Beyond stereotypes: Comparing Chinese and Australian parents’ perceptions of transition to school

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Abstract
Parents’ perceptions and expectations of transition to school influence their engagement in the transition process. In this study, eight Chinese and eight Australian parents were interviewed to explore their perceptions of transition to school. The results showed similarities in Chinese and Australian parents’ views of transition to school as a two-phase process involving preparation and school familiarisation. Cohort and intra-cohort differences were evident in the type of preparation, attention to diverse needs and the difficulty of the transition process. Moreover, Australian, but not Chinese, parents regarded transition to school as a change for themselves. The findings challenge stereotypes, indicating the need for more reciprocal communication to address parent expectations about transition to school in diverse communities.

Keywords
Transition to school, parents’ perspectives, international comparison, Chinese and Australian parents

Introduction
Successful transition to school has a positive influence on children’s development and learning, especially on their later school success and long-term academic outcomes (Chan, 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2013). Parents play a critical role in the transition process, and their engagement is positively related to children’s effective transition to school (Barnett & Taylor, 2009; Lau, 2014). Parents’ perceptions underpinning engagement are contextually influenced by their cultural and national backgrounds (Griebel & Niesel, 2013). Understanding parents’ views in context could...
contribute to family engagement, enhance teachers’ capacity to meet family expectations and support children during transition to school.

Transition to school is becoming a global issue. With the influence of globalisation, culture and context should be considered in early childhood practices regarding children’s development and well-being, as well as parental perceptions and practices (Reid et al., 2019; Nganga et al., 2020). However, global academic competition (such as PISA) and education reform in some countries are blurring the cultural differences between Eastern and Western contexts (Bach & Christensen, 2017; Sun & Rao, 2017). Contextual influences impact on parents’ perceptions and engagement with transitions (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Griebel & Niesel, 2013). Thus, it is worth investigating contemporary parents’ perceptions of transition to school in context. Though previous studies set in diverse cultural contexts have explored transition to school from parents’ perspectives (Chan, 2012; Belfield & Garcia, 2014; Kaplun et al., 2017; Costales & Anderson, 2018), few have directly compared parents’ perceptions on transition from different cultural contexts in a single study. The present study contributes to this body of research.

**Parents’ perspectives of transition to school**

When children commence school, they and their parents face a new environment without necessarily having received comprehensive information about what to expect. They may not be clear about the curriculum subjects, teaching approaches or school systems (Barberis, 2008). In a Finnish study, parents ranked familiarisation with the school as the most important aspect, and individual parent–teacher discussion meetings at school commencement as key aspects of transition (Ahtola et al., 2015). Similarly, parents in a Chinese study highlighted the value of communication with teachers about child development and effective parenting at the commencement of school, yet noted that such communication can be challenging due to teachers’ limited availability (Lau, 2014). An Australian study (Kaplun et al., 2017) also revealed parents’ desire for enhanced communication with teachers, including more information about children, school events and parent–teacher nights.

Apart from parents’ expectations for sharing information about children and transition to school with teachers and schools, many global studies have found that parents are concerned about children’s preparation for school (Lau, 2014; McIntyre et al., 2007). Typically, parents express enthusiasm about the new milestone for their children, but may be concerned about their children’s preparedness for the new environment (McIntyre et al., 2007). In the United States, when children commence school, parents value children’s growing independence
and hold increased expectations around self-care (Barberis, 2008). Distinct from parents in the United States, Australian parents consider children’s emotional adjustment more important than independence (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Some parents from diverse backgrounds worry about children’s language development if their home language is not the dominant school language (Sanagavarapu, 2010; Millar, 2011). Preparation for school may, therefore, hold different meanings or have different emphases depending on the context.

Studies from diverse global contexts suggest that parents vary in regard to how they value children’s academic preparation in transition to school. An American study found that parents placed increasing emphasis over time on children’s academic preparation (Belfield & Garcia, 2014), but an Australian study found that some parents valued such preparation while others did not (O’Gorman, 2008). Academic preparation plays an important role in children’s transition to school in Asian research such as a Chinese study in Shenzhen and Hong Kong by Lau (2014). Singaporean parents ranked development of basic skills as one of the top three ideal transition practices (Costales & Anderson, 2018). A Malaysian study found that parents’ main concerns included academic preparation, together with self-care skills and health and positive relationships with classmates and teachers (Zhang, 2013). These Asian studies also identified the importance to parents of school context factors such as class discipline, routine and classroom security (Zhang, 2013), academic pressure (Lau, 2014) and transition practices such as school familiarisation visits (Costales & Anderson, 2018).

Based on the existing literature, parents’ perceptions of transition to school are culturally varied, yet not always different. Moreover, there is little direct comparison to guide culturally sensitive policy and transition practice in multi-cultural communities. The present study contributes to this body of research by directly comparing Australian and Chinese parents’ perceptions of transition to school through an ecological lens.

**Research method**

**Procedure**

In this study, we explored the following research question: ‘How do parents in China and Australia understand transition to school?’ This article reports on part of a larger study incorporating a survey (not reported here). Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted 4 weeks after participants’ children commenced school. The interview participants were randomly selected from the broader survey group of parents who provided their contact details and consented to participate in the interviews. The Chinese participants were living in Beijing, China, and the Australian participants were living in Queensland, Australia. Potential participants were approached via phone calls, text messages or emails, and the first eight parents in China and eight in Australia who expressed their willingness to be interviewed were recruited. Interviews with Chinese participants were conducted via phone calls or social media software (such as WeChat). Three Australian participants were interviewed face-to-face, and five were interviewed via phone calls. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The quotes presented here were back-translated; thus, the quotes were translated from Chinese to English and then from English to Chinese, to ensure accuracy and validity (Sutrisno et al., 2013). Ethical approval was received from the Queensland University of Technology. Note that kindergarten is the term used in both jurisdictions to refer to an early childhood programme offered in the year before the commencement of primary school. In China, transition occurs for children aged 6 years on 1st September when they transition from kindergarten to Grade One of primary school. In Queensland, this transition occurs for children aged 4.5–5.5 years moving from early childhood services such as kindergartens to the preparatory year (Prep) of school.
Participants

In-depth interviews were conducted with eight participants from China and eight from Australia, including 12 mothers and four fathers. Pseudonyms were allocated according to popular Chinese and Australian names. Participants were asked about what they thought was important in transition to school, what they expected from teachers and what their role as a parent was in relation to transition (Table 1).

Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to the interview data, and comparison of data sets undertaken to highlight similarities and differences in the perceptions of Chinese and Australian parents regarding transition to school. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) process. First, the researcher read the transcripts several times to become familiar with the data and to gain a general sense of potential topics and themes. Then, three main themes were applied inductively as shown in Table 2. With inductive analysis and categorisation, themes and sub-themes were generated and re-grouped according to similarities or differences (see below). Co-authors cross-checked analyses.

Results

Thematic analysis identified three core themes. These themes and sub-themes were compared to

Table 1. Participants’ information.

| Participant | Relationship | Child’s gender | Child’s birth order | Primary carer(s) | Country of origin | Work mode | Interview site |
|-------------|--------------|----------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Wei         | Mother       | Boy            | 2nd                 | Mother           | n/a               | Employed full-time | WeChat |
| Hui         | Mother       | Boy            | 1st                 | Father, mother   | n/a               | Employed full-time | Phone call |
| Fang        | Father       | Girl           | 1st                 | Father, mother, Grandparents | n/a               | Employed full-time | Phone call |
| Na          | Mother       | Boy            | 1st                 | Father, mother   | n/a               | Employed full-time | Phone call |
| Ming        | Mother       | Girl           | 1st                 | Mother           | n/a               | Employed full-time | WeChat |
| Jing        | Father       | Girl           | 1st                 | Mother           | n/a               | Employed full-time | Phone call |
| Li          | Father       | Boy            | 1st                 | Father, mother   | n/a               | Employed full-time | Phone call |
| Ying        | Mother       | Girl           | 1st                 | Mother           | n/a               | Employed full-time | WeChat |

Chinese participants

Olivia        | Mother       | Girl           | 2nd                 | Father, mother   | India             | Employed part-time | Olivia’s home |
Charlotte     | Mother       | Girl           | 1st                 | Mother           | Australia         | Not in the labour force | Charlotte’s home |
Mia           | Mother       | Girl           | 2nd                 | Mother           | Australia         | Employed part-time Missig | Phone call |
Ava           | Mother       | Girl           | 3rd                 | Mother           | Australia         | Not in the labour force | Phone call |
Amelia        | Mother       | Girl           | 2nd                 | Father, mother   | Australia         | Not in the labour force | McDonald’s home |
Emily         | Mother       | Boy            | 2nd                 | Mother           | Australia         | Not in the labour force | |
Sofia         | Mother       | Boy            | 1st                 | Mother           | New Zealand       | Unemployed and looking for work | Phone call |
Jack          | Father       | Boy            | 1st                 | Mother           | China             | Employed full-time | Jack’s home |
identify differences and similarities between Chinese and Australian cohorts. Intra-cohort variations also emerged.

**Similarities in perceptions of transition to school**

Three themes reflected considerable similarity of perceptions for Chinese and Australian parents, and each of these similarities is now discussed.

*Transition as a two-phase process or project.* Both Chinese and Australian parents perceived transition to school as a two-phase process or project, rather than a single event or point in time. Chinese parent Fang described the two phases/processes of transition to school as:

One is to develop and adapt to social and group life, and basic personalities (in kindergarten), while the other is to learn about nature science and social science knowledge (in school). These are two processes. Then the transformation is the adaptation process between the two processes.

Australian parent Jack provided a similar definition on transition:

I think kindy [kindergarten] is to take care of children... in Prep, it’s part of school, it’s for formal schooling, this stage. These two are completely different. It’s a process transforming children gradually from a condition of free and thinking of playing every day, to focusing on learning without enjoyment.

Further, Chinese parent Jing and Australian parent Jack viewed the responsibility for this process as something shared between families, early childhood programmes and primary schools rather than a responsibility of parents or early childhood programmes alone. For example, Jing said ‘I think if things could be done well in the three parts, there would be no big problem’.

*Transition involving school familiarisation.* School familiarisation formed a key component of the transition-to-school understandings of both Chinese and Australian parents. In the interviews with Chinese participants, some of their comments indicated that they valued familiarisation with the school context. For example, Jing told his child ‘about some school stuff to make her [the child] get interested in it’. Ying mentioned that school visits were useful, and ‘hope there could be more school visits, and the daily routine [of kindergarten] could be changed more like school routine’. Chinese parents also mentioned familiarisation with class regulations and

| Table 2. Similarities and differences in parents’ perceptions of transition to school. |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| **Parents’ perceptions of transition to school** | **Chinese parents** | **Australian parents** |
| Overall perceptions of transition to school | Two-phase/shared project 2 | 1 |
| | Straightforward process 4 | n/a |
| | Important process n/a | 3 |
| | Difficult process n/a | 5 |
| Transition as preparation for school | Academic preparation 8 | 2 |
| | Socio-emotional preparation 4 | 5 |
| | School familiarisation 4 | 5 |
| | Physical preparation 2 | n/a |
| | Lengthy preparation 4 | n/a |
| Transition as change for parents | n/a | 3 |

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approaches. For example, Ying mentioned: ‘learning styles and adapting to class regulations are important for her [the child].’

School familiarisation played a dominant role in the Australian interviews, including three main functions: familiarisation with school environments, school routines and expectations for school work. Olivia talked to her child about what school would be like: ‘Just …to give her a bit of experience, what exactly the school will be, and how long you have to be separate from us’. More than half (5/8) of the Australian participants raised the importance of school information for supporting children’s transition to school. For example, orientation was frequently mentioned as the most helpful or most important aspect for supporting children’s transition to school. In the orientation, children could visit the school or talk to the teacher, which would help them become familiar with the school environment.

**Transition as preparation for school.** Preparation for school formed another key component of the understandings of both Chinese and Australian parents, although differences in emphasis were evident. Socio-emotional preparation was a frequently mentioned aspect of preparation for school in this study. In the interviews with Chinese parents, social interaction and communication with peers and teachers were identified as important. For example, Na hoped her child ‘can talk to teachers if something happens, and be friendly with classmates’. Another aspect of socio-emotional preparation to which Chinese parents paid attention was children’s mental wellbeing and confidence. Parents articulated hope that teachers could be patient. For example, Hui thought ‘If some teachers don’t have patience or have a bad temper and get angry with children, it could affect the child forever’.

Australian parents, like the Chinese parents, were concerned about children’s socio-emotional preparation in transition to school, particularly emotional preparation. Australian parents in this study expressed hope that their children would not experience anxiety in the new school environment. Frequently mentioned words included ‘confidence’, ‘anxiety’ and ‘scary’. Parents should be ‘encouraging them that school is not…scary’ (Ava). Mia prioritised building children’s confidence and said that ‘building her [child’s] confidence’ was the most helpful in her children’s transition to school. Sofia also mentioned that teachers ‘need to be really, really friendly and patient, and make the child feel welcome’. In addition, social interaction with peers was considered important by the Australian parents. For instance, Mia explained ‘making new friends…once they start [school], I think that’s quite a big thing’.

**Differences in perceptions of transition to school**

Analysis identified four key differences in perceptions between Australian and Chinese parents, and each of these differences is now discussed.

**Level of difficulty of transition to school for children.** One key difference between the two cohorts emerged in the perception of transition to school as either natural and straightforward or important and difficult. In the Chinese interviews, ‘straightforward’ was frequently mentioned when parents discussed their children’s transition to school, indicating that the transition happens naturally without particular attention being paid to it. Distinct from the Chinese participants, Australian participants used terms such as ‘important’ and ‘difficult’ to describe their children’s transition to school and raised concerns around diversity of needs, home language backgrounds and separation anxiety in younger children. For example, Amelia stated the importance of the first school year with ‘I think it’s the first year it really, I think it shaped, how they’re [children] going to feel for their schooling career’ Olivia said that ‘It’s really hard for them [the children], from kindy to Prep’. Mia and Emily mentioned the routine changes between
kindergarten and school that made transition to school ‘a big transition’. Charlotte and Mia also discussed pedagogical changes from kindergarten as ‘a lot of play-based’ and school as ‘very much kind of teacher-directed’. Further, Olivia highlighted language difficulties for her child, as English was not their first language. Two parents questioned the early school entry age in Queensland, and one of them had her child repeat a year in kindergarten.

**Emphasis in the form of preparation for school.** Although attention to preparation for school was shared amongst Chinese and Australian parents, there were differences in the emphasis on academic work and the range of other preparation types. In the Chinese interviews, basic knowledge and academic preparation for school were frequently mentioned when parents discussed concerns regarding transition to school. Among the eight interview participants, three specifically stated children should learn something about Pinyin (Hányǔ Pīnyīn, the official Romanization system for Standard Chinese), numeracy and even English; and all of them indicated that children should be equipped with basic academic knowledge before commencing school. Ming reported that children’s pleasure in academic learning supported positive dispositions and proposed academic preparation as a helpful way to promote the children’s self-confidence in the transition process. Chinese parents desired for their children to be prepared academically before starting school although they were not willing to place too much pressure on their children. Their emphasis on academic preparation included concern about kindergarten ‘not teaching enough’ (Ming). These Chinese parents turned to extracurricular preschool classes (EPCs) to support children’s academic learning before school. EPCs are privately owned teaching organisations providing basic literacy and numeracy courses aligned with the primary school curriculum, pedagogy and class routine in Chinese classrooms. In this study, half of the parents took their children to EPCs after kindergarten hours. There were also parents who sent their children to EPCs in the summer vacation between kindergarten and school. In the Australian interviews, participants had diverse opinions on the importance of children’s academic preparation for successful transition to school, and a broader focus was commonly adopted. This will be analysed later.

Differences between Chinese and Australian parents were also apparent in attention to physical preparation for school. Chinese parents discussed the importance of exercise and being healthy as a way of ensuring children’s physical preparation for school and expressed concern about inadequate attention to this aspect by teachers. For instance, when talking about what kindergarten and school could do better to help with children’s transition to school, Fang said:

‘they could do better to let children do exercise……Children stay and sit inside for so long, and lack of outdoor time…. should make children move, let children be in nature’.

None of the Australian interviewees mentioned exercise or commented directly about physical preparation as an aspect of transition. However, three showed awareness of children’s physical fatigue due to the routine changes between kindergarten and school, as Mia mentioned ‘I think tiredness is a big thing when they start Prep’.

**Transition as a lengthy and gradual preparation.** In addition to the content dimension of transition outlined above, Chinese parents also considered the time dimension. Four Chinese interviewees mentioned that preparation for transition to school should start early with three indicating that children should start preparation at least half a year before school started. Moreover, transition was viewed as a gradual process. For example, Na said that ‘I think it [preparation or transition to school] should be done step by step, and accumulated little by little’. In contrast, none of the Australian interviewees described preparing children for school early to provide a lengthy gradual transition process.
Transition as a change for parents. Apart from the change transition to school brought to children, Australian parents also described transition to school as change for themselves. Emily became emotional after her child started school:

because he’s [the child] my last one, so he’s my baby, so him starting school was a little bit daunting to me, a little bit emotional as well…it’s a bit of life changing for me as well.

Charlotte included herself in consideration of the transition process. When talking about helpful practices, she talked about herself after discussing what was most helpful for her child: ‘for me…I guess just meeting other parents, and talking, and meeting a teacher and talking to her a little bit more, probably the best thing’. In comparison, none of the Chinese parents described transition to school as a big change for themselves.

Intra-cohort variations in perception of transition to school

Differences within the Chinese and Australian parent cohort responses emerged during analysis. Close comparison revealed nuanced views on preparation for school.

Although Chinese parents placed emphasis on academic preparation including utilising EPCs to enhance preparedness, varied views about the value of extracurricular classes emerged. Chinese parents’ positive comments on EPCs include stating that EPC ‘is helpful’ (Na) and ‘a must-do’ (Ming), yet conflicting perspectives were evident. Three participants articulated negative attitudes towards EPCs reflecting concerns about excess pressure and children’s well-being. These parents stated EPCs were ‘unnecessary’ (Fang) with ‘little meaning’ (Li). Fang held strong negative opinions about EPCs: ‘[children] are treated as studying machines’ and stated that learning basic knowledge before going to school could reduce the child’s interest in learning.

Australian participants expressed diverse opinions on the importance of children’s academic preparation. Two Australian parents advocated for academic approaches in kindergarten to assist children’s transition. For example, Ava suggested teachers should teach children ‘the ABC, 123’ and supported the provision of homework in kindergarten to help the children academically with transition. Olivia, a parent of Indian heritage suggested that kindergarten would be improved if formal education was included in the programme to help children’s confidence in school. Two other Australian parents articulated a contrasting view. Jack, an Australian of Chinese heritage, stated that academic preparation was ‘not necessary’ and he thought ‘you can’t learn too much in kindy before school.’ This view was supported by Charlotte who decided not to focus on academic knowledge: ‘because…I just didn’t want her to be bored at school. I think all the other academic stuff can wait’.

Subtle differences in emphasis were identified within the above evidence on broader perceptions of preparation for school. Although generally Chinese parents desired for their children to be prepared academically before school starts, some were not willing to place too much emotional pressure on their children and only half thought preparation should start early. Most Australian parents held negative attitudes towards academic preparation, while two held positive views. Variation was also evident within both Chinese and Australian parents’ explanations of social–emotional preparation for school in emphasis on either social or emotional aspects.

Discussion

Localisation

The results of this study suggest that the Chinese parents in this study were deeply concerned about their children’s academic preparation during the transition process. These findings are in accordance with previous research in Malaysia, China and Singapore (Zhang, 2013;
Choy & Karuppiah, 2016), which indicate that academic development is one of parents’ key concerns during the transition to school. The popularity of EPCs in China is echoed in a Singapore study (Choy & Karuppiah, 2016) in which most interviewed parents also sent their children to preparatory classes (similar to EPCs) or employed home learning activities to prepare their children academically for school. This indicates concerns in these contexts related to localised factors such as academic pressures in schools (Lau, 2014).

More than solely about children’s development, transition to school is a family affair (Dockett et al., 2017). While transition to school brings developmental changes and challenges to children, it also causes ecological changes for all family members, especially parents (Dockett et al., 2017). Previous literature proposes that parents whose first child is starting school face a change in role from a parent of a kindergarten child to a parent of a school child (Griebel & Niesel, 2013; Webb et al., 2017). This was also evident in this study for some Australian parents. In comparison, none of the Chinese interview participants described transition to school as a big change for them, only for their children. One possible reason could be that all Chinese parents participating in the interviews had full-time jobs while two Australian interviewees were at home. Thus, children’s school commencement may not have had such an effect on the Chinese parents’ emotional state because their daily routines were unchanged.

Moving between microsystems in the transition process, children face changes between different ecological environments (Chan, 2012), such as different demands, expectations and routines (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Einarsdottir, 2011), which can make the transition a difficult process. These ecological transition changes and difficulties identified by Australian parents in this study related to policy and other contextual factors as well as child development. Language challenges identified in this study reflect a broader concern in linguistically diverse Australia, with parents who are not native English speakers holding concerns about the language context at school for their children (Dockett & Perry, 2005). In China, although there are different dialects, Mandarin is the official language and people use a universal writing system.

Policy factors such as age of school entry and curricular or pedagogic alignment influenced parent perceptions and highlighted the importance of continuity between microsystems for children’s successful transition (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, 2017). Evidence from other Australian research shows that there are increasing numbers of children being delayed school entry in Queensland, Australia (Mergler & Walker, 2017), which indicates that Australian parents in this study were not exceptional examples in relation to concern about children’s early school entry age or maturity. However, the school entry age in China is 6 years old, so Chinese parents had less concern about their children’s maturity and transition. Their concern was with addressing discontinuity arising from perceived misalignment between kindergarten and school curricula and pedagogies and between institutional and home priorities such as physical fitness and health.

Other policy factors such as hours and days of attendance also influence perceptions. Different attendance patterns and hours between kindergarten and school can influence the continuity of the transition process (OECD, 2017). In China, children go to kindergarten on workdays, generally 5 days per week, so there are few routine or attendance differences between kindergarten and school. However, Australian parents in this study sent their children to kindergarten two to 3 days per week, so the routine change was more marked. This may reflect parental choices as much as policy differences, as full-time early childhood education and care services are available to Australian parents. The range of policy concerns identified by both groups of parents suggests the value of
further investigation of exosystem and macrosystem influences on continuity, parent confidence and children’s transition to school.

**Globalisation**

Comparison of Chinese and Australian parents’ perceptions revealed some similarities that suggest the potential influence of global trends. Parents are often concerned about preparation for school in children’s transition to school (McIntyre et al., 2007; Lau, 2014), as the transition brings academic, socio-emotional and physical challenges for children (Margetts, 2002). Aligned with previous studies (Dockett & Perry, 2004, 2005; Chan, 2012; Zhang, 2013; Lau, 2014; Choy & Karupiah, 2016), preparation for school was an important focus when both Chinese and Australian parents were involved in this study. Some of the Chinese parents reported that their children gained confidence through academic preparation and enjoyed their exposure to literacy and numeracy before school. Previous research in Finland investigated children’s attitudes towards transition to school, finding that most preschool children held a positive attitude towards school work (Eskelä-Haapanen et al., 2016).

In this study, the Australian parents expressed concerns about children’s socio-emotional preparation and school familiarisation, which reflects previous research conducted in Australia (Dockett & Perry, 2007). However, some expressed anxiety about children’s academic preparation for school. This could possibly be explained by the diverse backgrounds of Australian parents or by an emphasis on academic preparation in transition to school and school assessment practices that place children in a globally competitive environment (Winter, 2011). Moreover, there is a global trend that time spent on academic preparation of literacy and numeracy is increasing in early childhood contexts at the expense of arts and exploratory learning, and more emphasis is placed on the measurable learning standards and outcomes (Haslip & Gullo, 2017).

**Beyond stereotypes: Implications for practice**

Similarities reflecting global trends and intra-cohort variations reflecting diverse influences indicate the importance of avoiding cultural stereotypes. Interestingly, not all Australian parents held negative attitudes towards academic preparation, and Chinese parents paid broad attention to children’s socio-emotional and physical preparation.

Australian parents showed diverse attitudes towards academic preparation for school, including unexpected opposition to such preparation by an Australian parent of Chinese heritage. Such variation has been identified in previous Australian research (Dockett & Perry, 2007; O’Gorman, 2008). Australia is a multicultural country with residents from diverse cultural backgrounds; thus, Australian parents would be expected to have differing perceptions of transition to school, adding complexity to the transition process. Findings of this study endorse the view that kindergarten and school teachers should take ‘varied cultural expectations of the families’ (Webb et al., 2017, p. 209) and consider the diversity of families more carefully when providing transition support for parents and children (Petriwskyj, 2010).

Traditionally, Chinese parents are renowned for prioritising children’s academic achievements, as illustrated in the ‘tiger mother’ parenting style (Sun & Rao, 2017). Nonetheless, it should be noted that even though all interviewed Chinese parents in this study described their concerns regarding academic preparation, they no longer placed a singular emphasis on children’s academic skills but also attended to children’s socio-emotional well-being, physical fitness and psychological health, reflecting the findings in other jurisdictions (Ren & Edwards, 2016). Therefore, as argued by other scholars
as suggested by this study’s findings, the ‘tiger mother’ parenting style is no longer sufficient to define parenting in contemporary China. Contemporary Chinese parents may have a more holistic view of children’s development and transitions than previously described. Further research is required to determine if this finding is replicated elsewhere in China.

Challenges in collaboration and communication between parents and teachers regarding transition to school have been identified previously in international literature (Griebel & Niesel, 2013; Lau, 2014). In this study, Chinese parents criticised their limited influence on curriculum and pedagogy and expressed concern about school classroom management practices. Australian parents’ access to unidirectional information sharing by teachers guided school familiarisation, while one parent nominated discussion with a teacher as personally supportive. There are opportunities in both contexts for improved parent–teacher communication to deepen teachers’ understanding of children’s needs and parents’ priorities as well as allay any unfounded parent concerns. Reciprocity in teacher–parent communication offers partnership opportunities that enhance transition processes (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Such reciprocity could address diverse concerns such as classroom practice, child well-being and maturity, physical health, English language skills and parents’ own transition.

Limitations
This article reports on a small number of interview participants (n = 16), and the literature suggests that the saturation number should be more than 12 for each cohort (Guest et al., 2006). Thus, there would be value in further research involving a greater number of interview participants, considering gender differences in parents’ perceptions or extending data collection to a survey on parents’ perspectives on transition to school. Further, this study was limited to an investigation of parents’ perceptions of transition to school in specific locations in China and Australia. Future studies could consider exploring parents’ perceptions in other contexts, investigating the influence of parents’ perceptions on their engagement practices in the transition process.

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