays in gaining consent forms and interview dates; however, these were accepted to keep up the respect for the busyness (or busy nature) of the kindergarten centres.

The cultural advisor from the Indian community in Frankston was kept informed on the progress of the research study since his support was beneficial in engaging with the Indian community in that suburb. For ethical reasons, the questions for the semi-structured interviews were framed taking into account the cultural sensitivities within the Indian communities after consultation with the cultural advisor who received an explanatory statement regarding the purpose of the study. Based on the advice of the cultural advisor, the questions were carefully drafted to remove any suggestion of inappropriateness or disrespect towards the learning community and the Indian community (Flinders, 1992).

Often researchers undertake an exit interview with participants; however, this did not occur in this study. I did not develop a close long-term relationship with the IP participants since the interviews were only for a short one to two hours. It is, however, acknowledged that rapport is needed to elicit authentic information relating to educational and cultural values. This requirement was fulfilled through the similar cultural backgrounds between the participants and me. For this reason, only a phone number was given to participants to ring if they had further questions regarding the research at a subsequent time. With ECEs, I developed a professional relationship with them that would likely extend to many years of sharing early childhood knowledge and networking.

#### **4.12 Ethics Summary**

Approval from the Monash University Human Ethics Committee (see Appendix A) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's (see Appendix B) was received to undertake research in the designated early childhood centres. Wyndham City Council's coordinator of kindergarten services consented for the kindergartens under her jurisdiction to participate in the research study (see Appendices H and I). The timelines for the data collection were Terms 3 and 4 of 2016 and Term 1 of 2017.

#### **4.13 Pilot Study**

The purpose of the pilot study was to refine the interview questions and eliminate any repeated questions. There were questions pertaining to biodata that were proving to be repetitive and so they were removed for the main study. The details of the sampling and data collection for the pilot study were detailed in Sections 4.7 and 4.8). The analysis of the data from the pilot study is presented in detail in the following sections.

#### **4.13.1 Interviews of ECEs.**

Two ECEs from Kindergarten A were interviewed separately after hours at the kindergarten. In the 45-minute interviews, both ECEs were passionate in discussing their work and spoke at length on the many aspects of teaching CALD children in their kindergartens.

#### **4.13.2 Interviews of IPs.**

The IP participants from Kindergartens A and B were asked to describe their child's home learning environment through the use of photographs that served as prompts and their descriptions formed the basis of the discussions in the subsequent interviews.

### **4.14 Analysis of the Data from the Pilot Study Interviews**

The recorded tapes of the semi-structured interviews of the Kindergarten A IP participants were transcribed and the responses were categorised into themes using the NVivo software program. The interviews of the Kindergarten B participants were not transcribed, as there were no corresponding ECE interviews to complete the process of data collection for the pilot study. After transcribing the interviews from the Kindergarten A participants, the main themes were extracted using the analysis procedures explained in Section 4.8.

### **4.15 Findings from the Pilot Study**

ECE Amy was quite articulate in answering the question on approachability to IPs in Kindergarten A. She said:

*I always make myself available to the parents, and I make a point of them knowing that they can come and talk to me at any particular time, and I always greet them and talk to them at the beginning of the session.*

Approachability created a comfortable environment for parents to talk to the ECEs; however, for this environment to be effective, it required the IPs to feel confident to come forward and take the opportunity to have a discussion with the ECEs. Barriers that were likely to discourage such dialogue were the IPs' lack of confidence with the English language, an understanding of the teaching practices in the kindergarten, and the assertiveness to express their concerns. While the ECEs' intentions were well meaning, the space offered was not conducive to IPs' communication methods.

An example of IPs not feeling the need to communicate is apparent in IP Gauri's interview:

*I don't want to interfere in their system of education [Kindergarten A]. But at the same time, when she [child] goes to school, I would really like the teachers to concentrate on whether she's learning or not.*

Unless the ECEs had any specific questions on the child's activities at home or would like assistance in understanding the child, the IPs were unlikely to approach the teacher to discuss their child. At one point IP Gauri wanted to talk to the ECEs regarding sending her daughter outside because of her asthma; however, she did not and said:

*But then I thought maybe that's good for her because I can't protect her all the time from this wild weather; she is a little bit asthmatic, she gets asthma only in winter, so I can't protect her. I can't keep her in all the time.*

However, it would have been important for these safety measures to have been communicated to the teacher. Many IPs' lack of communication with the ECEs is due to their respect for them, which stems from the IPs' cultural values. However, for their relationship to be effective, the communication between the ECEs and IPs needed to be improved.

ECE Amy mentioned taking time to understand other cultures:

*I think at the end of the day, I would love to have hours and hours of time to be sitting down and reading, and looking into the research, and you know investigating online and looking at everything the department has provided to us. I would love to do that but, ideally, that is not the best way for me to learn.*

Working with and creating communities of learning with the IPs is a complex aspect of not only partnerships but also in the dissemination of information that relates to their children's learning. The effectiveness of the relationship would often depend on the time made available by the ECEs and the IPs. Moreover, creating connections with IPs or other CALD families can sometimes be one sided according to ECE Amy:

*I think if we had a really strong connection with the family that would be the big thing, encouraging the family to come and be really open about what they're expecting, and that way we can gear what we do, not change what we do but have an understanding of where they are coming from.*

The phrase "not change what we do" in the quote from Amy suggests there could be resistance to integrating other cultural values into the ECC programs.



ECE Jill noticed the collaboration between ECEs and IPs at the Harmony Festival celebrations:

*We ensure that we look at all the diversity in our cultures. If there's something, whether it's their diet, or whether it's something that they're eating, whether it's a cultural celebration, we would include that in our program. So, when we've got something like Harmony Day, which we just recently had, we would ask the parents to bring something along that their children would like to eat from their culture.*

Although Jill's quote suggests there may have been a tokenistic "tourism model" occurring as part of Kindergarten A's program, it was likely to have promoted harmonious relationships and supported the wellbeing of the IPs and their children. However, such activities do not extend beyond familiarising children with different kinds of food and they also have the effect of emphasising the separateness of cultures as well. Consequently, a comparison of cultures needs to be accompanied by programs that assist children to be secure in their identity and culture. This principle also needs to extend to the different types of learning that occur in Indian families.

Some of these aforementioned examples from the pilot study led me to closely examine the MUM framework and adapt it to the kindergartens I was researching. Further discussion in relation to the theoretical framework and the literature review did not proceed due to an insufficient number of participants in this pilot study. However, the findings from this small sample from the pilot study were later included in the main study as some of them were particularly insightful for the overall study.

Modifications were made to the questions asked in the semi-structured interviews for the main study in order to refine the focus of the IPs and the ECEs when responding. Further relevant questions were added and repeated questions removed. The questions relating to policy were not repeated as the IPs in the pilot study findings did not have enough information regarding the same for the study. It became apparent that IPs did not read policies and in some cases were not even aware that such policies existed.

#### **4.16 Summary**

The research design and methodology of this study has been presented in this chapter, which included outlining the qualitative method that used an interpretative approach throughout the whole research process. The aim was to appreciate the cultural voices of the IP and the ECE

participants through empowering them to respond accurately to the interview questions. The profiles of the kindergarten, IPs and ECEs were included to present context and important biodata. This qualitative study worked with the participants and not on them. To optimise the understanding of this research, my knowledge of the Indian culture provided an insider and outsider perspective. The pilot study used the MUM framework, which was crucial to understanding the gaps in communication and collaboration between the ECEs and the IPs for effective multicultural education to take place. The next chapter present the findings from the main study.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Findings from the Early Childhood Educators: Who Am I (IPs) to the Early Childhood Educators?**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter the profile of the ECEs and the IPs were detailed and in this chapter I present the responses from the ECEs to the interview questions. These responses were the ECEs' perspectives on their interactions with the IPs. At this point, I would like to note that who we are is often revealed from our conversations in the presence of another (Laverty, 2009). In this case, the other could be the researcher or the respondent. Questions can "summon us to respond responsively and responsibly to otherness and differences in our own, unique ways" (Beista, 2006, as cited in Laverty, 2009, p. 570).

In this chapter I present the findings of the ECEs who participated in the study and the IPs' findings are presented in Chapter 6. This method of presentation facilitates the understanding of the conversations of each set of participants separately and then determine the connections, if any, between the two cohorts.

#### **5.2 What Are the Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives on Engaging with Indian Parents and Their Children?**

The themes that emerged from the analysis presented in the previous chapter under the four major themes and the direct quotes and explanations of the ECEs' findings categorised under each theme are presented in Sections 5.3 to 5.6.

It is important to note that some parts of the interview with ECE Mandeep were conducted in Hindi, but those parts were immediately translated into English in the field notes taken during the interview. As a researcher, I tried to capture the meaning of the Hindi words in real time. Each theme begins with an introduction and details the most insightful and relevant examples from the ECEs' responses to the semi-structured interviews.

#### **5.3 Time Spent Working in Partnership with the Indian Parents**

In the various participant kindergartens, the most common time that the ECEs interacted with the Indian parents was generally during the drop-off and pick-up times of their children at the ECC. The ECEs used different situations to interact and communicate with the IPs. Some of

those were through special events like festival celebrations, harmony festivals and parent events like an evening of fish and chips in the ECC. The following sections unpack some of the complexities faced by ECEs in building partnership with IPs.

### **5.3.1 Communication between the ECEs and the IPs when they are spending time with each other.**

Communication is an important element in the partnerships between the ECEs and the IPs and language was one of the barriers to effective communication as explained by ECE Heather:

*Most are busy. They just drop and go, and come back and pick up. Whether that's a language barrier for them to not to stay and participate in the program that's their decision.*

ECE Heather believed that one of the barriers was language and may be that was why the IPs did not come forward; however, there was another aspect that the ECEs were not likely to understand and that was the traditional values of the IPs that were associated with their home language. It was likely that in addition to the language barrier, the IPs were reluctant to participate in the program due to their respect for the ECEs. This phenomenon is examined in further detail in the discussion chapter.

ECE Heather would partner IPs with other IPs who understood the home language and English. She also appreciated that the IPs were keen to contribute as her interview revealed:

*We just do our best to get through or use another parent that can help. If they don't want to, that's up to them, that's quite okay, too. I've had one that's come and done some cooking, and I've had another one come and do ... is it ragoli? (Rangoli).*

Rangoli is the practice of using colourful traditional patterns in Indian festivals and it is likely that the IPs used this practice as a communicative tool to participate in the ECC program. While the partnerships were difficult due to language issues, being cognisant of the attempted contributions by the IPs, the ECEs could appreciate that the IPs were willing to participate and communicate when their cultural traditions were acknowledged. Understanding that communication could occur through such contributions was experienced by ECE Heather when Rangoli was offered by the IPs during the festival celebrations.

*As well as the role language plays in communication and developing partnerships between ECEs and IPs, trust is also built through non-verbal ways and the*

*exchange of cultural artefacts can contribute to the connecting of cultures.*

*Understanding English is not necessarily a barrier to building partnerships when there is a cultural connection between the two cohorts.*

### **5.3.2 ECEs collaborating with IPs.**

The ECEs collaborated in various ways with the IPs. ECE Jill liked to spend time with the IPs to understand their culture:

*I guess I am interested in different cultures, so I just ask them, “What sort of things do you celebrate?”, “Are you happy with what we’re celebrating?”, “How can we include what you celebrate into our program?” and things like that. I think that’s the best way because you can’t say, “Look, all Indian people celebrate this or all Japanese people celebrate that”.*

Understanding the culture was significant for ECE Jill so she could include the IPs in Kindergarten A’s program. Sometimes the IPs were invited to the kindergarten so that they could understand the ECC’s program, as ECE Jo explains:

*I have a roster for parents to come and see what is happening in the kindergarten and how we are teaching. We encourage a lot of Indian families to come and do that and see why the children are doing this or how they are doing that.*

However, ECE Jo also explains that:

*Yes, Indian parents do come and help but these are only a handful of parents and because they are either working or have other children, rostering can be hard.*

While the IPs could have busy lives and were not able to commit the time that the ECEs would have liked them to have, ECE Heather said that sometimes having the grandparents come and collaborate with the ECEs was likely to help build partnerships. She made a special mention regarding the Indian child’s family spending time at the kindergarten:

*...but sometimes when Grandma or Grandpa comes from India, they’ll bring them in and, you know, they might stay for a little while and watch their grandchild or participate in what the grandchild is doing...*

In addition, ECE Maxine believed that it took time to build relationships with the IPs who had the time to spend in the kindergarten:

*It takes a while to build a rapport. Sometimes that is triggered by a conversation about their lives, or is triggered through an event that is happening at the centre. Our meet and greet, or the Hollywood...Bolly boulevard later, then they love that and then talk about how their children like to go dancing.*

Maxine had found ways of collaborating with IPs by taking an interest in their cultural traditions and customs such as Bollywood dancing (Indian film dances).

In summarising how collaborative partnerships could be built in kindergartens, there is a complex array of interactions that could occur between the ECEs and the IPs, depending on the IPs' responses to the program information that has been given to them by the ECC. It is important that the ECEs have time with the IPs at the ECC to develop partnerships, but it can prove to be difficult. The notion that this space, where there is often a lack of time to communicate between the ECEs and the IPs, could be improved by the introduction of other possible scenarios is explained in the discussion chapter.

### **5.3.3 Comparing cultures and educational systems when spending time with IPs.**

ECE Amy would like to spend more hours researching the culture of the parents who have children enrolled in Kindergarten A. Her other passion was to read research literature that was available online. She was new to multicultural experiences, as was mentioned in her profile, and wanted to know how other cultures compared to her own:

*I think more [learning about their culture] from the families. I think that at the end of the day, I would love to have hours and hours of time to sit down and read and look into the research and investigate online and look at everything the department has provided to us. I would love to do that but, ideally, that is not the best way for me to learn.*

ECEs have less time to update their understanding of a fast-changing classroom milieu that is becoming more multicultural every day. If time was not spent by the ECEs in researching the different cultural values of CALD families, then it would be likely that they would encounter a situation that ECE Jenny confronted in Kindergarten E:

She referred to one child who was very anxious about almost everything in the kindergarten. From her previous experience, Jenny assumed that the child was of an Indian background and would therefore take longer to settle into the kindergarten, so she persisted for a while longer than she would have with other children. When this Indian boy still had trouble adjusting to the

ECC environment after Jenny had spent time with him, she finally referred the child to the kindergarten's field officer:

*Until we had that conversation with the preschool field officer, we did not realise that he (child) had not been given many opportunities to be independent.*

*So, we started to work with the family and we were all working together and now (pointing to the child) that child talks about the friendship book, and he is the one who has just blossomed, and in a matter of a few weeks all this has come together because we all worked together.*

When a child has been referred to a field officer, the officer visits the child's home to assess the situation and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the child's environment. The information Jenny received from the field officer was not to take cultures for granted, and that fostering a collaborative process with the IPs was necessary to obtain a holistic assessment of the child. Working with the mother of the child was a salutary experience for Jenny and she confirmed that the IPs' contribution in this intervention was most appreciated. Jenny also learnt to view each child individually rather than relate from her preconceived notion of a particular culture. Jenny's experience with IPs had taught her to understand that each Indian family is different in their practice of traditional values and customs. When a new child enrolls at the kindergarten, Jenny now makes sure she spends an hour with the child's parents to gather information and understand the family and its values.

Conversely, ECE Kate did not believe that taking into account cultural differences was of any value when making decisions based on what is best for the child. Most IPs never come forward with many demands or expectations for their children; however, she did say:

*Occasionally, I will have the odd family – it doesn't matter if they're Indian or otherwise – who request more from their child that...as a parent they may want their child to learn or achieve, but as an early childhood professional, I know that the child won't be able to achieve those goals because they're not yet old enough to do that or ready to do that.*

It was interesting to note that Kate made decisions for the IC based on her knowledge of child development and without consulting the child's parents. Kate also felt strongly that IPs needed to come forward to discuss their children's needs:

*Definitely, I would like to hear from them their Indian family's perspective; if there is something more...a consensus there...or something different that they would like to see that we are able to provide and that we are not providing already.*

Given the many barriers to communicating with the ECEs, the IPs were not likely to come forward and say what they wanted – moreover, Kate felt that she had provided everything they wanted and made the assumption that if the IPs did not ask for anything, then that meant they were satisfied with their child's situation. This finding is further discussed in the next Chapter 7. To understand further Kate's assumption, I asked her about the diversity policy practised in the kindergarten to which she replied:

*I can't think of anything specific that we've had to refer to our policy for or had to change our policies because of cultural issues. We definitely have our standard cultural diversity policies, but nothing comes to mind where we had to create specific multicultural policies or policies that related specifically to Indian families.*

Given her answers, it led me to believe that Kate was able to appreciate equality but not equity for children.

### **5.3.4 ECEs spending time with IPs to build communities of learning.**

Building a sense of community and the ECEs being included in Indian cultural activities was conducive to Indian children's learning abilities. For ECEs this was a welcome solution to improving partnering relationships with the IPs.

ECE Diane had a role at Kindergarten D where she was the first point of contact for all parents. She would listen to their needs and work with the IPs more closely than the other teachers did at the kindergarten. Diane would spend a lot of time with IPs to make sure that they had the necessary English language supports that the council and Frankston Kindergarten Association (FKA) provided for the parents. She believed that the parents needed more support with English than their child because the child could pick up English quickly from the kindergarten environment. The interesting part of her interview was her perceptions of how IPs form a community and become involved in the kindergarten:

*A few years ago we had a group of Punjabi parents who were so involved. I knew that many did not have the time but this group was involved. They would bring*



*food and teach the children different things. [These IPs participated in Diwali.] They also came and read stories and would become involved in other celebrations as well like we when we had breakfast at kinder. So they wanted to know what we did in Australia as well for their children. They were just a group of mums and they were very involved.*

Diane's recall of the those particular IPs being involved in so many events conveyed the ideal scenario of how communities of learning can operate. ECE Christine also believed that it was gratifying "that they come and teach us", which also indicated that an ECC's program was not only about ECEs teaching Indian children but also about the ECEs learning from the IPs.

Communities of learning can also be created when kindergarten committees of management hire CALD early childhood educators such as Mandeep, who is Indian. ECE Mandeep, when asked about her time spent with the IPs, said that she "*pretty much talks about the same thing*" as she does with all parents but sometimes the IPs wanted to know what their child did the whole day in kindergarten:

*They want to know if they (their child) did writing and reading and that sort of thing, but we try to teach them that this is a play-based learning environment and not a school and you can do this sort of a thing at home.*

Mandeep provided further details regarding her perceptions of the Indian community in Kindergarten C:

*See the Indian parents do understand [what happens in kindergarten] but because they don't want to understand [EC teacher Mandeep explains further]...with my personal experience I can explain that they [IPs] want them [children] to live here but want them to lead a life like in India. But a few of them understand...others because they are in their own comfort zone, they [IPs] want what they want.*

The research literature concerning immigrant teachers often discusses how these teachers are not able to defend what their ethnic communities want in work environments because they are also expected to be professional and accountable to their own teaching community. This dual thinking for the community and of the ECC program is why Mandeep thought it was hard for Indians to move out of their comfort zones. With their cultural heritage dating back several thousand years, it appears unlikely that IPs would consider moving beyond their comfort zones for the relatively short period that their children are in kindergarten. Moreover, when young

families migrate to other countries, sometimes the first point of contact is likely to be the local ECC, and what ECEs are confronted with are cultural values that have not yet adjusted to the new culture in the host country. This is further explained in the discussion chapter along with immigrant ECEs and their cultural apprehension at work.

Another important aspect of the learning communities is the larger CALD community is reflected when the kindergartens celebrate the Harmony Festival as demonstrated by Kindergarten A and in other cultural festivals. ECEs spend invest much time in building these communities for the wellbeing of the CALD children.

## **5.4 Understanding the Educational Learning Culture of Indian Children and Indian Parents' Aspirations for Their Children**

Often the understanding of the educational aspirations of IPs occurs through verbal communication or through other ways such as the cultural festivals that are celebrated in the ECCs. Events such as fathers' evenings or fish and chip nights in ECCs also provide opportunities for communicating and developing partnerships. The communication and collaboration that occurs between ECEs and IPs in relation to Indian children's learning is presented in the next sections.

### **5.4.1 ECEs' communication with IPs on teaching–learning experiences with IC.**

In compliance with the EYLF, all participant ECCs in this study used play-based pedagogy, and an important aspect of this philosophy is child agency (NQF) – acknowledging the child's voice and initiative in navigating their own learning. ECE Amy, a lead teacher and ECC program leader, had a similar view for an Indian child's learning. To her it is about giving IC a voice:

*We want to establish those relationships with the children and in particular with Indian children to let them know that their voice is important, and they're valued, and they're respected for whatever they bring to the table. And I think there are just better ways to do that than in giving them constant instructions.*

It was likely that the Indian children were not communicating with others in the ECC. As Amy said, it was “Indian children in particular” for whom she encouraged to use their “voice”. However, in stating that giving constant instructions was about not giving voice to a the child, Amy had not considered what child agency or child voice meant to different cultures, particularly the Indian culture. While there were bigger learning goals, like “giving voice”, at the

beginning of each year Amy would consult parents and note down the individual learning goals for their children:

*I think other cultures have more of a focus perhaps on learning and the importance of literacy and numeracy and reading and all of that in getting ready for school, and they see that as important and as a priority. I think that Indian families may sometimes fall into that category where they feel that there needs to be some learning occurring and they just want to get their children as ready as possible, and they regard that side of the process of getting them ready as very important.*

The information gathered from IPs during parent interviews at the beginning of the year is used to include Indian children in the program and give them a voice, as Amy explains:

*...and then in each program I'll acknowledge each of the children's individual goals in my planning.*

Amy outlines the proposed learning program for Indian and other children in “profile books”, which are then presented to the parents. The educational aspirations of IPs are associated with other Indian cultural values, one of which is respect for ECEs. This demonstration of respect was experienced by ECE Jill and her appreciation of that respect was evident in her interview:

*We were talking the other day and we think that, in general, the Indian parents seem to value what we do here a lot more than many other cultures do, which is good so I think it's just having the time and spending time and making a point of keeping in contact.*

The respect given by IP to ECEs is characteristic of the Indian socio-political and educational context, is further explained in the discussion chapter along with an understanding of why play is interpreted differently in different cultures.

#### **5.4.2 Collaborating with IPs to help IC learn.**

ECE Jenny sought assistance from an Indian mother to understand her son's behaviour, as she narrates the incident:

*PJ's son came half way through the year. He just wouldn't stop talking and she (IP) came up with idea to hold up a sign to stop the child from talking, which would also encourage him to listen and let others talk as well.*

Unlike Jenny, other ECEs may not seek to collaborate with IPs for a number of reasons, particularly when the trust necessary to develop with a has not occurred. In conversing with ECE Heather, it became apparent that IC never approach her for any assistance with their learning, and she said:

*And if you see them doing something, when you approach them, they don't want to talk about it, and they know they're finished. They will keep at an activity as long as you do not join them.*

In that situation, Heather was attempting to encourage the IC to participate in a table-top activity, and she recalled:

*Just getting them to may be come to the table. A lot of them like to play outside and on the mat with their cars and trucks, which is okay, but getting them to come and do a table activity...sometimes they [IC] remain there [outside].*

Heather observed that the IC were not interested in table-top activities; would rather continue activities that needed no guidance from adults.

In responding to the interview question regarding specific activities that Indian children were involved in at Kindergarten D, ECE Maxine, after a long pause, said that:

*I can't off the top of my head think of it. They have just had and talked about celebrations, not specific things, but just celebrations.*

Maxine found that the table-top activities that had been organised in the ECC after the celebrations of Indian festivals were popular among the IC. Elsewhere she mentioned that Rangoli was popular and that it continued for many days after the Diwali Festival had been celebrated. The celebration of festivals often occurred in collaboration with the IPs and this would encourage IC to become involved in the particular kindergarten's program.

In her interview, ECE Jo mentioned that she would explain to IPs the ECC's learning program that would be implemented for their children:

*They(IPs)would tell me the learning that they would like to see happen for their children and then I would try to explain – learning happens subtly through play, through song, through maths, through books, through discussions, and through watching, and it does not have to be concrete – all that is formal when they learn in school and so they have to get used to that, and I explain all that to them and*

*so they are really focused on how they [their children] learn. [This is the crux of a kindergarten education.]*

A discussion of how this explanation is interpreted by IPs is detailed in the Chapter 7.

#### **5.4.3 Comparing educational systems.**

ECEs would spend time explaining the different systems of education in Australia as Jo indicated in her reflection on the different education systems:

*But that's their system – culture (reading and writing). I can't change that, but when they [their children] are in kindergarten, this is what we build for them; that is why when they go to school (in Australia) they are ready.*

Jo was quite direct in explaining her role as an Australian teacher, although she, herself, was not from the prevailing Australian culture. She respected other cultures' traditional learning customs but believed that an IC should be prepared for school and understanding English meant understanding the system, which was equally important to their understanding of their own cultural aspirations. Jo would take time to explain to IPs the learning that would occur in Kindergarten C:

*They tell me what they want to see learning happening in their children and I try and explain- learning happens subtly through play through song thro mat, through book through discussions- through watching and does not have to be concrete all that is formal when they learn in school and so they have to get used to that-and I explain all that to them and so they are really focused on how they learn(this is the crux of Kindergarten education).*

Jo also commented on the learning ability of Indian children in comparison to other children from her experience. She said:

*The majority of Indian children – and I don't know if this is right thing to say – are very quick learners, and I think they are quite intelligent because I think from a young age that is what parents do; they want to teach them and make them the best.*

While Jo explained the learning that occurred in ECCs in comparison to Indian educational values, and thought that IC were intelligent, Heather's personal philosophy appreciated the Indian-structured teaching strategies. Heather believed that structured and focused activities

would increase each child's attention span. Children needed to practise remaining focused on an activity and she believed that this was not occurring in ECCs. For her, the EYLF curriculum was vague. The EYLF says that a child should be safe and protected, yet also says that children need to work with nature and being barefoot was permissible in kindergartens. To Heather, this was confusing; moreover, because it was okay for a child to leave an activity midway through it because something or someone else had distracted the child. Jo derived her information relating to focused activities from her former colleagues at primary school. She revealed that it formed some of her thinking and that a short attention span in children would lead to:

*behavioural problems. I know prep teachers are saying that it takes them a good seven to eight months to settle them into school.*

Her primary school colleagues would often say that the EYLF did not prepare children for school.

When comparing the educational values of IPs and the ECEs' Australian pedagogy, Jo believed that ECEs talked of developmental learning of which socio-emotional development was one aspect. Conversely, IPs were looking for academic learning.

To encourage IPs to understand this system of education that was based on developmental theories of children, ECE Kate said:

*...so that's when it's really important...to educate families...of not only why...we need to let children do that for their own belonging in the service ... but also the learning that occurs during the process, so when they do play in the sand, they're connecting through sensory play, and we know that....you know that we are looking to brain development and all of those crucial phases for children.*

However, further discussion is required on whether providing information to IPs on the current early childhood education system influences their educational aspirations for their children. Moreover, appreciating the cultural backgrounds of Indian families is crucial for ECEs to be able to create programs that take into account the learning patterns of IC as recommended by EYLF as "culturally responsive teaching". The aforementioned examples of ECEs' viewpoints on IC learning are further discussed in Chapter 7.

#### **5.4.4 Understanding and creating communities of learning.**

ECE Christine considered learning from a community involvement perspective. In commenting on IC learning, she said that most Australian parents or others who had lived in

Australia for a long time were likely to have had the experience of attending an Australian kindergarten when they were children and hence were comfortable with the learning program for their own children at kindergarten. However, these experiences are not those of many immigrant families such as Indian families. For most of the IPs, the kindergarten experience is an unknown and new phenomenon. Although the councils provide a considerable amount of information regarding their kindergarten services to IPs, who are often busy people, it does not equate to the personal experience of a parent having attended a kindergarten as a child in the same early childhood education system as their own children. Personal experience provides insights that paperwork cannot.

Christine remarked that, today, most kindergartens are being incorporated into community centres to help the kindergarten be a part of and reflect the community settings. In her ECC programs, Christine said that people not normally associated with the kindergarten are often invited to teach the children various aspects of community living. One example she quoted was the case of a dog lover who explained to the children at the kindergarten how to befriend a dog and not be afraid of them. For many CALD parents, their interaction with their children's ECC is likely to provide them with their first community experience and ECEs need to be sensitive to any apprehension this might engender in the parents. How communities have a role in IC learning is discussed in Chapter 7.

#### **5.4.5 ECEs seeking a compromise in their personal teaching philosophy to accommodate Indian children's learning.**

ECE Mandeep, an educator of Indian nationality, believed that there needed to be a compromise between IPs' values and the existing ECC programs.

*So Indian parents have these values – but as teachers, we have to convince them that play way is an important method. So to take advantage of the system in a practical way – yes, teach spelling but in a play way method. I told the parents that the children have to make their own efforts and kindi is the only place where they can do this.*

As an Indian, Mandeep could understand the IPs' way of thinking on education which did not include play-based methods, but she would promote EYLF play-based education to them, which she believed could be modified to assuage IPs' concerns.

ECE Maxine also believed that early childhood education could be adjusted to accommodate Indian culture. However, she was of the view that the learning and inclusion of other cultures in

the kindergarten setting also required IPs to show respect for the ECC's program as well. Many IPs want their child to stay indoors during the cold weather or do not want them to get messy during play. In response to such requests, Maxine said:

*I think it goes both ways in that respect; I think they have to appreciate there are certain parts to our program that we want the children to be a part of and are important for all our children to do, so sometimes we can't segregate and say: "You can stay inside, but you can go out" – that's why we run an indoor–outdoor [program].*

Attempting to fulfil the individual needs of all the children often presents logistical problems for the operation of an ECC. However, the kindergarten routines and expectations of ECEs have certain effects on IC and their ability to learn and this will be discussed in Chapter 7. In summary, it would appear that ECEs seek compromises from IPs so that their children will receive the benefit of the current learning methods practised in the ECCs.

## **5.5 Understanding the Food Culture of Indian Parents at Home**

Food is usually synonymous with cultural identity and often an entry point for learning about other cultures is to appreciate their food habits, example believing that Indians only eat roti, rice and curries is a stereotypical way of thinking of Indian culture. Most Indians would like their children to continue to practise the food habits they have developed at home in the ECCs; however, the food safety regulations of the ECCs restrict the type of food IC can consume. Although some IPs would prefer that their children's food habits could be accommodated by the early childhood centres, the ECCs might deem that these habits compromise the operations of the kindergarten. Preventing a culture from practising its food customs or restricting the way a CALD child eats conveys a sense of exclusion. Food and festivals as cultural celebrations were incorporated into the range of activities in the participant ECCs; however, the eating practices and the types of food the IPs would send daily with their children would appear to have created areas of miscommunication and apprehension for the ECEs. These findings are presented in the following sections.



### **5.5.1 Communication between IPs and ECEs regarding food requirements for Indian children.**

ECE Jenny said that she made sure she knew the dietary requirements of all the CALD children that she taught. She was meticulous in ensuring that she understood the various food regimens of the children so that she did not offend their different cultures. As she said:

*...understanding the dietary requirements of what they can and cannot eat, specially the Sikhs (who are vegetarians). Some can have eggs and others cannot. I am particular about this as I remember clearly that we were having a party and I saw some meat on a child's plate and asked the father if the child can eat meat, and the father replied he can eat anything that moves!*

Jenny did not take for granted that Sikhs or Hindus were vegetarian. Ever since she had had that conversation with the Indian father, Jenny made a point of talking to the parents regarding the dietary requirements of the IC in her kindergarten. Sometimes immigrant families in transition to adjusting to the new culture often abandon the dietary restrictions of their traditional cultures for various reasons. This is further discussed in Chapter 7.

ECEs Christine and Saranya, the other two teachers in Kindergarten E, took their instructions from Jenny regarding culture and food habits. All three teachers learnt about IPs' food habits from their Indian colleague who was a casual teacher at Kindergarten E but was not available for interview for this study.

ECE Kate did have a list of the children's eating requirements because although Kindergarten F did not provide meals to the children made from their own stocks, the staff would prepare meals for the children by cooking the food the children had brought from home, and the list was useful in providing alternatives for those who had dietary requirements. As Kate said:

*Culturally, especially with Indian families, there's no pork or it is vegetarian, but because families provide meals from home it's not really an issue; however, when we cook for the children, we do take all of those points into consideration.*

ECEs collect information relating to the food habits and requirements of CALD families for a variety of reasons. ECEs Heather and Jacqui reported the same response as ECE Maxine who said:

*We accept feedback from parents...whether it's about their [children's] diet, or whether it's something that they're eating, or whether it's a cultural celebration, we would include that in our program.*

The daily eating routines practised by the children in the ECC would always be conveyed by the ECEs to the IPs at the time of enrolment and at that time a note would also be made by the kindergarten of the dietary requirements in order to understand the food habits of the IC. ECE Maxine said that teachers were quite sensitive to the different needs of CALD families and would make sure that information regarding different cultural foods would also be shared with other members of the kindergarten community.

### **5.5.2 Collaborating with IPs and comparing Indian children's eating habits with those practised by ECCs.**

The apprehension that ECEs expressed regarding the food IC brought to the ECCs and the nature of their eating habits is presented in this section. ECE Jacqui was concerned at the amount of food IPs would send with their children and the fact that the IC were not independent eaters. Jacqui's experience of Indian children's food routines was as follows:

*It's interesting, I think, that sometimes they (IC) have a lot of food packed...and because they're busy during the day, they don't want to stop playing and eat all that food. So they're taking back home a lot of the food, and the parents then worry whether their children are having enough to eat during the day. So I think that's probably a bit concerning whether they eating enough, and it's a little bit of a juggling act to respect the child and to work with a lot of food.*

Jacqui understood that the Indian tradition was for young children to be handfed by their mothers and therefore they would begin their time at kindergarten not knowing how to eat independently, which was a custom that the ECEs did not want to encourage. Teaching children to be independent eaters is one of the indicators of developing child agency – and is an objective of the EYLF. A comment from Jacqui during her interview is as follows:

*[They have their own] agency, and when you are hungry, you eat, but I'm not going to force feed them to eat, but I also need to respect the family and their values.*

The Indian customs relating to eating and the feeding of children are markedly different from the EYLF's expectations of encouraging children to be independent eaters. However, an Indian

child's eating habits could result in a lack of nourishment that could be an indicator of potential learning difficulties in the child. This was a point of debate that had not been considered by ECCs and is discussed in Chapter 7.

### **5.5.3 Food, festivals and community building.**

ECEs work often in partnership with IPs to celebrate festivals and make cultural connections through food contributions. ECE Maxine explains:

*...if it's a cultural celebration, we would include that in our program. So, if we've got something like Harmony Day, which we just recently had, we'd ask the parents to bring something along that the children would like to eat from their culture.*

ECEs Amy and Jill also celebrated Harmony Day, which was a reflection of the one in Melbourne that brings communities together in celebration of the many cultures. ECE Mandeep, an Indian, mentioned the Indian festival Diwali and said:

*See, when we celebrate different festivals in the kindergarten like Diwali, we do tell them [IPs] to participate in our activities. They can make some desserts for Diwali, they can dance and do some dress-ups when they come, and they can do some voluntary work with us.*

The information ECEs have of the Indian cultural festivals is used to help socialise the Indian families and settle them into Australian society at the community level. The ECEs in all the participant ECCs use these festivals to teach new skills to the children attending their kindergartens. As ECE Heather commented:

*We celebrate Diwali, and have a little interest table set up with Diwali things on it, and they can come in and read a story. They'll go to the festival and then come and share – the children will share on the mat what they did at the festival and their celebrations they had at home.*

At the time of the interviews for this study, Kindergarten D's ECEs were planning to take the children to the larger community Diwali celebrations in their locality. The celebration of the various Indian festivals by the kindergartens involves the ECCs' communities, as well as the wider general community, and the inclusion of IPs helps to build learning communities. The sense of community expands the learning the children receive from their regular sessions in the

ECCs, and it includes all the ECCs' stakeholders. How this building of community in ECCs influences the learning of IC is discussed in Chapter 7.

#### **5.5.4 ECEs compromising to help support the eating habits of IC.**

While the ECEs did not provide many details regarding the eating habits of IPs, ECE Jacqui was sympathetic to the food routines of IC, and despite the policy on child agency and independence, she would sit with the IC when they ate and assist them to feed themselves. Jacqui expressed her support for the IC when they were eating as follows:

*...through supporting the child; maybe sitting with the child when they were eating and just encouraging them to eat a little bit more, but then when they're done, respecting[as respecting the child's agency and stop when the child does not want to eat anymore] that as well, and then just talk to them. We encourage children to bring their own food, but in respect of our own policies, ask them not to bring nuts and other things.*

ECE Dawn was also sympathetic to the Indian children's eating situation and said that she respected cultural diversity:

*If they don't like certain foods, you can try sandwiches with them, or if they want their food heated up, then we can do that for them. If they want to eat with their hands, that's fine, but I generally give them a spoon, but if they want to eat with their hands they can ask me and then they can do that.*

While the policies and regulations govern food safety for all children and the ECEs are accountable for enforcing these regulations, accommodating children who have diverse ways of eating is also necessary to help with their transition. Eating routines is one the socio-cultural habits of Indian families that is discussed in the next Chapter.

### **5.6 Early Childhood Educators' Understanding of the Role of the English Language in Indian Homes**

When they arrive in Australia, many Indian families are likely to speak at least two languages: English and a home/native language. Multilingualism has also been observed in families where the parents have come from families that spoke at least two languages.

In the following sections, I present the findings from ECEs' understanding of the language experiences of IPs and the parents attempts to adjust to the English language culture that prevails

in the ECCs. In the same way that the IPs struggle with English, the ECEs also find it difficult to interpret, manage and include the learning needs of Indian families. The differences in language and cultural thinking in the Australian and Indian cultures creates the complexities in learning and teaching that confront the ECEs. Indian children in kindergarten are in a bilingual environment that is likely to affect their learning.

The following sections outline the complexities of communication between people from different cultures from the perspective of the ECEs in their relationship with the IPs.

### **5.6.1 Communicating in English.**

ECE Kate said that she communicated with IPs who were not fluent in English by strategically using another parent to translate the information to the particular IP:

*My experience is that I find one parent who speaks English perhaps a little more fluently than the other parent and would get them to take control of the conversation, with a lot of hand gesturing as well.*

Apart from the hand gesturing and engaging a non-English speaking IP using another parent who was reasonably fluent in English, Kate also used the following strategy to manage IPs:

*If I had a family that didn't speak any English at all, I would look at getting an interpreter from the council...and encourage keywords...just to make sure we get communication.*

As all the participant ECCs were owned and managed by councils, the ECEs were able to access translation services if they requested them.

ECEs considered it essential that IC be able to speak English speaking fluently as did their parents. ECE Diane stated the following:

*So depending on how educated they (IPs) are, most Indian parents want their children to be able to speak English and understand. They want them to be able to write their names and be prepared for school.*

Of course, speaking in English helps the IPs and ECEs to communicate with each other and cater to the needs of their children; however, speaking native languages at ECCs is also encouraged by ECEs as they are mindful of the cultural competence policy, which encourages the preservation of home languages. ECE Jo is from the Middle East and her take on languages and cultural thinking is as follows:

*Most children come from an Indian background – actually, this year we have children who speak good English but in the past years we have had families who spoke good English but the children did not. I understand that they want to keep their home language and we encourage that.*

Although ECE Jo accepts the speaking of the home language in Kindergarten C, she also emphasises the need for IC to learn English so as to be able to communicate with peers and adults in the kindergarten. She said IPs speak English fluently at work and ECC and that this communication in English should continue at home with their children. Jo stated the following:

*But they think that they can send them to kindergarten where they will learn English and at home they speak no English at all. Sometimes we had parents who were authors with good English but their children didn't speak English, and maybe it's due to their upbringing, like when they are brought up by their grandparents, aunties and uncles who do not know English.*

Jo's statement does not take account of the transition time required for English as a Second Language (ESL) families, who are steeped in one language and culture, to then become conversant in another language and culture. IPs enrol their children in early childhood settings as soon as they arrive from India and the children have not had the exposure to the English environment to the extent their parents have. What has become evident is that ECEs assume that IC are being taught English at home. Speaking in English, being bilingual and multilingual and losing their home language influences their learning in different cultural environments such as the ECC. This complex language aspect of learning is discussed in Chapter 7.

Communicating did not necessarily require English, said ECE Jacqui, when she worked with the grandparents of IC:

*Grandma usually dropped off and picked up the children, but she didn't speak any English. It was so beautiful at the end of the year...we were able to communicate even without any language; that was how communication was until the end of the year. I felt that she was saying thank you, and she was just holding my hands and she cried and I cried. I felt that was beautiful to know that connection was made.*

Communication and connection can also be made with signs and artefacts and understanding body language. Communicating with IPs who are not fluent in English is possible by using

translation services, or engaging an IP who speaks English to interpret between the ECE and the parent. Not knowing English need not be a barrier to communication.

### **5.6.2 ECEs collaborating with IPs to bring languages into the ECC.**

ECE Kate believed that speaking English was not only important to her and the other ECEs at Kindergarten F but also for the IPs who had children enrolled there. She said the following:

*So, funny enough, a lot of the requests we get from Indian families is that they would like their children to fit in with the community. They're quite often worried that when their children do go into a social setting, to a kinder, and then off to school, because their child is culturally diverse, they may not fit in. So, often it is a big focus for Indian families that they would like their children to speak English fluently, and so they would like them to interact with their peers.*

According to ECE Jenny, how well IC learn was dependent on their level of proficiency in the English language when they arrived at the ECC:

*One Indian child has excellent English and is so clued on what we do in the program and another one does not have much English and just cannot listen and it is hard trying to get them engaged. The other child with English finds listening hard, too, even though he has good English. Each one is so different but listening seems to be a bit of a problem and it's just a whole-group [IC] thing this listening.*

When listening is poor in IC who know English, it is likely to be an indication that although they understand the English language, it does not necessarily mean that they understand the English conceptual thinking context. Attentive listening by a child is often followed by appropriate actions; however, if this does not occur, it is due to their inattention. An Indian child may understand an instruction in English given by the ECE but realises it requires a skill that does not match with the skill they have acquired from an Indian cultural context. There are many variables involved in the communication process between the ECEs speaking in English and IC listening accordingly. How the ECEs interpret their interactions with IC is discussed in Chapter 7.

### **5.6.3 Comparing languages to encourage bilingualism.**

Verbal language is not the only way of communicating with IPs and making a cultural connection with them. In addition to languages, cultural conceptual thinking is also valued by

ECEs in their learning and teaching. ECE Maxine shared her experience with Indian families, who generally do not get involved in Kindergarten D's activities due to their lack of English language skills, but came to the kindergarten to share their cultural activities:

*Bollywood dancing...all the children took part in it, and so did the other parents, and we were just talking about the different movements that they use when they do the dance, and we got everyone involved. Someone said: "Can I do the henna (temporary tattoos) on the children's hands?" IPs would normally be shy, but now she was very much wanting to share that with us.*

Bollywood dances are performed using various Indian languages and melodies that are uniquely Indian. Introducing these dances to the ECCs is about sharing the Indian languages with all the other children as well.

ECE Jacqui also mentioned how the languages and the conceptual thinking of a particular culture are intertwined and often expressed in the culture's stories. Children in her kindergarten were given the opportunity to listen to an Indian mythological story and Jacqui reflected:

*...be a bit more thoughtful about, not just going for stories that we all know. I guess the obvious, a little bit, stories that are authentic to the children, showing them all the different cultures and learning things from other places.*

This thoughtful inclusion of a cultural resource (provided by IPs) assisted the children to realise that not all stories were the same as the ones they were used to hearing at the ECC and at home. The subset of the Indian story was entirely different to those they had heard in the ECC. The Indian children benefitted as they were able to talk about all the characters in that story with confidence to their peers. A sense of belonging developed amongst the IC as a result.

#### **5.6.4 Creating multilingual community of learners.**

ECE Kate said that sometimes when she gave the enrolment forms to the IPs who spoke no English, they would take the forms back to their community to have them filled out in English:

*I find that sometimes parents who may not speak English well would take the forms back to their community at home or to other places in the community, and they will actually get their friends or their family members to help them fill out forms.*



While the Indian community helps IPs with their English, the ECEs in turn, help the IC learn English in the ECCs. This was evident when IP Mandeep said that she believed that her daughter, Ashpreet, picked up English in the ECC; both she and her husband spoke little English at home. Moreover, Ashpreet was in India during the first two years of her life, completely immersed in the Punjabi language environment. Nevertheless, in the interview for school, her daughter spoke fluent English and answered all the questions.

ECE Amy was particularly observant of how safe Indian children felt with others from the same culture, forming their own communities of learning and practising their home languages:

*I have noticed children, particularly from last year, perhaps pair up with other Indian children in the environment. Within half an hour of a new child starting last year, she had paired up with the another Indian child in the centre. It just so happened that their families spoke the same home language and it was just that instant connection and understanding; just love for each other, like they were best friends by the end of the year; they were inseparable. But I think perhaps nationality may have something to do with that because it's something familiar – oh, that child might look the same or that child might speak the same; it may be a bit of a comfort thing.*

When the IPs reached outside the ECC into the Indian community to help them fill out their enrolment forms, or when Mandeep looked to the ECEs to help her daughter learn English; or when the IC sought comfort with their peers by bonding through a familiar language, they were all forming communities of learning.

For ECE Sandra, all the stakeholders – the IPs, the IC and the ECEs – formed the community that was Kindergarten and belonging to a community was a necessary part of learning for children:

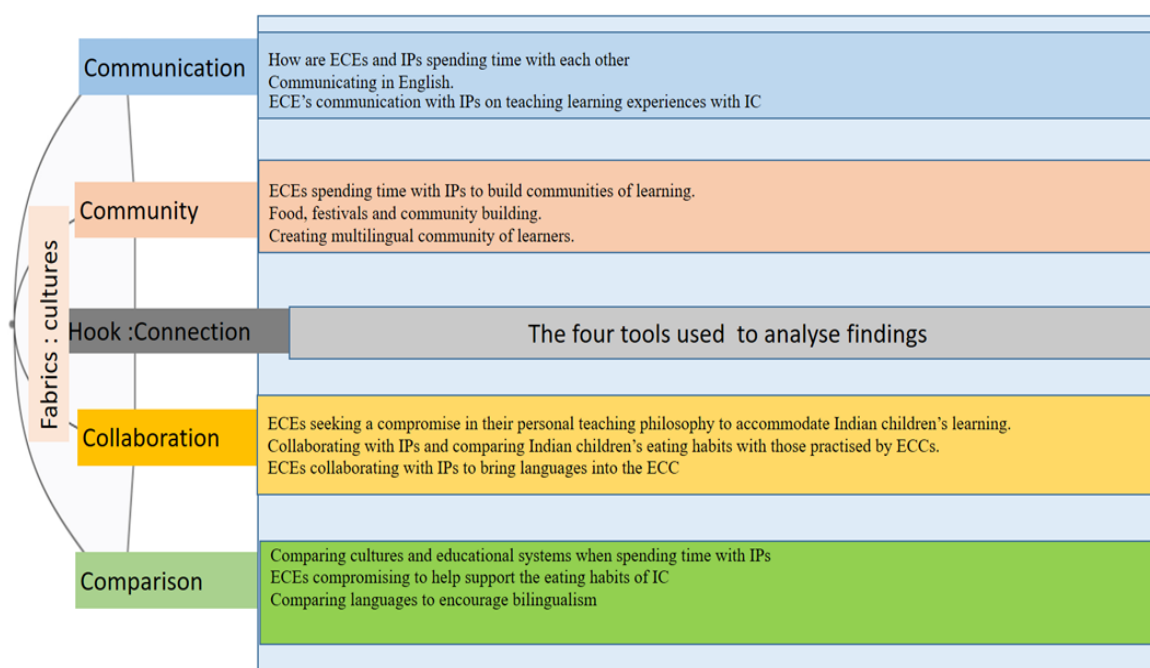
*Community to me is about my values contributing with people from inside of this kindergarten, and encouraging people to be a part of the service. And not just at the superficial level but about what their beliefs are and who they are and sharing that with us – and it's just not about us and the families, either; it is also about the broader community as well, which is the extended family, schools, child care, intervention services.*

How these communities of learning can help unpack the language complexities for ECEs is discussed in Chapter 7.

## 5.7 Summary

In the daily practice of ECEs educating IC in early childhood settings, the policies and political context of the Australian nation seem to take shape and influence Indian children's learning.

This chapter has presented the findings in relation to the ECEs, which included the many areas of learning that influence IC and the nature of the partnerships that the ECEs develop with the IPs. As an additional resource for how findings are connected to the MUM framework I have summarised the headings in the following diagram:



MUM and Themes in findings/analysis

Figure 5.1. Summary of ECEs findings as related to MUM Framework.

The findings in relation to the IPs are presented Chapter 6.

## **Chapter 6**

# **Findings from Indian Parents: What Am I (IPs) Looking for in Early Childhood Centres?**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the findings from the interviews with the early childhood educators (ECEs) were presented under four themes. The findings were then further divided into subthemes that related to communication, collaboration and community involvement. It became evident that when examining the ECEs' partnerships with the IPs, the workable MUM came into operation. I continued to use the MUM framework to present the findings of the Indian parents; however, the analysis of these findings was treated differently to those of the ECEs.

At this juncture in the data analysis phase, I noted that while the ECEs had an obligation to partner with the IPs as clients of the ECCs, the IPs did not have the same sense of obligation to partner except for the exchange of basic kindergarten operational information regarding their children's needs. The proposition that emerged was that the IPs would discuss their child with the ECEs, their aspirations for their child and their contributions to the kindergarten rather than specifically forming a partnership with the ECEs. Although I discuss communication in section 6.3 of this chapter, the other six Cs of MUM were only marginally applicable to the findings of the IPs.

### **6.2 Indian Parents' Practices and Perceptions in Engaging with Their Children at Home and with Early Childhood Educators**

This chapter presents the four major themes that emerged from the findings. The direct quotes from the IPs' interviews are presented in Sections 6.3 to 6.6. Some of the IPs' responses were given in their native language, which were then transcribed as closely as possible in English. Further clarification to explain the meaning and context of the responses has been added to the direct quotes. For some words used that are of Indian English language, I have given the correct English noun or verb in the parentheses following this word.

### **6.3 Time Spent Working in Partnerships with Early Childhood Educators**

The time spent by IPs in partnerships with ECEs varied greatly for each participant ECC as well as amongst the IPs within the same ECC. The main reasons given by IPs for not having time

to partner with ECEs were that they had young children at home and/or they were working full time.

### **6.3.1 Communicating with ECEs to build partnerships.**

IP Rachel said she was “on call” for her job and often the roster for IPs to help in Kindergarten C would clash with her work roster, so she could not “really commit for this reason”. Despite this drawback, she believed she was well informed regarding her child’s experiences in Kindergarten C:

*They had a lot of information to give us regarding healthy snacks and stuff about only drinking water, and getting only water to the kindergarten...those kind of things, but not really having a chat as to what is happening with her [daughter].*

IP Mandeep was also of the same opinion as Rachel, although she was not employed; she had a baby at home and therefore could not help at Kindergarten E. She also felt that she had enough information sent to her through the regular newsletters from the kindergarten.

Some other IPs did have time to attend the ECC like IP Aditi. She was free to come and meet the ECEs at Kindergarten C every Monday and Wednesday morning. Her questions to the ECEs would often relate to her child socialising with other children. When interviewed about spending time in the kindergarten to understand how her child was learning, Aditi said:

*...so how she’s learning? [ECE says] “No, kinder is now a little playing place.”  
They don’t do anything like that; perhaps she will when she goes to school.*

Consequently, Aditi believed that learning was reserved for children attending school, not for kindergarten where children were only playing. IP Gauri also said that she believed children only play at the ECC and she did want to “*interfere in their system of education*”; instead, she will partner with her daughter’s teachers at school when her daughter undertakes her learning there. The motivation to ask further questions regarding their child’s learning was not considered by these two IPs as learning for them did not relate to playing or a play pedagogy.

### **6.3.2 Collaborating with ECEs to build partnerships.**

For IP Lana, collaborating with the ECEs was one of her major priorities. She was a single parent and would take every opportunity to attend Kindergarten to spend time with the ECEs. Her son, Jayden, was the subject of a Family Court intervention order and she needed the

cooperation of the ECEs to help compliance with that order. In one of her meetings with the ECEs, Lana said:

*I went and met with her just to give her a run down on what's been happening in Jayden's life in the past six months, oh, not six months, but the past year.*

Lana wished she could obtain more information, but she did not take Jayden to Kindergarten C; the child's grandmother did, and consequently in this process she missed out on receiving information regarding her son's learning on a daily basis. So she would seize every opportunity to discuss Jayden with the ECEs and help at the kindergarten:

*Yeah, so they've only just last week put out that roster...that one that the parents were supposed to help, and as soon as I saw it, I was actually the first person to write my name down.*

Communicating and collaborating with the ECEs was quite important to Lana as a single parent.

IP Roveena also had a similar situation to Lana's but with a slight difference. Her son needed speech intervention as did his older sister when she was at Kindergarten A a year ago. Roveena knew the ECEs well and was quite involved with the kindergarten. Roveena also stated, with a smile on her face, that she was the sole person in charge of her children's education; the men in her family believed that it was not their job to be a part of their children's education. Consequently, building partnerships with the ECEs and spending time in the kindergarten became second nature for Roveena.

For IP Viji, spending time at Kindergarten C collaborating with the ECEs on a regular basis seemed unnecessary. She attended the parent interview at the time of her son's enrolment and asked that he be taught to be more confident and independent. She trusted the ECEs would take care of this aspiration for her son, which she said was important for her due to a previous unhappy experience she had had at a regional kindergarten her son previously attended. In transferring to Kindergarten C, Viji and her son felt more comfortable due to the professionalism of the ECEs there, and she trusted them to help with her son.

IPs Miteleswari and Anusuya were both working parents and were unable to attend their respective ECCs on a regular basis; however, they did contribute to their ECCs by offering resources like paper for painting and so on.

Other ways of IPs collaborating with ECEs was through their participation in the cultural festivals that were celebrated at the ECCs. Although this form of collaboration was not as apparent from the interviews with the IPs as it was from the ECEs' interviews, where, from their perspective, the IPs' participation in the Diwali and Harmony Day festivals was evidence of collaboration.

It is interesting to note the different perspectives on partnerships, where the IPs considered that participation and collaboration was confined to matters that specifically related to their children, whereas the ECEs had a much broader view of participation and collaboration. After analysis of the findings in this section, a review of equity in partnerships as defined in government policy and the EYLF is required particularly between ECEs and CALD families. This is further discussed in Chapter 7.

## **6.4 Understanding the Educational Learning Culture of Early Childhood Educators**

Moving to Australia and enrolling their children into a new system of education can be a daunting exercise for Indian parents. Most IPs from India would have been educated in a system that was markedly different from Australia's. Consequently, to understand an unfamiliar early childhood education system in a new country would require IPs to spend some time consulting with the ECEs to understand the teaching and learning programs practised in the ECCs. However, this is not possible for many of the IPs with busy working and family lives.

### **6.4.1 IPs who do not have the time to understand the EYLF.**

IP Chandima was not particularly fluent in English and the information she received regarding the educational learning culture in Kindergarten D was limited to what her son, Rasindu, told her. Rasindu said he liked the play dough in the kindergarten. Despite this limited knowledge of the kindergarten's program, Chandima, who appreciated play pedagogy, said:

*Their system is better than our Sri Lankan system because Sri Lankan people are always only focused on education – not much sport – only reading and writing. They are educated but not overall – here it is good.* [This quote was paraphrased from listening to Chandima speak in heavily accented English and Sinhalese.]

It was likely that Chandima had experienced the gruelling Indian school examination system, which led to her appreciation of play and the holistic development of children Kindergarten D's program.

#### 6.4.2 IPs who have experience of the EYLF.

IP Prabhjyoth came from a higher socio-economic status in India. Having a diploma in childcare from Australia, she worked as an ECE. She also had another aspect of experience of the educational system in Australia. Her son was soon to commence primary school and Prabhjyoth was concerned regarding his transition to school. She said that childcare, kindergarten and school were very different experiences for children, and therefore there needed to be a bridging program between kindergarten and school:

*because I work in childcare, I know we don't focus much on reading. There should be some program in between, where they encourage a lot of reading and writing and stuff like that, because suddenly they're going to expect after prep or half way through prep, that they should start writing.*

IP Prabhjyoth also commented:

*in childcare or kindergarten, you never actually focus much on that [reading and writing]; it's just play based, so they [IC] won't be sitting, how will he be sitting for like, two hours, continuous, one hour continuously at a place, for, to listen to what the teacher is saying, like how...*

(This direct quote from the transcript can be paraphrased as the mother expressing her concern that her child is unable able to sit in one place and learn. In the play-based curriculum practised in kindergartens, children frequently move around, so sitting down and listening to a teacher is difficult for her son)

As an educator, Prabhjyoth understood the system in which she was qualified; however, as an IP she was concerned, like other IPs, that reading and writing did commence at kindergarten in order to prepare children for school.

IP Anusuya had a certificate in early childhood education and had particular views on the curriculum and practice of the EYLF in ECCs:

*They [ECEs] will provide activities that they want him [her son] to explore, which he might not be interested in. My son explores the way he wants to and is not told to be quiet. He used to say, "Mummy, they didn't allow this; Mummy they didn't do this; they said can you please be quiet like that." He used to complain a lot about not being allowed to explore.*

To Anusuya, play and exploration meant different things to her son and Kindergarten B's ECEs. She said she had received many complaints from the ECEs that her son was disruptive; however, her view was that her son was quite advanced in his cognitive skills:

*He's so good at learning. I know that actually because now that he is four, he knows how to write the letters A to Z, and even the small bit letters [lowercase] as well as numbers. He knows how to count from one to fifty, and he's learnt addition as well, which I am not forcing on him at all; he's learning by himself.*

Anusuya is a proud mother who believes that many of the skills her son had developed were the result of his stay with her parents in India. He grew up with his cousins and peer group coaching came naturally to his extended family members. Anusuya attempted to register her son for accelerated learning but failed to find a suitable place and consequently had to continue to tolerate the ECEs' complaints regarding her son's disruptive behaviour in Kindergarten B.

#### **6.4.3 IPs who are attempting to teach their children at home like they are being taught by the ECEs.**

IP Aditi, like IP Prabhjyoth, was concerned about preparing her daughter for reading and writing at school, so she tried helping her child at home in ways that were not familiar to her as a parent:

*My daughter wasn't writing anything, when I first began teaching her, but, I don't know, perhaps it was my upbringing – the way was to write this and remember this....so, I saw it on Apple last year...*

Aditi's experiences from her childhood education were likely to have influenced her beliefs in the education of her own child. Often in India, teachers did not facilitate learning; rather, they would give instructions to students on how and what to do. However, since the modern method of giving instruction using the Apple online program had failed to generate any interest in Aditi's daughter, she had decided to leave it to the school to teach her daughter to read and write.

#### **6.4.4 IPs not having time to teach and appreciate the ECCs' programs.**

IP James was a manager at a motel and lived on the same premises. His son learnt many skills of being a manager from observing his father's managerial job. James believed that, generally, he did not have the time to understand the learning his son received in kindergarten; however, on one occasion he did visit Kindergarten E to observe his son from behind a wall.



*...I was just hiding in a place and watching him, and he's got four or five people under him [Indian English way of saying his son was delegating jobs]. They all sit down and the others are listening to him. [James explains that his son was delegating jobs to other children and they were listening to him.]*

James believed that his son had learnt his delegating skills from observing James in his workplace, and then when his son was at the kindergarten, the play pedagogy practised there would provide him with opportunities for him to perform his delegation skills on his peers.

IP Rachel was not familiar with her daughter's kindergarten programs but believed that the leadership qualities her daughter had been displaying had been learnt from the learning environment at the kindergarten. Rachel said the following as she attempted to explain the learning that occurred at Kindergarten C:

*so I think all those [being a leader]activities happen in kinder when they do a kind of role playing. I'm not aware what they're doing really, but I think when the teacher reads them a story, which has characters in them...or when they're doing role plays or pretend plays, like, okay, let's play kitchens, let's play home corners or something like that, so I think, like, she [daughter] might as well follow [the ECC program].*

IPs like James and Rachel appreciated certain aspects of Kindergarten C's program that promoted the development of leadership qualities in their children.

#### **6.4.5 IPs accepting the ECCs' programs because they suited the aspirations they had for their children.**

Despite IP Gauri being unaware of her daughter's learning program in Kindergarten A, she understood that playing at the dough table was her daughter's favourite pastime. She believed that her daughter's learning in kindergarten was concerned with making her child confident with her peers and she reinforced this practice at home when playing with her child:

*I say to her to speak, or to sing, or to sing a poem, or dance or clap her hands, just to build up her confidence. And I said: "Look, all your friends are sitting here, your pretend friends, and you can say whatever you want to say to your friends."*

Gauri said in her interview that she did not want her daughter pressurised, like most Indian children are, to study and become a professional; instead, she want

ed her daughter to enjoy life and apply herself to whatever she was capable of doing:

*It's in her studies that I don't want to pressurise her at all by saying, "Oh no, you have to become a doctor." Nothing like that, but at the least we would want her to graduate because studies do matter a lot in one's life, and I want her to be a good soul.*

It was likely that Gauri herself had been through a gruelling education system and would not like to subject her daughter to the same. Gauri no doubt preferred the Australian education system because it was holistic and did not apply undue pressure to the child to study.

## **6.5 Understanding the Food Culture of Indian Parents at Home and in the Early Childhood Centres**

Moving to a different country is complex and changing food habits is one of the major adjustments that Indian families make when settling into their new environment. While food policies in ECCs are well formulated, and the nutrition of the child is monitored in Australia, there are not many research studies or policies that relate to the eating habits of Indian children. In most ECC policies, there are general topics on respect for cultural foods and that children should experience different flavours. However, when it comes to eating food, Indian children are used to being fed hand to mouth by their parents. Independent eating habits for Indian children is uncommon.

While some IPs would prefer that their child's eating habits were accommodated in the early childhood centres, ECEs would no doubt find it difficult to adjust the operations of the ECC with its low teacher–child ratios in order to accede to such requests. Denying a culture its traditions regarding food or restricting the way a child eats sends a message of exclusion. In some cases, the ECC's food safety regulations restrict the type of food that children can bring to eat in the centre. In this section, I present the findings of this study in relation to the food habits practised in the homes of IC and in the ECCs that the IC attend.

I begin with the findings of the different food habits of IPs and their children at home. Each participant IP had their unique way of managing the eating habits of their child. In later sections, I also discuss the adjustment of food habits by the IPs in order to comply with the ECCs' policies and the expectations of the ECEs.

### 6.5.1 Indian children's eating habits practised at home.

IP Roveena was born and raised in Fiji and her husband was a Fiji Indian who had grown up in Australia. Both had different sets of values regarding food habits, which were a combination of Eastern and Western cuisines. As Roveena commented:

*...and then most of the food and everything is similar to Fijian cuisine. I think I prefer giving them [children] a balance of some of mine and some of my partner's food habits, rather than just my side of the things.*

Roveena's mother worked full time but unlike her mother, Roveena was not working by choice and preferred to pay attention to her children. When her mother was working, Roveena would feed herself without any help and she believed that her children also needed to develop these skills to make them independent eaters:

*Yes, he'll feed himself, no one is helping, and he's a big boy. He changes himself as well, toilet trained, everything...*

Roveena's food habits that she practised with her children indicate how the merging of cultures had brought about a fusion of food habits that had created a cultural identity unique to Roveena's family. Independent eating habits had been inculcated into her children. Consequently, eating by themselves was an advantage for her children when they attended Kindergarten A, which promoted independent eating habits at meal times.

IP Chandima was Singhalese and Buddhist mother who would use the food table to teach her son to eat. She had difficulty speaking English, but after a lengthy conversation regarding discipline and other behavioural issues, she discussed food habits. Her responses revealed that teaching her children about food and how to eat it correctly at the dining table was a family etiquette. Chandima said that she would not discipline her children in public but would make sure they were well trained to behave appropriately in a social situation. As Chandima explained regarding her son, Rasindu:

*When he was eating by himself and he spilt all the food on his T-shirt, I then explained to him how to eat and how to behave in my house and at the dinner table. There he eats by himself and when he doesn't eat properly, it's okay to then teach him. I am not feeding him when we go somewhere; he eats on his own and if he cannot, I say nothing until we come home and then I teach him again.*

Chandima was very particular not to discipline her children in public regarding their eating habits; she would practise preparing her children at home for eating in a social situation. Rasindu had been trained by his mother at home to become an independent eater and this was an advantage for him in the ECC and for his future transition to school.

### **6.5.2 IPs having cultural and family pressures when feeding their children at home.**

IP Prabhjyoth was trying to transition her son to school and was anxious regarding his eating habits. Her concern was the lack of cooperation from her own family in training her son to be an independent eater. The strong cultural values of her mother and husband were resistant to this change. Prabhjyoth revealed in her interview that the teaching of independent eating skills to her son was disrupted by her parents visiting from India:

*At home, he started eating by himself, but because Mum's [Prabhjyoth's mother] feeding him now, it's all going the wrong way, and I can't just tell her that she needs to stop this because he's going to school next year. If I tell her, she says when she returns to India, I can then go back to my routine.*

*But I say you [Grandma] have broken my routine, it's not going to go back [to what I started]. It will be so hard to get him back on track, but then my husband would say, "Come on, you give him half an hour to eat, it takes a long time, feed him yourself and that's it, we go". So, it becomes zero [back to square one], but it does get hard when your parents or in-laws are around [who don't support your efforts].*

This situation of other family members being cultural gatekeepers who do not support the practice of teaching an Indian child to eat independently makes it difficult for the child to reconcile the two cultures of home and the ECC. For Prabhjyoth's son, eating on his own was likely to be a challenge at Kindergarten E and in future at school where being able to eat independently is expected of a child. This cultural transition to developing independent eating habits in Indian children is further discussed in Chapter 7.

### **6.5.3 IPs having difficulty in teaching their children to eat independently.**

IP Anusuya had a certificate in early childhood education. Her concern was that her child, Avinash, was not eating his food when he was attending Kindergarten B. At home Avinash was fed hand to mouth by either one of his parents; however, such a practice was discouraged by the kindergarten as its policy was to promote child agency and independent eating. Avinash,

consequently, had no strategies to cope with the kindergarten's expectations regarding his eating habits. In her interview, Anusuya mentioned some of the problems she had encountered in Kindergarten B and talked of her attempts to have the ECEs help her son eat his food:

*First thing is, he [Avinash] wants his food a little bit warm, so, I told his teachers to heat it up, but they said, somehow, that was not possible. They said our policy was not to do this, not to do that. They said they can't keep our containers in the microwave oven, so we can't warm it up, and one of them said, "Actually, no, he's not asking me to warm it up." I forgot she said that. Finally, they are not warming it up, and I don't know why that is.*

Also, Anusuya wondered why the microwavable containers she sent the food in were not being used to heat the food:

*Yes, always microwavable containers only. Not the plastic ones. Another thing is my son won't eat by himself; that's the biggest problem for me, and even if someone pushed [persuaded] him to finish, he was very slow.*

Anusuya's concern not only included heating the food for Avinash but also in ensuring he was persuaded to eat. She explained that her son was too young to feed himself, but her requests for his food to be heated and for his eating to be overseen by staff were not acted upon by the kindergarten. The outcome was that despite Anusuya giving Avinash the food he liked, he was not interested in eating it anymore. She further explained the eating habits of her son, saying:

*So, yeah, he has to have someone come and sit with him to eat, and he should be asked did you finish your lunch, and only then will he eat it. He is little, while he's still having that one (habit), he will come out and he will take something else and he will forget the lunch there itself, and many times stop having the lunch at all. It's just like uh, little snacks are what he likes the most, I am giving that...like two snacks; one is for the morning and the other one is for lunch.*

It was evident that Avinash needed to be coaxed to eat. Anusuya sought the advice of friends who also had children attending Kindergarten B and provided details in her interview:

*Teachers are not willing to encourage them [IC] to eat the food they have and, so even many of my friends said, no, you can't take Indian food there and they can't have it, and they [IC] don't like bread and they don't like this sandwich, so they are not having the food at all. Lunch – ninety per cent of it he's not having, even*

*ninety-nine per cent I can [assure you] he never had. Always he would bring back the food to me or my husband.*

Anusuya had a large extended family in India and their style of eating was that children were fed hand to mouth. When Avinash was two years old, she sent him to India for a period of six months. In India, her mother toilet trained him and nurtured him by feeding him hand to mouth with traditional Indian food. Anusuya believed that these habits needed to be modified and Avinash would require help to adjust to the longer session times he would spend at the kindergarten or when he went to school. She attempted to change her son's eating habits in practice sessions at home in the following way:

*I am changing his food habits according to that (longer session times), actually, so, now I am introducing little buns and breads. He doesn't like cheese at all; however, we give cheese, so, there is some practice to make him full (satiated). That's what I can do, so I am practising these little things. He has to take it. Sometimes if we didn't have cheese at home, I would give him chocolate; at least he needed to have a little energy...at least I am giving him chocolate, which I don't actually want to do, and he is not fond of chocolate like the other kids.*

The only way Anusuya was modifying Avinash's eating habits was to feed her son chocolate to provide him with some energy. She had to understand which alternative food could replace the traditional Indian foods her son had been eating. This phenomenon of modifying cultural eating habits in children was an unexpected finding. Most programs on healthy eating habits in ECCs are concerned with nutrition intake, allergies and food intolerances but not the cultural eating habits of CALD children, which may influence their learning abilities and behaviour. These findings are further discussed in Chapter 7.

#### **6.5.4 Cultural food and festivals at home and their importance to IPs in child rearing.**

IP Aditi said that her daughter, Vernika, associated festivals, special occasions and religious activities with food. As a family they also would go to the community festival celebrations in Wyndham:

*In Wyndham, it's a big deal. We go every year for Holi because going to India isn't that frequent right now, so they [IC] know we celebrate Holi here. Even Diwali, we take them and go.*

Indian food at these large festival celebrations is a huge attraction for the Indian community in Melbourne. At home when Aditi's mother visited from India, the children would talk about the food and the festivals. Aditi believed her mother was the cultural gatekeeper in her family and would regale her children with stories from Indian mythology every time the various festivals were celebrated in the family home. As Aditi explained:

*[In Hindi] When my mother comes, she makes them [Aditi's children] listen. With me, seriously, I don't have the time. Yesterday, she told us that it was Diwali, so she talked about Diwali and the stories that go with it; she also made festival food.*

Aditi said that Vernika would listen to the stories but would over time tend to forget them; however, the food her grandmother cooked was always remembered and associated with the cultural festivals.

IP Lana said she would enjoy taking her son to the Diwali Festival celebrated by the community in the future, but at present her family celebrated Diwali at home:

*With the Fiji Indians, some are very religious and celebrate all the different special days throughout the year. Diwali is a big one. My mother will make lots of sweets and so forth, and we buy new clothes and things like that. It's not something he [Lana's son] really understands right now, but I think, moving forward, it would be something that I'd love to take him along for the celebrations and things like that that are happening now locally.*

In Lana's family, traditional food and cultural festivals were closely associated with the cultural identity of Indians and her mother was the cultural gatekeeper who would cook sweets well in advance to celebrate Diwali.

IP Miteleswari would attempt to instil confidence in her children through cultural values and beliefs:

*It's not that I want them to become religious, but I want them to be spiritual and not fearful of God, but think of God as your friend like, for example, when we have poojas, the thread, rawdi, right? So, they ask me small things initially – why do we have this thread on our arm? I said that that's God's blessing, that will stay with you all the time. So, if you are in trouble and Mum and Dad are not*

*around, you must think about God. Ask God for strength; so God is always there with you in that form.*

Although Miteleswari did not discuss food particularly in her interview, most festivals have traditional food associated with them. When she mentioned the thread around the wrist, she saw my expression of familiarity and did not proceed to expand on the food aspects of festivals. However, as I was a researcher from a similar background, I knew that most festivals were associated with prayer and food. Although Miteleswari did not directly discuss food, the tying of the thread around the wrist was an indication of a prayer with food offerings.

In these findings it has been noted that the food Indians eat is not only their staple diet but is also part of the cultural identity that different generations pass on to their children. How the food traditions associated with festivals are celebrated and acknowledged in the ECCs' programs are further discussed in Chapter 7.

## **6.6 Understanding the Role of English and Home Languages in the ECCs**

Many Indian families arriving in Australia speak at least two languages – English and a home language – with some speaking multiple languages. Learning English is, however, the most important educational goal Indian families have for their children, and is essential for their education in Australia. In this section, the findings are presented in relation to IPs' communication styles within their families; the loss of cultural values and home languages when assimilating into an environment where the English language is dominant; the role of community in language preservation, bilingualism and multilingualism; and the practice of more than one culture by the immigrant family.

### **6.6.1 IPs who do not speak English at home.**

IP Mandeep and her husband spoke only Punjabi and very little English. Their daughter, Ashpreet, grew up in India with her grandparents for the first two years of her life. She was exposed to many cultures and languages in India. When Ashpreet returned from India, she began to speak English, which she learnt from her time in child care and kindergarten. In her interview, which was conducted in Hindi and later transcribed to English, Mandeep mentioned that she and her husband were anxious that Ashpreet might not answer in English the questions asked of her at the interview she attended at her future school:

*I thought she would have had a problem with English because my husband and I speak very little English. That was why at the interview, which was conducted by*



*the teacher, I did not say anything. But whatever they asked her – they asked the names of her friends and teacher – she answered in English. They asked her quite a lot about what she liked. She said I liked colouring; I liked butterflies. So, they had conducted the whole interview in English. She picked up English in kindergarten, I think.*

While Mandeep was concerned at her and her husband's lack of English, which she thought would be a barrier for entry into good schools, her daughter confidently answered the interview questions in English. In the two years that Ashpreet has attended Kindergarten E, she has become fluent in English and speaks excellent Punjabi at home. Mandeep and her husband continue to speak to Ashpreet in Punjabi at home:

*But we keep speaking in Punjabi at home so that she does not forget to speak it. English she will learn in kinder and school, anyway, so we want to keep up the Punjabi.*

Children who experience many cultures and languages are likely to understand the differences in the sounds and cues in each language, which assists them to learn other languages, such as Ashpreet, for whom bilingualism became second nature. Bilingualism in the early years and its details are further discussed in Chapter 7.

IP Viji speaks Tamil at home with her husband and son. During her interview, she preferred to speak in Tamil despite her ability to speak English. Early in her school life she had learnt to read and write in English but was not confident of her oral English. However, she would make an effort to speak in English to her son so he could learn English as well. Once her son becomes fluent in English, she said she would teach him other cultural skills such as playing traditional Carnatic music using the Tamil language:

*After that, if he shows interest in music, I definitely want him to learn Indian Carnatic music. Melbourne has plenty of opportunities to do that, and that is one of the main reasons why we shifted from Bendigo.*

Viji was encouraging her son to feel comfortable with the English language and associated environments before attempting to teach him her traditional music form, which she hoped her son would show interest in the future. Often IPs continue with their home language, only using English when they are acquiring academic skills.

## 6.6.2 Does speaking two languages confuse a child?

IP Roveena had a Gujarati heritage; however, when her ancestors migrated to Fiji, her native language became Fiji Hindi, which she spoke with a slang accent, and this was her preferred language when she was with her family from Fiji. She had not forgotten Gujarati but spoke very little of it. Her husband spoke Fijian Hindi but preferred to converse in English with his children as he was born in Australia. When questioned which language her children felt comfortable with, she replied the following:

Roveena: *With my kids they speak more English.*

Vijaya: *So would they understand Fiji Hindi as well?*

Roveena: *Not really.*

Vijaya: *So they don't speak it at all?*

Roveena: *No, because it clashes with English and I have a slang in it. When my daughter was in kindergarten, we got speech therapy for her, and the therapist said I had to speak full Fiji Hindi (without the slang) or not at all. So, we have skipped Hindi at this moment. We might just have to wait, but maybe in another couple of years I might continue [Fiji Hindi]...*

Previously, Roveena's daughter had speech difficulties and so Roveena and her husband chose to speak English at home, which was beneficial for her daughter's schooling as well. Roveena said she would give her daughter and son a few more years before she would speak to her children in Fiji Hindi again. However, when the children's grandmother visited, she would speak to them in Hindi and Roveena made the following comment:

*We normally go out to the park; she [grandmother] likes to spoil them with the presents definitely. And if we're watching movies or something, they'll watch some Indian Hindi movies with us. Yes, they're into it [Hindi movies], but I'm just trying to keep it to a minimum.*

Although English was the preferred language for Roveena's children there was no escaping the cultural Fiji Hindi traditional prayers and other cultural norms of respecting elders:

*I do expect them to do the prayers and stuff. And you don't go disrespecting others. My husband is different – if you see an older person you call them by their*

*name but for us it's not like that. So, I expect my kids to call my husband's friend uncle. Simple as that.*

Roveena's situation led me to investigate whether using many languages or an unclear slang confused children, and whether monolingual children were cognitively advantaged and how it affected their learning in kindergarten. This point is discussed Chapter 7.

### **6.6.3 In speaking only English, what does the Indian child lose?**

Speaking only English and learning in an English environment means that Indian children are deprived of the cultural richness that their native languages would provide. For example, IP Aditi's daughter, Vernika, was unable to sing *lori* (lullabies) to her younger brother in their native language. Her cousin in India, however, was able to sing fluently in their home language and Aditi's mother would often make a point of this, which distressed Aditi as she explains (translated from Hindi to English):

*When I was about to give birth to Vernika's younger brother, Rian, they [grandparents] arrived a few days earlier, so my mother sings bhajans [devotional songs] and showed the video of Vernika's cousin singing in Hindi.*

*She's my brother's daughter, she sings properly, not like Vernika. My brother also has a son, who sings a little lori (lullaby); Vernika's female cousin sings the complete lori. My mother mocks her granddaughter: "See how your cousins sing better than you." Well, I told my mother that if Vernika could, she would sing it, but here she sings her own songs; she sings what she knows.*

Vernika watched a few videos of her cousin singing lullabies to her brother and asked her mother why she was unable to sing like her cousin. In an attempt to assure her distressed daughter, Aditi asked Vernika to sing English songs to her baby brother.

For Vernika, singing and bonding with her brother was done in English instead of her native language. While the cultural tradition of singing to create bonds between siblings was practised in Aditi's family, English was used for convenience.

IP James believed that speaking in English was a privilege back in his native India but, of course not so in Australia, where almost everyone spoke English. However, James said that the act of speaking in English at his home had come at some expense because his son was unable to bond with his grandparents in India who only spoke Tamil:

*I don't know whether I should be ashamed to say that my son doesn't know Tamil, but he had no option, he is of that age, so I will not blame him. My parents don't know English, and my mother says I have to teach my son Tamil; however, I can't force him to learn Tamil. My son can understand a little bit, but he's used to speaking in English.*

James fears for his son's cultural safety. Both he and his wife work full time, and as James said, if they had raised their son in India, it would have been safer for him coming back from school because if we were not at home, he would have gone next door to his neighbour's place to wait for us:

*In Australia, you don't have many other Indian people living in your neighbourhood, and to be honest, you know that if you live in a house here for five years, you still may not know who your neighbours are next door, okay? In India it's not like that. Even if my son were to arrive home and I wasn't there, he would knock on my neighbour's door and they would welcome him inside. He would stay there and have a snack or something until we came home. That's the culture there, but here, you couldn't even think of doing that, so those things are scary.*

Besides being concerned that his son did not have the advantage of speaking Tamil, James was also disappointed that the cultural safety he had experienced when he was raised in India will not be his son's experience in Australia. Many human and cultural expressions are possible beyond the language limitations of English. This is further discussed in Chapter 7, where the need for language traditions to be maintained to keep a culture alive is explained, and which is also encouraged by the EYLF as well.

#### **6.6.4 Speaking more than two languages at home.**

IP Rachel was multilingual and spoke Kannada, Hindi and English. Growing up in Bombay, she understood Marathi as well. However, her daughter only spoke English. Rachel wanted to speak only in Kannada at home for her children's sake so that they could learn her native language. Rachel commented regarding the languages she and her family spoke:

*In fact, my friends happened to tell me that they don't speak English at all at home; they only speak their native language. However, that doesn't happen with my family because English would just come out. We are so attuned to it.*

*Because some of my Hindu friends, only speak Marathi at home – no English at all – their children have picked up Marathi very easily; but for me, it has never happened because I also come from a Bombay background where my parents either spoke Hindi or English; so we picked up Hindi and English very easily. I only learned Kannada after getting married to my husband; probably when my daughter gets married to a Kannada guy, she'll also learn that language, so that's the thing.*

English was spoken more as a first language in Rachel's family as it appeared to be the common language for the family members who all had a different native language. This family's struggle was not so much concerned with learning English but more about learning native languages to keep their cultures alive:

*My mom is in Bombay and my brother is there as well, and they keep saying that our kids should know their native culture as well, so keep bringing them back to India. So I have made it a point that every year in December we do go there.*

Although native languages can be lost if not spoken regularly at home, IPs generally keep up their cultural traditions by various means. One example is Rachel taking her children regularly to Bombay to meet their relatives and maintain their Indian traditions.

For other IPs it is a matter of consciously making an effort to preserve their cultural traditions while speaking English as well as their native language in their home settings. IP Miteleswari, her husband and children spoke in Tamil and English at home. Miteleswari's concerns were no longer associated with language but more about practising the cultural traditions of which showing respect for elders is an example. She believed that students from non-Indian backgrounds raised in Australia did not demonstrate such respect like her own culture, as she remarked:

*Showing respect towards elders is very important. I've seen kids, especially high school kids, talking to adults, talking to teachers like they are just their mates; this is unlike our culture.*

Miteleswari was also concerned that she protected her children too much and hoped that she was not repressing their independent thinking. She mentioned her concerns to her older son:

*He said that he liked that I cared about what he did in school and that I would sit with him. I said to him, that you might think that I'm very strict when it comes to school, and he said: "No, Mum, please stay like that, I like that, Mum. I feel good.*

Miteleswari was keen that her children learnt English in order to excel academically but that they also continued to observe the cultural practices that had been instilled in them such as showing respect for their elders and teachers. She also sought assurance from her children that they were comfortable with her traditional protective ways and that she would consult with them regarding her decisions. Miteleswari's son liked the way his mother provided him with boundaries at home. He told her that his other friends did not receive this type of warmth and coaching at home. Encouraging child agency has a markedly different interpretation for Indian parents when compared to that for other parents. This point is discussed in Chapter 7.

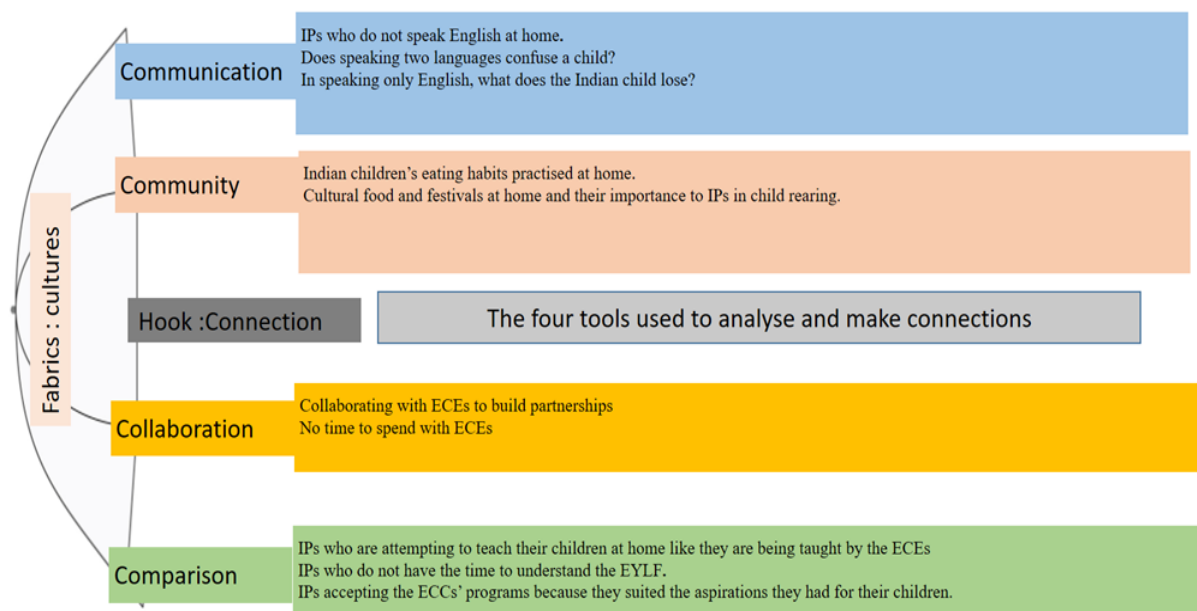
The speaking of two or more languages by parents raises questions regarding which languages should their children be encouraged to learn. For all IPs, whether they are bilingual or multilingual, it is important for their cultural traditions of respect and bonding with grandparents to be maintained. Indian families often have a rich heritage of bilingualism and as cultural traditions are changing due to the adoption of English as the primary language, one questions whether intervention is necessary for ESL children to be placed in the deficit model of assessment. It is important to remember that the EYLF encourages the assessment of children on what they are capable of rather than what they cannot do. Bilingualism and multilingualism have certain cognitive advantages that are further considered in Chapter 7.

## **6.7 Summary**

The findings relating to the Indian parents presented in this chapter indicate that the shift required in their beliefs, traditions and practices in order to assimilate into another culture is complex, and this study specifically focused on how they negotiated themselves through the unfamiliar area of the early childhood education system in Australia.

Partnerships with ECEs can be difficult, but that difficulty is usually reduced if a second child from the family attends the same kindergarten because the IP has become familiar with the practices of the ECC from the experiences of their first child. The transition to independent eating by an Indian child can be problematic, depending on the willingness of the IPs to modify their child's eating habits at home from the practice of eating hand and the dependency on being fed by their mother. Most Indian immigrants arrive in Australia mainly speaking their home language and only speak English or learn English in order to be able to navigate the Australian

education system. Some families are multilingual, with the parents having been raised in cultures where many languages were spoken, and they all have their unique ways of preserving their language and traditional cultural beliefs. Perspectives on the learning practices for children in the ECCs were varied among the IP participants and often differed markedly from those of the ECEs in Chapter 5. The summary for IPs in findings is connected to MUM framework and diagrammatically represented in the following figure 6.1.



MUM and Themes in findings/analysis (IPs)

Figure 6.1. Summary of IP findings as related to MUM.

These major differences on early childhood learning practices, on languages spoken, and on sociocultural habits between Indian families and ECEs, and how these complexities affect Indian children learning and teaching is discussed in Chapter 7.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Discussion: It Is No Longer about the Dancers, but the Dance**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapters 5 and 6, the findings of the ECEs and the IPs were presented respectively. In this chapter, I discuss the various aspects of these findings in terms of the relationships between the ECEs and the IPs under the same topics to answer the study's research questions on how these two cohorts engage with each other for the benefit of Indian children in early childhood settings. The methods used by ECEs to encourage IPs to engage with them affects the children in their care, and relate to the learning practices for IC, the types of food eaten and the eating habits of IC and the preservation of the native languages and the associated cultural thinking of IC.

In addition, this discussion chapter explores some of the complexities present when attempts are made to connect with different cultures or when advocating for multicultural education. The discussion is also framed taking into account the findings from the review of the research literature and the concepts of the MUM framework.

Figure 7.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the discussion presented in Chapter 7, which indicates the interrelationship between the themes, the research literature, the research questions and the MUM framework. Figure 7.1 is followed by an explanation of this interrelationship.



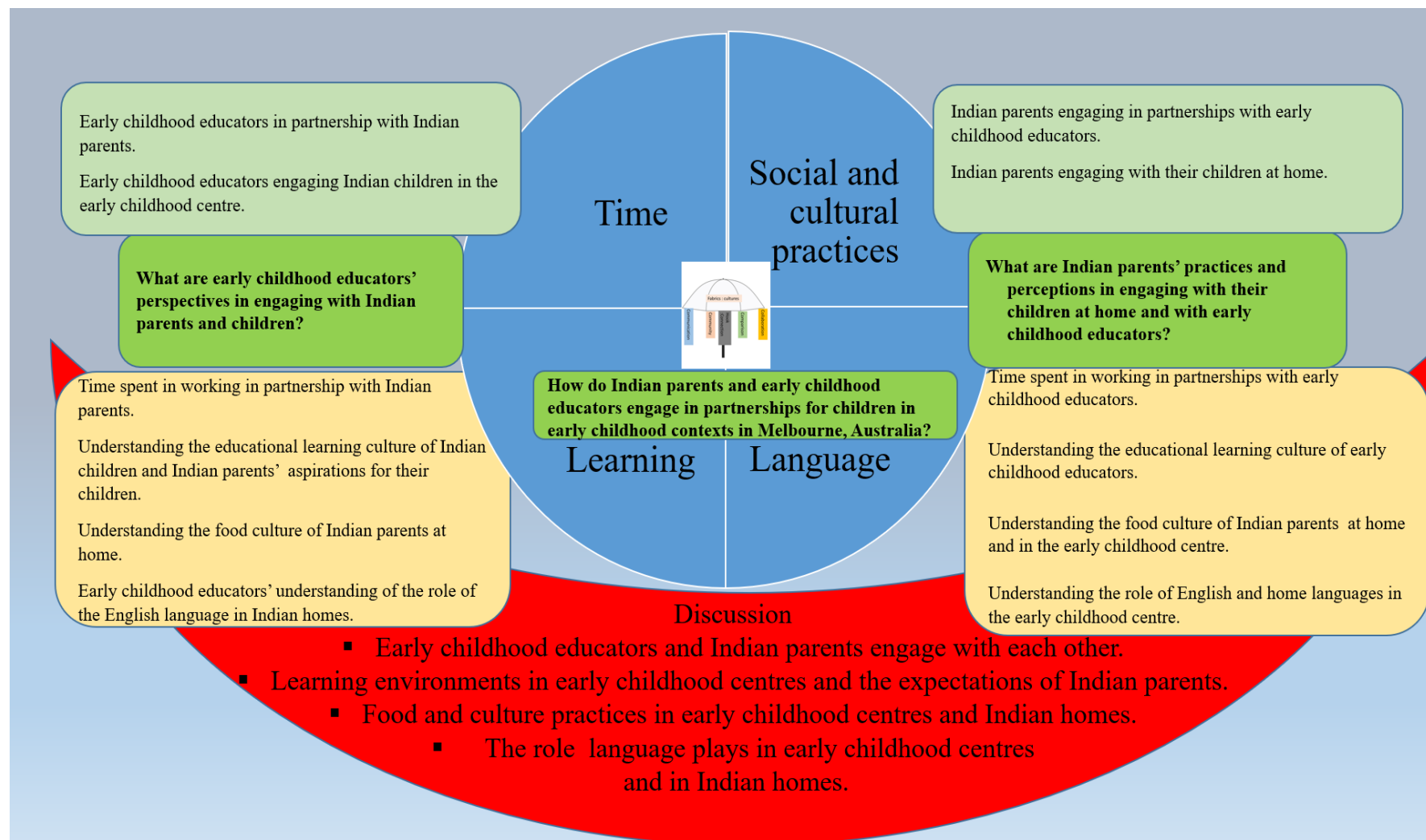


Figure 7.1. The interrelationship between the literature review, the MUM conceptual framework, the research questions, the findings and the discussion themes.

In Figure 7.1 the MUM framework is located at the centre of the blue circle. It was central to providing the structure that facilitated the analysis of the data and the development of the four themes outlined in the findings chapters, which are represented by the blue quarters of the circle – time; social and cultural practices; learning; and language. Situated at the core of the MUM framework is the main research question, which, of course, was central to the study, and from which stems the findings themes and the discussion points. On either side of the blue circle are the research sub questions that correspond to the theme headings for the ECEs and the IPs. The red “gravy boat” at the bottom of Figure 7.1 contains the discussion subject headings that synthesise the analysis of the findings to answer the main research question, which are as follows:

- Early childhood educators and Indian parents engaging with each other
- Learning environments in early childhood centres and the expectations of Indian parents
- Food and cultural practices in early childhood centres and in Indian homes
- The role language plays in early childhood centres and in Indian homes

Under each main topic the above are discussed.

## **7.2 Early Childhood Educators and Indian Parents Engaging with Each Other**

The programs that are implemented in ECCs are underpinned by the Australian Government’s EYLF. Both ECEs and IPs are guided by this framework in developing partnerships to deliver early childhood education for the IPs’ children. The nature of the interactions between the ECEs and the IPs that create these partnerships and their influence on the learning of IC is explained in the following sections of this discussion chapter.

Partnership, as defined by Dunlap and Fox (2007), “entails a clear and strong commitment by both parties, a shared vision, trust and open communication, mutual respect, and an understanding of each party’s circumstances and roles” (p. 277). ECEs are expected to form partnerships with IPs; however, often the economic situation of the parents restricts their participation in the ECC’s programs due to their full-time employment. Immigrant families also have the additional encumbrance of having to adjust culturally to new work and educational environments. Building relationships with ECEs under these circumstances is confronting for IPs. Apart from their employment situation, other factors that may be contributing to a lack of “shared vision” that Dunlop & Fox (2007) envision. There are likely to be language barriers and

the IPs' limited understanding of the ECC's programs and its educational cultural values, including the respect IPs give to teachers by not questioning their pedagogies (Gupta, 2006). The struggle IPs often have in articulating the educational aspirations they have for their children to ECEs might also create barriers to forming effective partnerships.

Parents who do get involved in partnerships with ECEs are often referred to as the "good parents" and they are typically white, middle class, married and heterosexual. Moreover, parents' perceptions of partnerships with ECEs, in the interests of their children's education, may vary substantially between cultures and subcultures (Tyler, 2006). For instance, most Australian parents would have the same values as the ECEs who have lived and trained in the host country (Hu, Torr, & Whiteman, 2014). When these values differ significantly, barriers are created for effective partnerships. Moreover, "many parents are isolated from success because their patterns of relating and interacting with their children do not fit the school culture" (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006, p. 188). Hornby and Lafaele (2011) suggest that sometimes the mismatch of the cultural capital of parents and teachers can deter parents from collaborating with teachers, which can often apply to the situation between ECEs and IPs.

Several studies have validated the gaps that can exist between ECC settings and the engagement of ECCs with immigrant families are due to differing cultural and educational expectations regarding the CALD children attending the ECC (Hand & Wise, 2006; Reese & Gallimore, 2000; Riojas-Cortes, Flores, Smith, & Clark, 2003). Despite these differences, the closing of cultural gaps can occur when ECEs embark on discussions regarding the ECC's pedagogical program with IPs during their interactions. Partnerships, according to the EYLF, are "based on the foundations of understanding each other's expectations and attitudes, and build on the strength of each other's knowledge" (DET [Clth], 2018, p. 13), which implies that unless families and educators become cognisant of other's sociocultural values, effective partnerships that benefit the child in their care cannot be formed.

These complex value differences, which are the basis of the cultural gap, are inextricably a part of the multicultural educational context but are rarely debated in detail by ECEs (Hand & Wise, 2006; Reese & Gallimore, 2000). Although ECEs (for example, Jill, Jo and Heather in Section 5.3.2) will try to understand these cultural gaps by instigating discussions with IPs, there is usually no enthusiasm on the part of the IPs to reciprocate; they would prefer to confine their conversations with ECEs to the operational details of the ECC (see Section 6.3.1). If IPs do wish to discuss their children with the ECEs, it is usually regarding an intervention they need for their children (for example, IPs Lana and Roveena in Section 6.3.2) or information regarding

transition to school (for example, IP Prabhjyoth in Section 6.4.2). However, the extent of these conversations is also likely to be curtailed due to lack of time or a lack of knowledge of the cultural child-rearing practices (for example, ECEs Amy, Jenny and Kate in Section 5.3.3).

Rouse and O'Brien (2017) explain why there are no clear reasons for answers to partnerships:

Policy is inconsistent in the way these partnerships are defined and intended to be enacted. This has resulted in an ambiguity in the way teachers and educators are engaging in partnerships in their work with families. (p. 42)

Moreover, complexities in spending time to build partnerships between ECEs and IPs are likened to “a series of jazz concerts in which a continuous array of new partners and venues requires improvisation without end” (Wortham, 2001, p. 121). While policy often advocates contextualisation (Sumsion & Wong, 2011), it does not provide advice for teachers on how to work within these varying contexts. ECEs need strategies in order to create successful multicultural program spaces where this “jazz concert” is understood through having conversations and collaboration taking place in the ECCs that are inclusive of CALD children.

In this study, it became apparent that each of the ECEs had a different interpretation of partnerships (Hujala et al., 2009; Tayler, 2006). For example, partnerships for ECE Jo were about educating the IPs regarding the Australian early childhood education system (see Section 5.3.2); for ECE Jill, they involved the cultural celebrations held at the ECC program for the children and their parents. For ECE Diane, partnerships were about engaging the Indian community (see Section 5.3.4) and for ECE Jenny it was about getting to know a child who needed intervention (see Section 5.3.3). Other ECE participants mentioned developing partnerships with IPs through cultural food and festivals (see Section 5.5.3).

However, partnerships are also concerned with “shared understandings, defined roles and reciprocal actions by those engaged” (Tayler, 2006, p. 249). The roles that IPs perceive in a market-based economy are that they “may become that of ‘fee-payer’ and ‘receiver of newsletters and class products’ regarding children’s learning” (Tayler, 2006, p. 249) rather than being partners with the ECEs in assisting their children to learn. The roles that IPs considered appropriate for themselves (for example, IPs Mandeep and Rachel in Section 6.3.1) were similar to those Tayler (2006) observed in her study.

In an attempt to create better connections between home cultural learning and kindergarten pedagogy that would encourage the formation of partnerships with CALD families, many

kindergarten committees of management would employ qualified immigrant teachers. However, in this study, although ECEs Mandeep and Jo were qualified ethnic educators, their presence in Kindergarten C did not necessarily ensure effective partnerships were developed with the IPs nor create opportunities for IPs to be engaged in the learning experiences of their children. In their study on immigrant teachers, Adair, Tobin, and Arzubiaga (2012) state:

Many immigrant teachers in our study reported that they often feel stuck between their pedagogical training and their cultural knowledge; between the expectations of their fellow teachers and of parents; and between the goals of being culturally responsive to children, families, and their community and being perceived as professional by their fellow teachers and their superiors. (p. 3)

Although attempting to use their knowledge to bridge the cultural gaps between teachers and parents, immigrant teachers are unable to voice their opinions or support for CALD families in particular nor champion their educational aspirations. AS ECE Jo said: *“It is their (Indian) system and this is ours (Australian). If they want to live and learn here, they need to adapt to this system”*. Jo, however, also believed that IC were fast learners because their parents were always wanting their children to be the best and would put in a lot more effort to educate them than other parents would for their children. Her opinions indicate that she had a good understanding of the IPs’ aspirations for their children and appreciated their child-rearing practices.

ECE Mandeep, an Indian immigrant, insisted that her training in Australia had enabled her to appreciate the early childhood programs practised in this country and believed that the system worked better for younger children than its equivalent in India. In her opinion, the Australian education system for the early years did not force the Indian children – or any children for that matter – to learn particular academic skills, unlike in India where the expectation is that children will learn to read and write in the early years. Mandeep laments that IPs, despite knowing the pressures the Indian system applied to young children, continue to exhort the ECEs to teach their preschool-aged children to read and write. It would appear that ECE Mandeep has compromised her own Indian values after realising the benefits to young children of the Australian early childhood education system.

Teachers often have a fear of expressing their own opinion on cultural responsiveness to their communities and frequently “experience a dilemma that prevents them from applying their full expertise to the education and care of children of recent immigrants” (Adair, Tobin, & Arzubiaga, 2012, p. 2). An additional fear of immigrant teachers is supporting their communities

when they feel accountable to the curriculum and expressing any dissenting view would not be considered appropriate by the ECC's leadership team. Nayar's (2009) research asserts that being accepted into the general teaching community is highly desired by these ethnic teachers. The research literature indicates that the voices of immigrants are marginalised in the early childhood sector (Adair & Tobin, 2008; Brougère, Guénif-Souilamas, & Rayna, 2008; Delpit, 1995/2006; Kurban & Tobin, 2009; Tobin, Arzubiaga, & Mantovani, 2007). In the example of Mandeep's situation, IPs' educational values were possibly being undermined despite the presence of an ethnic ECE in the Kindergarten C.

Another aspect of partnerships in Australian ECCs is that they are based in the family-centred practice as explained by Hu, Torr, and Whiteman (2014):

There has been a tendency in research papers as well as in regulatory documents to emphasise family-centred practice, where parents are viewed as the experts who know their child best and whose ideas are to be seen as a valuable resource for children's education. (p. 266)

While IPs consider themselves as having expert knowledge regarding their culture, the Indian education system and Indian child-rearing practices, they, understandably, do not have that same knowledge in relation to the Australian EC education system and the principles of play pedagogy. Roopnarine (1994) contends that Indian parents do not consider play as an intellectual activity because:

in a country where child-rearing practices are moulded by tradition and not by information generated from child development research, how cognizant are parents of the value of play in early cognitive and social development? (p. 18)

Consequently, IPs are not confident in discussing play. As ECEs Jo and Mandeep (see Section 5.4.3) claim, IPs need to be informed of the orthodoxy of play pedagogy. As they have no parental expertise on child development to share, partnerships with the professional ECEs is often daunting for IPs. In a study by Sanagavarapu and Wong (2004), their findings indicated that 93 per cent of teachers who participated in their study never raised the subject of play with parents from different cultures. ECEs in the same study also believed that the differences in the way ethnic children played with other children were due to language barriers, not the different cultural values attached to child play. (More details are provided in Section 7.3 of this chapter.)

In summary, it can be argued that often partnerships between ECEs and IPs do not accord with ECCs' expectations. The policy accountability of ECEs who are required to work in partnerships with IPs can prove to be as much a barrier to these partnerships as language or the cultural beliefs of IPs. ECEs are expected to form these partnerships with IPs despite the fact that the IPs are likely not to have the time nor the inclination to do so. ECEs are also expected to partner with IPs who do not understand the play-based curriculum that they are paying for their children to be taught, their educational aspirations for their children do not usually align with those of the ECEs and they are unlikely to receive particular support from the ethnic ECEs if the ECC has employed such staff.

General partnership systems that work for ECEs and Australian parents who are from the same communities are not likely to be as successful for IPs. However, partnerships between ECEs and IPs have proven to be effective when there is a particular issue that needs to be handled such as where an Indian child is the subject of an intervention order. IPs need a pedagogy that is inclusive of their culture and acknowledges their cultural values in the program; however, ECEs often have insufficient time to make the necessary cultural connections with IPs and acknowledge the differences between their respective cultures. The cultural gap makes it problematic for IPs to teach their children given the expectations of the ECCs regarding partnerships. Closing the cultural gap by explaining the pedagogy to IPs is not likely to work; rather, creating alternative places for interacting and understanding the socio-political constraints in order to remove these barriers is worth exploring, leading to the development of strategies for ECEs to make those cultural connections.

### **7.3 Learning Environments in Early Childhood Centres and the Expectations of Indian Parents**

The learning environments that operate in ECCs are readily accepted by IPs as their cultural traditions oblige them to respect teachers and their teachings (Gupta, 2006). However, this study has revealed that these learning environments can vary markedly from the expectations of IPs. In their interactions with the IPs, the ECEs explain to the IPs that the learning experience of their children is underpinned by a play-based pedagogy.

The discussion in the next section reveals a cultural gap between the Australian way of teaching and learning and the Indian equivalent. I begin with a policy discussion on the learning environments that prevail in Australian ECCs and how IPs and ECEs form partnerships within that learning policy framework.

### 7.3.1 Policy discussion.

Early childhood educators respect the diversity of families and communities, and the aspirations they hold for children. (DET [Clth], 2018, p. 14)

The findings from the study reveal that ECEs have respect for the operational, regulatory, state and local policy guidelines regarding diverse families (see Sections 5.4.1, 5.4.4. and 5.5.3). This respect in practice is usually related to food, habits, the celebration of festivals and the use of diverse languages. ECEs respect IPs' contribution to cultural events with food or resources such as books for the ECC (see Section 5.3.4). In acknowledging diversity, ECEs would make notes during enrolments on CALD children's food preferences, cultural habits of sleeping and the educational aspirations of parents and how they celebrate Harmony Day (see Section 5.5.1).

Schoorman and Bogtoch (2010) understand respect and acknowledge diverse cultures to be “typologies found in schools of ‘surface culture’, and ‘additives’ to the curriculum” (p. 80). The ECEs in this study expressed their respect for diversity through surface cultures and additives. These assimilationist efforts by the teachers, as contended by Reid, Kagan, et al. (2019), were intended to make the child feel welcome and assist in settling them in to the ECC learning environment. Despite some IPs' participation in food and festival events held at the ECCs, most of the IPs did not participate in the program discussions that were scheduled due to either their lack of time or their uninterest/ignorance/unfamiliarity of the play-based programs practised in the ECCs.

The concept of “diversity” is intended to accommodate the lived experiences of people from different cultures coming together as a result of their common involvement in a particular ECC but not necessarily in the way these cultural differences are managed and incorporated into the learning and teaching practised in the ECC. The power of ECEs, “whose practices and beliefs about culture can limit or extend the educational experiences of young children” (Ang, 2010, p. 42), is apparent in ECE Amy's (see Section 5.4.1) comments regarding her interpretation of what Indian children need to learn:

*and in particular with Indian children let them know that their voice is important, and they're valued, and they're respected whatever they bring to the table. And I think there are just better ways to do that than in giving them constant instructions.*



The sentiment expressed by Amy is likely to be limiting in the context of Indian children's cultural experiences and is indicative of policy that encourages the "voice" in children and is predicated on the developmental psychology, socio-political and historical beliefs of promoting independent thinking in children. However, this theory is in contrast to what mothers want for their children in a neo-liberal Indian society (Donner, 2018). Indian mothers' aspirations are for their children to attain mastery of the academic skills that will enable them to secure careers in professions such as engineering or medicine (Donner, 2018). Children in India receive instruction in these skills as soon as they enrol in kindergarten or other similar settings. Giving a voice to children and understanding its role in childhood is not necessarily the same in all cultures; rather, it is an early childhood Western concept used in relation to developmentally appropriate practice (DAP; Canella & Viruru, 2003).

When inducting CALD children into the ECC, the ECEs' expectation of them to "fit in" should not stem from a deficit model but from the "use of human interaction as a vehicle for actively guiding children's learning" (Hatch, 2010, p. 258). Guiding children is not about rote learning nor waiting for them to "explore and discover" but is more concerned with understanding that some, such as IC, are likely to need guidance, modelling and helping with acquiring skills to succeed in accomplishing tasks and completing activities in their programs. Moreover, learning to Hatch (2010) is as follows:

To learn, children are not expected to explore or experiment on their own in hopes they will discover the cultural knowledge they need. Learning happens in the exchanges between adults (or more competent others) and children around tasks about which the adult is an expert and the child is an apprentice. (p. 258)

Even EYLF has an alternative to the teaching methods and advocates for, "Intentional teaching [which] is in contrast to continuing with traditions simply because things have 'always' been done that way" (DET [Clth], 2018, p. 17). Only by understanding the complexity of cultures and using intentional teaching can ECEs:

engage in sustained shared conversations with children to extend their thinking  
provide a balance between child led, child initiated, and educator supported  
learning ... create learning environments that encourage children to explore, solve  
problems, create and construct. (DET [Clth], 2018, p. 17)

In expanding this argument, this section also discusses whether ECEs meet the “aspirations of what IPs hold for their children” and how IC are motivated to “learn and reinforce their sense of themselves as competent learners”.

Patel and Agbenyega (2013) state that IPs in their study believed that their children “missed the academic aspect of Indian early childhood education and believed that the Australian curriculum and pedagogy distanced their children from their culture” (p. 49), which also reflects the general sentiment of the IPs who participated in this research study. Gupta (2018) contends that Indian education is driven by privatisation, globalisation and competitiveness in contrast to countries like China, Singapore, the UK, the USA and Australia where their education systems are influenced by their respective socio-political agendas that promote children to be independent learners and develop initiative. However, Indian-based economies demand that families control and direct their children’s education.

The role of educating Indian children within the family is usually the responsibility of the neo-liberal Indian mother. Donner (2018) states that “mothers in particular are cast as facilitators of future success” (p. 1550). In support of this view, IP Roveena (see Section 6.3.2) mentioned that the men in her family did not believe it was their role to be involved in their children’s education so the responsibility of teaching the children fell to her. In her interview, she confirmed (with a smile) that this was a cultural tradition of fathers having no part in their children’s education (Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, & Vadgama, 2013). For Indian women like IP Roveena (with very little knowledge of the English language), non-interference from their husbands provides them with the freedom to determine the child-rearing practices they will exercise in their families. It appears that Indian women then depend on the ECCs and the schools to continue with the teaching of their children and assist the IC to learn English (Donner, 2018).

If women are in employment and/or not proficient in English then preschools in India take over the job of teaching their children from as young as two years of age (Donner, 2018). The mother’s involvement with their child is also high on the list of demands for successful enrolment in these preschools. Mothers are thus encouraged to teach and take control of their children’s education at home in India. In her interview for this study, IP Aditi says:

*My daughter wasn’t writing anything, when I first began teaching her, but, I don’t know, perhaps it was my upbringing – the way was to write this and remember this. (see Section 6.4.3)*

Aditi's method of teaching at home did not work with her child, so she tried using a digital learning program produced by Apple, only to realise that her daughter was already familiar with the content of this program from her use of it at Kindergarten C. Finally, Aditi ceased to teach her daughter, which meant she no longer controlled her offspring's education.

Coming from a culture that values education, unfortunately for Aditi, her own teaching methods had proved to be unsuccessful for her child in this context. It is increasingly difficult to change this notion of "[an Indian] national system [that] has been for centuries driven by academic rigour" (Gupta, 2015, p. 216). Immigrant IPs in Australia are confronted with an unfamiliar curriculum, where English is not taught in kindergarten but spoken in the learning environment.

Tobin, Arzubiaga, and Adair (2013) propose that teachers should not undermine the parental values of education and solely depend on their own developmental knowledge of children, ignoring parent input (Guo, 2015). Tobin, Arzubiaga, and Adair (2013) suggest that the reason this occurs is that teachers do not want to relinquish their power and professional expertise, although it is evident that ethnic parents respect teachers and are usually eager to adjust to new cultural demands in education (Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Snoeck, 2009). In this study, IPs Chandima and Viji both said that the Australian early childhood education system had promoted confidence in their children (see Section 6.3.2). IP James believed that his son had acquired leadership qualities through Kindergarten E's program. The debate is about whose philosophy on education is the most beneficial for the child. While IPs argue that the teaching of English and writing skills is the way to progress a child's development and prepare them for school, whereas ECEs believe that their knowledge of play, child development and the socio-political agenda will benefit the child. More so because the ECEs knowledge is based on developmental and scientific advancements (ECEs Jo and Kate in Section 5.4.3). Such thinking is confirmed by Buchori and Dobinson (2012), who say that ECEs believe that there is "a neutral, universal way of teaching that is appropriate and effective for every child and which fulfils national curriculum standards" (p. 49); however, such a one-size-fits-all approach ignores the context of children from different cultural backgrounds.

To continue with this argument, I support Vandenbroeck, Roets, and Snoeck's (2009) contention that teachers exclude IPs from taking part in the curriculum decisions because of the differing views on democracy and citizenship. Vandenbroeck, Roets, and Snoeck (2009) further suggest that often when an immigrant enters the host country, they challenge the ways of "welcoming, listening or hospitality" (p. 204), which forces teachers to work with the

“unknown”. Overcoming these fears of the unknown and being meta sensitive to cultures (Buchori & Dobinson, 2012) is referred to by Vandebroek, Roets, and Snoeck (2009) as a participating citizen view as opposed to the democratic citizenship view where multiple perspectives merge into the one view. It is hoped the calibre of future ECEs is such that they will overcome the limited views currently manifested by ECEs Kate and Jo.

Vandebroek, Roets, and Snoeck (2009) advocate “that ‘good practice’ cannot be essentialised, since good practice is the result of a multiplicity of antinomical perspectives: both ‘true’ and mutually exclusive” (p. 208). This introduces the inclusivity concept from the EYLF, which states that parents are consulted when programming in the early childhood setting because such diversity is present in the classroom. While the policy intentions are relevant in a multicultural classroom, implementation is hindered by the non-participatory nature of IPs in the curriculum planning, which is also reciprocated by the lack of understanding of such complexity by the ECEs. This was apparent in ECE Kate’s comments (see Section 5.3.3) where she exhorted IPs to come forward to request any cultural and educational needs they had for their children. In addition, “good practice” is also foreshadowed by the use and focus of ECEs in deficit models of assessment as explained by Pacini-Ketchabaw and Schecter (2002):

However, in focusing on the distance which they (ECEs) perceived lay between the socialisation practices of minority families and the prerequisite conditions for academic success on the part of culturally and linguistically diverse students, teachers relied on key tenets of deficiency frameworks as the basis for understanding the situation they were experiencing and what should be done. (p. 407)

The need for socially equitable spaces conducive to democratic citizenship and multicultural education is usually not sufficient to assess a child’s learning Guo (2015). What also counts in assessment is ECEs’ understanding of how learning takes place for IC in their own cultures. ECEs viewing CALD children’s learning through a deficit lens (Buchori & Dobinson, 2015) was evident from IP Anusuya’s (see Section 6.4.2) comments regarding the implementation of the EYLF. While ECEs believed in the child exploring the environment, the extent to which the child was permitted to explore would be determined by them. Anusuya’s son’s exploration behaviour did not comply with the ECEs’ pedagogical assessment of learning. Consequently, they would often tell Anusuya that her son was a disruptive child.

When asked what the IC were interested in learning, ECE Diane (see Section 5.4.1) mentioned that IC would complete their tasks when the ECEs were not in the vicinity. The

approach the ECEs adopted in the ECC appeared not to be culturally sensitive and, consequently, the IC were not confident to show their work to the ECEs. If trust is to be cultivated with IC, then understanding how they learn at home is a possible solution. In seeking alternative methods of teaching, ECEs are likely to find useful “funds of knowledge” (Llopert & Esteban-Guitart, 2018; Moll, 2015). Funds of knowledge is the understanding of learning and interests that children bring from their homes to ECC settings. When ECEs develop an appreciation of this knowledge, they are moving away from the expectations of the cultural thinking of the IPs to the more realistic experience of what the Indian child knows. The IPs’ educational values are expressed through the interests of the child and a form of reciprocity and contribution to the ECC’s programs can occur. Learning for IC happens through these contributions from their parents as observed by ECE Maxine (see Section 5.4.2 on Rangoli).

In this reciprocal space, not only are the IPs redefining their identities (Sanagavarapu, 2010) but they are also influencing the ECEs’ views on multicultural nationalism (Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Snoeck, 2009) despite the differences and confrontations that can occur in the interactions between these two cohorts. The essential nature of this argument is that ECEs who are “meta sensitive” to other cultures shift from their sense of power and control to accepting the differences in learning and focus on the knowledge that the IC bring to the ECC. This improved relationship between IPs and ECEs can only occur if the ECEs are not driven by policy but are willing to work with parents and their needs (New, 2009) without becoming too obsessed with the term “inclusivity”. Vandenbroeck, Roets, and Snoeck (2009) explain this concept clearly:

The concept of relational citizenship (which) is not to be understood as another set of competencies that the individual should perform, but as a quality of relations, an ethic of encounters without predefined outcomes. (p. 212)

ECCs are environments that can be conducive for effective communication and collaboration between IPs and ECEs, where the quality of relationships can be improved through the adoption of the MUM framework (Chapter 3). Recognising the contribution IPs can make to ECCs’ program planning requires rethinking, which is further discussed as part of the conclusion and recommendations of this study.

Summarising the various components of this section, it appears that in the early years setting, the “public sphere” encroaches on the “private sphere” of cultures (Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Snoeck, 2009, p. 204). Similarly, the intrusion into the lives of CALD families is visible through the policy and the citizenship values of a nation expressed at the micro level (Cheeseman, 2007;

Cheeseman, Sumsion, & Press, 2014; Murray, 2015) such as the pedagogical practices in early childhood education.

### **7.3.2 Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine.**

The unfamiliarity of the Australian play pedagogy is an additional factor that removes control from the IPs of their children's education, making them dependent on the ECEs to explain the ECCs' programs. Similarly, time and policy factors inhibit the ECEs from explaining the curriculum to the IPs. However, most Australian parents do not require an explanation of the programs practised in ECCs as they are familiar with them.

Wood (2004) writes "one of the most fundamental principles in early childhood pedagogy is the importance of play to children's learning and development" (p. 19). Play-based teaching and learning is central to the principal curriculum document, the EYLF (Barblett, Knaus, & Barratt-Pugh, 2016; DEEWR, 2009; Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Wood, 2014; Wood & Hedges, 2016). The EYLF principles are underpinned by the Western belief of an individualist society empowering families and children (Gupta, 2010; Rogers, 2010).

Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2008) explain:

At the most general level, social scientists have portrayed parents in 'western' cultures as promoting developmental goals that are autonomy-oriented or, at the more macro or community level, individualistic, and parents in most Asian, Latin, African, and rural, indigenous societies as promoting developmental goals that are relationship oriented or, at the more macro level, collectivistic. (p. 184)

Unlike Western cultures, collectivist cultures emphasise shared group decisions and activities (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). Moreover, play means different things to different cultures, and the use of play to promote educational goals for children in other countries differs widely (Ball, 2010; Sengupta, 2016) as commented on by IP Aditi (see Section 6.3.1). Play to IP Aditi did not constitute learning as she articulated:

*...so how she's learning? [ECE says] "No, kinder is now a little playing place."  
They don't do anything like that; perhaps she will when she goes to school.*

IP Rachel understood play and called it role playing:

*So I think all those [being a leader]activities happen in kinder when they do a kind of role playing. I'm not aware what they're doing really, but I think when the teacher reads them a story, which has characters in them...*

Rachel (see Section 6.4.4) realised that there was no formal teaching in the ECC; all activities were play based. However, she was happy to comply with the ECEs' requests and attempted to read a book to her child. ECE Mandeep (see Section 5.3.4) says IPs are aware of what to do because they search online for information regarding ECC programs. It appears that IP Rachel (see Section 6.4.4) used this online knowledge to simulate the play-based teaching practised in the ECCs:

*or when they're doing role plays or pretend plays, like, okay, let's play kitchens, let's play home corners or something like that, so I think, like, she [daughter] might as well follow [the ECC program].*

Another telling example of the same is seen in the findings of IP Gauri (see Section 6.4.5) who encouraged her child to be more of an extrovert:

*I say to her to speak, or to sing, or to sing a poem, or dance or clap her hands, just to build up her confidence. And I said: "Look, all your friends are sitting here, your pretend friends, and you can say whatever you want to say to your friends."*

While it is evident that IPs will attempt to simulate the play-based teaching from the ECEs' instructions, they really do not understand this culturally diverse way of teaching children through play. For IPs, play is only incidental to learning and is not an essential element for understanding the development of children (Sengupta, 2016).

Even though IPs do not comprehend play pedagogy, they appreciate that it does not pressurise children to learn (Patel & Agbenyega, 2013). IPs also value the availability of the resources, which are not available in their own countries. IP Chandima's (see Section 6.4.1) comments regarding play pedagogy:

*Their system is better than our Sri Lankan system because Sri Lankan people are always only focused on education – not much sport –only reading and writing. They are educated but not overall – here it is good.*

The IPs who participated in this study had many different views on the Australian early childhood education system. This is understandable because these immigrant families were at

various stages of adjusting and assimilating into the host country (Sanagavarapu, 2010). Education is a priority for many Asians (Chan, 2011) and similarly for IPs who migrate for a better education and lifestyle for their children. How IPs manage to retain their cultural values despite globalisation is quite complex and affects many aspects of their life (Sanagavarapu, 2010).

CALD parents believe there is a lack of balance in education that stems from the little academic learning that occurs in early childhood centres (Tobin, Arzubiaga, & Adair, 2013). This perceived lack of balance in early years education also creates much confusion for IPs. IP Aditi attempted different ways to teach her child to read and write; however, she reluctantly resigns to the fact that her daughter's school will teach her writing skills. In her interview, it was evident that she was not pleased to relinquish control of teach her daughter in her early years.

In the EYLF, although the cultural competence component celebrates various cultures, it is not particularly conducive to learning because "Play is a concept that has defied a simple definition and the relationship between play, learning, curriculum, pedagogy and outcomes has long been recognized as complex" (Hedges & Cooper, 2018, p. 371). ECE Mandeep, being of an Indian background herself, is naturally familiar with Indian culture and would attempt to explain the concept of play to the IPs associated with Kindergarten C. In her opinion, there needed to be a compromise on the part of IPs in terms of their way of thinking and their values as she explains:

*So Indian parents have these values – but as teachers, we have to convince them that play way is an important method. So to take advantage of the system in a practical way – yes, teach spelling but in a play way method. I told the parents that the children have to make their own efforts and kindi is the only place where they can do this.*

While Mandeep was able to advise the IPs to compromise their educational values of learning the 3Rs through the play-based teaching method, this defeats the purpose of play-based learning. Play-based learning is described in the EYLF as "a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they actively engage with people, objects and representations" (DET [Clth], 2018, p. 46). The keyword in this discussion is "engage", and raises the issue of how IPs engage with their children when they believe play is incidental and not essential to learning (Sengupta, 2016). It would appear that Mandeep does not have an in-depth understanding of play pedagogy, or is acting as an intermediary between ECEs and IPs to communicate teaching through play.



Other ECEs who find it difficult to communicate and collaborate with CALD parents generally are likely to find it more challenging to disseminate this complex idea of how play is related to learning. Rogers (2010) argues “what is actually meant by ‘play’ and why it should be supported is unclear from policy documentation, whereas structured activities are more clearly defined” (p. 8), thus presenting an argument for implementing intentional teaching and structured activities that are often requested by IPs. ECE Heather supports the practice of structured teaching (see Section 5.4.3). She mentioned that the present curriculum was quite vague, and as a former secondary school integrated aide teacher, she was aware of how disengaged the youth often are in schools who had experienced early years settings that promoted play pedagogy. She recommended that there be more structured teaching to help children acquire skills.

Play is considered the appropriate pedagogy for children in their early years, yet it does not complement IPs’ cultural values nor their learning aspirations for their children. IPs’ perception of learning involves imparting adult expertise to children and acculturating them into a market-driven economy. The mystery of play pedagogy to IPs can transfer power to ECEs, which can introduce tensions into partnerships between IPs and ECEs. Play environments are not socially equitable learning spaces for children. Play has many dimensions to it and the ECEs in this study were unaware of this, as they tended to use a deficit model of assessing and teaching IC. The study revealed situations where IC were unwittingly caught between ECEs not acknowledging their play and IPs who no longer directed the teaching of their children and thought they needed to teach “play”. Consequently, it has been revealed in this study that IC shying away from ECEs is the likely reason for their learning and engagement not being validated in the ECC environment.

## **7.4 Food and Cultural Practices at Early Childhood Centres and in Indian Homes**

A much-neglected area in ECCs is the management of CALD children’s food practices. There are many regulations and policies relating to a child’s eating practices – for example consuming healthy food safety when eating, allergies, and food preferences. However, there is little research that has been published or policies regarding juvenile eating techniques and the level of respect that educational institutions provide to a child’s cultural eating practices. For example, ECEs are not necessarily equipped with the skills to manage a child’s cultural eating habits such as using chopsticks or their hands to consume food. The findings in this study have revealed some of the issues relevant to this topic, particularly the practice of Indian children eating with their hands.

The cultural transition involved with Indian children's food habits are a challenge for ECEs as well as the children themselves.

Most of the Indian parents who participated in the study were quite satisfied with the handling of their children's eating habits in their respective kindergartens. The main reasons outlined in their interviews were that some of them had become familiar with the food routines in the kindergarten due to their older children having attended the same ECC (IP Roveena). Other IPs (IP Lana, IP Jincy and IP Rachel) mentioned that there were similarities between their cultural eating and food habits to those practiced by the ECCs, so there was no issue and hence their findings were not discussed here. However, IP Anusuya articulated her concerns regarding the care of her son in the kindergarten and his previous attendance at other ECCs. She stressed in her interview the importance of addressing the issue of Indian children's food and eating habits in ECCs, which is often a neglected issue that can affect Indian children's nutrition and care in their early years. This is a pressing area of discussion for the early childhood sector, which to date has given it little attention (MacNaughton & Davis, 2001). In the next section, I engage in further discussion regarding Anusuya's concern relating to her son's cultural food habits and the reaction they received from the ECEs.

#### **7.4.1 Research studies examining the eating habits of Indian families.**

Flowers and Swan (2012) indicate that the social and cultural traditions that are practiced in Indian families teach IC to eat with their hands and in the early years the mother/caregiver feeds them hand to mouth (Momin, Chunk, & Olson, 2014; Vasudeva, 2017).

Delormier, Frohlich, and Potvin (2009) contend that this is a learnt behaviour and further add that "eating patterns that are characteristic of different groups of people can be understood as being embedded in configurations of social relations and being shaped distinctively by them" (p. 218). The research literature reviewed indicates that the child-rearing practices of most IPs include feeding their children hand to mouth during their meal times at home.

The reasons for discouraging traditional CALD eating habits can be many; however, one prominent reason is linked to what Crotty (1993) says is "the act of swallowing divides nutrition's 'two cultures', the post swallowing world of biology, physiology, biochemistry and pathology, and the pre-swallowing domain of behavior, culture, society and experience" (p. 109). The relevance for the IP context of this study was the pre-swallowing domain. For instance, IP Anusuya (see Section 6.5.3) expressed her concern that her son was used to Indian food;

however, this cultural value was not particularly encouraged in her experiences of childcare and her son's current kindergarten. Consequently, her son ate little food in Kindergarten B.

When children are not encouraged or transitioned into new ways of eating, they stop eating altogether, according to Anusuya. She believed that her son was too "small" (young) to eat independently and was easily distracted from his food. The struggles that Indian mothers had in ensuring that their children were fed in their respective kindergartens became apparent in this study. However, it was also evident that little action was being taken to address this issue. Gallegos (2010, as cited in Thomson & McFeeter, 2016) says "food and its relationship to health and wellbeing is rarely mentioned" (p. 6). Early childhood studies to date have rarely discussed the eating habits of young children. Similarly, in early childhood policies the issue of cultural food habits has to date been given no consideration in practice and as observed in this study, cultural food habits are rarely discussed amongst ECC staff. If children are not eating and therefore are undernourished in ECCs, then it is a matter of concern for the children and their families in their care.

Bellisle (2004) states that one of the major concerns of undernourishment is its causal effect on future learning difficulties in the child. She further articulates that poorly nourished children and those who are deprived of food for longer periods of time suffer from energy inadequacies. Child development specialists advocate for a healthy interactive learning environment to enhance brain development and social cognitive functions (Kearns, 2017). Nutritionists also advocate that the healthy nourishment of children aids their brain development. However, the data collected from the ECEs participating in this research study indicated that they were more concerned about the large amount of food the IPs would send with their children (for example, ECE Jacqui in Section 5.5.2). Given the poor eating habits of her son, Avinash, at his kindergarten, IP Anusuya began to replace the Indian food she sent with him with a chocolate for Avinash to snack on so that he would could be nourished (see Section 6.5.3). Given that IPs feel coerced to compromise their cultural values in order to comply with Australian early childhood food policies (NQS, QA2, 2.1, 2.1.1, 2.2.1), a possible research topic in this area could be why ECEs view these cultural food habits as something for the IPs to work out with their children. In addition, the ECEs feel that the issue is largely not their concern despite their concern on healthy food and brain development of the child.

Most of the associated research literature to date has examined food security and immigrant food habits that highlight the struggles IPs have as a result of feeding their children the wrong foods that cause obesity. In their study of Mexican immigrants, Colby, Morrison, and Haldeman

(2009) state that “acculturation resulted in poor dietary intake due to decreased availability, food displacement, and cost” (p. 327), and often Indian immigrants would be in a similar situation. The non-availability of a variety of green, leafy vegetables (staple Indian diet), other Indian vegetables and the expense of buying these imported products from Indian food stores in Australia might not prove cost effective for families. However, the readily available foods in Australia that are high in sugars, high in GI and low in cost that are convenient for busy IPs to buy can change their dietary patterns, which can lead to health issues, as Jatrana (2014) quotes:

Migrant health over the long term could be impacted by the adoption of Australian habits relating to diet, physical activity, smoking and alcohol, as well as the stress of migrating, adjusting to a new culture, and discrimination. (Media release)

The aforementioned research studies discuss the health issues and struggles of immigrants and their adjustment to the host country. Many other related studies that are published in the medical and health journals examine the link between migrants’ eating habits and obesity (Green et al., 2003; Thomson & McFeeter, 2016). However, there is a paucity of research on the social aspects of cultural food habits, such as immigrants’ different ways of eating. Given the lack of information and studies examining culturally different eating habits and their significance for their respective cultures, there is a pressing need for further research in the Australian context. Research that examined the correlation between eating habits and the effect of nourishment on CALD children’s learning would not only assist in assimilating immigrant children into the host culture but also guide ECEs in developing programs that managed the eating habits of IC.

The discouragement of Indian parents to practise their cultural food habits, such as the feeding customs in their families and the cultural bonding during meal times, is not a part of the EYLF policy. EYLF policy encourages healthy eating and is based on the research on health for Australian families and their food habits. The responses from the IPs who participated in this study clearly indicate that there were issues relating to cultural food traditions and the eating habits of IC. Their comments also indicate their concern regarding some significant underlying issues relating to the health of IC, who may be at risk of malnourishment. The cultural promotion of independent eating in children is related to child agency and the encouragement of independence in the child: According to Reid, Kagan, et al. (2019):

...individualism, [where] children are encouraged to express personal preferences, make choices based on their own needs and wants, and enjoy

personal privacy and ownership of objects and accomplishments, albeit within the boundaries drawn by adults. (p.980)

However, the dependency of a child on the adult reveals itself only in the act of eating alone in IC. This does not necessarily mean that IC are not independent in other areas of learning. In Indian families where the parents exercise strong control of their children, there are nevertheless pockets of time when IC can enjoy playing with siblings and peers, which can facilitate the development of their own agency and promote independent decision-making which is usually unlikely that the ECEs observe. The collectivist cultures' philosophy is that group decisions are of more value than individual decisions and Indian children are strongly influenced by such authoritarian decisions. For example, the amount of food for the child is decided without taking into consideration the child's preferences, choices and needs.

The learning environment of early childhood settings in Australia are reluctant to accommodate diverse cultural eating habits fearing that the agency of the child will be suppressed. Further research is needed to help IPs like Anusuya to recognise the importance of preserving the cultural food habits that have been inherited from the older generation and the cultural heritage of India, which undoubtedly influence IPs' current cultural values and beliefs despite their current residency in Australia.

#### **7.4.2 Celebration of cultural food in ECCs – relationship building not learning.**

According to the ECEs who participated in this study, the contribution of the IPs to the ECCs' programs was mostly through the Indian food they would bring and their input into festival celebrations. The diverse cultures that are represented by the children attending the ECCs are often celebrated in the form of food events such as Harmony Day (see Section 5.5.3).

However, such celebrations are often regarded as a tokenistic method of making connections to children's cultural heritage (Reid, Kagan, et al., 2017). Food and festival celebrations in some ways contribute to the learning of children. They encourage children to become aware of different cultures' food traditions, and promote respect for the different viewpoints of children (MacNaughton, 2004). The EYLF also states that "children are connected with and contribute to their world in exploring the culture, heritage, backgrounds and traditions of each child within the context of their community" (DET [Clth], 2018, p. 27). However, the underlying issues that IPs and their children face daily in relation to the food routines practised in Australian ECCs outweigh the learning outcomes the food and cultural festivals provide to children. McCormilla (2012) explains:

Some families, depending on their cultural traditions or religious beliefs, may have different food customs than the staff working in the setting. These customs might include what foods are eaten, how and when they are eaten, how different foods are prepared and what combinations of foods are eaten. Talk to families to ensure that their food preferences and customs can be respected in the setting.

This may mean adjusting a child's food intake or snack time in the service. (p. 13)

She advocates for cultural and religious food inclusion and sharing as mapped from the cultural competence policy and the EYLF. McCormilla also stresses the need for teachers to talk to parents in order to understand children's food preferences; however, none of the government's policies mentions support and assistance in relation to feeding children. Two aspects are important to discuss in relation to food. The first one is the stereotyping festival celebrations like Diwali, which has many different forms in India. In addition, Indian immigrants can have many cultures and voices (polyvocal) as part of their family structures (Wortham, 2001). Moreover, culture is both a social as well as cultural construct (Spencer-Oatey, 2012) and this concept challenges the well-meaning intentions of ECEs in organising food and festival celebrations, which are likely to exclude some children who do not relate to such celebrations.

The second important aspect of food practices in ECCs is the eating habits of IC. Indian children are often raised in collectivist cultures (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008), which encourage parents to manually feed their young children at meal times. Whereas, the ECE participants in this study considered handfeeding children compromised the independence that the ECEs wished to encourage in young children (for example, ECE Jacqui in Section 5.5.2). In contrast to the ECEs' thinking, the practice of handfeeding a child in India is considered an act of bonding between a mother and her child. Reid, Kagan, et al. (2019) explain this concept of interdependence:

The cultural psychologists argue that evidence from multi-ethnic communities indicates that children in collectivist cultures exercise personal autonomy in ways that serve communal pursuits and that social harmony is a controlling value that negates personal autonomy is a decidedly Western bias. (p. 6)

Many IPs handfeed their preschool-aged children and sometimes continue feeding them even when they have reached school age. This practice is to endorse "interdependence" (Gonzalez, 2008, p. 68) in a collectivist society. Therefore, when ECEs attempt to use food and cultural festivals to build relationships they are supporting the wellbeing and sense of belonging in IC,

but when ECEs discourage the eating habits the IC have learnt from home, it is to the detriment of the Indian children's health and wellbeing and connection to their ECC's learning community. This contradiction in the intentions of ECEs suggests that they respect different cultures to a certain point; when the acknowledgement of certain cultural Child rearing habits may conflict with the implementation of policies, programs and assimilation processes, then that respect is curtailed. Situations and reasons that led to this contradiction-becoming manifest in the relationships between the ECEs and the IPs in this study are described in the next few paragraphs.

One reason was likely to be the child's extended family refusing to allow change despite the Indian mother wanting her child to learn new ways of eating. These family members are generally the gatekeepers of cultural traditions, which was evident in IP Prabhjyoth's comments (see Section 6.5.2). The independent eating habits she had begun teaching her son became subjugated when her husband and mother interfered and preferred that her son continue to be fed by an adult. Overridden by other family members, Prabhjyoth became distressed when she recollected this family situation of hers.

The EYLF states that "they (ECEs) value children's different capacities and abilities and respect differences in families' home lives" (DET [Clth], 2018, p. 14). The emphasis is on valuing and respecting the home lives of diverse families but in practice, ECEs are reluctant to accept the different cultural values of IC if they interfere with the operations of the ECC. From the ECEs' comments in the study, it was evident that most of them were defensive when talking about the food practices in their respective kindergartens as highlighted by ECE Jacqui:

*[They have their own] agency, and when you are hungry, you eat, but I'm not going to force feed them to eat, but I also need to respect the family and their values. In supporting the child, I may sit with the child when they are eating and just encourage them to eat a little bit more.*

The main reason ECEs do not support the practice of children being handfed is that underpinning many of Australia's early childhood education principles is the concept of "agency", which means that the child is in control of their needs and developing a sense of independence is cultivated. The National Quality Standard, encourages teachers to facilitate child agency, which is stated as "enabling them to make choices and decisions and influence events and their world" (ACECQA, 2017, p. 10). However, the ECEs who participated in the study are likely to have had misguided perspectives in relation to the child agency, eating practices and

food habits of IC. The ECEs seemed unfamiliar with the ways and merits of the bonding behaviour in Indian families and considered that this dependency of the IC promoted dependency or a lack of agency in IC.

Another argument is that the social constructionist theoretical view contains the notion that the ECEs create the environment that the children will experience at the ECCs. In any learning environment, children come with fluid identities and experience the various environments of home and early childhood settings. The findings from this study indicate that the food and festival celebrations held at the ECCs did not promote learning in IC; what these children had to contend with was an environment where they struggled to reconcile the different messages conveyed to them by the ECEs and their parents. It takes an intelligent Indian child to be able to navigate skillfully between their home and kindergarten environments and the possibility of every IC succeeding in this navigation is a merely a possibility because each child is equipped with a different set of skills and level of intelligence.

To summarise this section on the food habits and wellbeing of IC, while there is a number of studies that have examined immigrants and their struggles to adjust to new food regimes and the link to obesity, there is little research that has specifically investigated the cultural eating habits of immigrants and how early childhood educators understand or accommodate the eating habits of the IC attending their centres. In my 26 years of early childhood teaching and interacting with IPs in Australia, New Zealand and India, together with the findings that have emerged from this study, it can be strongly argued that there is an urgency to examine the connections between the food habits and the health and wellbeing of IC. Early childhood centres currently lack evidence-based research to develop policies that would provide guidance to the ECEs in managing the cultural food habits of CALD children attending kindergarten.

There is a compelling need to conduct research immediately into the eating habits of IC and the wider implications for their health and wellbeing because it has been an issue for too long without receiving the appropriate attention. Early childhood education is concerned with both the care and the education of young children. While IPs seldom raise their cultural issues with the ECCs as they are preoccupied with adjusting to the host nation's culture and its routines, the ECEs also are unable to advocate for the IC due to the lack of research in this area and the fact that they have had no professional development to support them. The requirement to ensure children receive sufficient nourishment when attending ECCs needs urgent attention.



One of the main aims of discussing the aspect of this research study that relates to the food and eating habits practiced in ECCs was to highlight the research gap in this area and the lack of evidenced-based practice in multicultural education. In early childhood settings, the care of children is a major part of their remit and because the consideration of the cultural eating routines of IC has been demonstrated in this study to be a neglected area in the operations of ECCs, the incorporation of CALD children's food and eating traditions into early childhood education policies would be a salutary research area for future studies. The contribution of my study to this field of research has been to underscore the gap in the consideration of the eating habits of IC and other CALD children, which will hopefully stimulate the closer monitoring of this issue so that the welfare of CALD children becomes a priority for ECCs. Unfortunately, the food habits of IC and the children's transition into the new cultural environment of the ECC is an issue that has not been addressed to date by multicultural education policies.

### **7.5 What Role Does Language Play in Early Childhood Centres and in Indian Homes?**

As revealed in this study, IPs often speak at two or more languages in their home. "Contact between two languages is typical in regions of many continents, including Europe (Switzerland, Belgium), Asia (India, Philippines), Africa (Senegal, South Africa), and North America (Canada)" (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013, p. 1). Bilingual and multilingual IPs often struggle to understand the role of English and the preservation of their home language(s) in the lives of their children. The findings of this study have revealed that there is a diverse range of beliefs amongst IPs regarding which languages should be taught at home. Some IPs believed that the home languages needed to be sustained, whereas others believed that speaking English at home would help children to communicate in the ECC they attended and later at school. The IPs who participated in the study indicated that their children were often in a transition phase between using their home language with their families and English in the kindergarten, which created communication issues for both the IPs and the ECEs.

The EYLF (DET [Clth], 2019) advocates that:

Children's use of their home language underpins their sense of identity and their conceptual development. Children have the right to be continuing users of their home language as well as to develop competency in Standard Australian English.  
(p. 41)

However, educators continue to prioritise monolingualism despite celebrating diversity (Ball, 2010; Conteh & Brock, 2011). ECE Jo was an example of a teacher advocating for monolingualism in ECCs, when she said that IPs needed to teach English at home if they wanted their child to succeed in the Australian education system.

The necessity to deliberate the complexities involved in languages and its subsequent “conceptual learning” provokes discussion as Ball (2010) contends “language is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for the individual and the group” (p. 9). Moreover, ECEs use the play-based method of teaching in socio-cultural contexts that encourage children to “share ideas, negotiate, and resolve conflicts” (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2018, p. 262). To be involved in play means IC need to be communicating, collaborating and demonstrating a sense of agency to negotiate in English, which is the language used by the majority of children and adults involved with ECCs. When IC have English as their second language, and in some cases third language, their learning is affected because of an assessment method that is not conducive to their bilingualism and related conceptual learning style. I further explain this in the following subtopics:

- Bilingualism and multilingualism and their effect on Indian children’s learning and teaching.
- Losing language, culture and teaching English. Is it a sign for intervention in Indian children’s learning?
- Losing home language skills in preference to speaking English and its effect on IC and their social relations with other family members

#### **7.5.1. Bilingualism and multilingualism and their effect on Indian children’s learning and teaching.**

Research indicates that bilingual children will, at times, mix words of different languages to convey a message, but this does not mean they are confused. Children using different words (code mixing) in a sentence is seen as a “sign of bilingual children’s ingenuity” (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013, pp. 2 and 3) and these children become proficient at switching between activities and inhibiting previously learned responses.

However, IP Roveena (see Section 6.6.2) said that her two children were having speech difficulties in kindergarten. She thought it was because of the different languages the children

experienced at home: there was the Fiji Hindi with a slang that she spoke, the Fiji Australian English her husband spoke and the Hindi the children would hear from the Bollywood movies they watched at home. She took her children to a speech therapist for advice.

The speech therapist's advice to Roveena and her husband was to speak only one language at home and the choice they made was English, which they believed could be an advantage for the children's schooling and career. Roveena felt this was the appropriate choice for her children; speaking English would help them make friends in the kindergarten. To avoid confusing her children, it would appear that Roveena chose not to practise bilingualism in her home. Despite discontinuing to speak their native language, which was certainly a concern, Roveena's family have maintained their cultural traditions. The findings that relate to preserving cultural traditions in this study (see Section 6.6.2) indicate that Roveena continued the Fiji Indian practices that related to prayers and the eating of cultural foods at home for her children.

In another situation, IP Mandeep's daughter, Ashpreet, grew up with grandparents in India until she was two years old. During her time in India, she was immersed in the Punjabi language and cultural ways of learning. In India, children are often in social situations with friends and family speaking different languages with different rhythms and tones of voices. "Infants are also sensitive to these perceptual differences, and are particularly attuned to a language's rhythm" (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013, p. 3), so it could be inferred that Ashpreet developed the ability to sense these differences and this could be one of the reasons that could explain the ease with which she learnt English in her kindergarten (Ball, 2010). Ashpreet's parents did not speak English and yet she was able to learn English without one-on-one direct instructions. Research indicates that "a one-person-one-language approach is neither necessary nor sufficient for successful bilingual acquisition" (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013, p. 4). Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams (2013) also note that the sensitivity to differences in language disappears after eight months in monolingual children. Bilingual children, on the other hand, continue to be sensitive to information that distinguishes between languages. It would appear that not all IC need to be taught English by their ECEs or their parents at home as some IC are capable of differentiating between languages and learn by themselves.

ECE Kate remarked that in her experience most of the IPs wanted their children to learn English (see Section 5.6.1) in order to succeed in school, which aligns with Ball's (2010) statement: "Most minority language parents are eager to see their children succeed in school and the broader society" (p. 17). Ball (2010) also says that the desire to speak and be accepted by the predominant cultural group of the organisation (ECC) is natural.

From the discussion to date, it can be discerned that there are both advantages and disadvantages for a child to be bilingual, and ultimately it is the IPs' decision that will influence their child's learning of languages and the associated world views that may be different from the conceptual learning that is inherent with a particular language. Although the EYLF advocates that a child learns both their home language and Standard Australian English, it does not provide any guidance on the decision-making processes that ECEs and CALD parents exercise supposedly in the best interests of the child that influences the child's learning, which can be problematic as revealed by this research study. Consequently, the related factors that are used to assess children from such varied backgrounds should also be different. However, since language and conceptual learning are interrelated, the issue for most IPs in this study was that they did not want to lose their native language(s) and the associated cultural traditions and thinking, and the complexities of arriving at this decision are discussed in the next subtopic.

### **7.5.2 Losing language and culture. Is it a sign for intervention in Indian children's learning?**

Brown (1994, as cited in Jiang 2000) describes language and culture as follows:

A language is a part of the culture and a culture is part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. (p. 165)

Discontinuing to use language can often result in the essence of the culture associated with that language disappearing. Jiang (2000) conducted a study with Chinese and American participants and gave them English words and phrases, each of which elicited different connotations for the two cohorts. For example, the compound noun "get-together" meant gathering, dining out together, or a having a meal together for the Americans; whereas for the Chinese participants, the same phrase meant "family". English words are the same for both cultures but their meaning is often culturally dependent.

Similarly, in this study, IP Aditi (see Section 6.4.3) misinterpreted the play-based method of learning and attempted to teach the English alphabet to her daughter through play. Aditi's idea of teaching was to tell her daughter how to write the alphabet rather than facilitate her learning through a mixture of playful interactions, and the outcome was that Aditi's daughter did not respond to her mother's teaching. Although English was spoken in Aditi's home, teaching was still practiced in the Indian way of giving instructions. If IPs spoke English at home, it might

help their children to learn to speak English; however, the related conceptual learning would not be culturally the same as the dominant orthodoxy in the ECC.

For IP Gauri, ensuring that the two cultures associated with English and Punjabi remained distinctly different meant she continued to speak Punjabi at home, which was a “major tool by which adults induct children into a particular view of the world” (Siraj- Blatchford & Clarke, 2000, p. 23). Consequently, the Punjabi language and the associated culture was preserved in Gauri’s home life. English, for Gauri and her family, was a language skill that would benefit her daughter’s future schooling and employment prospects. Gauri’s situation was typical of the scenarios described by Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams (2013). They quote Kluger’s (2013) article in *Time* magazine and say that “bilingual children will know multiple languages, which is important for travel, employment, speaking with members of one’s extended family, maintaining a connection to family culture and history, and making friends from different backgrounds” (p. 3). While IC can switch from one language and culture to another, it is important for ECEs to note that this ability to navigate between their home languages and the English language that is used in the ECCs they attend gives IC opportunities for developing cognitive skills (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). The extent to which ECEs apply this knowledge will determine how well they interact with IC during their teaching in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as stated by Kim (2003):

Vygotsky’s (1978) theoretical framework argues for appropriate and meaningful interaction, both culturally and linguistically, and through this type of meaningful interaction, the child may develop a sound and suitable cognitive structure that is continuously revised by new experiences and feedback. (p. 4)

Vygotsky’s theory emphasises the learning processes that take place when a child is developing the ability to reach the outcome set for by themselves or by adults. He calls the space between what the child knows and what the child does not know as the ZPD – a space in which the child is scaffolded by an adult or a peer to reach that outcome. Both peers, adult facilitators and the child need ways of communicating through language or other means for this to happen. “Supported learning” and “sustained learning” forms of interaction “identify the level of verbal support an educator gives, which matches the child’s understanding of the activity at hand” (Nolan & Raban, 2015, p. 31). The superficial interaction between the ECEs and the IC was apparent when the ECEs who participated in this study said they did not know what activities the IC were involved in in their respective ECCs. When the ECEs approached the IC, the latter generally shied away, hiding their work or discontinuing the activity. What ECEs fail to

understand is that a child's cultural language acquisition enhances a higher order of thinking to fulfil the needs of the cultural maintenance and being a member of that culture. If the language they speak in their homes is not encouraged at the centres, then the child might stop using it and cognitive development is likely to be affected.

One ECE claimed that IC were influenced by the child-rearing practices of their parents and therefore would generally prefer the quieter activities of reading, drawing and writing, where they were not necessarily interacting with the other children. Data from this study confirms that many IPs taught reading and writing to their children at home. The lack of communication between IC and ECEs could be one of the reasons that the ECEs are often unaware of the Indian children's learning activities in the ECCs. Communication can be difficult when the home language of the IC and ECEs is not the same. In these situations, using the socio-cultural method of assessment to determine the level of learning and development of IC in ECCs can become problematic. The lack of research in relation to the skill level of ECEs to assess the abilities of IC is possibly the reason why the practice of intervention is used for IC.

However, conversely, in the case of ECE Jenny, intervention seemed to be the only way of understanding how IC were learning. After the intervention officer from the kindergarten council had been engaged to investigate the situation with the Indian boy that Jenny alluded to, staff began to realise that the child had had no opportunities to be independent and they ceased to treat the boy's behaviour as problematic. Once this realisation had occurred, the staff modified their program to include ways of boosting this child's confidence levels. The lack of English in some IC seems to create barriers for ECEs to assess these children's level of independence and agency through the lens of the play-based pedagogy that is practised in ECCs. Understanding that the bilingualism of many IC is beneficial for their learning changes the perception of these children for ECEs.

### **7.5.3 Losing home language skills in preference to speaking English and its effect on IC and their social relations with other family members.**

IP James felt that learning English and his son's immersion into the English learning environment had disadvantaged his family in India. James's mother was always complaining that she and her husband were not able to bond with their grandson because the child could not speak Tamil and they did not speak English. The child's mother was a Tamil teacher in India but was unable to impart this skill to her son due to her full-time job.

IPs Miteleswari, Viji and Aditi (see Section 6.6.1) believed that acquiring English had alienated their children from learning traditional songs and being able to converse with the elderly relatives in their families. The respect shown to elders was an element intrinsic to their home languages, whereas in speaking English, their children learnt to call their teachers by their first names, which is considered extremely disrespectful in India. IP Rachel (see Section 6.6.4) recounted how giving direction to her children in an Indian way had made her question her tradition, which realised was oppressive to children growing up in the Australian culture of free speech and advocacy for child agency. IPs in the situations described in this section are feeling the loss of values, traditions, beliefs and family wisdom, and a breakdown in relationships with the older members of their families (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). It is in these circumstances that IPs need reassurance and time with the ECEs to relay their thinking and seek advice.

IP Prabhjyoth (see Section 6.6.4) took advice from her friends in relation to teaching her home language to her children. Her first child spoke only English, like his father who came to Australia at a very young age, and her husband was completely immersed in the Australian way of life despite his Indian heritage. Prabhjyoth believed that with her second child she would only speak her native language in the home. She wanted to preserve her Indian languages in order to retain her cultural links for the benefit of her children, which Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) say boosts the self-esteem of the child and mother.

#### **7.5.4 Summary.**

There are advantages and disadvantages for IPs to be bilingual or multilingual. Learning to understand the factors that will assist their children to assimilate into the cultures at their respective ECCs while simultaneously practising their cultural language and traditions are likely to stress the IP. How effective the ECEs are in their support of the IPs who are dealing with these circumstances depends on their own understanding and research of the influence a second language has in an Indian child's life.

### **7.6 Learning from the Discussion – the Third Space**

The notion of a “third space” is relevant when looking for solutions to navigate between the two contrasting worlds of ECEs and IPs that will create a balance to benefit Indian children's learning. The third space, is a concept developed by Gupta (2015), where she suggests that teaching is “understood within the locus of intersecting and evolving values and beliefs that profoundly influence daily life inside and outside the (Indian) classroom” (Gupta, 2013a, p. 177).

It is a place of conciliation between IPs' suggestions, demands and needs and ECEs' teaching philosophies.

The third space involves creating negotiating spaces for Indian teachers between traditional classroom curriculums and the introduction of play in recent national educational policies in India. The same scenario can be applied to the situation in Australia, as revealed by this study, where teachers in this country are implementing the national policies relating to play pedagogy as well as attempting to accommodate IPs' aspirations for their children to receive academic instruction in ECCs. The third space is a plausible solution given the current multicultural context in many early childhood settings.

Consequently, seeking programs that include “intersecting and evolving values and beliefs” (Gupta, 2013a, p. 177) of the two cultures is a better option than using a deficit model that uses the dominant play pedagogies to assess CALD learning. Alternatively, a democratic citizenship view, which is a consensus of multiple views, that Vandenbroeck, Roets, and Snoeck, (2009) proposed in the earlier sections of this chapter could be adopted. Mitchell et al. (2015) also recommend to “recognise the complexity and plurality of values that exist” (p. 19) between the cultural educational systems. This recognition calls for a “third space”, which symbolises good practice as a “result of a multiplicity of antinomy perspectives: both ‘true’ and mutually exclusive” (Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Snoeck, 2009, p. 208), as explained in the earlier parts of this section. While the third space principle is contrary to the attitude of ECEs, which constrains socially equitable practice with CALD families and children (Guo, 2015), it also fulfils everyday early childhood parental demands to equip their children with more academic skills for a market-driven economy.

In practice, this means effective communication and collaboration between IPs and ECEs in relation to other aspects of community involvement as well. Good practice in the third space also means creating possibilities for IPs to have effective conversations that motivate them to be involved in their children's learning. While one cannot deny the importance of play pedagogy, Rogers (2010) comments on:

how such insights are to be translated into pedagogical practices across diverse social and cultural contexts has presented the international early childhood field with some of its most enduring challenges. (p. 5)

Within the cultural context of the third space, alternative pedagogies for IC are sought and are explained in the recommendations section of this thesis. This not only benefits the IC but also



every other child in the classroom where multiple literacies are used in the many areas of thinking and problem-solving.

IPs' aspirations are not necessarily the focus of ECEs due to their lack of training or familiarity with engaging IC in learning; they expect the IC to learn in accordance with the EYLF's program principles. The EYLF, however, is much broader in its inclusion of other cultures than many ECEs realise as revealed in this study. The curriculum and programs are implicit and are embedded in the socio-political educational agenda of Australia, unlike in India. However, there is a lack of awareness on the part of ECEs regarding this knowledge gap and the expectation that IPs will quickly assimilate into a new system is an oversight that needs to be addressed. The effects of this knowledge gap are manifest in the non-engagement of IPs and their children in the activities and the curriculum of their respective ECCs.

While the lack of proficiency in English is often presented as a barrier to effective CALD parent and teacher partnerships, the findings and discussion presented in this thesis indicate that there appears to be disagreement as to who should teach English to the IC. Is it the ECEs' responsibility even though they do not believe in instructive teaching, or the responsibility of IPs who come from neo-liberal backgrounds, have an educative role to their children, and also expect the ECCs to teach English their children. Despite the inclusiveness of cultures in ECC programs, in terms of cultural food and festival celebrations and IPs attempting to work with the play-based teaching programs and help their children assimilate, the learning habits of IC are strongly influenced by the entrenched cultural habits of their parents. The obvious results of the findings are that most IPs are not fluent in English and are unfamiliar with play-based teaching. Consequently, the discussion contained in this thesis suggest that for there to be more effective partnerships between IPs and ECEs that will produce better learning outcomes for IC, a stronger commitment is required in terms of making cultural connections and communicating with each other.

While making cultural connections is a commendable pursuit, the likelihood of it occurring is outweighed by the deep-rooted cultural habits of IPs and ECEs, which are currently inhibiting the implementation of the necessary changes. When a product's design (cultural competence policy) is not effective in producing the intended outcome (making connections with cultures and teaching them effectively), often the design can be modified after a review of the product's purpose and functionality. I believe that the functionality of the product can be effective when situated in the third space that Gupta (2015) speaks of, but this space, in turn, needs to be based on a working principle or theory from which the third space can be embedded and designed to

work. A revised objective of encouraging ECEs and IPs to improve their approaches to teaching and learning, which will benefit IC and other CALD children, should be pursued. It is timely that a different lens is applied to the method by which learning and cultural connections are undertaken in order for the wellbeing of ECEs, IPs, IC and other CALD children to be optimised.

In the conclusion chapter based on the discussion and the new design concepts in this chapter, I rework the MUM conceptual framework to be a practical model that will provide guiding principles for ECEs and IPs to make those vital cultural connections in early childhood settings that will benefit the learning outcomes for Indian children.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion: New Thinking, New Wings, New Beginning

#### 8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I established that the third space was a means of bridging the gap between the cultural differences of ECEs and IPs; the next appropriate step was to introduce a practical MUM framework into the ECC environment. How the tools of the MUM framework – the four Cs of communication, collaboration, community and comparison (of differences) – could be applied to build the necessary cultural relations remained to be determined. The practical application of this model was important to me as I believed its implementation would improve the relationships/partnerships between ECEs and IPs. A solution was important and I reflected deeply on my experience as a curious researcher and a person who could still see the sad face of the Indian child in childcare many years ago before I embarked on my research journey. I discovered four research studies – two from NZ and two from Australia – that were similar in their objectives to my research study in highlighting the cultural differences between ECEs and CALD/IPs. These were the studies undertaken by Guo (2017); Chan (2011); Patel and Agbenyega (2013); and Patel & Agbenyega, (2014).

As a recommendation to her research, Guo (2017) suggests that there be “a change towards supporting children and their parents” (p. 19); however, how this support is provided is not detailed in the journal article. Chan (2011) recommends that immigrant/CALD families be given extra supports by critical multicultural educators that allow the families to narrate their cultural stories and create social networks for themselves. These solutions require the investment of time from both ECEs and CALD/IPs, which they are currently reluctant to do as my study suggests. Patel and Agbenyega (2014) propose that “together, parents and teachers should create a platform for each other where they can be heard and where they can speak without any judgments or apprehensions” (p. 10). However, how such a platform is different to the one that already is available (and not functioning as per my study) through policies is not clear. In the other study by Patel and Agbenyega (2013), they advise that “exploration of their (IPs’) perceptions of transition can help in developing purposeful partnerships” (p. 53); again, how is the exploration of their perceptions going to take place when it is likely that no time will be reserved by either ECEs or IPs for such interaction? Nor is there a possibility of expressing these perceptions due to diverse languages of IPs. There are possible solutions suggested in these studies, but the outcomes of my research suggest that a more comprehensive change is required

to encourage productive partnerships between ECEs and IPs that will benefit the education of IC/CALD children.

So I read more widely, seeking a framework that would provide a solution (which bordered on overthinking at times), but it was necessary that I disrupt my superficial comfort zone of “this is how it is” and think laterally of solutions that would improve the current state of relations between ECEs and IPs in a multicultural classroom environment. I was hoping to discover innovative solutions rather than continue the ongoing polarisation (assimilation) or fragmentation (with no interactions among the cultures) practices, which are likely to only highlight what is not working in the education of IC/CALD children. My study demonstrated that the partnerships were difficult to implement or were beset with cultural misconceptions, with food habits a particularly fraught issue that was affecting the nourishment of IC. The home languages that provided a rich heritage were often sacrificed in striving to achieve the skills deemed important to enhance the future job prospects of Indian and other CALD children. Learning and its implications for the future employment opportunities of CALD and Indian children was the most important study finding, indicating that the teaching methods practised in Australia did not align with the expectations of the IPs.

When I was seeking solutions to answer the most basic of educational questions on diversity, I read some articles by Todd (2011), which was titled *Educating beyond Cultural Diversity*, and Lavery (2009), who quoted excerpts from Biesta’s (2006) publication, *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future*. These articles relating to education and diversity not only influenced my thinking but also changed my views on education. They helped me to see beyond the seemingly intractable issues between ECEs and IPs to the point where I began to view my findings and the associated discussion through a different prism that facilitated the development of a solution and an outcome for this research. Moreover, as a lecturer in academia, there has been a move away from multiculturalism and diversity towards pluralistic thinking. When, as part of this research, I changed my thinking as an educator and embraced pluralism rather than just diversity, the result was a transformation that had not occurred previously in my 30 years of teaching. Although it is late in the thesis to introduce an already existing concept (but a new one to me), I nevertheless have adapted the theories from Todd (2011) and Lavery (2009), with her take on Biesta (2006), and applied some aspects of pluralism to develop a possible solution to my research outcome.

While it can be argued that this thinking was developed many years earlier, I willingly take the risk of using this deep-rooted theory because, as I said before, I was looking to disrupt the

comfort zone of the past 20 years as an early childhood educator/practitioner and the past 10 years as a lecturer in early childhood education in the higher education sector. I hope it will lead to ECEs advocating for CALD children in multicultural classrooms through their changed thinking on education. The change is necessary because of the changing socio-political nature of the early childhood sector. I analyse and present my thinking on pluralism and its application to my research under the following headings to complete the conclusion chapter.

- New thinking, plurality and its place in my research study
- Creating a workable framework for early childhood educators – the MUM framework
- Recommendations
- Limitations of my study

## **8.2 New Thinking, Plurality and Its Place in My Research Study**

In a market-driven economy, education has in many ways become the commodity where the family is the consumer and the educator is the provider of learning. When the economy is linked to education, a child might learn a set of skills and attributes that contribute to the economy but “it minimizes the personal risks involved in education” (Laverty, 2009, p. 571) and the willingness to let change happen to you as a person. Children enjoy taking risks in their developmental phase (like walking and other skills where a risk is involved), but as they grow, this joy is removed from their education when risk-taking is not explained to them. My question is how the ECEs provide these risks and challenges to the Indian and CALD children that are culturally appropriate, when there are no interactions between the ECEs and the IPs and they are not likely to step outside their comfort zones.

So far, the educators have been accountable to the management of this market-driven education and consider themselves to be responsible for educating the CALD/IP parents to subscribe to the ECCs’ play-based education policies. Although the participants in this study are from council-operated kindergartens and do not pay fees, I regard them as economy driven because in the larger political picture, the child is viewed as an investment and not necessarily as a participating citizen. However, when ECEs begin to think of pluralism and its role in our society and education in a democratic society, the view of the deficit model/ polarisation/fragmentation for CALD and Indian children will change. Given that pluralism is a broad concept, I briefly define and present only those aspects of pluralism relevant to the conclusion chapter.

Pluralism is “a state of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain an autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture or special interest, within the confines of a common civilisation” (Miriam-Webster Dictionary, 2019). Pluralism is also a theory where “there are more than one or more than two kinds of ultimate reality” (Miriam-Webster Dictionary, 2019). My focus, however, is the concept that pluralism is only possible when all cultures can be themselves and yet interactions between the diverse cultures take place to form a pluralistic community, institution or any space in which the diverse cultures/communities come together. The creation of a pluralistic community in the third space was the objective of my use of the MUM framework. This is quite different to a diverse society where two or more cultures exist adjacent to each other but there is no interaction between them. In my research study there are two cultures: ECEs, with their particular practice of education, and IPs, who have different educational aspirations for their children; these two cohorts are necessarily brought together in the ECC environment but the study revealed there could often be little effective interaction between them, even though the common ground for interactions was the child in their care.

I view such confluence as being inclusive of diversity but not pluralistic in terms of a community of learners. The community of an ECC could only be considered pluralistic if each of the cultures maintains its cultural thinking and being but also learns to interact and engage with each other. Without any engagement or relationship between the different groups, there is no pluralism. Unlike diversity, pluralism is not a “given” but an achievement.

After my many years of teaching, the “Becoming” in the EYLF title now resonates with me in relation to this new form of thinking that encompasses the concept of pluralism, which is defined as:

Becoming reflects...[the] process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years as young children learn and grow. It emphasises learning to participate fully and actively in society. (DET [Clth], 2018, p. 7)

For children to participate fully in society, a pluralistic community of learners needs to be created in EC settings where the interaction between CALD parents and ECEs encourages CALD children to “Become” who they are intrinsically; they are not coerced into conforming to a particular ideal so as they “fit in”. Implementing the four Cs of the MUM framework, which are based on the concept of pluralism, can achieve the desired “engagement” in a pluralistic ECC community.

### **8.2.1 How is pluralism achieved in ECC? The shift in thinking for educators.**

When educators interact with Indian parents, the communication can be influenced by their socio-cultural background, qualifications and worldview of each participant. This point was established previously in the literature review.

For a paradigm shift to occur, ECEs need to operate in another space that involves Todd's (2011) theories; instead of treating the person as a "what", (for example, Indian, Korean or CALD), the different mindset of the ECE should allow for the "who" of the person to emerge. The presence (who) of a person emerges when another person provides them with a safe space to do so. Todd (2011) advocates Arendt's view:

the "who-ness" of which Arendt, (1959) writes, is a uniqueness that emerges in a particular situation and context. Specifically, it is a uniqueness that appears in the in-between space with other human beings; it reveals itself in speech and action.  
(p. 105)

In applying this concept to the early childhood environment, ECEs need to understand that the "who" of IPs is manifested through their requests for reading and writing to be taught in ECCs. In accepting the who of IPs, the ECEs should consider the request as simply a request, and not view it as a specific Indian request. In terms of pluralistic thinking, an IP is a subject who requires a skill from the ECE that the IP does not have. This "who" is communicating a need because IPs know that the skill of writing can be acquired by their children at the ECC, as well as other skills and knowledge in general. In this interaction, the IP is communicating to the ECE that at this stage of their son's or daughter's life, they want their children to learn a certain skill that can be taught by the educator.

The educator's particular response to such a request (of learning to write) is shaped by how they consider themselves as a teacher. Is the educator considering the situation from a pluralistic point of view or with a sense of accountability to the prevailing program/pedagogy? Does the educator, as a person is responding to the demand in a pluralistic community, impart the skill to the Indian child? The educator's response is influenced by their political stance on the subject of reading and writing in early childhood. If the ECE says yes, they will be facilitating the development of the child's writing skills, which in turn supports the IP's cultural thinking (preserve their cultural learning habits in early childhood) and has adopted a pluralistic view on the subject of reading and writing. Even though the ECE is acquiescing to the IP's cultural request, they are not abrogating their own beliefs on developmental pedagogy – the child is still

learning to develop fine motor skills when writing. Generally, IPs are not familiar with fine motor skills but definitely understand the benefit of writing skills. If the ECE says no to reading and writing, then they are not demonstrating a pluralistic mindset and are likely to antagonise the Indian community by promoting a play pedagogy that IPs do not support.

If the ECE does not respond positively to the IP's writing request, using the excuse that they have no time, then the ECE is likely to alienate the various ethnic cultures represented in the ECC. To be considered pluralistic in their thinking would require a paradigm shift in the ECE's way of teaching, which would not contravene the objectives of the EYLF because intentional teaching is one of its principles. Unless the IPs convey to the ECEs their needs, the ECEs are not likely to recognise the "who" in IPs or themselves. This coming together in a partnership between ECEs and IPs where a pluralistic approach has been adopted produces a clearer vision and dialogue than those previous partnerships underpinned only by diversity. Partnerships underpinned on knowing a culture are time consuming and always put in the hard basket by ECEs. Adopting a pluralistic paradigm replaces the previous thinking of "what IPs should be" to "who" the IPs are, and enables ECEs to understand and reflect on their roles as educators when interacting with IPs. Such a third space of dialogue (embedded in pluralism) and understanding provides an opportunity to reflect and become "who" one truly is (Todd, 2011). This concept of pluralism that has been outlined is used as a platform to create a practicable MUM framework.

### **8.3 Creating a Practicable Framework for Early Childhood Educators – the MUM Framework**

I have utilised the concept of pluralism and modified some aspects of the four tools – communication, community, comparison and contribution (see Chapter 3) – from a pluralistic point of view. Reasons for the modifications are explained with examples, together with some practicable situations and some future recommendations for ECCs.

#### ***Pluralism and the MUM framework***

When ECEs change their present thinking to embrace the concept of pluralism, the implementation of a redesigned MUM framework is likely to facilitate a more favourable outcome for CALD parents and their children. I begin with an explanation of the MUM framework as conceived after its modification. To peruse the original framework, refer Chapter 3.



### **8.3.1 Culture: The fabric of cultures.**

The multicultural learning environment provides an enriching scenario for interacting with the each other in safe spaces where communication, collaboration, contribution and comparison of cultural thinking can occur between ECEs and CALD parents, underpinned by the ECCs' programs, that benefit CALD children. An example is ECEs' realisation that productive multicultural learning environments involve much more than celebrating cultural and food festivals. Adopting a pluralistic approach, ECEs would encourage ongoing dialogue with Indian and other CALD parents, which would result in their children's participation in the ECCs' programs.

As part of a pluralistic paradigm operating in the ECCs, ECEs could review the cultures in their centre and contemplate questions like how could CALD and Indian parents participate in activities of the ECCs apart from contributing their cultural talents of dance, food, cooking and singing? What are IPs gaining from the learning environment in the ECCs, and what are they contributing as learners to this rich multicultural environment? How are ECEs incorporating the knowledge IPs have imparted to their children at home into the ECCs' activities? The shift to pluralistic thinking allows cultures to be what they are – polyvocal and poly-potential (Wortham, 2001) – meaning ECCs can adapt in various ways to the essential nature and thinking of the families to whom they provide their services.

### **8.3.2 Connections: The process of making connections.**

The connecting process is a space that is creative and brings ECEs and IPs together in order that they may discover the “who” within themselves. However, ECEs will require professional development before they are able to connect with Indian and CALD communities. Does the process of making connections with IPs assist ECEs to reflect upon their own processes of teaching and learning? Are the ECEs able to convey messages of safety and wellbeing to IPs during their interactions?

While IPs Lana and Roveena (see Section 6.3.2) felt safe to express their concerns regarding their children who needed intervention, can other IPs also feel secure to express their daily child-rearing concerns regarding their children with ECEs? Are ECEs receptive to Indian and CALD parents the same way they are with the parents of families from their own cultures? If ECEs were able to adopt a pluralistic approach to their interactions with CALD and Indian parents, they could relinquish the wielding of power and be a collaborative force with the ethnic minority parents.

### **8.3.3 Community (tool): Creating learning communities in the ECC.**

For ECCs to work effectively as learning communities, their leaders and advocates for children need to collaborate. Involving ECEs and various other stakeholders from the early childhood and primary school sectors in understanding the goals of leadership required to educate CALD and Indian children is a large part of this community building. Community building by ECEs also includes advocating and sharing their knowledge of pluralism and its benefits for CALD and Indian communities to other ECCs, universities and research communities. Working with universities to revise personal practice and commence research partnerships with them is invaluable for creating communities of learning.

An example from my study is my experience with ECE Jenny. Enrolling participants for my study was proving to be difficult until I met Jenny, who was an advocate for cultures and had the experience of working in Indonesian schools for several years. Jenny recommended that I send my research request to her network of early childhood educators. She introduced me to her network of ECEs. This introduction enabled me to commence the data collection phase of my study because a member of the network wanted to understand Indian culture in her ECC. ECE Sandra also believed in community building (see Section 5.6.4). These examples indicate that practising pluralism is a way of connecting to and interacting with the various cultures that require advocacy and the assistance of the community.

The questions for ECEs to reflect on in multicultural early childhood settings are: What does our network look like? Does the network include Indian community connections? Are we familiar with CALD research? How can the EC learning space work in partnership with universities in order to undertake valuable research that will benefit CALD communities?

### **8.3.4 Comparison (tool): Seeking common ground between the cultures of ECEs and IPs in order for there to be effective interaction and the building of connections.**

The commonality between ECEs and IPs is the wellbeing, belonging and becoming of the Indian children attending the ECCs. By comparing the different cultures and understanding the benefit of pluralism in education, strategies for teaching and learning are compared to the strengths and weaknesses of specific learning methods.

Methods of teaching in EC settings should take into account the aspirations of IPs and the knowledge of ECEs in educating children. Sometimes it becomes necessary to think laterally for the benefit of children during their years of becoming. Becoming is concerned with preserving

cultural values and being safe to interact with other children and adults who the children encounter.

The need for a shift in thinking to pluralism is important when the scenario described by ECE Heather (see Section 5.4.2) is reflected upon, where she mentions that IC do not often participate in table-top activities and prefer not to be noticed by the ECEs. This is a concern because IC displaying such shyness towards ECEs is indicative of their lack of confidence to present their activities to the ECEs. When confronted by these actions from IC, which is inhibiting their learning, ECEs need to apply a different form of interaction if their current practice is not conducive to Indian children's learning.

A consistent reflective practice on how MUM operates, in conjunction with the questions posed for IPs and ECEs, is likely to assist ECEs to engender confidence in IPs and make those vital connections with Indian and CALD parents. For partnerships to be effective between ECEs and IPs, it is necessary that the ECEs adopt a pluralistic approach to their interactions with IPs. The MUM framework also works contextually, as the reflective questions in the MUM framework may need to be modified for different situations; however, the concept of pluralism that is central to this framework is applicable to all situations. As mentioned previously, pluralism is achieved and not a given.

### **8.3.5 Communication (tool): What is the nature of ECEs' communication with Indian and other CALD parents?**

When ECEs and Indian and other CALD parents practise pluralism in their respective ECCs, the opportunities for openly connecting and communicating with each other are unlimited. In communicating with IPs on a daily basis, the conversations can take various pathways of online expression. For example, meeting spots such as Zoom meetings, and story packs (online space for skills their children have acquired) where IPs are provided with spaces where dialogues are encouraged from narratives, cultural stories and expectations of parents for their children. Such IT communications transcend barriers of languages and time. Every IP will find it convenient to be informed of their child's activities at their ECC through these online resources and every ECE is likely to find these online communication methods synchronistic, simple and less time consuming.

Communicating using a pluralistic approach hopes that educators working with the MUM framework in the future incorporate this practice into their teaching so the lack of time as evidenced in Section 5.3.1 is managed. Assisting IPs to adjust to the ECC culture and understand

that its culture is dynamic and changes constantly is one of the characteristics of this example as follows.

ECE Jacqui (see Section 5.5.1) assists an Indian child, who has no self-help skills, to eat his food at the meal table in the ECC. Jacqui sits by his side and consistently coaxes him to eat small amounts of food. The child obliges. She understands that the child needs to be consistently reminded to eat. This is in contrast to other ECEs in similar situations, who believe that feeding the child will hinder the child's development of independent eating skills.

ECEs need to reflect on the means by which they and IPs connect with each other. Whether it is online or face to face, is assessment of the child being communicated? Is the wellbeing of the child being communicated? How well are the IPs communicating with the ECEs and vice versa? Is there regular professional development for ECEs on the subject of communicating with Indian and other CALD families? Has the ECC empowered any of its ethnic staff to take decisions that will assist Indian and other CALD families?

### **8.3.6 Collaboration (tool): Working collectively.**

Pluralism encourages interaction between members of ECC communities, which facilitates participation in the ECCs' programs and their various activities. How does pluralism manifest itself in the programs? While Indian children will naturally play with each other (see Section 5.6.4 – ECE Amy), how are the ECEs encouraging IC to interact with other children in their ECCs? Are the IPs socialising with the other children's parents? Are ECEs facilitating their conversations and interactions with Indian and other CALD parents in the third space? How is the Indian community being encouraged to interact with other cultural communities involved in the early childhood education system?

An example of ethnic staff working in the early childhood sector is IP Prabhjyoth (see Section 6.4.2) whose services will be useful to the Indian community when she interacts with them and relays her points of view on the differences of early childhood education between India and Australia. Her services will not only benefit the Indian community but also the ECEs and other diverse cultures in her son's ECC. Once other CALD and Australian families understand the differences, communication between the various cultures and ECEs will be much easier and more productive in creating communities of learning.

A summary of the modified four Cs in the redesigned MUM framework that have been discussed in this chapter is diagrammatically represented in Figure 8.1.

## Viewing MUM with a pluralistic lens

**Cultures :** Is the third space for cultures encouraging interactions between IPs and ECEs?

- How can CALD and Indian parents participate in the ECC apart from their cultural talents of dance, food, cooking and singing?
- What are IPs gaining from the learning environment in the ECCs, and what are they contributing as learners to this rich multicultural environment?
- How are ECEs incorporating the knowledge IPs have imparted to their children at home into the ECCs' activities? Are ECEs using funds of knowledge they bring with them?

**Connections:** The connecting process is a space that is creative and brings ECEs and IPs together in order that they may discover the “who” within themselves.

- ECEs will require professional development before they are able to connect with Indian and CALD communities.
- Does the process of making connections with IPs assist ECEs to reflect upon their own processes of teaching and learning?
- Are the ECEs able to convey messages of safety and wellbeing to IPs during their interactions?

## REDESIGNED CONTENT in MUM



**Community:** The questions ECEs reflect on are:

- What does our network look like?
- Does the network include Indian community connections?
- Are we familiar with CALD research?
- How can the EC learning space work in partnership with universities in order to undertake valuable research that will benefit CALD communities?

**Comparison:** Strategies for teaching and learning are compared to the strengths and weaknesses of specific learning methods.

- Are the methods of teaching understood by IPs?
- How are ECEs encouraging “Becoming”, which is concerned with preserving cultural values and being safe to interact with other children and adults who the children encounter.
- A consistent reflection on practice with MUM and how it works in conjunction with pluralistic thinking is required.

**Communication:** When ECEs and Indian and other CALD parents practise pluralism in their respective ECCs, the opportunities for openly connecting and communicating with each other are unlimited. Reflective questions:

- Whether it is online or face to face, is the wellbeing of the child being communicated?
- How well are the IPs communicating with the ECEs and vice versa?
- Is there regular professional development for ECEs on the subject of communicating with Indian and other CALD families? Has the ECC empowered any of its ethnic staff to take decisions that will assist Indian and other CALD families?

**Collaboration:** Pluralism encourages interaction between members of ECC communities, which facilitates participation in the ECCs' programs and their various activities. How does pluralism manifest itself in the programs?

- Are the IPs socialising with the other children's parents?
- Are ECEs facilitating their conversations and interactions with Indian and other CALD parents in the third space? How is the Indian community being encouraged to interact with other cultural communities involved in the early childhood education system?

Figure 8.1. Redesigned content of the MUM framework.

## **8.4 A Final Thought**

It has been 12 years since I met that sad Indian child in the childcare centre and was frustrated that I did not have the solution to resolve his situation. However, the solutions I have suggested in this thesis might take another 12 to become standard practice in multicultural environment in the early childhood sector. Nevertheless, the journey this research has provided me with has been one of personal growth and experiential revelation. It has included ideas, concepts, theories, pedagogies, boundaries, cultures, policies, nationalism, educational funding, political decisions, parental aspirations, and educators' understandings that are transitional, time bound and elusive – a process of the mind but not above a child's hunger and developmental needs of being, belonging and becoming a productive, well-adjusted citizen in Australia

## **8.5 Recommendations**

- 1) Terminology for use in multicultural classrooms needs to be defined for the Australian context to differentiate between inter-culturalism, multiculturalism, diversity and differentiated learning, as other nations understand these terms differently and therefore the Australian early childhood sector needs these terms explained at the policy level for the edification of teachers. Implementing the modified MUM framework during professional development workshops, using it in University courses of Diversity as an example or even piloting it in an early childhood centre will start an understanding of how to work with CALD children and families.
- 2) Working with the MUM framework for Indian children might have to be contextualised for children from other cultures—for example creating environments where Chinese parents feel comfortable communicating with early childhood educators. Teachers can reflect upon how to make these changes to the MUM when using it in various cultures.
- 3) To help gain knowledge from various cultures that might be used to trigger off conversation with families, some extra information can be gathered during enrolments. This extra information in the enrolment forms includes the child's interests at home, together with their food habits, toileting abilities (equally important) and daily routines. Armed with this knowledge and the concepts of pluralism, ECEs can facilitate a child's transition to this new environment and employ the MUM framework to interact with Indian and other CALD parents.

- 4) Early childhood educators (ECEs) assist IPs in understanding the importance of the early years in ways it is understood by CALD families in third spaces embedded in pluralism.
- 5) ECEs to undertake professional development that incorporates the principles of pluralism to fully understand the use of MUM framework and assist them in their interactions with the different cultures present in their centres.
- 6) Empower ethnic educators to know who they are and empower them to work alongside their communities. This involves the other teachers working in conjunction with CALD communities with the help of the ethnic teacher. Their input is vital to creating those bridges for better communication, collaboration and community building. Community building is an important part for the well-being of the children.
- 7) Refining the MUM framework after it is put to test in the field of practice in early childhood centres. The refining process to involve all stakeholders involved in the process of using the MUM framework.

## **8.6 Limitations of the Study**

### **8.6.1 Small sample size was limited to participants from six kindergartens.**

Limited participation by Indian families in the research for reasons of non-availability during research data collection and the amount of management of data within a given research time, this sample was small, however the rich and complex data derived enough to analyse and draw conclusions for this study. However, in future by testing MUM framework in a larger sample it is likely to help standardise the model.

### **8.6.2 A limited understanding of the concepts of pluralism in relation MUM framework.**

Since the study suggests that MUM framework be embedded in the principles of pluralism, a further exploration into this theoretical framework is deemed limited in its application until further testing of the MUM framework with a large sample of Indian diaspora across Victoria state in Australia.

The limitation of the study also lies in understanding how a method used in Western thinking of pluralism could elicit the many thoughts and cultural viewpoints of Indian and other CALD parent participants.

Case study gives an understanding of the profiles of participants; however, a nagging question is whether case study is the only method of uncovering the genuine 'who' of the participants as related to Todd's (2015) advocacy of Arendt's view of a person.

### **8.6.3 The limitations of the MUM framework.**

Can the implementation of the MUM framework change policy direction in relation to the incorporation of multiculturalism in early childhood education? The MUM framework is broad and not specific to what the educators need to look for when using the tools and what they need to look for can be different to the policy request, there are many educational and ethical boundaries that needed to be considered by policy before MUM can be implemented. Lack funding and further research is an important aspect of multiculturalism in early childhood education to be considered if the MUM framework needs to be implemented rigorously.



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# Appendices

## Appendix A – Monash University Human Ethics Certificate of Approval



**MONASH**University

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)  
Research Office

### Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

**Project Number:** CF14/862 - 2014000351

**Project Title:** Engaging Indian Children in Early Childhood Centres in Melbourne

**Chief Investigator:** Dr Denise Chapman

**Approved:** **From:** 12 June 2014

**To:** 12 June 2019

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**Terms of approval - Failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**

1The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation.

2Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.

3It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.

4You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

5The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.

6**Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Require the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.

7**Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.

8**Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.

9**Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

10**Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.

11**Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

Professor Nip Thomson  
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Mrs Vijaya Tatineni



## Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Strategy and Review Group

2 Treasury Place  
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002  
Telephone: +61 3 9637 2000  
DX 210083  
GPO Box 4367  
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

2014\_002366

Mrs Vijaya Tatineni  
U2, 14 Shakespeare Avenue  
MT HELEN 3350

Dear Mrs Tatineni

Thank you for your application of 28 April 2014 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled *Engaging Indian children in early childhood centres in Melbourne*.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals and/or centre directors. This is to be supported by the DEECD approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.
3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for its consideration before you proceed.
4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.
5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in any publications arising from the research.
6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.
7. If DEECD has commissioned you to undertake this research, the responsible Branch/Division will need to approve any material you provide for publication on the Department's Research Register.

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at [michaels.youla.y@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:michaels.youla.y@edumail.vic.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



**Joyce Cleary**  
Director  
Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch

18/06/2014

enc





Permission Letter

**Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne**

**Date:**

Vijaya Tatineni  
St.ID 25025155

Dear Vijaya Tatineni,

Thank you for your request to recruit participants from Community Kinder Plus for the above-named research.

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research project (Project no: CF14/862 – 2014000351, Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne) and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Spencer".

Jane Spencer - CEO

## **Appendix D – Explanatory Statement for Early Childhood Educators (Teachers)**

### **Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne**

**Project Number:** CF14/862 - 2014000351

#### **Explanatory Statement for Teachers**

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

The study is for PhD degree and is undertaken by Vijaya Tatineni, PhD student at Monash University and a Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the Federation University of Australia, Ballarat. The study is supervised by Dr Sivaness Phillipson and Dr Nish Belford.

#### **What does the research involve?**

The aim of the project is to identify ways to support the learning and development of minority children and their families in the early childhood sector and provide research information to teachers for understanding the learning teaching of children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds(CALD).

The purpose of this research is to collect data from 12 Indian child parent and teachers and explore Indian children's engagement within the learning environments in an early childhood centre.

#### **Why were you chosen for this research?**

Your centre caters to Indian children who will be the main participants along with teachers trained in early childhood in Australia. We used the website to look for Centres in Indian populated suburbs of Melbourne and chose to do our research with you.

#### **Participant recruitment: Teachers**

I will be inviting three teachers from four different early childhood settings to participate in semi- structured interviews. Participants will talk about how they support learning and

development in Indian immigrant children at their centre. (A sample of the interview questions and details is provided to management).

### **Indian Parents/Child:**

Indian parent and child participants in your Centres will be recruited using the teacher's expert advice. Interested participants will give written consent before participating. Parents will be interviewed in their homes about their aspirations for their children's learning in the early childhood setting and asked to take photographs of their children learning at home and discuss these at their home interview.

### **Research procedures:**

After initial consent from the management, teachers will be invited to an interview to talk about their understanding of the teaching and learning of Indian children and their educational goals for these children. The discussion will also look at some of the issues teachers face while teaching Indian children and working in partnership with Indian parents. Interviews will be no longer than half to one hour for teachers in a time that suits those most.

The data collected will be used to create case studies of Indian parents/children and early childhood teachers. This data will provide my research with information on how Indian children engage with the learning environment at home and in the centre. The aim of research data collection and analysis is to understand the learning environment at home, and the knowledge Indian children bring from their homes to the centre and the teacher's interactions with them. My research aim is to understand the space where these intercultural communications are happening in the centre. With this information, teachers can shape these spaces to create activities that engage Indian children.

The identities of all participants will be coded and kept confidential in any reporting of the data collected. There are no legal obligations for the researcher to report these findings. A summary of the project results will be made available to teachers and parents on request.

### **Teacher participant involvement:**

The interviews will take between 30 to 60 minutes at a time. Sometimes teachers take the time to answer questions and hence we like to say an hour to allow for flexibility and authentic data collection. The interview is conducted at a time and place that is convenient for participant teachers.

**Participant's rights:**

You are under no obligation to accept the invitation to participate in the interview. You can withdraw from the project at any time from the data collection time up until the data analysis.

- ☐ You can decline to answer any question in the interview.
- ☐ You can ask questions at any time before, during or after the data collection.
- ☐ The researcher will keep your name confidential.
- ☐ You have a right to access findings of the research after completion.

Results of research are used in research reports and articles from the same. However, all participants and Centres will remain unidentifiable.

**Complaints:**

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Room 111, Building 3e

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052      Email: [muhrec@monash.edu](mailto:muhrec@monash.edu)

Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Many thanks for your cooperation

Vijaya.L.Tatineni

**Researcher contacts:**

Vijaya.L.Tatineni

**Email:** [Vijaya.tatineni@monash.edu](mailto:Vijaya.tatineni@monash.edu)

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## **Appendix E – Explanatory Statement for Parents**

### **Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne**

**Project Number:** CF14/862 - 2014000351

#### **Explanatory Statement for Parents**

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed at the end of this letter.

The study is for PhD degree and is undertaken by Vijaya Tatineni, PhD student at Monash University and a Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the Federation University of Australia, Ballarat. The study is supervised by Dr Sivaness Phillipson and Dr Nish Belford.

#### **What does the research involve?**

The aim of the project is to identify ways to support the learning and development of minority children and their families in the early childhood sector and provide research information to teachers for understanding the learning teaching of children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD).

The purpose of this research is to collect data from 12 Indian child parent and teachers and explore Indian children's engagement within the learning environments in an early childhood centre.

#### **Why were you chosen for this research?**

Your centre caters to Indian children who will be the main participants along with teachers trained in early childhood in Australia. We used the website to look for Centres in Indian populated suburbs of Melbourne and chose to do our research with you.

#### **Participant recruitment: Teachers:**

I will be inviting teachers from four different early childhood settings to participate in semi-structured interviews. Participants will talk about how they support learning and development in Indian immigrant children at their centre. (A sample of the interview questions and details is provided to management).

**Indian Parents/Child:**

Indian parent and child participants in your Centres will be recruited using the teacher's expert advice. Interested participants will give written consent before participating. Parents will be interviewed in their homes about their aspirations for their children's learning in the early childhood setting and asked to take photographs of their children learning at home and discuss these at their home interview.

**As a parent participant here is what you need to do:**

After you sign a consent form to participate in the study, you will be requested to make time at home/kindergarten for the interview. This interview can take place at a time that suits you. A translator will be arranged, if necessary.

Before the interview takes place, you will be asked to take at least five photographs of your child playing and learning at home in activities that are typical of the things they enjoy doing. These photographs are discussed at the time of the interview along with related questions.

**Confidentiality:**

Translators and transcribes along with other participants in this research will sign confidentiality forms and all data collected will be under lock and key with the strictest adherence to privacy and confidentiality matters. Data is destroyed after a storage period of five years. Data will be reviewed only by my supervisors, me and specified participants. If the parent or child is not comfortable with the data collected, it will not be analysed. A summary of the project findings will be made available to teachers and parents on request. The identities of all participants will be coded and kept confidential in any reporting of the data collected.

**Research procedures:**

As the initial consent from the management is signed, teachers/parents will now be invited to an interview to talk about their understanding of the teaching and learning of Indian children and their educational goals for these children. The data collected will be used to create case studies of Indian parents/children and early childhood teachers. This data will provide my research with information on how Indian children engage with the learning environment at home and in the centre. The aim of research data collection and analysis is to understand the learning environment at home, and the knowledge Indian children bring from their homes to the centre and the teacher's interactions with them. My research aim is to understand the space where these

intercultural communications are happening in the centre. With this information, teachers can shape these spaces to create activities that engage Indian children.

The identities of all participants will be coded and kept confidential in any reporting of the data collected. There are no legal obligations for the researcher to report these findings. A summary of the project results will be made available to teachers and parents on request.

### **Participant's rights:**

You are under no obligation to accept the invitation to participate in the interview. You can withdraw from the project at any time from the data collection time up until the data analysis.

You can withdraw yourself and/or the child from the project at any time from the data collection up until the analysis.

You can decline to answer any question in the interview.

You can choose to decline audio or video recording any time prior or during the answering of questions.

You can ask questions at any time before, during or after the data is collected.

Researcher will keep your name confidential

You have a right to access findings of the research after it is completed.

Results of research are used in research reports and articles from the same. However, all participants and Centres will remain unidentifiable.

### **Complaints:**

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

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Research Office



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**Many thanks for your cooperation**

Vijaya.L.Tatineni

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## **Appendix F – Consent Form: Early Childhood Educators (Teachers)**

### **Permission Letter from Teachers**

#### **Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne**

**Project Number:** CF14/862 - 2014000351

**Date:**

Vijaya Tatineni

St.ID 25025155

Dear Vijaya Tatineni,

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research project (Project no: Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne) and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

I agree to the following:

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. To be interviewed at my centre                    | Yes | No |
| 2. For that interview to be recorded and transcribed | Yes | No |
| 3. Observations of Indian children                   | Yes | No |

Yours sincerely,

(signature of person granting permission)

(Name of person granting permission)

Date

## Appendix G – Consent Form: Parents

### Permission Letter from Parents

#### Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne

**Project Number:** CF14/862 - 2014000351

**Date:**

Vijaya Tatineni

St.ID 25025155

Dear Vijaya Tatineni,

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research project (Project no: Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne) and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

I agree to the following:

- |   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. To be interviewed in my home   | Yes | No |
| 2. For that interview to be recorded and transcribed  | Yes | No |
| 3. To take a series of digital photographs of my child playing and learning at home in activities that are typical of the things they enjoy doing | Yes | No |

Yours sincerely,

(signature of person granting permission)

(Name of person granting permission)

Date)

**Appendix H – Research Approval from Wyndham City Council's  
Coordinator of Kindergarten Services**

**PERMISSION LETTER**

**Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne**

**Project Number: CF14/862 - 2014000351**

Date 15.08.16

Dear Vijaya Tatineni

Thank you for your request to recruit participants from Wyndham Vale City Kindergartens for the above-named research.

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research project

**(Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne CF14/862 – 2014000351)**

and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

**Yours sincerely**



Melinda Chapman

Coordinator Kindergarten Services

Wyndham City



PERMISSION LETTER  
Centre Management

**Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne**  
Project Number: CF14/862 - 2014000351

Date 15.08.16

Dear Vijaya Tatineni

Thank you for your request to recruit participants from Wyndham ~~State~~ City Kindergartens for the above-named research.

I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research project  
(Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne CF14/862 – 2014000351)  
and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

**Yours sincerely,**

(Signature of person granting permission)

(Name of person granting permission)

(Position of person granting permission)

*Jenny Douglas*  
Jenny Douglas  
Team Leader

## **Appendix J – Pilot Study: Interview Questions for Early Childhood Educators (Teachers)**

### **Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne**

**Project Number:** CF14/862 – 2014000351

**Teacher: Semi-structured Interview Questionnaire:**

#### **Pilot Study**

#### **PART A**

**This section is about your interactions with Indian parents.**

1. When you meet Indian parents during the course of the day in teaching, in the centre, what do you talk about?
2. Do Indian parents partake in your planning for learning and teaching with their children?
3. Describe a time when an Indian child was transitioning from home to your centre. How was the parent involved in the process? What was your involvement in making this transition happen?
4. How do you involve Indian parents in the programme and curriculum planning? Give examples of Indian parental involvement with the centre.
5. Name some activities that the centre has for the Indian parent to be involved in their child's learning?
6. How do Indian parents contribute to the centre- for eg voluntary parent help, fund raising, being a committee member? And any other activities not mentioned here.
7. Has there been a time when Indian parents wanted to contribute to the centres teaching and learning and the centre was able to facilitate their request. Give us an example.explain.
8. Tell us a time when the parent was able to talk about their family traditions or child rearing practices with you, tell us what they wanted to talk about this and how this was responded to by the centre?

#### **PART B.**

##### **General Section:**

1. What is the centre's learning teaching goals for children from other cultures?

2. Can you name any experiences you would plan for an Indian child's learning and teaching?
3. Is there anything that you would like to talk to us regarding Indian child's learning in the classroom? (Examples: fine motor skills, language, social and emotional skills)



## **Appendix K – Pilot Study: Interview Questions for Parents**

### **Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne**

#### **Parent Semi-Structured Interview Schedule**

##### **Pilot Study**

###### **Part A.**

###### **Allotted:**

###### **This part of the interview is about you:**

1. Name of Parent.....
2. Spouse's name.....
3. Participant child's name.....
4. Names of your other children (optional).....
5. When did you arrive in Australia/Melbourne.....
6. What is your visa status? (Optional).....
7. What was the reason for you to migrate to Australia?
8. For how long have you been staying in this city? Have you lived in another place in Australia before this? If so, why did you move to Melbourne?
9. What Language/s do you speak?
10. Does your spouse speak the same language?
11. If both of you speak different languages what language do your child/children speak?
12. What is/are your highest educational qualification?
13. Are you currently employed and if so, what does your employment involve?
14. What is your spouse's educational qualifications and employment status?

###### **This is about your extended family:**

1. Do your parents or your spouse's parents live with you or are they in a different country? Please explain and give details.
2. Do you have any other relatives in this country?
3. Do you have extended family support? Please tell us, how often do your overseas relatives come to visit you? How long do they stay with your family when they visit?
4. How often do you visit them?
5. How often do you go to India? For what length of time do you stay in India?
6. Please explain, if you have members of extended family living with you.

###### **This part is about your child**

1. How old is your child and where was your child born?
2. How many siblings does your child have and where were they born?
3. How old are your child's siblings?

4. How do you raise your child- please explain, feeding sleeping and other activities you do with your child?
5. Is your child's upbringing somewhat similar to how you were raised or if it is different? Please explain in terms of how different it is.
6. Do you have different set of disciplinary rules for your children when visiting India and Australian social life?
7. How do you discipline your child?
8. What strategies do you have that encourage good behavior at home, early childhood Centre, and in social gatherings?
9. What is the role of your spouse in sharing childcare responsibilities at home and in the Centre?

**Please take five photographs of your child learning at home and during the interview answer the following questions:**

**This part is about the learning you have recorded at home prior to the interview:**

1. Please tell us about the learning happening in this photograph/s
2. Why have you chosen to take this particular photograph of the child learning- was it because the child asked you to or because the child does this activity quite often or for other reasons? Please explain what other reason.
3. Does the child do this activity in the early childhood center as well?
4. Would you like your child to do similar activities at the center as well? If not why not?

**This part is about your educational aspirations for your child:**

1. What are your educational aspirations for your child?
2. Where would you like to see your child in 20 years' time in terms of education and employment, placed in society?
3. Would you like to see your children live in Australia, India or any other country?
4. How would you like the Centre to contribute to your child's educational aspirations?

**This part is about your involvement with the early childhood Centre that your child attends:**

1. What was the reason for choosing this early childhood Centre?
2. Do you drop and pick up the child from the early childhood Centre? If not who helps with this?
3. Have you been involved in Centre activities? How often and how have been involved? Eg: voluntary help, fund raising, being a committee member? Taking part in social events/ any other.
4. What is your spouse's involvement in the Centre
5. How often do you meet the teachers?
6. What are your conversations with the teacher like –please explain and give details

7. What resources would you like to see in the Centre that will help with your child's education?
8. Because you are from a different culture, do you think the teachers and management of the Centre hear your voice?
9. What were your expectations of the Centre when you first enrolled your child?
10. What in your opinion, can the Centre provide better care for your child? /Are your child's educational and care needs being met?
11. Is there something more you want to tell us that we have not covered regarding your child's education?

## **Appendix L – Main Study: Interview Questions for Early Childhood Educators (Teachers)**

### **Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne**

**Project Number:** CF14/862 – 2014000351  
**Teacher: Semi-structured Interview Questionnaire:**

#### **Main study**

#### **Teacher Interview Questions**

##### **PART A**

**This section is about your interactions with Indian parent.**

1. When you meet Indian parents during the course of the day in teaching, in the centre, what do you talk about?
2. Please explain in detail how Indian parents partake in your planning for learning and teaching with their children. What is your opinion on how they take part in or not in the program for their children?
3. Explain what parental activities the centre provides for parents and specifically for Indian parents. What is the most popular activity parents participate in? What particular activities do Indian parents like to participate in?
4. How do Indian parents contribute to the centre- for e.g. voluntary parent help, fund raising, being a committee member? In addition, any other activities not mentioned here. Give details.
5. Has there been a time when Indian parents wanted to contribute to the centres teaching and learning and the centre was unable to or able to meet their request. Give us an example.
6. Describe a time when an Indian child was transitioning from home to your centre. How was the parent involved in the process? What was your involvement in making this transition happen?

7. Tell us a time when the parent was able to talk about their family traditions or child rearing practices with you, tell us what and why they wanted to talk about this and what was response by the centre?

## **PART B**

### **General Policy Section**

1. Tell us about the policies you use for teaching children from diverse cultures.
2. Mention a specific policy you follow that encourages interactions with parents from different cultures.
3. What do you think of the new VELYDF policy that is being updated?
4. What are your thoughts on the particular statement, in the update for VELYDF that teachers need to pay more attention to the teaching and learning for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and CALD children partnerships?
5. How often do you go to professional development and what are the names of PD sessions you attend? Do you implement these PD in your teaching and learning?
6. What professional development courses would you like to see happen, so you can interact better with children from India and other cultures?
7. Can you name any three experiences you would plan for an Indian child's learning and teaching?
8. Is there anything that you would like to talk to us regarding Indian child's learning in the classroom?

## **Appendix M – Main Study: Interview Questions for Parents**

### **Engaging Indian children in early childhood environments in Melbourne**

#### **Parent Semi-Structured Interview Schedule**

##### **Main Study**

###### **Part A. Code Allotted:**

###### **This part of the interview is about you:**

1. Name of Parent.....
2. Spouse's name.....
3. Participant child's name.....
4. Names of your other children (optional).....
5. When did you arrive in Australia/Melbourne.....
6. What is your visa status? (Optional).....
7. What was the reason for you to migrate to Australia?
8. For how long have you been staying in this city? Have you lived in another place in Australia before this? If so, why did you move to Melbourne?
9. What Language/s do you speak?
10. Does your spouse speak the same language?
11. If both of you speak different languages what language do your child/children speak?
12. What is/are your highest educational qualification?
13. Are you currently employed and if so, what does your employment involve?
14. What is your spouse's educational qualifications and employment status?

###### **This is about your extended family:**

1. Do your parents or your spouse's parents live with you or are they in a different country? Please explain and give details.
2. Do you have any other relatives in this country?
3. Do you have extended family support?
4. How often do you go to India? For what length of time do you stay in India?
5. Please explain if you have members of extended family living with you?

###### **This part is about your child**

1. How old is your child and where was your child born?
2. How many siblings does your child have, what ages and where were they born?
3. How do you raise your child- please explain, feeding sleeping and other activities you do with your child?

4. Is your child's upbringing somewhat similar to how you were raised or if it is different? Please explain in terms of how different it is?
5. Do you have different set of disciplinary rules for your children at home and Australian social life?
6. What is the role of your spouse in sharing childcare responsibilities at home and in the Centre?

**This part is about your educational aspirations for your child:**

1. What are your educational aspirations for your child?
2. How would you like the Centre to contribute to your child's educational aspirations?

**This part is about your involvement with the early childhood Centre that your child attends:**

1. Do you drop and pick up the child from the early childhood Centre? If not who helps with this?
2. Have you been involved in Centre activities? How often and how have been involved? Eg: voluntary help, fund raising, being a committee member? Taking part in social events/ any other?
3. What is your spouse's involvement in the Centre?
4. How often do you meet the teachers?
5. What are your conversations with the teacher like –please explain and give details
6. What resources would you like to see in the Centre that will help with your child's education?
7. Because you are from a different culture, do you think the teachers and management of the Centre hear your voice?
8. What were your expectations of the Centre when you first enrolled your child?
9. What in your opinion, can the Centre provide better care for your child? Are your child's educational and care needs being met?
10. Is there something more you want to tell us that we have not covered regarding your child's education?