

## Positioning Children Citizens: Exploring Discourses in Early Childhood Curricula in China and Aotearoa New Zealand

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*Positioning young children as citizens, now rather than as citizens in waiting, is an emerging discourse in early childhood education internationally. Differing discourses related to young children and early childhood reveal various ideas of children as citizens, and what their citizenship status, practice and education can be. This paper analyses the national early childhood education (ECE) curricula of China and Aotearoa New Zealand for the purpose of understanding how children are constructed as citizens within such policy discourses. Discourse analysis is employed in this study as a methodological approach for understanding the subjectivities of young children and exploring the meanings of young children's citizenship in both countries. Based on Foucault's theory of governmentality, this paper ultimately argues that young children's citizenship in contemporary ECE curricula in China and New Zealand is a largely neoliberal construction. However, emerging positionings shape differing possibilities for citizenship education for young children in each of these countries.*

**Keywords:** young children, citizenship, discourses, governmentality, neoliberalism

### Introduction

In this changing society, citizenship has become a global issue in relation to strengthening democracy, human rights, and sustainable futures (Kennedy, 2018; Torres, 2018). However, young children have been marginalised in citizenship studies for quite a long period as they have been traditionally viewed as “citizens in the making” (Marshall, 1950, p. 25), which overlooks the ways that young children already operate as citizens (Phillips & Moroney, 2017; A. Smith, 2010). Current citizenship studies call for a more caring and encompassing notion of citizenship that recognises the flexibility of identities (e.g., Kennedy, 2018; Osler & Starkey, 2018). It has been argued that acknowledging young children as citizens empowers and enables them to build, experience and exercise their citizenship in the early years, transforming the traditional adult-centred frameworks and producing greater intergenerational dynamics (Devine & Cockburn, 2018; Phillips, Ritchie, & Adair, 2018). In light of this, citizenship studies about children, especially young children, should be taken into account more seriously, holding the potential to enrich traditional citizenship theories and practices (Xu, 2019).

In this article, I agree with A. Smith (2010) that young children's citizenship is “an entitlement to recognition, respect, and participation” (p. 103). Correspondingly, young children's status and membership as citizens should be respected and treated fairly and equitably (Bath & Karlsson, 2016; Phillips & Moroney, 2017). In addition, young children can

be considered active citizens and contributors when citizenship is conceived as practice (Adair, Phillips, Ritchie, & Sachdeva, 2017; Larkins, 2014). As Larkins (2014) stated, “if citizenship is conceived of as a practice, children can be firmly seen as citizens in the sense that they are social actors, negotiating and contributing to relationships of social interdependence” (p. 7). Such a shifting conception moves beyond the traditional notion of citizenship as a status, and is “more fruitful than a focus on legal status alone” (Lister, 2007, p. 695). Instead of simply focusing on young children’s status as citizens, young children are encouraged to actively participate and solve the problems encountered in their daily lives. Whilst this suggests a possible way to conceptualise young children’s citizenship appropriately, their status as citizens may still be ignored or misunderstood by adults, and their opportunities for participation are arguably still inadequate (Bath & Karlsson, 2016; Devine & Cockburn, 2018; Larkins, 2014).

To explore the above unsettled relationship between young children and citizenship, I consider how citizenship is understood in early childhood settings. I do so through a cross-national analysis of discourses of young children’s citizenship as this provides opportunities and different angles for reconceptualising young children’s citizenship. For example, research about young children’s citizenship in the United States has revealed that the individual is emphasised over the collective (Knight & Watson, 2014; Payne, et al., 2019), while other studies have shown that collective forms of civic engagement are more prevalent in the Indigenous Māori of New Zealand, Latinx in the US, and indigenous Australian contexts (Adair et al., 2017; Phillips et al., 2018). In addition, children’s persistence during conflict situations in Japanese kindergartens has also inspired American teachers to think about more possibilities for young children’s civic actions (Payne et al., 2019; Tobin, Hayashi, & Zhang, 2011).

The focus of the early years’ curriculum is a useful starting point for studying young children’s citizenship in different contexts, as ECE curricula exert a key influence on the establishment of norms and boundaries, and children’s capacities to enact their citizenship (Bath & Karlsson, 2016; Farini, 2019; Phillips et al., 2018). What’s more, these curricula carry “historical and sociopolitical influences, values, curricula beliefs, and aspirations” (Wood & Hedges, 2016, p. 389), and serve as an “avenue” (Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011, p. 900) where the ideology of citizenship can be discerned.

The analysis in this article extends previous discussion about young children’s citizenship in western democracies (e.g., Bath & Karlsson, 2016), and adds to earlier studies of citizenship curricula for young children. China and New Zealand are selected as both nations have unitary political systems but have dramatically different territories, histories and populations. In terms of comparison, current early years curricula in both nations incorporate developmental psychology and rights-based disciplines (e.g., Feng, 2017; Ritchie, Skerrett, & Rau, 2014), and are not immune to neoliberal discourses (e.g., Alcock & Haggerty, 2013; Gupta, 2018). A comparative study can explore the diversity across those different contexts and settings, and examine how the mainstream discourses engage or do not engage in young children’s citizenship.

For these reasons, this article examines current early childhood curriculum documents in China and New Zealand, and seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) How are young children positioned as citizens in early childhood curricula in China and New Zealand?
- (2) What are the limitations and opportunities for young children’s citizenship participation as reflected in both nations’ curricula?

In this article, I firstly explain the theoretical positioning and methodology of the chosen method of discourse analysis. Then I explore discourses pertaining to citizenship and young children in both nations. After that, young children's membership and participation as citizens are discussed and compared through identifying illustrative curricula excerpts in early years curricula. In the end, I summarise the hegemonic ideas of young children's citizenship in both nations and consider possibilities that arise from this analysis.

### **Governmentality and children citizens**

In Foucauldian discourse, governmentality describes a series of techniques of power applied to govern the conduct of both individuals and populations, which operates on all scales, from the relations between individuals to the relations among different institutions and communities. The practices of power produce rules that organise and guide behaviour (Foucault, 1982). All institutions, including early childhood settings, function by creating a set of "officially sanctioned truths" (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 34) which are used to direct human behaviour.

It can be found that various, even contradictory, discourses represent different forms of governance. For example, a prevalent neoliberal discourse that highlights quality, accountability and human capital formation, proposes young children as "investment for the future" (Sims & Waniganayake, 2015, p. 336). In this regard, early years' curricula and early childhood services are required to place emphasis on core academic skills (e.g., numeracy and literacy) which are viewed as fundamental for children's future employment (Savage, 2017; Sims & Waniganayake, 2015). Additionally, developmental psychology continues to be a privileged source of knowledge about young children. This developmentalist discourse monitors young children's learning and development in line with educational indicators or goals (Mac Naughton, 2005; K. Smith, 2012). Another example is discourse of children's rights. Recent studies have revealed that recognising young children as competent citizens and rights holders creates new forms of governance that respect their rights to be heard, to participate, and to have a voice in the decision-making process (Cohrssen & Page, 2016; Holzscheiter, Josefsson, & Sandin, 2019).

Early childhood curricula can be seen as a symbolic articulation of discourses which contain various forms of knowledge and power relations (Pechtelidis & Stamou, 2017; Phillips et al., 2018). These discourses and embedded power relations shape young children's civic behaviours and practices, and control how young children's citizenship is understood and enacted through curriculum.

### **Early years curricula in China and Aotearoa New Zealand**

In both nations, early childhood education covers care and education for children in early years (in China the age range is 0 to 6 and in New Zealand 0 to 5). Kindergartens are the major ECE institutions in both nations, serving children between 3 and 6 years in China and 2 and 5 in New Zealand. To begin, I devote this section to the evolution of early years curricula in both nations.

### ***China: Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years***

In the last century, ECE in China has seen three waves of reform, bringing dramatic change to ideologies and curricula (Li & Chen, 2017; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). The first ECE curriculum was released in 1932 and it was influenced by a number of western educationalists such as Dewey from the US, Froebel from Germany, and Montessori from Italy (Li & Chen, 2017). This ECE curriculum revealed a child-centred and play-centred model. After the founding of the People's Republic of China (henceforth PRC) in 1949, ECE reform was based on educational theories and pedagogy from the Soviet Union which emphasised teacher-centred pedagogy and subject-based curriculum (e.g., P. R. China Ministry of Education, 1952). Another dramatic change took place in the early 1980s after China launched a "reform and opening-up" policy (also known as "open-door" policy). This period saw a refocusing on western theories such as Piaget's developmental theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and Montessori Education as well as curriculum models such as the Italian Reggio Emilia approach and the United States' High/Scope curriculum (Guo, Kuramochi, & Huang, 2017; Qi & Melhuish, 2017). In addition, during the third wave of ECE reform, the Chinese government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (henceforth UNCRC, United Nations, 1989), signalling the willingness and readiness of China to adopt a "universally agreed" norm for children's rights and development (Liu & Feng, 2005; Naftali, 2009). The curricula released in this time period, such as the latest curriculum which will be discussed in the next paragraph, are influenced by all those complicated and even contradictory discourses.

The latest iteration of China's early childhood curriculum, *Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years* (P. R. China Ministry of Education, 2012, henceforth *PRC Guidelines*) was developed by domestic scholars in cooperation with experts from UNICEF. This curriculum is underpinned by the developmental sciences and discourse of children's rights, which requires educators to respect children as active learners, while emphasising the importance of environment, play, and the role of adults. Young children's development and learning are highly valued via four principles (paying attention to young children's holistic development, respecting children's individuality, understanding young children's learning processes, and understanding young children's approaches to learning). Meanwhile, the *PRC Guidelines* describe children's learning and development in five domains: health; language and early literacy; social development; sciences; and arts. Several scholars (Li & Chen, 2017; Li & Feng, 2013) have argued that this curriculum indicates that ECE in China is shifting to a more child-centred and play-oriented curriculum. However, these principles and domains also reflect a contradictory discourse of school readiness which aims to "build a solid foundation for young children's subsequent school learning and their lifelong development" (P. R. China Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 1), revealing the national aspiration of ECE, as mentioned by Tobin et al. (2011), for national renewal and producing qualified and competitive citizens.

### ***Aotearoa New Zealand: Te Whāriki***

The New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017) has also influenced and reflected the discursive context of the time. First of all, young children's rights, especially those of indigenous Māori children, lay the foundation of *Te Whāriki*. As pointed out by Duhn (2012), *Te Whāriki* is a profoundly innovative, significant and influential document as it was the first Ministry of Education document to be published in both Māori and English. It is "a site of Tiriti-based becomings" (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 122)

which ruptures the hegemony of a monocultural discourse of education and opens up new possibilities by shifting the power relations between Māori and Pākehā. In addition, this curriculum exhibits strong traces of sociocultural philosophy and developmentalist discourses (Ritchie et al., 2014).

The new version of *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017; henceforth *2017 Te Whāriki*) maintains the intent and content of the 1996 version. The four overarching principles (Empowerment/Whakamana, Holistic development/Kotahitanga, Family and community/Whānau tangata, and Relationships/Ngā hononga) and five strands (Wellbeing/Mana atua, Belonging/Mana whenua, Contribution/Mana tangata, Communication/Mana reo, and Exploration/Mana aotūroa) are interwoven within *Te Whāriki*. Each curriculum strand contains several learning goals, and learning outcomes are illustrated for different age groups. It should be noticed that the *2017 Te Whāriki* strengthens the bicultural framing (Kaye, 2017; McLachlan, 2017), and inherits the vision to support young children as contributing and culturally competent citizens (Betts, Mackey, Rarere-Briggs, & Summers, 2018; Phillips et al., 2018). According to the Treaty of Waitangi | Tiriti o Waitangi, ECE will provide young children with equitable opportunities to learn. In response to the changing demographic landscape in New Zealand with immigrants from different cultural backgrounds, ECE is expected to be inclusive of all the immigrants, and their identities, languages and cultures (Chan & Ritchie, 2019). As stated in *2017 Te Whāriki*:

New Zealand is increasingly multicultural. Te Tiriti | the Treaty is seen to be inclusive of all immigrants to New Zealand, whose welcome comes in the context of this partnership. Those working in early childhood education respond to the changing demographic landscape by valuing and supporting the different cultures represented in their settings. (New Zealand Ministry of Education, p. 3)

### **Approach to curricula analysis**

My approach to discourse analysis is based on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, in which meanings are fluid and the social field is a web of processes where meaning is created (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Discourse, according to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), is a temporary closure rather than a permanent closure. In this regard, discourse can never be fixed, and multiple discourses are constantly struggling to fix meaning and to dominate the field of discursivity. A key objective of research in line with this perspective is, therefore, to analyse how discourses are constituted and changed. In the context of this curricula analysis, I locate the dominant discourses of citizenship and young children in both nations, then examine whether young children's membership as citizenship and their civic participation are accepted or not. After that, I read both nations' ECE curricula (*PRC Guidelines* and *2017 Te Whāriki*) to get a sense of how young children's citizenship is constructed in these texts, and to explore their membership as citizens and possibilities for their participation.

In Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, key signifiers organise discourses, identity and social space. Locating key signifiers helps me to investigate the chains of meaning, thus identifying how different discourses are organised and the meanings they articulate. In relation to young children's citizenship, signifiers such as children, membership and participation are hard to define in their own right, unless these terms are related to other signs such as cooperating, negotiating and making decisions (see examples in Phillips et al.,

2018). All these signifiers form a discursive network, implying hegemonic discourses of young children's citizenship in both nations.

To identify key signifiers, I firstly located references that appeared connected to young children's citizenship, membership and participation. Then a list of key signifiers was made and revised based on word frequency analysis of curricula documents in both nations as well as literature about children's citizenship (e.g., Lister, 2007; Phillips et al., 2018). Based on the above steps, key signifiers for citizenship membership include: belong/belonging; relationships; connect; interdependence; collective consciousness; identity; and nation/nationality. Key signifiers for citizenship participation mainly include: responsibility; contribution; participation; decision making; respect; habits; and cooperation. Once these signifiers of young children's citizenship membership and participation had been located in curricula, I conducted close readings in order to investigate the ways that young children are viewed as citizens, and early childhood settings as social spaces for their citizenship participation in multiple discursive fields.

### **Discourses of citizenship in China and New Zealand**

Citizenship in China has been influenced by the discursive context of different time periods. In the early 20th century, citizenship was recognised due to the introduction of western ideas such as democracy and freedom. However, after the PRC was founded in 1949, citizenship, as a Western construct, was replaced by "people" with communist moral virtues rather than the Western civic and public values (Kennedy & Fairbrother, 2004; Woodman & Guo, 2017). After the central government of China launched "reform and opening-up" of policy in 1978, the notion of citizenship gradually revived with the introduction of a western political and economic system as well as domestic social and political reform. The rule of law, freedom, equality, fairness and justice became key aspects to establish socialist democracy (Tan, 2010). Nowadays, China aims to generate a modern citizenry by simultaneously learning from other countries and preserving national identity and traditional culture (Law, 2013; Woodman & Guo, 2017).

For New Zealand, the early idea of nation building was to create "the Britain of the South" (Druett, 1983, p. 88). As a nation that prides itself on progressiveness and egalitarianism, in 1893 New Zealand was the first nation to give women the right to vote. Since the 1970s, indigenous consciousness in New Zealand, grounded in Māori philosophy and cosmology, has been influenced by global civil rights activist movements. In addition, the progressive and egalitarian tradition in New Zealand has been challenged by discourses of neoliberal globalisation. Nowadays New Zealand has moved from being a British colony, albeit facing ongoing Māori activism focused on equal citizenship rights as promised in the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi | Tiriti o Waitangi (Phillips et al., 2018). Citizenship in New Zealand grapples with the impact of its cultural and ethnic diversity (Chan & Ritchie, 2019; Royal Society of New Zealand, 2013) and adopts a more global outlook (Mutch, 2002). All these aspects contribute to shaping the national identity in unique ways. Correspondingly, in this context, citizenship/raraunga does not simply refer to residents of a state who have legal rights and responsibilities, but the "informal, practical experiences of being, belonging, and participating" (Hayward, Bargh, Barrett, & Knight, 2018, p. 3).

## Discourses of children in China and New Zealand

For young children in both nations, there are elements of developmentalist discourse apparent in the curricular statements of both nations such as “children’s development is a continuous and evolving process with distinct characteristics at varied stages” (P. R. China Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 2) and “learning and development generally follows a predictable sequence” (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 13). Correspondingly, young children’s learning and development are divided into different stages (3-4, 4-5, 5-6 years old in China and infants, toddlers and young children in New Zealand). Statements about learning outcomes in curriculum domains or suggested teaching strategies also differ across the age ranges. For example, the *PRC Guidelines* has pointed out that benchmarks and indicators imply the general expectations regarding what young children ought to know and be able to do at different ages (P. R. China Ministry of Education, 2012). In *Te Whāriki*, young children’s capabilities and examples of teaching practices are also organised based on their age grouping.

A second influential discourse is that of rights. Following the adoption of UNCRC in 1989, young children’s rights became influential globally, including in both China and New Zealand. The Chinese government signed this convention in 1990 and ratified it in 1992. Since then, a new way of conceptualising young children has emerged due to the discourse of children’s rights (Jiang, 2019). They are no longer objects and appendages to their family and society, *but active subjects and independent persons* (Jiang, 2019; Liu & Feng, 2005). In New Zealand, *a rights-based perspective has been highlighted and young children are viewed as competent citizens within policy discourses. For example, it was pointed out in New Zealand’s Agenda for Children that “children have the right to be treated as respected citizens, to be valued for who they are, and to have their views considered in matters that affect them”* (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2002, p. 10). *Te Whāriki, as pointed out by A. Smith (2007), also respects children’s agency and emphasises their voices in curriculum and assessment.*

*Another influential discourse is that of neoliberalism which emphasises standardisation and accountability.* The concept of citizen is transferred to the “autonomous active citizens with rights, duties, obligations and expectations” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 252). Correspondingly, education and curriculum are more about building human capital and contributing to the economy (Moss, et al., 2016; Sims & Waniganayake, 2015). Neoliberal doctrines, such as consumer autonomy and individual enterprise, have also infiltrated early childhood education in both China and New Zealand (see examples in Gupta, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2014). The ECE curricula in both nations also follow a neoliberal framing that highlights school readiness and human capital formations. In *PRC Guidelines*, academic subjects such as literacy and mathematics have been listed as the curriculum domains. In *Te Whāriki*, the regime of learning goals, dispositions and outcomes also reveal an image of children *becoming* compliant and rational [citizens-in-the-future](#) (Alcock, 2013).

Other prominent features of discourses in the interdiscursive blend in each of these nations are mainly from Indigenous Māori of New Zealand, and Socialism and Confucianism in China, both of which exert strong influences on ECE. In China, according to socialist values strongly influenced by Marxism, young children are located in certain social environments and social relations from birth. A key goal of ECE is socialisation which means that young children should acquire commonly accepted values and acts, laying the foundation for them to become “qualified social members” (Li & Feng, 2013, p. 89). Besides, the Confucian

ideology of filial piety and etiquette have a very strong influence on how young children are viewed and educated. Several studies have shown that great importance has been attached to the values of being obedient to parents and teachers, and respecting older people (see Li & Chen, 2017; Naftali, 2009). In New Zealand, the indigenous Māori culture and values have also influenced how young children are viewed and educated. Based on Māori tradition, children are valued members and precious seeds of the Māori world (Reedy, 2013). According to the indigenous discourse of Māori, young children are competent, capable, and gifted, and are able to contribute to the early childhood setting, family and wider community (Phillips et al., 2018; Ritchie et al., 2014).

The above discourses of citizenship and children continue in circulation and together create a complex interdiscursive mix in each nation. The next section will further explore how these discourses influence the construction of children citizens and opportunities for them to participate through locating examples (see Table 1, key signifiers are indicated in bold) in early years' curricula in both nations.

### **Citizenship membership and participation reflected in early years' curricula**

In this section, membership and participation of child citizens are examined separately. It should be noticed that they are interrelated and some curricula excerpts in Table 1 can reflect both identity and participation.

#### ***Citizenship membership***

Membership is located at the heart of citizenship. As stated by Lister (2007), "children's claim to citizenship lies in their membership of the citizenship community" (p. 699). For young children, early childhood settings are important communities in which they can have much stronger and localised membership as citizens (Lister, 2007; Phillips et al., 2018).

In both nations, young children's membership as citizens is closely related to their collective identities and consciousness, which is constructed as belonging and connectedness to family, community and nation. In addition, young children's belonging is "a dynamic process" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199), reflecting different "emotional investments and desire for attachment" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). In the *PRC Guidelines*, attachment to collectivities (e.g., group, hometown) and identity as Chinese are emphasised, implying Confucianism discourse of the child as being loyal to the nation and respecting authority. The patterns of emotion and attachment in *Te Whāriki* are different in China. In Māori discourse, young children are the links to the past and the future (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017), and are positioned as active whānau participants (Phillips et al., 2018; Ritchie et al., 2014). Their belonging is not like that as represented in the discourses of China where it is attached to the national flag and anthem and their nationality as Chinese. For Māori, it is very much expressed in tribal discourse articulated via histories and songs and viewed as being intrinsic to their land, language, and culture.

Another difference with regard to children's citizenship is the ways in which their identities are constructed in curriculum. In *Te Whāriki* young children are viewed as culturally competent citizens, and the relationship between children and adults is thus interdependent and reciprocal. As stated in *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017), teachers are suggested to provide empowering environments in which "children have agency to create and act on their own ideas, develop knowledge and skills in areas that interest them and,



increasingly, to make decisions and judgements on matters that relate to them” (p. 18), while, in China, young children’s citizenship membership is still a paradox. On the one hand, it is advocated that young children are active learners and rights holders (Jiang, 2019). For example, young children are able to choose and engage in play based on their own interests. Teachers also respect and treat young children equally and encourage them to make decisions based on their own opinions (P. R. China Ministry of Education, 2012). On the other hand, the current curriculum still emphasises childhood as a preparation period for adulthood and young children are expected to become compliant citizens. Taking the domain of language as an example, it is stated that language for young children is a “tool for communication and thinking” (P. R. China Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 14) which is more relevant to their future learning and working rather than as representing and articulating their cultural identities and sense of belonging.

Table 1. *Curricula excerpts that reflect membership and participation in China and New Zealand*

<i>Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years (P. R. China)</i>	<i>Te Whāriki (Aotearoa NZ)</i>
<p>Membership</p> <p>‘Know the <b>relationships</b> between their family members and themselves, and experience they are part of their families’ (indicator for 3-4-year-old children, benchmark 3 in social development, 29)</p> <p>‘Know their <b>nationality</b>, and China is a nation with many ethnic groups, and various ethnic groups shall respect each other, unite, and keep friendly’ (indicator for 5-6-year-old children, benchmark 3 in social development, 29)</p> <p>‘Know some significant achievements of the <b>nation</b>, show love for the motherland, and feel proud of being a Chinese’ (indicator for 5-6-year-old children, benchmark 3 in social development, 29)</p> <p>‘Attract and encourage young children to <b>participate</b> in group activities to nurture their <b>collective consciousness</b>’ (pedagogical suggestions for social development, 30)</p> <p>‘Inspire young children’s emotions of loving for their hometowns and motherland by employing the methods appropriate to young children’ (pedagogical suggestions for social development, 30)</p>	<p>‘An ability to <b>connect</b> their learning in the ECE setting with experiences at home and in familiar cultural communities and a sense of themselves as global citizens’ (evidence of learning and development in belonging, 32)</p> <p>‘A feeling of <b>belonging</b> – and that they have a right to belong – in the ECE setting’ (evidence of learning and development in belonging, 32)</p> <p>‘The <b>interdependence</b> of children, whānau, and community is recognised and supported’ (belonging, 35)</p> <p>‘Children have a strong sense of themselves as a link between past, present and future’ (contribution, 36)</p> <p>‘Language and culture are inseparable. Kaiako (teachers) enhance the sense of <b>identity, belonging</b> and wellbeing of mokopuna by actively promoting te reo and tikanga Māori’ (example of practices in communication, 43)</p>
<p>Participation</p> <p>‘Help young children form good language <b>habits</b>. For example: remind young children of some situation-specific communication etiquettes, such as talking politely to elders, saying hello to guests, and expressing thanks to people for offering help’ (teaching strategies for language and literacy, 17)</p> <p>‘Be able to <b>participate</b> in peer play through means such as self-introduction and toy exchange’ (learning outcomes in social development, 23)</p> <p>‘Kindergartens shall provide young children with more opportunities that require concerted efforts, so as to enable them to experience the importance of <b>cooperation</b> and <b>responsibility sharing</b>’ (teaching strategies for social development, 24)</p> <p>‘Be willing to shoulder the <b>responsibilities</b> for some small tasks’ (learning outcomes in social development, 25)</p> <p>‘Have the courage to insist on one’s own opinions and provide justification in case of disagreement’ (learning outcomes in social development, 25)</p> <p>‘Show care and <b>respect</b> for others’ (benchmark in social development, 26)</p> <p>‘Guide young children to learn to treat individual differences in an equal, inclusive, and respectful manner’ (teaching strategies for social development, 27)</p>	<p>‘They (young children) are developing social skills that enable them to establish and maintain friendships and participate reciprocally in whanaungatanga <b>relationships</b>’ (young children’s growing interests and capabilities, 15)</p> <p>‘In an empowering environment, children have agency to create and act on their own ideas, develop knowledge and skills in areas that interest them and, increasingly, to <b>make decisions</b> and judgements on matters that relate to them’ (principle 1 empowerment, 18)</p> <p>‘Ability to play an active part in the running of the programme, take on different roles and take <b>responsibility</b> for their own actions’ (evidence of learning and development in belonging, 32)</p> <p>‘Children are encouraged to <b>contribute to decision making</b> about the programme’ (example of practices in belonging, 34)</p> <p>‘Working together for the common good to develop a spirit of sharing, togetherness and reciprocity, which is valued by Pasifika and many other cultures’ (strand 3 contribution, 36)</p> <p>‘Treating others fairly and including them in play’ (learning outcomes in contribution, 37)</p> <p>‘Confidence to stand up for themselves and others against biased ideas and discriminatory behaviour’ (learning outcomes in contribution, 37)</p>

### **Citizenship participation**

For young children, citizenship participation is relevant to the enactment of their rights and responsibilities, to the acquisition of civic competencies such as decision-making and collaboration (Lister, 2007; Sierra-Cedillo, Sánchez, Figueroa-Olea, Izazola-Ezquerro, & Rivera-González, 2019).

Young children's participation in China is largely confined to the kindergarten and classroom, and children are supposed to follow the instructions and arrangements of teachers. This is suggestive of both neoliberal compliance and the Confucianism discourse of filial piety and etiquette. As mentioned previously, citizenship membership of Chinese children is related to patriotic knowledge and their nationality as Chinese. Few statements in the *PRC Guidelines* suggest young children's participation in community or even national affairs. This implies a discourse of young children as innocent and vulnerable, and who are incompetent, compared with adults, to participate in public life. Moreover, education for young children is mainly a means of socialisation and to prepare themselves as qualified members of society and compliant citizens (Li & Feng, 2013). During this socialisation process, children are expected to learn civic competencies such as cooperation and problem-solving, and they should also learn civilised habits (e.g., speaking politely and being respectful to other people) which are rooted in Confucianism. Benchmarks and indicators in each curriculum domain reinforce both the discourses of neoliberalism and Confucianism, forming a much stronger hegemonic discourse of young children's citizenship and participation.

Citizenship participation in *Te Whāriki* takes an inclusive approach, reflecting the progressive origins and egalitarian ethos as well as the Māori activism and statements in the Treaty of Waitangi |Tiriti o Waitangi. ECE settings, parents, whānau and communities form a wider social field for young children's participation and young children are expected to be able to treat others fairly, care for their place, and participate in the decision-making process. Besides, a focus on justice, equality, bias and discrimination is also inspired by critical theories, promoting "equitable practices with children, parents and whānau" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 62). In addition, the partnership between Māori and Pākehā is emphasised and is based on the Treaty of Waitangi |Tiriti o Waitangi, and young children have equal opportunities for participation regardless of their age groups, abilities and ethnicity (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). The Māori values, such as aroha (love, compassion, empathy, affection), mana (the power of being) and kotahitanga (unity, togetherness, solidarity, collective action) support young children's citizenship participation (Ritchie et al., 2014). This can be seen in excerpts in Table 1 such as "establish and maintain friendships" and "participate reciprocally in whanaungatanga relationships" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 15).

### **Closing discussion**

The objectives of this article are to identify how young children are constructed as citizens in China and Aotearoa New Zealand, then to explore the possibilities and opportunities for young children's citizenship participation outlined in early childhood curricula in both nations. According to the discourse theory from Laclau and Mouffe (1985), different discourses define young children and their citizenship in different ways and there are constant discursive struggles for hegemonic understandings of young children's citizenship. The discursive conditions in New Zealand support young children as citizens who are active and culturally

competent participants in wider communities, whilst China expects young children to become competent contributors to the nation. This reveals that both curricula have been established in context-specific ways and implies the prevalent discourses of citizenship and young children in both nations.

Despite these distinctions, according to the discourse analysis conducted above, both curricula echo traces of neoliberal governance that exerts ideological power upon young children's subjectivities. Neoliberal discourses of self-regulation, individual responsibilities and active citizenship are more about acquiring knowledge and skills for building children's human capital as competent workers and compliant citizens. In the case of New Zealand, whilst an image of a culturally competent citizen emerges, the aspiration statements of young children such as becoming "competent and confident learners" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 2) still imply a neoliberal discourse of rational and compliant citizens in the making.

Moreover, other discourses in both nations probably serve as subtle instruments for achieving the aims of the hegemonic neoliberal discourse. Taking developmentalist discourse as an example, the curricula in both nations contain child-centred statements in which young children are treated as active and initiative learners. However, as discussed above, learning outcomes for different age groups have the potential to become normative standards of the neoliberal governance. Psychological theories pose powerful influences on the perspectives of young children as passing through transitional stages to become adults, which undermines the current advocacy for viewing young children as citizens and might further prohibit young children's participation in wider communities. The neoliberal discourse in China is furthermore combined with a socialist discourse of collectivism and the Confucianism discourse. This might, together with neoliberal compliance, exert a stronger hegemonic discourse that controls young children and limits their citizenship and participation.

This comparison has highlighted the discursive struggles that also imply some possibilities and prospects for young children's citizenship. The individualism of neoliberalism is challenged by discourses of collectivism in both nations. In China, collectivism is rooted in Confucianism and is strengthened by socialist ideology, as expressed in the *PRC Guidelines* such as the prescription that teachers should "nurture their (children's) collective consciousness" (P. R. China Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 30). As stated by Lee (2004), the collectivism in China, especially under the influence of Confucianism, seeks to build a harmonious society, which is an inspiring model of civil society. In New Zealand, collectivism is rooted in Māori values such as *whanaungatanga*, *aroha* and *utu* (Ritchie et al., 2014). Young children are expected to develop "a spirit of sharing, togetherness and reciprocity" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 36). In addition, academics in both nations start to reflect on neoliberal education goals that highlight individualism and the production of competent workers. The Chinese academic, Tan Chuanbao (2010), has argued that the education goal of children as "socialist contributors" highlights children's value as human resources whilst neglecting their holistic development and agency (p. 208). Likewise, Phillips, Ritchie, Dynevor, Lambert, and Moroney (2019), based on their analysis of indigenous children in Australia and New Zealand, have constructed citizenship as "community building" (p. 23) which is more about relationships and the inclusion of young children, especially those from marginalised groups.

In sum, it is important to note that within multiple discursive fields, young children can be simultaneously positioned as compliant citizens in the making and as competent citizens. This raises the consideration as to whether this binary opposition is a useful approach

to viewing children's citizenship. Given that several studies (e.g., Bath & Karlsson, 2016; Phillips et al., 2018) have positioned young children as agential rather than compliant passive subjects, it is important for us to consider, understand, and respect children's citizenship through their own articulations. It should be noticed that young children's civic actions are not as bold or as visible as adults' (Ritchie & Lambert, 2018). In this regard, more research is needed to focus on the intergenerational dialogue and interaction between children and adults, and to explore how young children enact their citizenship.

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