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Josephine Ng
Berenice Nyland *Editors*

Comparative Perspectives on Early Childhood Education Reforms in Australia and China

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Volume 32

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Part 1
The Reform Agenda in Both Australia and China

Chapter 1
Introduction: Early Childhood Education Policy Reforms in Australia and China

Berenice Nyland

1.1 Introduction

Across the world, the changing nature of higher education (HE), due to globalisation, has increased the mobility of academics and students and created an unprecedented number of international activities and collaborations across borders. In this book Chinese and Australian early childhood academics have shared their experiences and research to explore lessons that can be learnt during times of reform, including shared understandings and challenges. History and theoretical approaches are explored within context (Chap. 2) and the value of comparative studies as a way of deepening educational practice is discussed. China has the largest education system in the world and is moving towards universal access for three years of preschool. Faced with similar issues as Australia, in relation to access and quality of provision, China has been keen to study the international experience while maintaining Chinese characteristics. Australia is a country defined by diversity of languages, culture, experience, countries of birth and socio/economic status. The different histories that have created education systems and given rise to particular challenges for the respective governments in delivering quality early childhood services are important when deciding which examples of research and practice contain valuable exemplars. Differences in policy development and types of policies, especially implementation issues are useful to share. For Australia and China there have been many initiatives between the two countries in the area of developing early childhood education. A significant initiative has been the large numbers of international students studying in Australia as well as shared research and opportunities to examine educational practice in both countries.

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These opportunities can have many advantages as international exchanges can bring significant benefits for HE institutions. International partnerships and project collaboration have created opportunities for overseas deployment of academics for teaching and research. Internationalisation of education has always enriched early childhood education which has had a strong international flavour throughout its history (Chap. 2). Policy makers and leaders in universities have been faced with unpredictable circumstances and challenges as the international education platform continues to change and expand, while the value of early childhood education increasingly becomes a focus of governments. There is widespread interest in international education and collaboration with China in Australia. China is a major trading partner of Australia, has seen economic development at unforeseen speed, even though it is slowing and has the second largest economy in the world (Yang 2012). This has given rise to considerable attention and opportunities for internationalisation with accompanying complications that may be practical, operational, political or cultural (Turner and Robson 2008).

The complexity of internationalisation of HE arises from the advancement of globalisation. This book offers a contribution to the story of internationalisation in HE by reporting on three research projects that have examined real life situations in early childhood education that are relevant to Australia and China. The major themes developed are based largely on empirical research and contribute to the discussion about early childhood education in a global and local context. As internationalisation of educational policies increase, curriculum frameworks and teacher training become part of the reform agendas of many countries. The three research studies reported on in the chapters in this book examine issues of workforce development, curriculum (Fan et al. 2016) and educators' theories of how children learn (Li et al. 2017) and an in-depth case study of an international joint program partnership between an Australian and Chinese university conducted in 2014–2016 (Ng and Nyland 2016).

The book is divided into four distinct but interconnecting sections. The first section of the book is mainly contextual and provides background information and examines the reform agenda in both Australia and China. Government policies for early childhood education in both countries (Chap. 3) illustrate the significance of an international agenda that includes early childhood education as a strategy for economic growth. Since 2009, both countries have had significant policy development in the areas of national curriculum implementation, teacher education reforms and growing international partnerships. In the first chapter of the book we provide a description of the context and a discussion on the importance of comparative research (Rao et al. 2017). The second chapter describes theoretical underpinnings of international and comparative perspectives of early childhood education, historical events that have influenced the development of early childhood education and a statement by a Chinese academic analysing current reform trends. The third chapter compares policy initiatives for early childhood workforce development across the two countries.

The second part of the book explores curriculum and its role in early childhood practice and pedagogy. China has had national curriculum for early childhood

education in the past and these have reflected the historical thinking of the time. Australia now has its first national curriculum document and in the light of globalisation and growing international partnerships it is interesting to be able to compare the philosophical commitment to early childhood education and the policy directions of the two countries. The first chapter in this section (Chap. 4) outlines the role of curriculum frameworks as policy documents, how they have been implemented in the two contexts. The next two chapters provide evidence from comparative research, conducted in both China and Australia, on early childhood educators' perspectives on children's learning. The first of these chapters (Chap. 5) reports on results of a study of educators working with children birth – three. The second (Chap. 6) examines the ideas of practitioners working with preschool children three–six years-old.

The third section of the book presents an Australian/Chinese case study of a collaborative articulation program (CAP). Here the idea of the CAP model as a transnational relationship is unpacked and the voices of stakeholders involved in the partnership have been shared. We hear from policy makers, academics and preservice teachers. Early childhood teacher training has become a focus for policy makers as teachers are often seen as being strategically placed to implement reforms and the quality of the workforce is therefore crucial for the reform process. Educational partnerships have been designed across the world and these have taken myriad forms. Some partnerships have been successful, some have been self-serving while others have struggled with the challenges that such relationships encounter. The fourth section of the book, the concluding chapter, summarises lessons that can be learnt and implications arising from the research projects discussed here.

In this introductory chapter we touch on the value of comparative studies, the rationale for choosing China and Australia and discuss early childhood education development in the context of internationalisation and globalisation.

1.2 A Comparative Perspective

This book examines the differences and similar movements in early childhood education in China and Australia. As both countries strive to reform the provision and quality of early childhood education policy documents, like curriculum, are useful indicators of differing traditions and shared discourses. A comparison of policies is described in Chap. 3 and in Chap. 4 an in-depth discussion of the curriculum documents of each country is presented. Implementation in the Chinese context is supported by interviews with directors from across the country. This curriculum discussion is taken as representative of a measure of a national view of childhood. This theme is also a topic in Chap. 2 when children's picture books are compared as an indication of societal ideas about childhood. Woodhead (2005) warns of the "tension between universalistic theories and the pluralities of pathways" (p. 3). This is always difficult when attempting comparative studies but by viewing children in context then views of childhood and children's learning and development is taken to

be a social, cultural, historical and political process. We have therefore taken a socio/cultural view of children and development (Vygotsky 1978) where benchmarks are "extrinsic, historically-specific and negotiable" (Woodhead 2005, p. 13). The same socio/cultural approach is used in Chaps. 5 and 6 where the surveys presented to the Chinese and Australian educators were based on their perspectives of children's learning within a participatory context.

The study of the transnational higher education (TNHE) initiative, the CAP program, also focused on the perspective of participants. This project was a response to internationalisation at the tertiary level. While pre-service early childhood teacher education is usually regional, or national, with the advent of TNHE there has been a necessity to adjust teaching, learning and content to suit local markets in more than one setting. Did the research report on here lead to a deeper understanding of the Chinese and Australian early childhood teacher education environments for the participants? The study was qualitative, interpretive and explored the experiences of the participants/stakeholders who found themselves acting in local, national and global contexts.

Internationalisation of education policy, including curriculum documents, has been widespread in recent years. In this research globalisation was the lever that produced the CAP which was an example of TNHE. The participants experiences have been explored through their role in the program. The students moved across both contexts and reported on their early childhood teacher training and practical experience in both China and Australia. The Chinese academics only taught the cohort in China and shared their views on the program itself and how well the students would be prepared for teaching if they returned to China. The Australian academics had experience teaching the cohort in both countries and were more likely to comment on different teaching styles, student learning and content. The policy makers were collaborating to plan and organise an initiative that was both a marketing exercise and a "global cultural-interactive process" (Walstrom et al. 2018, p. 588). The comparisons we make in this study are on the perspectives of the participants/stakeholders. We look to evaluate the social and cultural movements that have occurred through the partnership.

1.3 Why China and Australia?

A comparative perspective of early childhood education between Australia and China is timely because of the large numbers of international students that have come to Australia in recent years and the numbers of Australian teachers who have gone to China. Increasingly international students are returning to their homeland after their overseas studies, so the training and education students receive in Australia needs to be appropriate for the social and cultural expectations of early childhood education in both the home country and the new setting. That this can be achieved may be reflected in the history of early childhood education which has had

a strong international perspective. A knowledge of many early childhood education theories and theorists are shared and include Dewey, Montessori, Piaget and Vygotsky. The Reggio Emilia approach also has popularity in China and Australia. The countries are different, diverse within their own borders, but there is an early childhood language and philosophy that is international and can lead to respect and beneficial exchange.

Globalisation has brought closer levels of economic interdependence and competition. The nature of competition in education has changed over time. The competition for market share of international students is fiercely fought around the world but there are also other forms of competition emerging. Musselin (2018) suggests that competition has spread, not just between countries but within countries as quality becomes an aspect of provision that can give a competitive edge. She says that as the framing of educational competitiveness becomes more nuanced and organised new aspects of competition emerge that combines competition and co-operation and these can "intersect and combine" (p. 657). This is a concept worth pursuing and in the three research projects reported on here two were collaborative research conducted with Australian and Chinese partners. The third was an empirical study conducted in China with secondary data added for the Australian section. In all cases Chinese and Australian academics worked together.

International benchmarking has played a part in helping policy makers plan appropriate reform initiatives to meet local needs and often with international support. PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) are international instruments used by the OECD (Organisation for Economic and Co-operative Development) to assist countries to make decisions about sharing expertise. An example that emerged from the PISA results in 2012 was that Chinese children, in Shanghai, at 15 were three years ahead in maths performance than their counterparts in the United Kingdom. This has led to a teacher exchange program between the two countries (Yuan and Huang 2019).

There are many early childhood connections between China and Australia that operate on a more local scale. Preschool relationships exist between individual services (Deans and Brown 2008). Mandarin immersion programs are popular in many childcare centres both in the private sector and the not-for-profit sector. Mandarin is the second most spoken language in Australia. Many universities have given early childhood students the opportunity to have a teaching placement in China. Research partnerships between Chinese and Australian early childhood researchers abound (eg. Li et al. 2017; Nyland et al. 2016). In this volume Chinese and Australian researchers share projects that have explored policy reform, the enactment of curriculum, issues with building the early childhood workforce in a time of expansion and change and a study of a specific partnership.

The Australian government has also urged Australians to gain more knowledge of the Asia-Pacific region through schemes like The New Colombo Plan which:

> is a signature initiative of the Australian Government which aims to lift knowledge of the Indo-Pacific in Australia by supporting Australian undergraduates to study and undertake internships in the region (DFAT 2019).

China is one of the 40 destinations that Australians are encouraged to apply to visit. The early childhood education connections between China and Australia are myriad and comparative studies like those carried out by Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989) and Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa (2009) strengthen our knowledge of our own ideologies and practices as well as our own relative place in the world.

1.4 Early Childhood Education Development in a Context of Globalisation and Internationalisation

The context for this book is globalisation and internationalisation. These two similar concepts have been drivers in early childhood education reforms and have also made possible an examination of local and global pressures that have prompted change. It is within this context that countries borrow ideas and also critically reflect on how these borrowed ideas appear from one place to another and which features should be maintained to signify what is important to the local culture. In this volume we have discussed globalisation in education as a contested term (Chap. 7). Drivers for globalisation can be social, cultural, political economic or an intersection of all these. Globalisation and internationalisation are intertwined but not the same entities. See Chap. 7 for definitions and discussions of these two notions. The relationship between the two is often framed as globalisation causing a ''*convergence around educational policies, practices, and values*'' (Jackson 2016, unpaged) while at the same time ''*educational and cultural differences across social contexts remain*'' (unpaged). The acceleration of globalisation, understood as the process by which nations and communities become more closely integrated, has drawn increased attention to the cross-cultural movement of ideas.

Many aims and problems in developing high quality early childhood education systems are shared between China and Australia. See Chaps. 3 and 4 for a comparison of policy development in the two countries. Chapters 5 and 6 found many shared beliefs about children's learning between the Chinese and Australian practitioners suggesting that much of the training the educators received had similar images of children's competence and the social nature of learning. This presents opportunities to explore the possibility of direct exchange and discourse between the groups participating in a more nuanced way that could build insights into both societies and their aims for children. Although similar understandings about children's learning emerge differences were indicative of value systems that had different emphasises when the chosen set of conditions for children's learning were examined. If these ideas are explored it might be possible to extrapolate how some of the ''universal'' ideas about early childhood education have been transformed by their use and application in a different time and place. This is of interest when considering internationalisation of curriculum and other policies, in a global context.

The case study in Part 3 of the book is an example of globalisation and internationalisation. These partnerships are developed in a context of the global education market as countries seek to gain advantage by studying practices in other countries.

Direct export or importation, of education follows and how the actual processes of partnership are enacted depends on the success of internationalised activities. The possibilities and challenges on economic, educational and social levels are discussed in Chaps. 7, 8, 9, and 10. Global concerns with early childhood education include access to services, affordability, arguments about universal or targeted provision, funding models and quality debates about staff qualifications and ratios and what is appropriate curriculum. It is within this frame that individual countries, or local areas, seek what is best for them. The Chinese curriculum has content areas as well as an emphasis on social and emotional development. This decision has been maintained since 2001 and supported with newer policy documents on standards and developmental guidelines. Australia has a very different statement in the curriculum document (2009). Supporting documents are very similar. How these documents are interpreted in practice is another level of experience.

The interactions of global, international, national and local may be complex within a society. Between societies meaning making and perspectives may be close in some ways, for example international understandings of early childhood education, while the development of local or national characteristics may be more complex and more difficult to express. That differences may be nuanced in a global and international environment can be seen in the cultural artefact, chosen in chapter two, to give an indication of societal views of children in the two countries. Australia and China are countries where book consumption is high, especially for children's books. We therefore chose children's picture books as a cultural artefact and then commented on how many of these books, in a globalising age are shared. That children around the world can enjoy *The Hungry Caterpillar* is understood but how do the translations relate to the story? Carle's story has a wonderful lyrical emphasis in English and strong beat. We imagine in Chinese it is very different. An example of differences in translation can be seen in the Russian story *Little Chick* by Kornei Chukovsky. A translation by Sheena Wakefield has the refrain 'just like this' on every page but the writing is stolid and unexciting. Mirra Ginsberg also tells the story and her translation has magic and emotion. 'Just like this' has turned into the beat 'like this' and she breaks the rhythm on one page to become 'like these'. As we comment in Chap. 2 by choosing books as the cultural artefact, we have added the translator as a mediator. Perspectives of early childhood education in Australia and China can be considered to be a bit like these two translated books of the same story. The same but different.

1.5 Conclusion

The three sections of the book reflect research into early childhood in China and Australia. The first two sections supply context in relation to history, policy and pedagogical beliefs using a socio/cultural frame (Rogoff 2003), Part 3 is case study and has used the internationalisation literature to conceptualise this research (Turner and Robson 2008). In the concluding chapter we consider the findings to reflect on

what has emerged and identify questions that have arisen. Both countries have followed international trends in developing curriculum policies and support documents. Indeed UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) recommends that countries develop frameworks and policies to develop early childhood education. This has meant that such activities are commonplace across the globe. The two countries discussed here have followed the trend but as the Chinese directors' comments in Chap. 4 suggest, the problems may lie in implementation which involves many players at different levels of influence. This presents the questions, what is the role of policy in educational reform, who develops it and how is implementation supported?

In Chaps. 5 and 6 educators' perspectives on children's learning was explored. Once again, like the children's picture books, the differences were nuanced. Travelling ideas is a theme that can be brought into this discussion as many of the educators knew the answers that would be most acceptable in the survey. It was a biased survey in that it was designed with a participatory approach to early education in mind and this could be read into the questions. The survey results suggest the educators recognised the theoretical base of the survey and therefore differences in responses that were significant would be areas to explore when making a comparative interpretation of the results. Travelling ideas, how they manifest in different environments, might provide a guide to articulating such concerns as the maintenance of Chinese characteristics. This research also highlights the issue that educators are often considered to be change agents. In a national system where is the educators power base? Do we need to reconsider the assumption that change can happen at the grass roots when both countries have identified educator low status, poor pay, shortage of trained staff and insufficient training as quality issues?

The third part of the book reported on a transnational higher education (TNHE) collaborative partnership. This partnership was developed at a distance from the main players and such initiatives should be considered from an economic, political, cultural, social, and educational viewpoint as all these aspects formed a part of the decision to have a partnership and the form it would take. If a partnership is to be successful there should be knowledge of the aims, shared information from each side and an understanding of the role of each stakeholder. What emerged here was a top down design with participants at the universities having little shared knowledge and therefore performing their duties in silos. In their interviews the students were focused on their own experiences and it was difficult to know if the experience had been one of personal growth. When the interviews were conducted the students were fourth years students who had successfully completed their degrees. They were critical of the teaching in China and this was a flaw in the method as the comparison between a first-year student and a completing student who has stayed in the same environment may also reflect such differences. Adapting from school to university can be a challenge, the 4 years from 18 to 22 can see enormous changes in maturity and ideas about life choices and the political and social context has been difficult. The students were critical of their Chinese experiences when they were younger and praised the Australian experience and this could be an accurate

reflection of their impressions. The change in attitude could also be explained by differences in circumstance or could have been stereotypical thinking as the Australian atmosphere, expressed through press coverage, has had a cold war rhetorical sound for a long time and is getting worse. In a study conducted with an earlier cohort of students in the same CAP program (Nyland and Acker 2017) it was noted that the students interviewed for this earlier study were positive about particular courses they had studied in China, these were music and one spontaneously praised the psychology content of the Chinese degree. A comparison between the interviews cannot be drawn as the purpose of the studies were different. A future study could be spread across the four years, focus on content and relationships as well as general perspectives and be shared with research academics from both institutions to capture this important voice.

> Globalization as a contemporary condition or process clearly shapes education around the globe, in terms of policies and values; curriculum and assessment; pedagogy; educational organization and leadership; conceptions of the learner, the teacher, and the good life; and more. Though, following the legacy of the primacy of a nation-state and systems-theory levels of analysis, it is traditionally conceived that educational ideas and changes move from the top, such as from UNESCO and related bodies and leading societies, to the developing world, we find that often glocalization and hybridity, rather than simple borrowing, are taking place (Jackson 2016).

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Chapter 2
History, Theory and Practice: Early Childhood in Australia and China

Berenice Nyland

2.1 Introduction

As a comparative study the context of the two countries being discussed is important. Australia and China are very different countries in terms of language, culture, history and educational practice but there are also many shared ideas and challenges. In this chapter we explicate some of the differences, shared understandings and challenges that each country faces as early childhood education becomes part of global competition. At the end of the first section of the chapter is a chart showing some main historical events in both countries, social/political and economic development, international influences and the educational changes that accompanied these historical periods. We discuss some of the main theories that have dominated early childhood education in the two contexts. The Reggio Emilia scholars state that the image of the child is the cornerstone of their philosophy and practice (Edwards et al. 1993) so the image of the child was chosen as a subject that could represent cultural views of children. The image of the child seemed a difficult topic especially for an author who is not Chinese and does not speak the language. We therefore decided to look at children's literature, especially picture books. This gave us an approach to describing images of children in the two cultures. The literature given to children has been a focus of research and in recent years, has also been researched as an expression of values of contemporary societies (Colomer et al. 2010). Nodelman (2008) argues that picture books depict the adults' perspective of the child's worldview, or what they believe it should be. The second section of the chapter is a discussion by a Chinese early childhood scholar on trends in early childhood education in China today.

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2.2 History and Theories of Early Childhood Education

Australia and China were aware of discourses around early childhood education in the nineteenth century and the first preschools established in both countries were dominated by Frobelian ideas. In Australia the first preschool was established in 1897 and in China in 1904. The teachers with Froebel training in Australia came from England and in China were brought from Japan. This history indicates that the early childhood education movement has been international in nature since the 1860s. Although Froebel is associated with children and play the instruction in these early preschools was highly regulated. Access to preschool was limited and as ideas about children and education were changing in both countries a demand for qualified staff was growing. By the time the Qing dynasty collapsed in China and by the time of the first world war in Australia, there were numerous training colleges established. In China Sun Yat Sen's three principles of democracy, nationalism and livelihood of the people would be taught in schools throughout the country to support the ideals of the New Republic. For Australia the early childhood services in the early part of the century were mainly concerned with child poverty. It was not until after 1945 that a new migrant population and improved economic conditions saw an increase in demand for preschools and a changing emphasis towards health, including family and mental health.

There were shared theoretical influences during these times. In China figures like Chen Hequin, who had studied educational psychology in America and scholars of the May 4th movement who were acquainted with the works of Dewey were influential. Chen Hequin observed his own family to establish a Chinese psychology of the young child, a Christian who had Confucian beliefs he developed curriculum, parent education and practitioner training colleges. At the same time in Australia Kindergarten Unions had been established in most states and advocates, like Maybanke Anderson and Lillian de Lissa lobbied for trained teachers and assistants and teachers' colleges were founded in each state (Press and Wong 2013). As the social value of preschool became more accepted other theories, than the mystical and metaphysical ideas of Froebel (Brehony 2009) became popular. In both countries the ideas of Dewey, Montessori and the McMillan sisters were studied. The Child Study movement led by Stanley G. Hall was also increasingly on the agenda. However, China stood out by taking a national approach early on and produced national Kindergarten Curriculum Standards in 1932. There was a recognised need to incorporate Chinese characteristics in the curriculum.

> It is necessary to conform to the national character of our country. China's people are honest and persevering and different from Europe, America and Japan. The equipment of kindergartens should not be too flamboyant and must be cared for. It is not necessary to adopt foreign styles and imported goods but use Chinese materials as much as possible.

The only two established early childhood programs mentioned in the curriculum document were Montessori and the Nursery School Association (NSA) founded by

Britain's McMillan sisters, which were programs that had a heavy emphasis on health and nurture. Australia was also influenced by these ideals of social reform because of welfare considerations for children growing up during war and depression. After the Chinese revolution in 1949 the ideas expressed in the 1932 curriculum were denounced as being aligned to American imperialism and Dewey was also criticised (Su 1995).

From the 1930s to the 1980s the Chinese approach to early childhood followed a different path than the one taken in Australia. As the communists fought in the countryside, especially around Yan'an where a base camp had been established, a model kindergarten was established and was moved to Beijing in the 1950s and renamed the May 1st Kindergarten (Tillman 2013). The influence of the Soviet Union could be observed in these rural activities and this influence was obvious in the 1952 kindergarten guidelines. The 1952 guidelines were developed under the direction of Soviet educators, Chinese scholars and 'proper ideology' (Chiaromonte 1990, p. 2). The new curriculum emphasised subject knowledge, skill development and classroom-based instruction. Homework and text books were introduced. Subjects were physical education, language, arts, music, maths and environmental learning (Li and Chen 2016). This was a didactic syllabus influenced by behavioural science. Tumultuous years would follow with the great leap forward (the great famine) and in the 1960s and 1970s the Cultural Revolution. It was not until the opening of China and the decision to expand the role of the market in Chinese society, under Deng Xiaoping, that the development of early childhood education became a focus for educators and policy makers.

Australian early childhood was moving slowly ahead during these years. In the '30s Lady Gowrie centres were opened in working class areas in the major cities in each state. These centres were to be exemplar programs and would also carry out research. The advent of war in 1939 meant the newly opened Gowrie centres were quickly re-established as long day care centres to support women working for the war effort. These model child development centres were the first national initiative. From the post war years until the 1970s Australia experienced high migration and a growing demand for childcare as well as early education. In 1972 the federal government committed to funding childcare as a workforce support. The state governments would be responsible for education. By the 1960s Australia was forging new allegiances with the United States. Australia committed to the Vietnam War. It was also a time of prosperity as the population grew, there was ever greater diversity. Child study became popular and children were observed and check listed and parents were interviewed about their child rearing practices.

By the 1970s Australia was changing. The Whitlam Labour government had been short lived but had brought in many education reforms across the country. The Australian Preschool Association (now Early Childhood Australia) (ECA) had been established in 1962 and had a national journal. By the 1970s major tensions were childcare versus education and quality of services. This latter meant that teach

training became a focus of reform. By the 1980s national organisations, like ECA, were becoming more involved with a range of children's services, child care policy was considered to have an important economic role to play. To meet demand the suggestion that for-profit centres should receive government funds met with opposition from all sides of the political context. This was the start of funding becoming complex, bureaucratic and a political tool. Government subsidies did go to the private sector eventually, both for- profit and not-for- profit. The government introduced quality assessment for all long day care centres to make this a politically acceptable move. In the early 1990s, Australia and China begin to converge again.

As China recovered from the cultural revolution early childhood education was not an initial priority. By 1989 China had issued two national policies that reflected the government aim that children must be educated in ways that would enable them to become adults who could compete in an open market society. The American National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) influenced policy makers who drafted the Chinese 1989 regulations. Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) was the Piagetian approach to early childhood education dominating America and it was also the dominant theoretical approach in Australia. The national quality improvement regime for child care centres developed in Australia in the early 1990s was based on the American accreditation system that had been written and promoted by NAEYC. In the past 20 years different educational theories of early childhood education have found favour in different countries. A detailed discussion of curriculum reforms in Australia and China, in recent years, can be found in Chap. 4 of this volume. China has strived to articulate Chinese characteristics as the country has formed policies in curriculum development and teacher standards. Australia has been less concerned, possibly because the culture of Australia is dominated by diversity and since the second-world-war, very much under the shadow of America. However, to try to capture the significance of these expressions of culture we have looked at images of young children in the two countries through the cultural artefact of children's picture books.

2.3 Images of Children

> A tool mediates activity that connects a person not only with the world of objects of activity but also with other people (Leont'ev 1974, p. 9).

The availability of children's picture books and type of books are a product of people within a particular society at a particular historical time. They reflect views of the literature and visual aesthetics that are considered suitable for children within the group. In that sense they are a mediating tool for children who are becoming enculturated. They provide material for a child to interpret their own role in the social environment. Engestrom (2014) says of this concept of mediation that:

> The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produce artefacts. This meant that objects ceased to be just raw material for the formation of the subject as they were for Piaget. Objects became cultural entities, and the object-orientedness of action became the key to understanding human psyche (p. xiv)

Ho (1997) reviews Chinese children's literature and comments that literature specifically for children was not common before the turn of the twentieth century. After the revolution of 1911 children's books were published in China but tended to focus on western literature like Grimm's and Anderson's fairy tales and Aesop's fables. Australia reflected a similar pattern. Fairy stories, fables and Mother Goose were popular fare for young children in Australia as well. As a colony and a fairly new European settlement Australian literature in the twentieth century was keen to express the characteristics it saw, especially those found in nature like the animals and plants, to give the country an identity. However, Australian literature for children was often couched in a framework that settlers had brought with them. Australian alphabet books were the earliest and seemed to have been common (O'Connor 2009). These alphabet books are interesting in their own right as the jingles that go with each letter reflect the interests of the time. One of the early alphabet books was published in 1871 (William Calvert) and praised corn, wool and gold. By 1922 the Australian alphabet book was still closely aligned with settlers from Britain but now espoused growing industries established by the 'new' Australians. For example, "C is for coal". The first children's book in China is considered to be *The kingdom without a cat,* written by Sun Yuxui in 1908. This was one of the first books to be written in the vernacular and was about a labourer and his cat.

In Australia many children's books in the early part of the twentieth century belonged to the fairy genre. Books like Harold Gaze's *The simple Jaggajay* (1919) and Pixie O'Harris' *The fairy who wouldn't fly* (1945) were popular. As the century progressed Australian children's books took on a more unique flavour than the fairy books. However, these were expensive and by the end of the second world war America had started to produce The Little Golden Books. Formulaic in writing style, length and illustrations these books covered everything from bible stories to Star Wars. The Little Golden Books were a cheap and accessible literature for Australian children. The Little Golden Books are still popular but high-quality Australian books have become accessible to families as publishing costs have dropped and preschools and child care centres promote children's literature and most no longer have the Golden Books in their libraries. Chinese children also experienced exposure to children's literature that was less that stimulating during this period.

> From the 1950s to the 1970s, children's literature became truly proletarian with the works of young professional writers nurtured by the communist regime. Among these writers were Jin Jin, He Yi, Bao Lei And Ge Cuilin. With works of traditional and universal themes no longer available, those with highly propagandist themes and poor quality writing flooded the market (Ho 1997, p.131).

By the 1990s the books available to children in China and Australia were increasing and topics were expanding and were suited to an international audience. As globalisation increased children's books were made popular in a variety of languages and books that came to be considered children's classics could be found in Australian and Chinese preschools and around the world. Examples observed include *The rainbow fish* (Marcus Pfister 1992), *Handa's surprise* (Browne 1994) and of course the ubiquitous *Very hungry caterpillar* (Eric Carle 1969) can be found everywhere. The Australian author Allison Lester is also available in a Chinese format. By 2000 the Chinese government had become concerned that foreign books were being given to children almost exclusively. According to Koetse (2017) the ratio of foreign books to Chinese children's books sold was 9:1. The Ministry of Culture promoted local children's authors and by 2011 the ratio was 6:4. There was a suggestion in the Koetse article that some parents did not have fond memories of the worthy and didactic books they were given when young, the poor-quality books that Ho (1997) refers to. In contrast post-war Australians seem to look back on the Little Golden Books they were given as children with affection and nostalgia. The book *Everything I need to know I learned from a Little Golden Book* (Diane Mulfrow 2013) was a best seller and started a spate of adults revisiting their childhoods and collecting all the Golden Book titles mentioned. This is not to ignore the growing number of children's books that would be considered to be quality literature and the illustrations that complement the texts that are done by accomplished artists in both countries.

2.4 Comments

Children in both countries were given folk tales and fairy stories until the twentieth century. It is not a coincidence that illustrated books aimed at preschool children were introduced at the same time that preschools were being established. Many of the folk tales and fairy stories had universal themes and different versions of the stories existed simultaneously in many countries. For example, Cinderella was first known in China (Yeh-Shen) in the ninth century and introduced to French children in the 1690s. However, when books started to be written specifically for children they were more grounded in the local context. The Chinese book, *The kingdom without a cat* (1908), is a story that used vernacular speech and had a story line that was relevant to a Chinese audience as the Qing dynasty was finishing. In Australia the fairies were flying around in the Australian bush dressed in Australian wild flowers but were very much part of the English and Irish fascination for the fairy folk that seems to permeate English culture (Jones 1994). Historical events took the two countries in different directions and after the second-world-war Australian children's culture was dominated by America, as evidenced by the Little Golden Books. The books supplied to

children in China after the revolution and during the cultural revolution can be equated with the Little Golden Books in that they promoted particular ideals and the quality of the literature was not a primary concern. In Australia the Children's Book Council started at the end of the war to promote quality children's was an organisation that existed alongside popular mass culture. Educational institutions in Australia have actively supported the promotion of good literature for children. Many of these are international texts, like the examples given above and many Australian children's picture books, though native animals abound, have themes that resonate with children around the world. After China started opening up in 1978 children's books, like the Monkey series started to re-appear. By the early 1980s books like *Havoc in heaven* were available in English. Globalisation has meant that children now share many stories and these are accessible in multiple languages.

The popularity and type of children's books in Australia and China can be associated with the historical times and social context. The Chinese Ministry of Culture found it necessary to promote local Chinese stories to parents who may have grown up during the cultural revolution and did not find the literature inspiring. For Australians the American culture was easy to digest while a strong Australian literature grew up at the same time. Efforts to make theses home grown books expressions representative of Australian culture have been difficult. Aboriginal stories still belong to a more specialist genre and attempts to capture an Australian spirit by turning some of the well-known poems, like those of Banjo Patterson, into picture story books were attempted in the 1980s but the effect was momentary.

Social images of children are embedded in these complex histories. That children are the offspring of historical circumstance is illustrated here as we can see how revolution, world war, migration can change the stories we tell our children. Reflected in this is the hopes that we have for their future and this comes back to the values that are considered important lessons to be learnt in the present. The Chinese aim to maintain "Chinese characteristics" can be understood in this context. Chinese parents are anxious their children must not miss out. Book buying is a sign of being a good parent and this can be seen in the size of the publishing industry in China and the emphasis on books for children. Books do express implicit values. That many of the books given to children are the same books in different languages is indicative of the strength of globalisation. Some of the nuances might be lost in the translations. As an expression of culture language is one of the first and most major systems a child learns. The international market for children's books has turned attention to translators as mediators between cultures, ideologies and languages (Frank 2014). Governments, education departments, local institutions like preschools, parents and children are involved in a complex exchange in the global world of books. A society's values and moral systems are expressed in the literature. Children can understand their own role in relation to others, the important aspects of encouraging imagination and

whimsy in the stories in picture books is also significant for the child. In the next section a chart of historical events is presented (Table 2.1) and these can be juxtaposed against this brief description of children's picture books as cultural artefacts that changed as social/political/economic circumstances changed the contexts.

2.5 Chart of Historical Events in Australia and China

Table 2.1 Early childhood historical events in Australia and China from 1900

History	SOC/POL/EC Devel	International Influence	Events
1900–1912 Qing dynasty	**Boxer rebellion against colonialism and China's 'century of humiliation'** **Modernisation movement starts** Federation	**Missionaries** **International preschool movement** **Japan** **Froebel** England – colonialism Froebel	**First Chinese kindergarten established 1903** First kindergartens established Kindergarten Unions in each state Training colleges Lillian de Lissa
1913–1949 the new republic	**Modernisation** **Westernisation** **War against Japanese occupation and civil war** Great depression, first and second world wars	**New culture movement** **May 4th movement** **American education** **Dewey** **Montessori** **Britain Nursery School Association** Britain Nursery School Association Free kindergarten movement (America)	**Chen Heqin established child psychology courses in higher normal schools** **Progressive kindergartens established** Research Lady Gowrie centres established in each state
1949 People's Republic of China The cold war begins	**Recovery from war** The long boom starts	**Preschool not an immediate priority** Free play movement Montessori Britain Nursery School Association	Play-based programs most popular
1949–1958 First five-year plan Cold war continues Long boom continues	**Relatively good economic growth** **Female workforce participation** Female workforce participation Post war migration	**Marxism–Leninism** **Soviet Union** England but increasingly turning to America Piaget becoming known	**Kindergarten access expanded to rural areas, the poor and work units** Kindergartens expand, health instead of poverty emphasised

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

History	SOC/POL/EC Devel	International Influence	Events
1958–1960 the great leap forward Long boom continues Post war migration	**Mass starvation** Full employment	**Marxism–Leninism** **Soviet education** American competitiveness	**Training of teachers modified and expanded** Baby boom and migration means increased demand for services
1966–1976 the cultural revolution Education and care debate	**Chaotic period** Prosperity Growing demand for childcare from women in the workforce	**Marxism–Leninism** Developmentally appropriate practice – Piaget	**Teacher training all but stopped** **Research ceased** Teacher training expanded, regulated VE – Courses for teacher aides 1972 – Funding for childcare and preschool changed
1978 – Reform and the 'opening up' Demand for expanded services	**Chinese market socialism** Playgroup movement Rise in child care	**The market** **Chinese communism** **Soviet education** **America – Piaget** Piaget	**One child policy** **Shortage of trained teachers** **Research resumed** In some states EC teachers get pay parity with primary teachers
1980 s – 1990s Socialist neo liberalism Neo liberalism	**Economic division of China by State Education Commission favours provinces with highest level of development**	**Chinese communism** **Western ideas, UNICEF and US Piaget** Piaget but moving towards NZ socio/ cultural approach - Vygotsky	**1982 National kindergarten curriculum** **1989 National kindergarten curriculum** **2001 National guidelines** Expansion of private sector
2009 – Curtailment of socialist neo liberalism National legislation and regulation 2012 NQF	**Renewed acknowledgement of the importance of equity** Access and affordability becoming issues	**Chinese communism** **Western ideas on investment,** **US – Heckman** **Dewey and Vygotsky** **Significance of Chinese characteristics** New curriculum not prescriptive	**2010 – National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)** 2009 – First national curriculum EYLF

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

History	SOC/POL/EC Devel	International Influence	Events
Present **Move to curtail the private sector** **Rural urban divide diminishing** National partnership to support affordable preschool	**Regulating quality** **Issue of under-three care as child population and workforce participation for older workers increases** Cost of childcare a workforce issue	**Marxism–Leninism** **Western ideas on investment, family growth, US – Heckman and DAP** **Chinese characteristics** Adoption of new curriculum and quality assessment regime well established	**End of one child policy** **Increased provision of services – Rise of private provision now being contained (several opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the deepening reform and standardisation of pre-school education)** **Provincial three-year plans** Remuneration of early childcare educators has become a national issue

China – Bold Australia - Unbold

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided general context for the empirical studies presented in parts 2 and 3 of this volume. A comparative study of early childhood in two countries is complex. The theories chosen to articulate our comparison have been related to a socio/cultural approach which includes history, context, politics and what the use of cultural artefacts tells us about a society and the children at a given time. It is also difficult to make definitive statements about aspects of society in the context of internationalisation and globalisation. This became evident when we decided to used children's picture books as a cultural artefact to explicate social images of children.

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Chapter 3
A Comparative Study of Early Childhood Policy: Building the Early Childhood Teacher Workforce in China and Australia

Tianzi Liu

3.1 Introduction

In recent years, countries around the world have been aware of the importance of early investment in children's lives. Governments have invested energy and resources into improving the quality of early childhood education, and one of their policy priorities has been building a high-quality early childhood teacher workforce. As early as 2012, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2012) identified early childhood teachers as a main policy lever for developing high-quality children's education services (OECD 2012).

At the end of 2018, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "*Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Standardization of Early Childhood Education*" (from now on the "Opinion"). This "Opinion" is the most detailed and specific policy document on reform and development of early childhood education in China in the past decade. Regarding the importance of developing early childhood education, the "Opinions" have clear and specific requirements for the construction of the early childhood teacher workforce. Australia also attaches importance to the quality of early childhood education with a focus on quality of staff. In recent years, the Australian government has regarded local early childhood teachers as an important part of the reform agenda. Overseas trained early childhood teachers, or international early childhood teaching students have been a focus of immigration policy in an attempt to alleviate a shortage of

Note: preschool and kindergarten have been used synonymously as the Chinese policy documents used the word kindergarten to refer to 3–6 preschool. In Australia all early childhood staff are referred to as educators

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qualified staff. This chapter compares the policies of China (State Council, Opinions 2018) and Australia (COAG 2009) in the construction of an early childhood teacher workforce in recent years and discusses similarities and differences in approach as well as lessons that may be learned.

This chapter provides a background to the early childhood teacher workforce reform and development, in China and Australia and describes the strategies adopted, to improve teacher quality, in each country. The following three aspects of the reform process are discussed: first, main policy documents and the bodies responsible for developing content; second, the content of the reforms and third, the introduction and implementation of the policies.

3.2 Australia

Australia is a country characterised by migration and is one of the most multicultural countries in the world. The country consists of six states and two territories. Each state has certain autonomy over some of the educational affairs within the state. To respond to growing international evidence that the early years are critical to long-term health, behaviour and capacity to learn (McCain et al. 2007) and that preschool attendance for four-year-old children is critical to their long-term success at school (Sylva et al. 2004) there have been growing calls for a cohesive national approach. Since 2007, the implementation of an extensive early childhood reform agenda (COAG 2009) has been underway in Australia. In order to fund this agenda, Australia's federal government and its state and territory governments increased their investment in early childhood education by over 53% between 2007–2008 and 2011–2012 (Productivity Commission 2013).

The *National Partnership on Early Childhood Education* (COAG 2008) was established: "*…as a starting point for joint [government] action to improve the supply and integration of early childhood services, including child care and early learning and development*" (COAG 2008, p. 3). A key commitment of this National Partnership is to "*ensure universal access to [15 hours of] quality early childhood education in the year before school*" (COAG 2008, p. 1). This policy is closely connected to workforce sustainability because of the need for greater numbers of appropriately qualified educators to meet the increased demand this policy has generated (see 'Qualifications' box in Fig. 4.1 for further details).

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG 2009) endorsed the *National Early Childhood Development Strategy—Investing in the Early Years* thereby securing a means "t*o ensure that all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation*" (COAG 2009, p. 1). This Strategy integrated (and in some cases established) a complex range of early childhood education, health and family services and targeted strategies to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.

A key initiative is the *National Quality Framework* for Early Childhood Education and Care [NQF] (DEEWR 2009a). The framework includes five elements: first, national laws and regulations for early childhood education and care;;

second, national quality standards for early childhood education and care (National Quality Standard: NQS); third, a national quality and assessment system for early childhood services; fourth, defines the roles of state and territory bodies involved in the different policy areas and fifth oversees state and territory regulatory agencies that supervise the interconnected systems. This has led to the setting up of a national body to monitor and evaluate the system – this body is ACECQA (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority),which supports the administration of the National Quality Framework to ensure consistent implementation across all states and territories (DEEWR 2009a).The NQF is a comprehensive and systematic national suite of policy documents for early childhood education and care and is intended to regulate and evaluate all aspects of early childhood education services (ACECQA 2013). Underpinned by national legislation the NQF initiated a new legal, regulatory and accountability framework that, in turn, is informing the restructure of almost every aspect of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Australia. So, for educators, there is a strong focus on raising the qualification requirements at all levels and increasing the number of qualified Early Childhood Teachers working in ECEC services prior to school. Australia's first national early childhood curriculum guide *The Early Years Learning Framework* [EYLF] (DEEWR 2009b) have implications for workforce sustainability. The *National Quality Standard* focuses on the importance of qualifications and higher staff to child ratios as ''key influences on the quality of care'', while the EYLF provides a guide to assist educators to provide 'quality teaching and learning' (DEEWR 2009a, p5).

Because early childhood education serves different types of people with different needs, Australian early childhood institutions deliver a variety of services that include preschool programs (17.6%), Long Day Care (49.4%), Family Day Care (9%), Vacation Care, Outsides School Hours Care (19.6%), Occasional Care and In-Home Care (2%) (DET 2017). However, faced with such diverse needs, a high turnover rate and a shortage of suitably qualified Early Childhood Teachers have been identified as impediments to the quality agenda in ECEC (DEEWR 2012). Australia's policy document "Early Years Workforce Strategy" on the construction of the early childhood workforce has emerged under the macro environment where the teacher turnover rate is high and there is a lack of a sustainable early childhood workforce.

The "*Early Years Workforce Strategy*" was issued by the Department of Education and Training (DET) in 2012. There is now a strategy to continue these reforms from 2018–2022 (DET 2017). It is a macro-directive policy document for the development and growth of the early childhood teacher workforce. Its purpose is to guide governments and departments at all levels to focus on the quality and quantity of the early childhood education workforce through reform initiatives. This "strategy" puts forward three requirements for the construction of an early childhood teacher workforce for the future. First, in order to build a sustainable and high-quality professional staff; second, to cultivate a workforce that can meet a diversity of needs of children and families in different services; and third, to support the development of early childhood staff to work cooperatively with other professionals across a range of associated disciplines (DEEWR 2012).

The policy document puts forward specific goals and development directions for early childhood and care teachers with five main aims: a professional workforce, a growing workforce, a qualified workforce, a responsive workforce and a collaborative workforce (DEEWR 2012). These are summarized below.

3.2.1 A Professional Workforce

This specific goal is to improve the professionalism and leadership of early childhood educators. Early childhood teachers are increasingly regarded as a profession that needs professional skills and knowledge to support children's development (Egert et al. 2018). Early childhood teachers' professional development and job-based continuous training play a vital role in the renewal of their professional skills and the matching of their working environment (Egert et al. 2018). The professionalism of preschool teachers is incorporated into the National Quality Standard (NQS) through their professional ability, leadership, teaching and learning ability. The Australian government recognizes that raising public perceptions of early childhood teachers' professionalism can help attract and retain skilled early childhood teachers. It is important to note that many of the NQF documents, including the curriculum document, *Belonging, being and becoming: an early years learning framework* (known as the EYLF) (DEEWR 2009b) refers to all contact staff as educators. There is no specific differentiation between those with degrees, diplomas or certificates or even working towards a qualification.

3.2.2 A Growing Workforce

The specific goal is to attract and retain a diversified teacher labour force in early childhood services, including in remote areas. In order to cope with a rising birth rate, the growing demand for female employment and a new awareness of the importance of early education for the future workforce the demand for early childhood education is expected to continue to grow and the demand for educators will continue to increase (Egert et al. 2018). The early childhood education industry must establish a skilled and stable growth of teachers, improve retention rates and meet the differing needs of children, families and communities.

3.2.3 A Qualified Workforce

There is a specific goal to improve the qualifications of early childhood teachers. High-quality teachers play a vital role in children's development (Egert et al. 2018) and the National Quality Standard (NQS) stipulates the minimum qualification

from a certificate 111 through to a Bachelor degree. All these qualifications are included in the National Quality Framework (NQF), so as to meet the qualification requirements of National Quality Standards (NQS). There are also ratios for number and type of qualifications required in a centre depending on numbers of children and the type of service.

3.2.4 A Responsive Workforce

A specific goal is to improve the ability of early childhood teachers to respond to and meet the diverse needs of children, families and communities. The Australian Government believes that Australian society will become more diverse and early childhood teachers must develop professional skills to empower families and communities and increase family and community participation in early childhood services. Staff should respond appropriately to children, families, from different language, ethnic and social backgrounds to ensure high-quality pre-school services for all (Ang 2010).

3.2.5 A Collaborative Workforce

Another goal is to improve the ability of early childhood teachers to work effectively with other early childhood educator services. Associated services include child and family health care workers, community workers, child protection officials, speech therapists, physiotherapists, family counsellors, local government and inclusive support staff. Improving effective cooperation between early childhood teachers and other early childhood professionals can help to establish an interdisciplinary and inter-organizational collaborative network that can better meet the diverse needs of children and families.

Finally, the "*Early Years Workforce Strategy*" has been implemented by the Federal Government of Australia in conjunction with the state and territory governments. The States and territories have proposed plans for the provision of early childhood educators in the regional areas. These plans must meet the requirements of the "*Early Years Workforce Strategy*". ACECQA is the main national entity overseeing early childhood education and care in Australia. ACECQA is responsible for the specific management of the National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care and the consistent implementation of the legislation, regulations and curriculum and assessment in all States and the two territories. It is worth noting that a potential weakness of the system is that ACECQA makes the rules and evaluates the rules. ACECQA is accountable to government but there are many powerful players in the field who can also influence government decisions. These include interests that may conflict like the need for workforce support while trying to keep costs down so families will use services to enhance workforce

participation. Cost and quality are always problematic. That quality can be measured in any sure sense has been queried (Fenech 2006; Ishimine et al. 2010). The previous national quality system for childcare, the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS), existed from 1993–2011. It was initially introduced by the Federal government as the government wanted to start subsidizing private centres to help boost supply. The QIAS was introduced to make centres accountable in terms of quality provision and was a strategy to make it acceptable to give public funds to the private sector. By 2011 the QIAS was considered to be flawed. The problems with the QIAS, especially in terms of a powerful private sector that had a strong tendency to keep wages and conditions at a minimal level were perpetuated with the new funding system (Irvine et al. 2018). This problem exists today within the NQF.

3.3 China

Since China's reform and the opening up of the economy in 1978 goals of early childhood education policy have undergone a transformation from "serving women's employment" to "promoting children's development". The corresponding provision of early childhood services has undergone a gradual transition from a dominant government collective sector and unit supply, to include a large private market sector (Zeng and Liu 2018). Since the State Council issued the policy document "*Issues Regarding the Current Development of Early Childhood Education*". In 2010, which was widely known as the *Ten State Guidelines (guoshitiao)*, early childhood education officials at provincial and local government levels developed first three-year action plans to enhance early childhood education in their districts to match the spirit of the document. The policy makers were deeply convinced that this document would enable children to access high quality services and further China's transition to a knowledge intensive society. In the *Ten State Guidelines (guoshitiao),* the policy statement advised that provincial administrators must: ensure there is an adequate number of preschool teachers and government paid posts (*bianzhi*); enforce teacher qualification requirements; improve the social status and compensation of teachers, especially in rural regions; expand and enhance preschool teacher education systems; and provide in-service training for directors and teachers. So, these provincial three-year action plans emphasise the following:

(1) Government paid teaching posts (bianzhi) for public kindergartens: All provincial governments instruct administrators to increase the number of posts in public preschools in line with the existing/new teacher-pupil standards.
(2) Monitoring and support for private preschools: Private centres are instructed to meet mandated teacher-pupil ratios, and some provincial plans require county officials to inspect private centres annually and have public preschools temporarily assign teachers to private centres to further workforce development.

(3) Qualifications: All provinces require local administrators to raise the qualifications required for entry into preschool teaching and a significant number have ordered a substantial increase in the number of teachers with Bachelor degrees.
(4) Social status and compensation: All provinces mandate the minimum wage that must be paid to public preschool teachers and specify how their performance is to be appraised. Some provinces specify that the wage of public sector preschool teachers should match wages paid to teachers working in schools and instruct that higher wages should be paid to teachers working in remote and rural regions.
(5) Teacher Education (TE) programs: All provinces plan to expand the enrolment of TE programs in order to increase the labour pool of qualified preschool workers. The primary instruments that provinces plan to utilise to achieve this goal are vocational schools and three-year normal colleges.
(6) In-service training: Many provincial plans list in-service training as a key measure to upgrade the preschool workforce and promise to include both public and private workers in this training regime.

This campaign-style top-down strategy with Chinese characteristics was effective to some extent. Directors from across China reported regional administrators responded positively to the 2010 Plan particularly in relation to infrastructure and training provision. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder's understanding of the preschool teacher were also altered as a result of receiving more resources and political legitimacy. However, local governments tend to prioritise measures that can be easily quantified while ignoring concerns that are less easy to measure or require substantial and/or long-term commitment. For instance, while a surge in government sponsored in-service training was reported, the level of remuneration paid to preschool teachers remains unresolved. In addition, there is a suspicion that local administrators are not convinced that support for the new policy will be sustained, given the campaign-style strategy utilised to promote the institutionalisation of the 2010 policies.

This arrangement has now entered a third round of the action plans, but many problems of the "difficulty" of affordability and access remain. Teachers' low wages and high turnover still exist, and there are even repeated scandals of child abuse by teachers. The influence of *Ten State Guidelines* appearing in campaign-style has gradually subsided and new policies are urgently needed. In response, at the end of 2018, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued "Some Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Normative Development of Early Childhood Education", which can be considered to be the most concrete and powerful policy document for standardizing the development of early childhood education in China in the past ten years. This document reflects the government's determination to build a public service system of early childhood education with "wide coverage, basic protection and quality". It is divided into nine elements, involving all aspects of the field of early childhood education. The opinions on the construction of a preschool teacher workforce are reflected in the fifth section, which states the aim of strengthening the building of the early childhood teacher

workforce. There is a comprehensive improvement plan laid out with five goals. These five goals are: to improve the number of teachers, make employment conditions more attractive, improved teacher education, workplace and in-service training, and management (State Council, Opinions 2018). These five goals are summarized below.

3.3.1 Number of Teachers

The main measures adopted relate to teachers in public kindergartens and government sponsored 'affordable kindergartens'. Public kindergartens must be equipped with a permanent team of teachers. It is strictly forbidden to use sessional, or contract, teachers in public kindergartens for a long time in order to save costs. Public kindergartens must ensure stable employment conditions for their teachers. Private kindergartens are required to comply with standards of teacher-child ratios in accordance with national regulations. All kindergartens are required to be equipped with health care personnel. Severe penalties will be imposed on some kindergartens who are not equipped with health care personnel in order to save the cost of running a kindergarten. However, pay and conditions are not regulated in the private sector. This will impact on staff retention rates.

3.3.2 Conditions That Will Attract Teachers to the Workforce

Measures recommended to enhance work conditions for early childhood teachers and attract more teachers include paying the salaries of teachers in public kindergartens according to policies; to provide subsistence allowances for public kindergartens in rural areas; to include nurses and other personnel in public kindergartens in line with government purchasing services; to determine the salary level of teachers in private kindergartens according to public kindergartens; to pay social insurance and a housing accumulation fund for all kindergarten teachers; and to improve the professional titles and status of all teachers; finally, establish an award system for excellence in teaching. At the same time, teachers' salaries in 'affordable' kindergartens should be in line with those in public kindergartens. The affordable kindergarten is a special private kindergarten subsidised by government and their tuition is regulated. The Chinese government is currently promoting kindergartens in this form. The government requires that by the end of 2020, affordable kindergartens and public kindergartens will account for 80% of the total number of kindergartens.

3.3.3 Teacher Education

The suggested measures to address teacher education are to run kindergarten teachers' colleges and teachers' colleges and secondary vocational schools; expand the scale of training and public teachers' payments; improve the training admission levels and provide training in special education; expand the supply of higher-qualified teachers, improve the professional level of training, and start a national certification system of preschool education in normal universities.

3.3.4 Teacher Training

Here the aim is to implement a system of directors, teachers engaging in a regular rotation of training programs to develop kindergarten teacher training programs, increase training levels and introduce innovative training models to enhance the relevance and timeliness of training.

3.3.5 Teacher Management

For management main measures are to implement the system of levels of admission and registration of teachers' qualifications to be in a management role and ensure non-preschool education graduates hold certificates after training. These initiatives are aimed at strengthening teachers' understanding of professional ethics and style of teaching, to improve teachers' professional qualities. These systems must be regulated and monitored.

Finally, The Ministry of Education has formulated standards for the education and training of preschool teachers, which include quotas for teachers, improved financial support from the Ministry of Finance, employment and work condition guarantees from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, and supervise teachers' care work under the Health Departments (State Council, Opinions 2018).At the same time, the provinces and municipalities directly under the Central Government will formulate relevant policies in line with the development of preschool education in their respective regions in accordance with the provisions of the "Opinions" report on their implementation be accountable to the relevant department (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Policies for Early Childhood Teacher quality and training: Australia and China

Country	Australia	China
Policy	"Early years workforce strategy"	"Several opinions on deepening reform and standardization of preschool education": Fifth point
Relevant department	Department of education and training	CPC central committee, state council
Responsible government bodies	State and territory governments + child care quality administration – ACECQA	Local governments + relevant departments
Aims	A professional workforce A growing workforce A qualified workforce A responsive workforce A collaborative workforce	Number of teachers Teacher employment conditions Teacher education Teacher in-service and on-the-job training Teacher management

3.4 Commonalities and Differences in the Building of a Quality Early Childhood Teacher Workforce in China and Australia

Through a review of the policies of early childhood teachers in China and Australia in recent years it was found that the two countries have different systems, different cultural backgrounds and histories but have adopted many similar policies in the construction of an early childhood teacher workforce. There are also many differences in policy orientation. The following is a comparison of the similarities and differences between the policies of the two countries.

The policies of the two countries on building an early childhood teacher workforce are led by the national governments with implementation being guided at state and local government levels. The local governments are authorised to cooperate with the functional departments to implement. Australia has introduced the "NQF" at the national level and has developed specific strategies "*for the growth of the early childhood teacher workforce"*. China has issued a number of "*Opinions on Deepening Reform and Standardization of Early Childhood Education*" at the national level and specifies the direction of the reforms for the teacher workforce. Corresponding implementation is assigned to local governments and the development plan of the local the region is formulated in accordance with the policy texts issued by the national government. These three-year plans are supervised and managed by designated government departments.

Secondly, the policies of the two countries on the building of the teacher workforce are embedded in the framework of more macro-early childhood education developments and quality control. The OECD has described, as a major policy lever for the development of high-quality children's education services, an ultimate goal

of early childhood teachers who incite comprehensive reform of early childhood education and improve the quality of overall early childhood education services. Australia's policy document "*Early Years Workforce Strategy*" for early childhood teachers is in line with the overall requirements of the National Quality Framework (NQF), while China's "*Strengthening the Construction of Kindergarten Teachers*" is the fifth largest policy document embedded in the early childhood education "Opinions". This reflects a similar policy logic in the two countries: that is, they both hope to build a pre-school teacher workforce that will ultimately have the capacity to improve the overall quality of pre-school education. There is a focus in both countries on teachers as an important part of the reform process.

Thirdly, there are long-term plans for the number of trained early childhood teachers in policies. Populations in both countries are expected to grow. Australia mainly through immigration and China has liberalised their restricted child policy in recent years. There is a strong demand for early childhood education in both countries and the early childhood teachers in both countries have a relatively high turnover rate. The importance of building a stable number of early childhood teachers in the long-term is recognised and the need to respond in a timely manner.

Fourth, the policy of the two countries has a minimum requirement for teacher qualifications to ensure the quality of teachers. China implements a teacher qualification system by having a minimum requirement to enter training. Whether it is a preschool education major or not, it is necessary for Chinese students to obtain a teacher qualification certificate if they want to enter the kindergarten profession. Australian potential early childhood professionals must pass specified requirements to work in kindergarten. There is also teacher registration in some states for those with a degree. ACECQA sets the minimum requirements for staff in early childhood services. ACECQA must approve training and education programs against the requirements and these include certificates, diplomas and degrees.

3.5 The Differences in the Development of an Early Childhood Teacher Workforce in Australia and China

The form of Australian policies is not only embodied in the policy text but is also supported by corresponding legislation. However, most Chinese early childhood policy has not risen to the level of legislation. The Australian Government has designed a set of "*policy packages*" for early childhood education. This "*policy package*" covers a variety of forms. There are policy documents, laws and regulations, and professional standards. The NQF involves most aspects of early childhood service delivery, including preschool education. Policies and regulated standards and practices are embedded in the NQF. Regulatory monitoring is built into the system as well as the quality improvement initiative. In China policies cover a wide range of aspects of provision but many have not been mandated. The 2001

Table 3.2 Commonalities and differences in the building of an early childhood teacher workforce in China and Australia

Commonalities	Differences
The policies are developed at the national level of the government, and then state and local governments are authorized to cooperate with designated local departments.	Australian policy will not only support policy documents, there are also laws and regulations. China has less legislation
The policies of the two countries on building the early childhood teacher workforce are embedded in a framework of macro-early childhood education development and quality control.	The Australian government has a national early childhood education regulatory body to supervise the implementation of policies; there is no such organization in China.
There are long-term plans for the number of early childhood teachers in both countries' policies	The Australian government emphasizes the importance of collaboration between parents and communities as this is built into a quality standard
There are minimum requirements for the qualifications of teachers in the two countries' policies.	Working with parents and communities is embedded in Australian policy documents and is mentioned in the Chinese curriculum but not emphasised

curriculum is still a guideline. Problems with teaching standards and practice are often dealt with at an industry or administrative level and there may be no supporting legislation.

That Australia has a special early childhood education regulator – ACECQA, responsible for the overall implementation, coordination and supervision of the National Quality Framework (NQF) makes the systems represented nationally cohesive. China mentions in the "Opinions" that relevant departments need to work together, but without an overall frame this can be confusing. Organisations like ACECQA do not exist in China. Local governments often lack specialised departments to provide expert support for preschool education and preschool teachers.

Third, the Australian government emphasizes collaboration between professionals working in the early childhood area and also encourages families and communities to be active players in the establishment and operating of centres. Such participation is promoted but obviously there is more scope for collaboration with families and communities in some centres. Parent participation is often limited in the private sector as this could impact on the business model of the owner/s. China also endorses building relationships with parents. This is stated in Article three of the 2001 curriculum guidelines, but this is a draft document and not all aspects of the document have been emphasized in practice. Building a professionally recognized workforce is also part of the Australian government's agenda. For a long-term stable and qualified workforce early childhood teacher careers must be reflected in industry conditions and widely appreciated by the public. Early childhood teachers' professionalism is often not easily recognized by the public. Problems exist because pre-primary education is not compulsory and educational staff have many different levels of training (Table 3.2).

3.6 Implications on the Construction of the Early Childhood Teacher Workforce in China and Australia

Through the comparison of the policies for the development of early childhood teachers in China and Australia there are opportunities to study reforms in each country and learn from each. China could consider accelerating the pace of early childhood education legislation. Australia's policies for workforce development is embedded in a set of "*policy packages*", which is the National Quality Framework (NQF), which includes the "*laws and regulations of early childhood education*" which makes the system seem straight forward. Laws and regulations in the field of early childhood education can be key to administering to such issues as the nature and orientation of early childhood education, government responsibility, management systems, investment and funding systems and staffing policies being clearly defined so and preschool education can develop along sustainable lines. In the four stages of education in China it is only early childhood education that lacks comprehensive legislation, which can create a bottleneck that restricts the rapid development of early childhood education in China (Pang and Wang 2019). This said China is in advance of Australia where access to early childhood education for children 3–6 is acknowledged as a major government policy. In Australia there is only a national commitment for children to access preschool for one year before school and this is only funded on an annual basis. Such government commitments influence the building of the early childhood workforce in terms of both training and numbers. In China there has been obvious progress in the training of teachers and the evaluation of their professional titles as stated in the 'Opinions', but some fundamental problems restricting the development of teaching staff have yet to be resolved. Australia and China share the same problems about status and perceptions of teachers. Conditions in different types of centres are also a quality issue. Teachers in public kindergartens in China enjoy the same pay and conditions as primary school teachers. Teachers in ''*affordable private kindergartens*'' and the private sector generally do not have the same protections. Australia has a similar problem where the large private sector often acts as a powerful lobby to keep conditions at minimal levels. In that case staff in the community sector are more likely to receive over award payment and better staff/ child ratios which improves work conditions and quality of the service. If early childhood teaching is to become a respected and desired career, then regulatory standards are important as are professional standards and industry Codes of Ethics. In Australia the peak industry body '*Early Childhood Australia*' has developed a Code of Ethics that is based on wide consultation with those in the profession and the content has been disseminated throughout the workforce (Kennedy et al. 2016). Such initiatives support the regulatory environment which is perhaps a reason why Australia has not had incidents of child abuse by teachers that have been reported in China (Yan 2017).

The establishment of a national early childhood education supervision and coordination body, ACECQA, has endeavoured to give early childhood services across Australia a shared voice. As in China this stage of education is not compulsory so a

national body to promote its specific interests and values is significant. Early childhood education is unique as early childhood staff are involved with the education of young children and also play an important nurturing and family support role, these mixed interests involve the education sector, but also the health care sector social security and other government departments. In Australia the early childhood sector has come under different jurisdictions over the years, but it was finally decided the different services were better served under one department and had a more concerted voice in education than in welfare where competing needs were so great. This is a conversation China could have but the country is so huge and needs so diverse that the building of the early childhood teaching workforce will need the cooperation of groups like the Women's Federation (Yu and Liu 2017) which does not exist in Australia. At present, the management of early childhood education in China is mainly based in the Education Department with an aim to achieve multi-departmental cooperation to manage early childhood education. There is inevitably a lack of management due to communication difficulties between departments and management issues arise when there are overlapping management responsibilities. A national coordinating organization like ACECQA might be useful to design, direct and supervise the implementation and of early childhood education policies. However, Australia is a small country that can dictate from the centre, but such administration comes at a cost if local needs are not fully understood. China's system of central policy making with local plans for implementation is one that Australia could look at as the role of ACECQA becomes fully understood and practice can be further developed.

The focus in Australia on fostering the ability of early childhood teachers to collaborate with parents, communities, and other early childhood educators is an important one. In countries like China and Singapore parents are often powerful as consumers but are not necessarily partners in the education process. In Australia this expectation of working with parents as partners is built into staff training, professional standards, practice evaluation and the Code of Ethics. Although the relationship with parents and early childhood staff is a part of the system the poor conditions of staff and lack of status generally can make this an unequal partnership. Australian research (Rouse 2012) suggests that to be empowered to work in an equitable partnership early childhood staff need professional respect and their work to be valued. There does not seem to be a political will in Australia to improve conditions for early childhood staff at this time.

3.7 Conclusion

There are many issues that China and Australia share as each country develops policies to develop a strong early childhood sector with staff who will be part of the reforms. There are many concerns that could not be mentioned here, for example, both countries have a rural/urban divide, albeit of very different natures. However, how one country pursues a need can have lessons for other countries. Comparisons are useful. Often comparisons remind us of our own goals and there are many ways

to achieve these. Australia and China are so different in terms of size – population and landmass – and it is challenging to know what lessons may be relevant or applicable. A chapter like this indicates that early childhood staff development can be a shared international language.

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Part 2
Comparative Curriculum and Its Role in Remodelling Early Childhood Practice and Pedagogy

Chapter 4
The Role of Formal Curriculum Documents in Early Childhood Education Reform: China and Australia

Xin Fan and Berenice Nyland

4.1 Introduction

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has received increased attention from policy makers in recent years. Reasons for this are multiple reflecting the fact that ECEC has diverse goals that include child development and education outcomes, support for parent employment and/or training, the growth of future workforces suited to a knowledge economy, early intervention for vulnerable children and wider social and civic well-being. Curriculum in early childhood is a contested concept and differs greatly from curriculum in other educational areas. Even the language used by policy makers to describe early childhood curriculum suggests ambiguity. Two popular terms used to refer to early childhood curriculum are 'guidelines' and '*frameworks'*. The Chinese document is referred to as guidelines (MoE 2001) and the Australian curriculum is a learning framework (DEEWR 2009). The introduction of accompanying policies to support successful implementation of these policy documents has been a common practice in many countries including China and Australia.

The Chinese data is drawn from interviews with Chinese early childhood directors across 16 provinces who were attending a national in-service in Beijing. As directors they all felt they were considered leaders in the implementation process. The Australian data was drawn from interviews with staff across three ECEC

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centres. They held various positions, director, room leader and educators. Findings suggest varied interpretations of curriculum reform among these educational directors and staff and a variety of constraints. For the Chinese participants there were issues because of differing applications of policies across jurisdictions. For the Australian staff the problem of differing policies across states and borders was one of the reasons for the reform so they were all under shared national legislation, regulations, curriculum and quality assessment for the first time. Many of the Chinese directors found the curriculum policy document abstract and some were confused by opportunities for commercialisation that the national curriculum provided. Some Australians had a similar reaction to the EYLF, also finding it ambiguous, while one participant was wildly enthusiastic. The EYLF has also seen commercial systems introduced, especially in the documenting of children's learning. A challenge for both groups was the role of play in the curriculum documents. The question asked in both studies was: What is the role of formal curriculum documents in early childhood education reform?

4.2 Literature Review

> It wasn't so long ago that the idea of using a written curriculum to guide the care and education of children under five was not widely accepted. It was unheard of in programs serving infants and toddlers and still controversial for programs serving preschool children. Even defining curriculum for this age group has been challenging (Trister-Dodge 2004, p. 71)

The word curriculum was traditionally associated with the formal school years to describe course content, learning outcomes and how standards would be measured. In early childhood decisions about educational practice were based on educational philosophy and theories of development (Evans 1982). Curricular activities and methods of instruction, like play as a medium for learning, were the focus. Elkind (1989) explained this focus when he discussed the separation of early childhood educational practice and child development research. Practice he surmised had largely grown out of an oral tradition with teachers passing on their own insights about the best learning conditions for children. The enthusiasm for Piaget in America and countries like Australia, from the 1960s with the 'cognitive' revolution (Piaget 1952) changed this situation and educational practice and developmental theories became more coherent in their relationship (Elkind 1989). Different theories that would dominate practice were based on debates about maturation (eg. Gesell 1940), behavioural theories (eg., Skinner 1957) and constructivist theories (eg., Piaget 1952: Vygotsky 1978).

China during the same period had a number of early childhood curriculum documents that emphasised child development and the importance of play. Scholars like Xingshi Dao, Xuemen Zhang and Heqin Chen were influential before the 1949 revolution. Dao and Chen had studied in Columbia and had been influenced by Dewey's 'learning by doing' approach. Chen also studied child psychology and

took a great interest in children's development (Feng 2017). The 1952 Chinese curriculum adopted Soviet style teaching methods and am emphasis on content (Feng 2017). During the Cultural Revolution, 1966–1976, preschools closed and there were no theoretical advances made about young children and learning. After the 1978 opening of the Chinese economy the flow of ideas that influenced preschool curriculum was strong.

Since 1996 most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have developed early childhood formal curriculum frameworks or guidelines and this activity has been gaining momentum. This development can be partly explained by the interest in investing in ECEC which comes from drawing on the body of knowledge known as the new economics of Life Cycle Skill Formation (LCSF) (Cunha et al. 2006). Drawing on brain research and longitudinal studies of child development and the accumulation of human capital, the LCSF literature argues that skill formation is a whole-life process and children's abilities to develop skills in later years will be influenced by investment in the preschool years (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). This evokes the issue of quality which becomes an important concern because of the deepening inequality that has occurred in many countries at a time when policy makers have become convinced that children raised in disadvantaged environments may be developmentally challenged. This situation has been highlighted as a threat in the US literature.

> The future success of the US economy will depend in part on well-educated and highly resourceful workers who are capable of learning new skills, so they remain competitive in a continually changing global market. That success is in jeopardy because a growing fraction of the nation's workforce will consist of adults who were raised in disadvantaged environments (Knudsen et al. 2006, p. 10155).

Knowledge of the curriculum and an ability to use these policy documents to inform practice is a measure of quality. A recent study carried out in England (Department of Education 2017) looked at centres considered to be delivering good quality programs and conducted longitudinal surveys of families with preschool children. A key finding of this report found that good practice was associated with curriculum planning and planning approaches that were "grounded in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework but tailored to individual needs" (p. 23). Qualifications were emphasised and staff reported that more qualified staff had a better grasp of curriculum planning in relation to teaching, planning and assessment. Of particular importance staff considered having educators who had a thorough understanding of child development and the EYFS added value to the program. One setting manager commented:

> I think what would help is if we were able to afford more highly trained staff. The only way we're going to get progression in the early years sector is if we have highly educated people, delivering our curriculum (p. 66).

That a formal curriculum document on its own is not enough to drive change and encourage best practice is supported by this UK experience. Influences and experiences in implementing curriculum, and the importance of skilled and knowledgeable staff also emerge in the literature. In this chapter we describe the Chinese and

Australian context in terms of curriculum and implementation of reforms. The two studies are described, and findings combined to look for differences and similarities in the experiences the participants enjoyed.

4.3 The Chinese Context

The Chinese curriculum document is heavily influenced by ideas that are similar to many curriculum documents in other countries and the strategy of developing curriculum guidelines has been popular in countries seeking early childhood reforms. An early example was the New Zealand *Te Whäriki* in 1996 and countries like Australia followed later (DEEWR 2009). China adopted a national curriculum 18 years ago and design implementation strategies started to emerge after 2010 when early childhood professionals had enjoyed time to become familiar with the new educational approach for Chinese early childhood proposed (Naftali 2010). This 'new' approach included a respect for individual difference and an emphasis on play as a medium for learning.

The key curriculum instrument adopted by the national government as a strategy to inform changes to the ECEC sector was *The Guiding Outline for Kindergarten Education (Provisional)*, promulgated by the Ministry of Education in 2001. These curriculum guidelines were subsequently supported by curriculum standards for teachers in 2011, kindergarten teacher professional standards in 2012 and developmental guidelines for children 3–6 also in 2012. Subsequent policy documents have addressed issues of planning in the different provinces, rural and urban provision, affordability and regulation of the private sector (see Chap. 2).

Examples of major national documents that have influenced early childhood policy and practice include the original curriculum guidelines. This 2001 document presents a child-oriented model of early childhood education describing approaches to learning and highlighting five goals. These are listed as: Health; which includes physical and emotional development, Language; where children will become confident users of language, express ideas and are aware of others, Society; in which children learn to communicate, co-operate, share and learn from others, Science; to be engaged learners who actively explore the natural and made environment and Art; where children gain skills in expressing ideas through creative mediums while gaining a sense of aesthetics.

Except for the 2001 curriculum guidelines all other documents were developed after 2010 and were designed to assist in applying the principles from the curriculum guidelines to everyday practice. These policies included the *Medium and Long-term Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020), Curriculum Standards for Teacher Education* (2011), *Kindergarten Teacher Professional Standards* (2012), and *Early Learning and Development Guidelines for 3–6 years old* (MoE 2012). From the titles of the policies we can see that ECEC educators have become a focus of curriculum reform. For example, the teacher curriculum standards specify that preschool teacher graduates must have a clear understanding of teachers' duties and

responsibilities and a sound knowledge of relevant pedagogy; and the professional standards specify 62 areas in which preschool teachers are expected to be both knowledgeable and competent. The standards document was deemed one of the most important supplementary curriculum documents by the practitioners interviewed for this study given it explicates developmental goals for children of different age.

4.4 The Australian Context

Australia's early childhood provision has been complex because it is a federation of six states and two territories. As each state had jurisdiction over education and care services this resulted in variations in the regulatory environments. There was no agreement as to staffing levels, physical space and child/adult ratios that are considered measures of structural quality (Doherty-Derkowski 1995). Australia has also had a care and education divide with education being delivered through a sessional preschool model and care, available across the day was seen as a workforce support. By the end of the twentieth century demand for services meant there was a growing private sector and in 2001 the first corporation was listed on the Australian stock exchange. This background paved the way for the Australian state governments and the federal government to agree to a more coherent system across the states and territories.

The National Quality Framework (NQF), which was mandated in 2012, started with the curriculum document, *Belonging, being and becoming: an early years learning framework*, being introduced in 2009 (DEEWR). This lead time was to help staff in centres to become familiar with the curriculum (EYLF) and to be able to attend in-services and participate in professional conversations so that by the time the NQF, with its accompanying legislation, regulations and quality assessment regime, was mandated staff and parents had been exposed to the content of the first national curriculum and had been able to take time to interpret the content and requirements. A two-year program was unfolded nationally (2010–2011) that included workshops, online forums, newsletters and e-learning videos and online professional learning vignettes were provided. A national body was established to implement and monitor the changes. This body is the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). A stated aim of the EYLF is to "provide a common language about children's learning" (DEEWR 2009, p. 7) for "early childhood educators and other professionals" (DEEWR 2009, p. 9). The introduction of the EYLF states that it draws on international research and is designed to provide directions for early childhood educator's daily planning and practice. The document has children's learning at the core and three elements, learning outcomes, principles and practice. There are five 'process' learning outcomes, the child: has a strong sense of identity, is connected with and contributes to their world, has a sense of well-being, is an involved learner and an effective communicator. The theoretical approach is non-prescriptive so practitioners may choose their own approach to designing children's learning though this must have a fit with the framework.

As with China, implementation strategies for reform have targeted staff to play a dominant role in the reform. Whilst education and support were available, and the curriculum was not immediately mandated many staff felt initially overwhelmed with the task of trying to lead and implement change.

4.5 The Research

Both studies were qualitative in design and aimed to provide insights into how policy strategies like a national curriculum support a process of reform. Semi-structured interviews with early childhood directors were conducted in China and similar interviews were conducted with the staff from the Australian centres. This gave the interviewer the chance to focus on the topic of early childhood education reform while also having the opportunity to gain in-depth information of the experience of implementation. Early childhood directors attending a Director Training Program in Beijing were approached to participate in the research. The Australian interviewees were drawn from participants of a survey on early childhood teaching who also volunteered to be interviewed about their experiences in implementing the EYLF.

4.5.1 The Participants

In the Chinese cohort there were 24 directors from a wide diversity of backgrounds who volunteered to be part of the research. The participants were all female, aged from 24 to 46 years. Their locations ranged from coastal cities to inland villages and their working experience in early childhood settings were from 1 to 28 years. More than half were from provincial demonstration kindergartens (*shengji shifan youer yuan*) which are ranked by the government as the highest quality centres in a given region. The majority had been categorised as elite teachers before taking on a director's role. Only one director from the private sector attended the program so the representative opinion presented here is from the public sector.

There were 7 participants in the Australian cohort. They were from three urban centres in Melbourne. One participant was male. Level of qualifications ranged from an early childhood degree (2), a graduate diploma (1), certificate 4 (1) and certificate 3 (3). Years of experience were from 20 to 4 years and ages were 25–50 years.

4.5.2 The Data

In both countries participants were asked for their opinions on ECEC policy development and the role of the curriculum document in the reform process. Interviews took 45–90 min. In China they were conducted in Mandarin recorded, transcribed

and translated into English. The interviewees were asked to discuss the curriculum guidelines, framework, as an integral part of the process that helped shape their worldview of high-quality early childhood education. For the Chinese participants the process of the interconnectedness of different levels of policy formation to encourage implementation is illustrated in Fig. 4.1 below. According to the interviewees the 2001 curriculum guidelines gained significance after the 2010 plan.

In contrast the Australian educators were experiencing the development of the first national curriculum document in Australia. There was significant support provided through in-servicing, on-line forums and as time went by the national body, ACECQA, built a comprehensive website for staff to use and a newsletter keeping centres up-to-date with any government changes as well as sharing stories of practice. This has been made available to all centres. Although localities and services are diverse Australian practitioners feel they are using a common professional language.

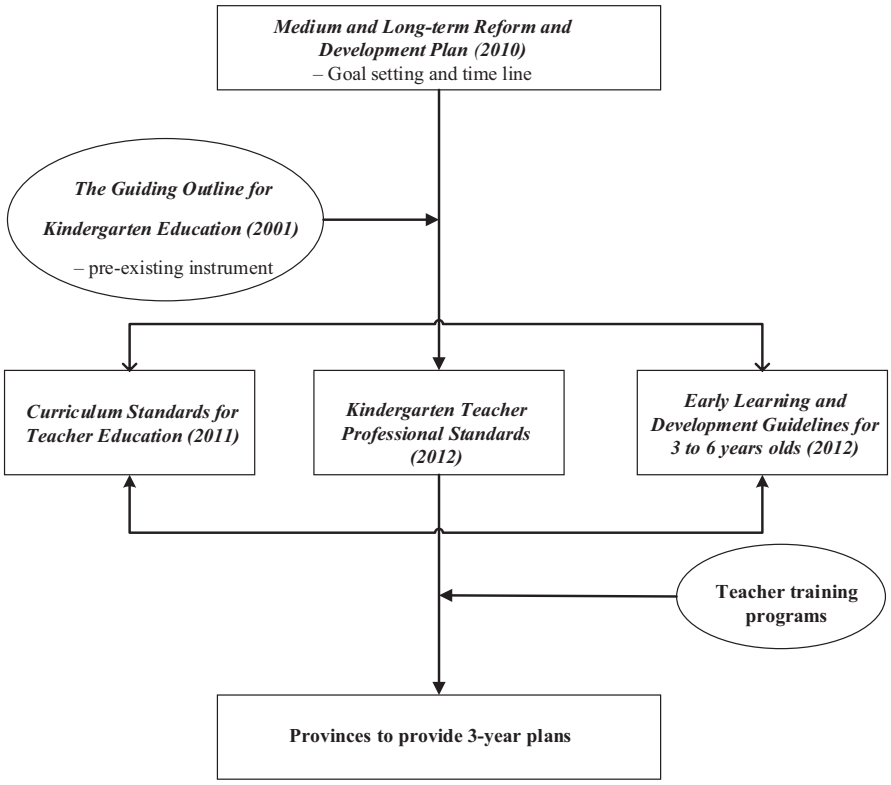

Fig. 4.1 Interconnections of policy levels in China

4.6 The Analysis

Conceptual codes and open codes that emerged from the data were used to generate key themes Two dominant themes overlapped in Chinese data and Australian data. These were; the questioning of the capacity of teachers to take a leading role in the reforms, the second reflected on the early childhood centre itself as directors and teachers had problems designing programs based on the curriculum guidelines, a key aspect of this was a discussion of the role of play. The Chinese participants were also concerned about a lack of expertise among officials who were responsible for designing 3-year reform plans in each province. For the Australian experience anxiety about the quality assessment process was expressed and this was a third theme for this cohort.

4.7 Findings – China

The perceived need to develop the teacher workforce to have the capacity to deliver high quality ECE services and thus enable children to become effective learners was strongly emphasised. Consequently, directors paid much attention to what might be done to improve teachers' ability to teach in ways that could facilitate children's development. In so doing, they commonly observed that as early childhood leaders they have a limited capacity to enhance the quality of their workforce and that this limitation is particularly acute in rural, remote and underdeveloped regions. The surge in the provision of in-service teacher training by local governments from 2010 was welcomed. The directors suggested more support including more tailored in-service training programs designed to enhance the quality of teaching were required.

The difficulty of translating national curriculum guidelines into practice faced by the teachers was stressed by many interviewees. All directors claimed their teachers followed the spirit of government documents, especially the 2001 curriculum document. In so doing they used terminology derived from this key document such as "five content areas" and "play" to explain how they organise their own curriculum. However, the directors made it clear that they consider these curriculum guidelines to be highly abstract and that teachers need to know how to translate the provisions in the document into forms of action that assist in daily planning that is appropriate to the local context. Unfortunately, this transference has proved difficult in many settings given the traditional teacher-centred methods which the government now holds are obsolete and need to be abandoned and are not supported by the principles expressed in the 2001 curriculum document.

Participants suggested that individual centres are the main agent between the national curriculum and curriculum in practice. They indicated that pedagogic practice in each setting has unique characteristics and the support educators receive is dependent on the ideas and skills of individual directors and on the centre's history.

While this situation is less problematic in the well-established elite centres, it was likely to hamper the many new centres where directors have less experience and expertise. The interviewees believed that the latter should receive particular attention, and this is particularly so in those rural regions which have seen rapid growth of ECEC centres since 2010. This was a point stressed by participants from rural kindergartens who advised that their staff lack confidence and skills needed to deliver curriculum effectively and admitted that they needed more help.

> Now we have new buildings, new teachers and all the equipment. Everything is ready all we need is an east wind (a suitable curriculum). I want to build a brand for our kindergarten (participant 15).

> The national ECEC policy instructed how many kindergartens should be built and how many teachers should be trained. It's all good. But a lot of problems are still not solved, like the curriculum. The ECEC sector is still like a pile of loose sand (in terms of curriculum) and is not as standardised as the school system (participant 20).

More than half (15/24) of the directors reported that to address the need to upgrade the knowledge and skills of their staff they had purchased some sort of commercial training package, a few (3/24) had bought a whole curriculum for the kindergarten including textbooks, teaching materials and a training regime. However, the marketisation of kindergarten texts and curriculum has tended to induce a degree of disarray. In terms of curriculum in the ECEC sector assisted by the wide range of teaching materials and curricula available in the market place creating difficulties was a situation agreed to by a number of the directors:

> One severe problem in the kindergarten is the chaos of existing curricula. Unlike the situation in primary education, there is no unified standard for the kindergarten curriculum. We used to say it's good to have 'contention of a hundred schools of thought' (*bai jia zheng ming*), but I disagree. Though it is good for kindergartens to have unique features, I would like to see the adoption of a common curriculum. Based on that standard, we can then explore unique features. I think what we miss in the kindergarten is such a standard. (That's why) when experts praise a certain method of teaching, we tend to do as suggested but then feel lost when others criticise it. When the 'five content areas' were promulgated, many textbooks emerged in the market. The publishers and staff training firms made a fortune out of that. All sorts of curriculum are used in kindergartens: art specialisation, Montessori, Carl Orff, Reggio Emilia. They confuse you. At the end of the day, all curricula should be based on child development theories, and if not should be considered useless. We should gain a grasp of the essentials (participant 12).

The foregoing criticism regarding the lack of national standardisation of the ECEC curricula indicates the need for more awareness and professional development to complement the curriculum. It also reflects the belief that the transformation of early childhood education depends on first educating the teachers who are charged with the task of delivering an informed early childhood curriculum and this has implications for pre-service training as well as professional development. The *Curriculum Standards for Teacher Education (2011)*, *Kindergarten Teacher Professional Standards (2012)*, and the *Early Learning and Development Guidelines for 3–6 years old children* (2012) were policies designed for this purpose but at the time of the interviews were not well known.

The literature regarding national ECEC curriculum in OECD countries advises that while the adoption of a national curriculum can encounter resistance the process has a capacity to enhance the professional standing of the ECEC worker (Oberhuemer 2005). The directors interviewed agreed this was the case and were hopeful that the *Early Learning and Development Guidelines for 3–6 years old children* could satisfy this need.

> I think one problem existing in preschool education is that we follow suit. It has been getting better in recent years, but it was definitely chaos in the past. We learn bits of curricula such as Montessori and Reggio Emilia from many countries. We need to find out the curriculum that suits best in a Chinese context. I think the situation has improved since the promulgation of the *Guiding Outline for Kindergarten Education (Provisional)* (in 2001) and will be further improved with the issue of the *Early Learning and Development Guidelines for 3 to 6 years old*. Nonetheless, different textbooks are chosen across provinces, although I believe this is necessary given regional differences. (participant 14)

Participant 14 acknowledged the central government's efforts to support the ECEC curriculum, as well as its intention to leave space for creativity and regional differences, but she insisted more support was needed to assist teachers to formulate and deliver a curriculum that could meet the needs of national and local settings. In this regard it was recognised that the role of local authorities is crucial to bridge the gap between central policy and individual kindergartens. Some directors lamented that though local education authorities were supposed to supervise and provide tailored support for local ECEC providers they had all too often failed to do so, not least because they did not know what was required. Many local officials devising provincial three-year plans often had no teacher training or had generic teacher training that did not include specialist early childhood knowledge. A number of directors were explicit in complaining that:

> None of the officials who are in charge of preschool education in municipal and district education bureaus have an ECEC background. They are either from primary schools or administrative positions. The newly appointed preschool education official in the municipal education bureau has been transferred from an administrative position; and the one in our district is from a primary school. They never give us instruction or supervision, never. We are all by ourselves. (participant 10).

> Back in the 1990s, every education bureau had an ECEC office with a specialised person in charge, but this is no longer the case and the ECEC sector is under-supervised. No wonder problems exist. So, I think assigning specialised personnel to supervise the ECEC sector is required. The standards regarding the qualifications of the kindergarten as well as its teachers should be implemented strictly. In so doing the chaos in the ECEC sector will be solved. Appealing through the media is not enough. (participant 19).

These themes arising from the interviews raise a number of concerns about the role of the formal curriculum documents for these early childhood directors. They saw themselves and their centres as being responsible for the interpretation of the guidelines and for assisting their teaching staff. That the guidelines provided a shared language was acknowledged but 15 of the 24 directors admitted to buying commercial resources and this in turn was associated with 'chaos'. Presumably the shared language and principles of the guidelines were lost when too many disparate approaches were adopted. As the purpose of a commercial

curriculum is to make a profit these resources must compete on the market and the idea of branding becomes important. Participant 15 commented on the idea of building a brand.

Issues discussed by the directors included a perceived lack of standardisation, unlike the primary school curriculum, the need to 'grasp' essentials like a knowledge of child development (participant 12) was identified as was the lack of early childhood expertise amongst the government officials who were charged with planning the implementation of the national policy.

4.8 Findings – Australia

In Australia teachers in early childhood services have been identified as having a major role to play in curriculum reform. They saw themselves as changing their perceptions of their professional roles as the new curriculum was rolled out. The introduction of the curriculum initially caused a crisis in confidence among many early childhood educators (Gibbons 2011).

4.8.1 This Was Strongly Expressed by One Participant

> It [the reform agenda] is creating a little terror. I don't know why there is all this panic (participant 3).

There was confusion about what was required to implement change. Who were the leaders? Colmer, Wanganayake and Field (2014) studied effective ways to develop professional teams in the workplace. They looked at the roles of staff across the whole service and considered the role of a distributive leadership model as a way of managing change. The curriculum requires staff to engage in reflective practice but for this to happen there has to be pedagogical knowledge and leadership capability. These were challenges for practitioners. Discussions on the role of play also created some tensions as the document emphasises learner centred experiences which could be seen to compromise ideas about play. Play has been a special part of ECEC practice in Australia but poorly articulated as the following anecdote indicates.

4.8.2 Anecdote – What Is Play?

> The late Professor Margaret Clyde gave a workshop to a group of early childhood directors in the early 2000s. She told the gathering she was giving a keynote in America the following week. The keynote was on play and she commented that "Americans don't understand play". At this one of the participants asked: "What is play"? The answer: "You know a couple of gumnuts". The audience were amused but also acknowledged they could see the point she was making.

The EYLF claims to be play-based but under the practice elements "planning and implementing learning through play" (p. 16) is only one of eight principles. Ideas like intentional teaching have become popular and encouraged through renewed interest in such curriculum approaches as the American Highscope (Kennedy 2014). Numeracy and literacy are emphasised and there is little mention of the arts, once considered expressive activities. For some the idea of play seems to have been downplayed in the EYLF while others believe the opposite.

The interpretation of the document is varied as shown by comments of the participants. One was thrilled with the document, another considered it a defence for play while another considered it moved away from the 'formula' of old thinking.

> I am absolutely thrilled with the document and all the supporting materials. I refer to them all the time. I can break [the EYLF] down easily for parents (participant 1).

> I have spent my life talking about children's play as work. This document talks about play and you don't have to talk about work anymore. Play is a legitimate word. It doesn't necessarily change practice, but it helps understand practice (Participant 2).

> Changed [practice] yes. It embraces openness. There was a safe place in the old thinking like putting out the play-dough. We follow the children now. More challenging. Moved away from a formula (participant 3).

These comments suggest diverse readings of the document, the responses from these educators were that they felt confident in their interpretation of the document though the first quote from participant 3 does refer to the 'terror' a mandated curriculum has created.

The third theme from the Australian discussion that differed from the Chinese themes was the discussion about the quality review process. All services are assessed against the National Quality Standard (NQS). The NQS was introduced in 2012, three years after services started engaging with the EYLF. The NQS was revised in 2018 as the number of elements in each of the seven standards were considered to be excessive. The standards have a dual purpose of compliance and quality improvement (Mulhearn 2016). To meet the standards ECEC services must be consistent with the EYLF. As the EYLF claims to be non-prescriptive many staff are anxious about their practices being judged against the standards. This feeling of assessment being a test that can be failed was one mentioned by a number of the participants. One had felt particularly distressed.

> I remember the day our centre was visited by a reviewer. Everyone was tense. I was in a room where two young children were fighting. I physically separated them and looked around to see the reviewer was in the and was watching me. We always talk to the children about using their words and instead of setting an example and calming them down verbally I had physically stopped them fighting. Later I burst into tears thinking I had made the centre fail (participant 4).

4.9 Discussion

From participant comments there would appear to be systemic problems with capacity building across participating players in the Chinese context, a situation made more complicated by a private sector driven by commercial interests. Such problems are global issues. The Australian experience was somewhat different although one participant referred to panic and terror across the sector. The tone of the interviews was very different. The Chinese directors talked more generally about their services and the system. The Australians, even the two directors and the room leader, only referred to their own personal experiences. The Australians were from three community centres while the Chinese were all from the public sector, except for one participant. None of the Australian participants mentioned differences in provision, resourcing and programming between the private and public sector. This is an issue, but Australia has brought all centres under the same legislation, regulation, curriculum requirements and quality assessment through its system of registration and demand side funding. As funding flows through the family all services receive government funds and must comply with the NQS. This has not prevented private centres charging high fees in areas where this is possible. There are also issues of availability, especially in country towns and the private sector does curtail reforms like ratios and qualifications of staff.

There was an emphasis on teachers as change agents (Pantić and Florian 2015; Chen 2005) in the introduction of these documents in both contexts and this emphasis generated demands for improved quality training and pedagogical practices. The diversity of goals for ECEC has created tensions for a workforce who have tended to favour relationships and pedagogical influences over a human capital approach (Brownlee and Berthelesen 2006). The Chinese participants were all positioned as leaders in the early childhood reform process and effective leadership was considered a crucial element for quality improvement and workforce development (Waniganayake 2014; Mujis et al. 2004). For the Australians the responsibility of leading change was not so strongly expressed. One participant did comment on her ability to inform parents about the new curriculum, but the Australian participants answered interview questions from a viewpoint of their own immediate experience and did not seem to feel they differed from other staff in their participation in the change process. Colmer et al. (2014) suggest that in centres where change was most effectively managed there would be a system of distributive leadership. What emerged from this research is that an individual's competence is important but also, for the Chinese directors, the authority vested in the leadership position and the flexibility of the organisation itself to respond were important factors.

4.9.1 *The Question We Asked in This Chapter Was: What Is the Role of Formal Curriculum Documents in Early Childhood Education Reform?*

To address the question, it is worth considering the ambiguity reported in the literature review as to a definition of early childhood curriculum. Australia and China chose not to use the label curriculum in these documents designed to represent part of the national policy for the reform of early childhood education. The terms used were 'guiding outline' and 'framework' and presumably these terms were carefully considered. In Australia the authors of the national curriculum document have written on the process of developing the framework and have tried to distance themselves from the concept of curriculum by pointing out a framework is a broader document that can be interpreted and applied in different ways within a particular early childhood paradigm which is implicit in the choice of learning outcomes (Sumsion et al. 2009). The Chinese participants stated that the curriculum was not standardised like the primary school curriculum and this highlights the issue of trying to define a curriculum document in early childhood and how can it best be applied to daily practice? When established leaders in the field buy commercial props instead of studying existing policy documents and interpreting practical applications in the light of their own theoretical understandings, as happened in China, then the problem becomes systemic. It was interesting that none of the Australian participants chose to comment on the commercial programs that abound in Australia to assist in programming, recording children's learning, parent communication, professional development and even templates for preparing assessment reports. One of the more popular software programs is Storypark, it is inexpensive, free for families if the centre is using Storypark. Perhaps the presence of these resources has become ubiquitous.

The Chinese participant 12 commented on the importance of having a grasp of the essentials of child development. The kindergarten guidelines require the teachers to "adopt a developmental view" on children's growth and learning and to "avoid overemphasizing knowledge and skills while neglecting emotional, social and practical skills" (2001 p. 10). The document itself is reasonably direct as to the approach to planning that should be taken whilst leaving choice of activities and the design of the learning environment to the trained pedagogue. This was a departure from previous curriculum documents (Naftali 2010). In 1989 the State Council had issued regulations on the management of preschools and rules for daily routines (Zhu 2009) but the 2001 guidelines presented a challenge to the directors, as designated leaders, who were responsible for facilitating the delivery of quality early childhood programs in these new circumstances. The perceived necessity to buy commercial curriculum and suggestions for learning activities suggest that many educators in early childhood centres lacked confidence in their knowledge of early childhood philosophy and development required to implement the guidelines. If directors and educators lack skills and confidence this makes it difficult to see their role in promoting the guidelines as a significant policy document for reform.

The Australian situation differed in that the experience of a national policy document at all was a new initiative. Resources and commercial products were also an accepted part of practice. The Chinese were keen to adopt the developmental guidelines that the government released as they felt this would give them guidance in using the curriculum and recording children's progress. The Australian participants had different ways of looking at the framework as they were all looking for something new in the situation. Participant 2 saw it as a document that supported play. In contrast participant 3 thought it embraced openness and "we can move away from older thinking" while participant 1 said it gave her "more confidence to follow my own instincts. As well as these somewhat different responses is the nature of the resources that were made available initially to support working with the curriculum. There is an *Educator's guide* to the EYLF (DEEWR 2010) which is a 150-page document. Although sections are designed to be used independently this does not work well. An indication that this was a document hastily put together can be seen on page 60. The EYLF invites a variety of theoretical approaches and page 60 in the guide has a chart of different theories, theorists and implications for practice. Local scholars are listed in the theorist column next to names like Piaget and Vygotsky. Another major resource is a publication from DEEWR (2014) that provides guidance for profiling children according to developmental milestones. The title is *Developmental milestones and the early years learning framework and the national standard*.

The document states:

> A sound understanding of developmental milestones will support you to effectively assess children's play and learning. Intentional teaching, planning and evaluation should be based on sound professional knowledge (p. 3).

Far from being non-prescriptive this resource privileges a developmental approach. For the Chinese participants working with officials who did not have the background to promote the content of the guidelines was an issue raised. The observation that local authorities were neither sufficiently trained nor competent to assist in ECEC workforce development was an issue. The incapacity of local education authorities to further the development of ECEC staff (interviews) is best explained by two factors. First, regulation of the sector was allowed to decay in the 1990s when the state focussed on the short-term goal of marketising the economy in order to render China capable of joining the World Trade Organization and to facilitate this process state regulation was withdrawn in many areas thus diminishing the regulatory capacities of local administrators (Napoleoni 2011). Second, when attention began to be directed to longer term objectives, such as the development of the education of the future workforce, a top-down approach by the national government was adopted. Once Beijing announced that both the quality and the size of the ECEC sector had to be enhanced local officials not surprisingly focussed on increasing the number of centres and the quality of related infrastructure as these were outputs that could be easily documented while efforts to enhance staff development was much more difficult to evidence.

4.10 Conclusion

In many countries early childhood curriculum is associated with the development of high- quality early childhood services that will address a number of issues including inequity of opportunity and focus on future citizens. The Chinese guideline issued in 2001 contains four sections; general provisions, education content and requirements, organisation and implementation and assessment. There is an emphasis on quality and lifelong development of every child in the general provisions of the document, the content section has five goals each expressed as goals, content and requirements plus guiding outlines, the organisation and implementation requires individual participation and the creativity of purposeful teacher planning to include local situations, interactive learning and include children with special needs while the assessment section provides guidance on the importance of reflective practice, self-evaluation, observation, a developmental view of children's growth and learning and a balance of an individual and community focus. The Australian document could be said to express very similar values even though the language is different and there is an attempt to open out the document by encouraging the use of different theoretical approaches to early childhood pedagogy. In both cases educators were being asked to develop their own content based on their knowledge of children and for the Chinese, child development.

Curriculum documents are always political documents (Sumsion et al. 2009) that tend to reflect a society's beliefs about education. They have an intended audience of politicians, policy makers, researchers, educators, families and children. The 2001 guidelines in China were not politically risky, although they represented a new direction for early childhood education in China, as they were provisional guidelines and issued years before the government promulgated the 10 years plan that required action through three-year provincial plans. There was time to educate practitioners and families as well as the extended audience. This did not happen although the national government has been active in promoting early childhood education for the past 25 years. Contributions include a quality framework for public kindergartens, the curriculum guidelines and policies that focus on developing the workforce. Workforce skill levels at the grass roots education level and the provincial level where plans were devised appear to be identified weaknesses in the system according to the directors in this research. An endemic flaw may even exist in the curriculum document itself. Tobin et al. (2009) suggest the ECEC changes represented in the document are a hybrid of China's past and ideas from the west. Whether this hybrid draws on the best practices from the two contexts or whether it adopts "some of the worst elements of western capitalism into China's chaotic post-socialist society" (p. 91) they were unable to tell. This perspective is arguably problematic as it assumes China is a post-socialist society when in fact this is an unresolved issue. For Australia the developers of the framework have shared their experience through a number of publications (Sumsion et al. 2009; 2018). One paper (Sumsion et al. 2009) explored the silent spaces and the constraints they worked within as this was a public government document and there were political and policy terrains to work within.

A major difficulty of any policy is implementation (Tsegay et al. 2017). In the case of ECEC reform China and Australia have used strategies very similar to a

majority of OECD countries who emphasise reforms to their early childhood systems (OECD 2012) for economic and social reasons. Formal curriculum development has been a global approach and many educational ideas contained in the Chinese guidelines are ideas that are common across the international early childhood field (Tobin et al. 2009). Australia tried to produce a more open document, but it also shares ECEC international ideas. A factor influencing implementation of reforms is that when ideas have become international, as in the acceptance that a national curriculum is a necessary strategy on which to build ECEC reforms, it becomes challenging for a country to develop an alternative approach and there may be a loss of significant cultural knowledge. Pang (2012) has said that the 2012 professional standards document was designed to give China a world class system that maintained Chinese characteristics. Similarly, the EYLF has tried to find a voice for Australian ECEC. As policy documents for reform curriculum guidelines/frameworks are one part of a system. The NQF was devised because of this and the subsequent Chinese documents and provincial plans for implementation of reform in China also acknowledge the interconnection of the different stakeholders. In this chapter we have explained the Chinese and Australian curriculum frameworks as documents directly related to the reform agenda. As the participants were identified as being at the forefront of implementing curriculum reform, the discussion of interview data presented an expression of the relationship and responsibility these early childhood education staff felt towards the reforms, Educators and directors in these interviews were aware that they needed outside supports to be successful at implementing policy.

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Chapter 5
Education and Care for Children Under Three in Australia and China-Pedagogical Perspectives

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5.1 Introduction

In recent years there has been increased research on children birth-three in out-of-home care and education facilities. This has resulted in a call for policy and educator training reform to encourage responsive program design and perhaps even specialised pedagogy for this age group (Rockel 2009). Many existing programs have been based on knowledge gained from working in the preschool years or from infant nursing courses. Therefore, we frequently have a situation where infants and toddlers have a 'push-down' curriculum or a health and care curriculum based on physical needs. As research and policy moves beyond images of infants and toddlers as needy and incompetent there is an identified need to explore attitudes and pre-service training for those working with the very young. The questionnaire that was used to gather data for this chapter had a strong emphasis on participatory learning (Nyland 2009) and we start the chapter with a brief review of the relevant infant/toddler literature. Policies and practices in the two countries being compared are discussed. Data and results are presented for each of four questions addressed in a

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survey. These are the same questions preschool educators answered in Chap. 6. Implications are discussed across the Australian and Chinese data.

5.2 Literature Review

Research into children under three in group care settings has been mixed and has had a problematic history in countries like Australia. An example of this history is represented by the influential infant psychologist Penelope Leach who was opposed to out-of-home care in the 1970s. With the prevailing attitude that childcare for babies and toddlers was not desirable research into childcare for this age group was limited. Much of the research focused on the home environment assuming the mother/baby relationship must take priority in the first two years. More recent research (Barnes et al. 2010), that Leach has been involved with, has taken a more nuanced approach. In China, after the revolution there was a history of nurseries, or creches, for the very young run by those from a nursing background. Life in many rural areas changed very little. An issue with China is that there is little research from the 1970s because of the 'cultural revolution' and after the opening up of the economy in 1978 preschool education took precedence over the first three years in the development of educational policies and providing access to services (Zhou 2011). Chapter 1 in this book has historical charts on the development of early childhood services in both Australia and China and it can be seen from these charts that the idea of infant and toddler participation rights in their own learning is a reasonably new concept. Participation is the focus of the questionnaire that provided data for the research reported on in this chapter.

The research literature on infants and toddlers and participation is growing but is still limited. Degotardi and Pearson (2014) produced a book on the relationship world of infants. The idea that infant learning is based on relationships has become an increasingly dominant position in the literature and this has prompted some scholars to concentrate on the relationship between educators and young children. Meade, Stuart and Williamson (2012) examined how teachers approached their work of caring and educating infants and toddlers and how different relationships with this age group could support quality practice. Maguire-Fong (2014) has examined teaching and learning with children in the first three years from the point of view of co-construction of meaning. In Europe the work of Rayna and Laevers (2011) has been influential. With a similar approach to Laevers Roberts (2011) has called quality learning experiences of infants and toddlers in group care companionable learning and emphasises dialogic exchange of the relationships formed. For critical theorists Paolo Freire's ideas about democratic spaces have been revisited (Oliveira-Formosinho and Araújo 2011). In this research the work of Freire has been applied to daily life in a child care centre and the opportunities for participation and collaborative learning that can potentially be developed when a democratic ideology is adopted. For many the idea of participation and democracy are ideals that should go together (Rinaldi 2013).

A strong ideology from earlier research is that of attachment theory and for some this is still a compelling idea. Practices that apply attachment theory to group care environments, like primary caregiver arrangements, have been introduced. How is attachment theory relevant to group care? is still a research question for those who investigate how attachment theory may be enacted in out-of-home care (Elfer 2006). In recent years, however, attachment theory has become less important in the group care research as it has become a less favoured paradigm for this particular environment. In 2009 Berthelsen, Brownlee and Johannson edited a book on participatory learning in the early years that presented a range of views and research that covered infant/toddler research in a number of countries including, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Canada, the USA, England and a comparative piece by Penn (2009) on international perspectives of participatory learning across rich and poor countries. Penn examined implicit views of children across different contexts and warned against "generalizing about the needs and rights of all young children" (p. 12). The importance of context was emphasised and a critique of the dominance of theories about child-centred education where individuality and choice are promoted was presented. In another approach the scholars of Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi 2013) state that their philosophies and practice are dictated by their social image of the child. Their image is of a social, powerful child with desires, opinions and ability to relate from birth. Penn suggests that children accommodate to the realities of their daily lives and these can include experiences within social groups that are individualistic or collective in nature, may be confronting and will demand adaptation. She argues for:

> New research and new paradigms, using methods that give prominence to children's perspectives as they engage in challenging and demanding cultural journeys (p. 15).

The research presented in this chapter explores educators' perceptions of children's learning from a socio/cultural perspective. We analyse Chinese and Australian educators' views of children's learning by asking about favourable characteristics of the learning situation, circumstances important for learning, preconditions that promote learning and how the participating educators understand child participation in relation to children under three.

5.3 The Australian Context

Childcare was a Cinderella in Australia for much of the twentieth century. Initially taking a second place to preschool education in 1972 the Federal government supported the development of childcare places across the country. The Federal government changed the funding system in this 1972 legislation so that it would subsidise childcare as a workforce support and preschool would, in future, be funded by state governments. Gradually centres in most states started to combine services but funding and budgets were messy with the divided funding system. In 2012 the National Quality Framework (NQF) (see Chaps 3 and 4 for more details) was introduced that brought different early childhood services under the same regulatory and quality

umbrella. In the study reported on in this chapter only staff in long day care centres (LDC) settings were approached to participate as we were interested in perceptions of children's learning in the under three years. LDC centres cater for children from birth-six and provide care and education programs. In many centres, children six weeks – two will be in a separate nursery and many will have a separate room for children 2–3 years. Outdoor space is often shared depending on the centre. The staff ratio of adults to children under three is now 1:4. Staff must have a Certificate 111 which is an introductory, or foundation qualification, for working with children before school. The certificate 111 is a level 3 on the *international standard classification of education scale* (ISCED) (UNESCO 2013). The certificate 111 is considered an entry qualification, has been questioned as to whether it is sufficient for designing care and education programs for young children (Cheeseman et al. 2015). Most of the Australian cohort in this study had a certificate 111, or equivalent.

Australia has long had a childcare preschool divide and there is also a divide for staffing qualifications for educators working with preschool children from those in the younger years. These differences now see the care and education debate being enacted across age groups and not between the different services. Research suggests there is a different attitude to those educators working with children under three (Degotardi 2010). Unfortunately, the new national curriculum *Belonging, Being and Becoming: An early years' learning framework* has taken a general approach to children as active learners defining children as young people from birth-to-five years. There is no differentiation across the ages, and many see this as a silence that disadvantages younger children (Degotardi and Pearson 2014) and the educators who work with them. Some of these issues are political as the Federal government has a stronger interest in workforce participation than early education. At present to gain funded access to early childhood services families must meet an activity test which disadvantages unemployed families. At a recent forum (CELA 2019) the government representative, Senator Paterson, defended the activity test when an audience member queried whether this impacted on vulnerable children in the community.

> Senator Paterson replied with a clear grasp of his government's position. He acknowledged the educational benefits of ECE but said the workforce participation component of childcare was a greater priority.
>
> *The government … stands by [the activity test]*

He went on to say:

> When there are parents [working full time in two jobs] who struggle to find places in childcare … and there are … other families [who] don't work … I think it's fair to say that all children [in childcare places] should come from families who are either working or making some other contribution to the community.

5.4 Observation of Chinese Students Completing a Birth – Two Practicums in Australia

5.4.1 Birth-Two Practicum: An Observation

This observation has been included here as it introduces a comparative aspect that can be added to the Australian context. The Collaborative Articulation Programme (CAP) described in Chap. 7 has involved students from both China and Australia having to complete a practicum with children under 2 in a formal childcare centre. In 2016 a small study was conducted with four of the Chinese students who had come from Wuhan to complete two years of their degree in Australia. The students in the birth-two unit found the 'baby' practicum the most complex because they were often unfamiliar with infants and found it difficult to feel confident as teachers in the nursery. Some reported feeling shy and not knowing how to relate. These problems had been particularly marked by the Chinese students as most were only children and had had minimal exposure to infants. They found the older children would talk to them and establish relationships but with the little ones they felt uneasy and a couple even worried about their accents when speaking English as they thought this would not be a good language model. One of the lecturers decided to help these students have more confidence by looking at the expertise they brought from their undergraduate studies in China. It was obvious they had strong training in the arts, and all were highly literate in music. Ukulele workshops were run for all students to encourage them to exploit the language of music while on their practicum. A couple of examples from the interviews indicate how successful this strategy was.

Student A

> Yeah, I find it so interesting as played ukulele; I thought that babies did not know anything about it or what that was; but some of them were so curious; they loved it, they wanted to touch it, some were even scared (laughs).
>
> I found the staff in the centre were more interested for me to play songs; the babies cannot speak much and express in their words, but they respond to me; they clap and look at me, so happy. I was so proud I could play for them.

Student B

> I took my guitar to placement, I felt comfortable – my mentor encouraged me to sing Chinese songs; I played music games…all the things were random…spontaneous, because I do not have a curriculum book, but the teacher would ask me to just play songs and children were so cool and they liked that I played. I think placement was short, I would find some resources and play even more if it is longer.

This observation about the Chinese students working with young children in Australia supports approaches in the literature review that emphasises relationships and communication. These incidents were valuable for the students, the mentors in

the centres and the infants. In Chap. 10 we report further on the experience of the Chinese students studying in the CAP program.

5.5 The Chinese Context

As mentioned earlier China has put much effort into developing its preschool system and aims to have universal access for children by 2020 (Zhou 2011). Like the NQF in Australia China has actively developed national policies and standards in recent years. They have had a draft curriculum since 2001. The reform agenda has been described in Chap. 3 and 4, a similar timeframe China has developed national outlines for reform, curriculum standards for teachers and kindergarten teacher professional standards (Hu and Cai 2012). Pang (2012) stated that an important part of the 2012 professional standards that outlines 62 areas of required knowledge and expertise was to acknowledge the Chinese context and address issues of practice that would be fitted to '*Chinese characteristics'*. To explore differences in practitioner perception was a major aim of this study.

Provision for children under three has been mixed in China. This has become an issue as the one child policy has been dropped and couples are being urged to have a second child. This happens at a time when China's generous retirement age for wage workers has followed the trend of most countries and the age of retirement is rising. This will make the grandparent care that many families rely on less accessible. With increasing international research on the importance of the first three years there has long been an acknowledgement that this has been a neglected policy area in China (Zhu 2009). Separate administration agencies have meant infant toddler programs have favoured basic health care over education and there has been a lack of resources. Some kindergartens have started accepting children from 2 years old, but this has problems. There is no strong regulatory regime for children under three, push down preschool programs are not appropriate and there is a lack of professional standards and cohesive training programs for those working with the very young. The Chinese participants in this study had qualifications ranging from a high school certificate through to a masters' degree. The latter were directors of services. These qualifications are levels three to seven on the ISCED.

5.6 The Research

The comparative research project examining educators' perceptions of how children learn was part of an international study inspired by academics in Norway and Denmark that rapidly came to include a number of participating countries. Australia was part of the research from the early days (Brostrom et al. 2012, 2014) and Chinese scholars expressed a desire to join in 2015. This chapter and Chap. 6, on educators in preschool, are drawn from the same study. Adopting a socio/cultural

approach (Vygotsky 1978) emphasising context and social interactions to promote participatory learning a basic questionnaire was developed to use across contexts, countries and early childhood learning situations. The questionnaire was designed to explicate adults' views of how children learn and what are the optimal environments, social and physical to promote children's growth and development. The questionnaire was designed to explore teachers' perceptions of how children learn. The questions were based on principles of participatory learning (Smith 2002). These principles include the notion that learning is relational, embedded in culture and context and adults who design environments that invite participation are aware of the importance of affording children reciprocal rights to take part.

In this project researchers have studied perceptions of children's learning from the viewpoint of educators in preschools, with children under three, the early years of primary school (5–8) as well as those of preservice teachers. As stated above this chapter looks at the perspectives of adults working with children in the first three years.

5.6.1 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed for previous comparative research consisted of 4 key questions consisting of 6–10 items that inquired into some aspect of children's learning and the significance of participation. The four questions covered the following:

- What situations are characteristic of learning?
- What circumstances are important for learning?
- What are preconditions for children's learning?
- How do you understand participation in relation to children's learning?

Participants were asked to rank each item from 1 to 4 (or N/A if not appropriate) with 1 being the most important, 2 the second most important and so on. The participants were also informed they could give the same number to several items if they chose. The aim of the research was to explore educators' views of children under three in terms of how they learn and how learning can best be promoted. We were interested in seeing if there were significant differences and commonalities across the two countries. As education for the under threes has research and resourcing in both countries and numbers were low this was considered a preliminary study to inform future research.

5.6.2 The Participants

In Australia the questionnaires were sent to child care settings in one state and educators working directly with children in the target age group were asked to respond. 33 early childhood educators responded. In China 104 educators responded and

Table 5.1 The Australian and Chinese participants

	Australia		China	
Age range	n	%	n	%
<24	0	0	25	46.3
24–29	8	24.2	20	37.0
30–39	9	27.3	8	14.8
40–49	14	42.4	1	1.9
50–63	2	6.0	0	0
Years of experience				
≤1	0	0	19	35.2
2–5	3	9.1	22	40.7
6–9	7	21.2	4	7.4
10–19	14	42.4	9	16.7
≥20	9	27.3	0	0
Year of qualification				
1970–1979	0	0	0	0
1980–1989	0	0	0	0
1990–1999	6	18.8	4	7.4
2000–2009	11	34.4	12	22.2
2010–2013	15	46.9	22	40.7
2014-	0	0	16	29.6
Qualifications				
ISCED level 3 Certificate 3 or equiv.	26	78.8	21	20.2
ISCED level 5 Diploma, associate degree or equiv.	7	21.2	44	42.3
ISCED level 6 Bachelor or equiv.	0	0	32	30.8
ISCED level 7 Master or equiv.	0	0	7	6.7

these responses were across a number of provinces as the questionnaire was delivered through 'Wechat'. The Chinese participants were all directly involved in providing services for children under three but not all were face-to-face educators. Some of the Chinese respondents were non-teaching directors.

From this table we can see the Australian participants fell mainly into two age groups, those between 20 and 39 and those over 40, though only 2 were over 50. Most had the minimum qualification required by Australian regulator, the Productivity Commission, which has set the minimum qualifications for practitioners working with children under three at Certificate 111 level. The Chinese participants provided a different profile to the Australian educators. They were younger, had less experience and tended to have higher qualifications. Qualifications were compared using ISCED descriptors with the Australian Certificate 111 matching the Chinese high school certificate in terms of level and time of study. Most of the Australian participants had the minimal level of qualification required.

5.6.3 Results from the Questionnaire

Table 5.2 Question 1. What situations are characteristic of learning?

	Australia			China		
	Rank	M	%	Rank	M	%
Play where children and adults participate together	1	1.38	69.7	4	1.59	48.1
Situations which build on children's own initiatives	2	1.53	63.6	3	1.54	59.3
Situations which contribute to children's social development	3	1.55	60.6	5	1.65	48.1
Free play	4	1.58	48.5	6	2.07	35.2
Creative activities, for example painting and music	5	2.00	33.3	1	1.35	70.4
Conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve themselves	6	2.26	42.4	2	1.43	63.0
Goal-directed activity in order to develop reading and writing	7	2.72	21.2	8	2.48	24.1
Circle time	8	2.81	21.2	7	2.17	27.8

5.6.4 Situations Characteristic of Learning

As can be seen by the situations ranked educators were being asked what types of activities or situations, would be most conducive to a child's learning. The types of participation and levels of choice and self-direction are included. The Australian educators thought 'play where children and adults participate together' most important but also included 'situations which build on children's own initiatives,' situations which contribute to children's social development' and 'free play' as important. The more formal activities where adults would be more likely to direct, or instruct, children were least popular suggesting an interest in child-centred activity. The Chinese educators emphasised different situations with creative activities being the one ranked number 1. There was an emphasis on children trying to solve everyday conflicts themselves which suggests an encouragement in developing social skills and interacting with others and the third choice 'situations which build on children's own initiatives' also supports the idea of children being encouraged to direct their own activities where possible. The biggest similarity for this question was that 'circle time' and reading and writing skills were not considered important by either cohort.

Table 5.3 Question 2. What circumstances are important for learning?

	Australia			China		
	Rank	M	%	Rank	M	%
Participating in a variety of activities across the day	1	1.21	78.8	1	1.63	53.7
Playing with other children	2	1.53	48.5	5	1.80	44.4
Self-initiated activities	3	1.70	48.5	2	1.72	51.9
Participating in activities with adults	4	1.77	36.4	3	1.67	51.9
Seeing what other children do and say	5	1.80	48.5	6	1.76	40.7
Seeing what adults do and say	6	1.81	51.5	7	1.91	40.7
The child being absorbed in own interest	7	1.84	51.5	8	2.22	25.9
Adults teaching by explanation and modelling	8	1.84	45.5	4	1.85	46.3
Being challenged by adults	9	1.87	27.3	9	2.26	24.1
The child being allowed to be left in peace and quiet	10	2.60	18.2	10	2.54	11.1

5.6.5 Circumstances Important for Learning

The circumstances in the table are all interactive circumstances involving a child being mediated into a culture as an active member of the group. Active participation, participant observation and maintaining a level of self-awareness are all emphasised. For this question the Australian and Chinese educators agreed on the most and least important. The Chinese educators valued 'teaching by explanation and modelling' more than the Australian group and the Australians put more value on 'playing with other children'.

5.6.6 Preconditions for Learning

Preconditions for learning could involve children's levels of well-being and relationships with significant others, especially parents and educators. Although in different order there is some agreement for the first 4 statements. The Chinese educators considered cooperation with parents more important that the Australians. On the whole the valuing of relationships comes through as a pattern here as both groups put less importance on number or challenge of experience and both consider adult intervention to be a significant part of their work.

5.6.7 How Do You Understand Participation?

This last question was a contextual question seeking to understand how these educators interpreted the notion of participation and therefore how this understanding could influence their perceptions in relation to the previous three questions. Differences emerge here that could represent important variations in images of

Table 5.4 Question 3: What are preconditions for learning?

	Australia			China		
	Rank	M	%	Rank	M	%
Educators are in active interaction with children and support them	1	1.23	72.7	3	1.33	66.7
Children experience respect and security from adults	2	1.28	75.8	1	1.17	83.3
Educators create conditions for children's well being	3	1.38	69.7	4	1.37	66.7
There is good cooperation with parents	4	1.56	54.5	2	1.33	72.2
Children must meet challenges adjusted to their level of development	5	1.66	48.5	5	1.78	48.1
Children get many experiences	6	1.67	63.6	7	1.98	42.6
Children's own choices without adult intervention	7	1.93	39.4	6	1.78	44.4

infants and toddlers and ideas about the educator role with children of this age group. The Australian educators listed as number 1 'listen to children and understand their way of thinking'. This is a closed response in many ways as it suggests that children get listened to for a specific purpose and it is possible to understand how they are thinking. This may be the case but is not guaranteed. In contrast the Chinese educators nominated the more open-ended approach of 'to listen' as their number 1. For the Australian participants 'encourage children to make their own decisions' was number 2 and fits their first choice as this statement suggests that children do not necessarily need to be listened to if the educator does not approve of the choice. The Chinese educators emphasise the importance of the group.

5.7 Discussion

Firstly, the difference in background, especially education levels and therefore the actual work done with young children, must be considered when comparing responses from the two groups. The Australian cohort have similar levels of qualification and were all working face-to-face with infants and toddlers. Most had gained their qualification after the year 2000. The Chinese were younger as a group, had less years of experience and were generally more highly qualified. These circumstances would be expected to influence perceptions and then there is the contexts of Australia and China. To be able to compare perceptions between such disparate groups can be argued in two ways. One is that this questionnaire has been tested in

a number of jurisdictions and the questions had meaning for the participants. In some instances, we followed up the questionnaire with interviews and found that respondents were confident they understood the questions. Another is that internationalisation of education has seen many ideas cross borders. Australia has close ties with the Chinese education sector and has shared many early childhood programs, as is evidenced by the example discussed in Part 3 of this book. As the design of childcare and care and education for under threes, in 2019 is part of a global conversation we would expect to find many shared ideas. In this research we look for more nuanced differences.

In the discussion that follows we look at the perceptions of the educators as expressed in the questionnaire. The idea of participation for each group is considered separately and then ideas combined. The first consideration is taken from question four: how do these educators perceive the notion of participation? The other three questions from the questionnaire are discussed using the perception of participation as a frame.

5.7.1 The Australian Participants

The perception of participation expressed by the Australian participants is a respectful one and the respondents were able to identify the questions that in an Australian context would be considered the least important, 'to be part of a group and enter into its activities together'. In the last decade or so images of young children and their competence has been reconsidered. McFarlane and Cartmel (2008) argued for the importance of positioning children under three "as agentive individuals" who could "contribute to their own learning" (p. 41) and claim we need to study how: "particular social contexts constrains or enables children as competent and capable learners" (p. 41). The Australian curriculum (DEEWR 2009) supported this stance by deliberately not separating children and their learning environments by age as they did not want to portray infants and toddlers as needy. The choices made about participation, in the questionnaire, by the Australian participants indicates they are aware of the arguments about the competent agentive child. However, the order of choice about what is participation suggests that for these educators the relationship is one where individuality is respected but the educator is positioned as the competent member of the culture. This positioning means the educator can "understand children's ways of thinking", they "encourage' decision making" and they "influence'' what happens so they are in the position of power in the relationship. This is a reasonable approach to take but some would argue that the educators could still be able to direct actions while actively listening (number 6,) be actively involved with children (number 5) and create conditions for ''independent choice'' (number 5). The statements in the questionnaire are nuanced and the Australian educators indicate a knowledge of the importance of respectful relationships but fall short on reciprocity and democratic practice.

5.7.2 *The Chinese Participants*

The Chinese participants had a more varied pattern in terms of qualifications and the order of answers for the questionnaire suggest a commitment to quality early childhood practices in relation to providing for choice and decision making while also privileging the idea of joint activity. Table 5.5 contains the most differences between the Chinese and Australian respondents for this questionnaire. The Chinese answers contained more sensitive acknowledgement of the child as having individual desires and needs as well as putting importance onto the idea of being 'part of a group'. This latter was least important to the Australian group and of second importance to the Chinese group. 'To listen' which is more open-ended than 'educators listen to children and understand their way of thinking' was scored at number 1 by the Chinese participants and number 6 by the Australians. What emerges here is the importance the Chinese place on collective activity. In an analysis of early childhood education policy in China Tsegay, Kansale and Goll (2017) emphasise the identified need to improve the overall quality of early childhood services whilst also developing socialist education with Chinese characteristics. So, for this group if their first four choices of what is most important are considered we have the 'to listen' as number 1 and then group belonging as number 2. Three puts an emphasis on educator's creating the best conditions for independent choice and 4 was 'educators encourage children to make their own decisions'. These educator's display a strong social cohesion and this gives them the confidence to take risks. They do not feel the need to be in charge as the Australian cohort does, even though the control the Australians want to enjoy is benign.

Table 5.5 Question 4. How do you consider participation in relation to children's learning?

	Australia			China		
	Rank	M	%	Rank	M	%
Educators listen to children and understand their way of thinking	1	1.22	75.8	5	1.35	72.2
Educators encourage children to make their own decisions	2	1.33	69.7	4	1.28	75.9
To have influence on what happens	3	1.77	45.5	7	2.09	22.2
Educators make up best conditions for children's independent choice	4	1.77	45.5	3	1.31	77.8
To be involved in current activities	5	1.83	45.5	6	1.48	55.6
To listen	6	2.00	36.4	1	1.20	87.0
To be part of a group and enter into its activities being together	7	1.17	33.3	2	1.24	79.6

5.8 Conclusion

The Australian educators were of mixed age and years of experience and their qualifications were similar across the group. As stated, their view of participation presented an image of the child that emphasised the role of the educator. This was across all the questions where situations for learning, circumstances for learning and preconditions for learning are considered. The first choice for each has adults and children playing together, participating in a variety of activities and supporting children through active interaction. If these choices are considered within the frame of a more adult interventionist view of participation, then the educators see their role as 'showing' children how the culture of childcare works. The Chinese educators have a firmer vision of education and their role. They often agree with their Australian counterparts in the questions and situations, circumstances, and preconditions but the frame is one where risk taking in terms of active listening and encouraging decision making while at the same time valuing the collective nature of social interaction. The similarities and differences discussed here are examples of the shared global conversation about early childhood education and care, internationalisation of the curriculum and shared theoretical knowledge. Pang (2012) has said that professional standards were developed in China to promote high quality practice and encourage the idea of Chinese characteristics. The standards are for preschool teachers but in the absence of such policy documents for those working with children under three it is reasonable to presume these educated early childhood professionals would be aware of the standards and adapt their practices accordingly. Coming from a society where many beliefs and values are implied the Australian educators do not have such a strongly articulated philosophy of childhood to guide them. The differences would appear small in day-to-day practice.

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Chapter 6
Education and Care for Children Three – Six Years in Australia and China – Pedagogical Perspectives

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6.1 Introduction

This chapter complements Chap. 5 and reports on an investigation into the perspective of early childhood educators in Australia and China on children's learning and optimal conditions for learning for children in the preschool age range, 3–6 years. A structured questionnaire was conducted in both countries and four main questions were investigated;

(1) What situations can be characterized as learning?
(2) What activities are important for learning?
(3) What are the best conditions for children's learning?
(4) How do early childhood educators understand participation in relation to children's learning?

This same questionnaire, based on theories of participatory learning, has been used for previous comparative studies that examined educator perspectives in Australia and a number of European countries (Broström et al. 2012, 2015) as well as in Chap. 5 of this book.

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The chapter is based on theoretical understandings of young children and their learning, including ideas on the importance of participation and relationships within the learning context (Berthelsen and Brownlee 2005). Early childhood education refers to pre-primary programs that aim to develop cognitive, language, physical and socio-emotional skills in young children. The significance of the study is premised on the increasing body of evidence that supports the long-term impact of early childhood education on personal development, citizenship qualities and national competitiveness (Heckman et al. 2013; Melhuish 2014). These research findings have resulted in early childhood education becoming a primary focus for advocacy and an international priority for governments. The question of quality has also become central to policies involving provision and delivery of early childhood education and these issues include the question of how to increase and strengthen the early childhood educator workforce (OECD 2015).

For Australia and China, reforms in this new era of early childhood education have occurred almost simultaneously. In Australia the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, as the first ever national curriculum for the early years (see Chap. 4). As discussed in Chap. 4 China, in the following year, 2010, released the "*Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (*2010-*2020)*", and with this instrument the Chinese Central Government committed to increased funding for pre-primary education for the next decade. A significant policy statement in the document called for an expansion of pre-primary education, aiming for 100% access to early childhood education services by 2020 and 80% of families to have access to three years early childhood education by 2020. Similarly, in Australia, early childhood reforms saw the introduction of a universal access policy that would to ensure all 4 years old 600 h per year subsidized preschool under a national partnership agreement. Unfortunately, in 2019 this partnership is still funded on an annual basis instead of becoming an ongoing initiate. However, there has been rapid expansion of provision of services in the two countries and expansion raises questions about the quantity and quality of the early childhood workforce. These are on-going issues in both countries.

Early childhood education in recent years has emphasised the importance of relationships, the concept of child agency and active learning, the significance of context and the relationship between play and learning. Established early childhood programs, for example, Highscope, have regained popularity as notions of guided learning and intentional teaching (Epstein 2007) have been added to the conversation as more integrated approaches to early childhood emerge as a result of global competitiveness and a sharing of ideas. In this paper we present the findings from a structured questionnaire that has been utilized in a number of countries to compare views on how educators think children learn. Chinese and Australian educators have been chosen as the comparators as there is a growing interest in the validity of different educational beliefs and implications for future policy growth. In this chapter we discuss the research that the study was based on, report on the questionnaire results and discuss educators' perspectives on children and their learning in both countries.

6.2 Background to the Study

The questionnaire used for the research in Chaps. 5 and 6 contained four main questions and was based on theories of the importance of participation in learning. Participation is associated with active interactions and opportunities for children to make decisions about their own learning (Edwards 2003). The fourth question directly explored educators' understandings of the concept of participation of children in their own learning. The other questions explored the idea of what educators think learning is and what activities and conditions best support learning. As play pedagogy is an important part of early childhood philosophy different forms of play were always predicated in the range of answers available. Ideas of learning, play and participation in early childhood education are therefore essential to the design and interpretation of this research project. Learning, participation and play are often ambiguous concepts and create challenges for preschool educators who work with children and their families and interpretations of these ideas would be expected to present differently in diverse environments (Ng 2014). Variations exist in social, cultural, political and historical landscapes specific to the countries discussed here, Australia and China, but each country faces common challenges in terms of sharing professional expertise and developing workable policies and exploring theoretical approaches to practice to produce the best results for children, families and society.

There are perceived differences between European-Western ideologies and Asian perceptions about education, especially the idea of play as a medium for learning (Huang 2013). These differences in educational approach are sometimes expressed as a result of China being a 'Confucius Heritage Culture' (CHC) while countries like Australia and America are characterized by individuality and child-centred pedagogy (Hu et al. 2015). These assumptions are crude and do not accept that cultures are dynamic. There are also those who claim the teacher-directed instructional content approach in Chinese kindergartens is not a legacy of the Confucian heritage but due to the influence of the Soviet Union after the Chinese revolution (Rao and Li 2008). Australia also has a checkered history on adherence to a play pedagogy in the privileging of indoor play over outdoor play and increasingly adopting notions of intentional teaching without careful exploration and interpretation. Intentional teaching is an element of the national curriculum (EYLF). These discourses on play are examples where thinking and ideas are often challenged for educators in both Australia and China. The nature and role of play in learning has been a common focus of debate and a reconceptualization of play has emerged from different directions. There is the post developmental perspective of play and learning, which has gone beyond the image of Piaget's child acting and experimenting on the world through intrinsic motivation with no pre-conceived purpose (Piaget 1952) and Vygotsky's theory of play as a leading activity in learning and development (Bodrova and Leong 2006). Shared theoretical understandings have been discussed in earlier chapters and the Chinese early childhood discipline has also explored the influence of such thinkers as Piaget and Vygotsky on educational policy and practice (Vong 2008). Play pedagogy is also promoted in the Chinese curriculum document of 2001.

Some researchers challenge free play as a medium that does not necessarily lead to meaningful learning. Current studies, influenced by the socio/cultural approach of Vygotsky have emphasized the role that social mediation plays and therefore, suggest that children's development and learning take place in the context of the children's interactions with others within social, cultural and physical environment. This has led to the role of the adult in children's learning being re-visited and reconceptualised. Ideas of co-construction of knowledge from the Reggio Emilia approach, popular in China and Australia and sustained shared thinking from the UK (Siraj-Blatchford 2009) have been influential in re-envisaging the adult role as one that is actively engaged in children's learning. These ideas can find a resonance with the American Highscope curriculum and are attractive for countries like China looking for hybrid pedagogies that are inclusive of traditional methods but offer programs where children can develop creative thinking skills (Vong 2008). The most heated debates in early childhood education occur around the role of play in children's learning and this is possibly where the greatest difference would be expected to be found between Australian and Chinese early childhood programs (Hu et al. 2015; Huang 2013).

Closely associated with theories of play is the notion of participation (Bertlelsen and Brownlee 2005) and children as protagonists in their own learning. Learning is both individual and social. That learning occurs within social contexts and that play is a medium for learning has meant that both the Australian early childhood curriculum framework, the EYLF, (DEEWR 2009) and the Chinese Guidelines for Kindergarten Education Practice (State Education Commission 2001) and the Chinese Early Learning and Development Guidelines for children 3–6 (Ministry of Education 2012) have all three included the notion of play and child-centred programs for young children. These curriculum documents do not specifically have sections on participation and therefore participation is taken to be a method of learning within a number of different mediums. Concepts of play and child-centred learning are represented within the Australian framework and the Chinese guidelines and can be viewed as pedagogical approaches that encourage participatory learning.

As discussed earlier (see Chaps. 3 and 4 for further details) the Australian framework, the EYLF, has five learning outcomes related to identity, connectedness, well-being, confident and involved learners and effective communicators (DEEWR 2009). The EYLF was designed with children's learning at the core and has three elements around the core; the learning outcomes, principles and practices. One of the 8 practices is play based learning. There is a section on children's learning which highlights the significance of play as a context for learning. Participation is specifically referred to in relation to the second outcome about connectedness to the world and the reference applies to community participation. The EYLF supports the idea that play-based learning and intentional teaching are important but earlier phrases, popular with the free kindergarten movement of the first half of the twentieth century (Bettelheim 1972), like 'free play' do not appear. This has created tensions for teachers who were trained at a time when the idea of play was the dominant theory of learning in the preschool years. Grieshaber

(2010) has commented that creating a balance between child-initiated play and intentional teaching to realize outcomes can be very challenging, since it is a marked departure from tradition. It is within this context that Australian educators were asked to participate in the questionnaire developed for this research.

In China two major national documents have influenced policy and practice. These are the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education Practice (State Education Commission 2001) and the Early Learning and Development Guidelines for 3–6 years old (Ministry of Education 2012). Like Australia China also has teacher standards. The 2001 document presents a child-centered model of early childhood education describing approaches to learning and highlighting five goals. These are listed as: Health; which includes physical and emotional development, Language; where children will become confident users of language, express ideas and are aware of others, Society; in which children learn to communicate, co-operate, share and learn from others, Science; to be engaged learners who actively explore the natural and made environment and Art; where children gain skills in expressing ideas through creative mediums while gaining a sense of aesthetics. Like the Australian framework the word participation occurs to describe types of participation to be encouraged, for example, working with parents. The word play appears frequently linked to children's learning and assessment of learning. The American Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Copple and Bredekamp 2009) approach was developed in the late 1980s by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and was a source for these guidelines as Chinese early childhood scholars and policy makers have been strongly influenced by NAEYC methods for defining best practice. The NAEYC Position Statement described five guidelines for best practice; the first is creating a caring community of learners, (2) teaching to enhance development, (3) planning curriculum to achieve important goals, (4) assessing children's development and learning and (5) establishing reciprocal relationships with families. Studies have indicated sympathy in China for the American ideas of DAP whilst acknowledging that class sizes and vast discrepancies in staff training make it difficult to pursue a unified national view of quality preschool education across the country (Li et al. 2015).

Familiarity with DAP in both Australia and China provides another connection to support a comparative study. The Australian EYLF attempted to be non-prescriptive in approach and recommended that a number of theories could inform approaches for the application of the principles and practices of the framework. The first example given was:

> … developmental theories that focus on describing and understanding the processes of change in children's learning and development over time (p. 11).

Such a developmental approach can be directly aligned with DAP. The 2009 version of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Copple & Bredekamp) also added a focus on intentional teaching, which is one of the 8 practices in the Australian framework. As Grieshaber (2010) has pointed out the balance between play and intentional teaching may present challenges for Australian early childhood educators. A similar situation may exist for Chinese early childhood educators as they

also face the challenge of moving towards a balance between intentional teaching and the encouragement of more play activities.

International and comparative studies have investigated teachers' beliefs about learning and participation in Nordic countries (Broström et al. 2012) and six OECD countries (Broström et al. 2015). Using the same instrument employed in the Broström et al. studies a comparative analysis of how Australian and Chinese preschool teachers understand learning and the conditions that support learning in preschool was conducted.

6.3 The Survey

6.3.1 Participants

Australian and Chinese participants were recruited to complete a questionnaire with 66 Australian educators and 87 Chinese educators responding. The Australian educators all had an education degree while the Chinese cohort was mixed. Eight had secondary school early childhood qualifications, 31 had the equivalent of a college diploma, 44 had a degree and 4 had post graduate qualifications.

As noted in Table 6.1, the majority of preschool educators from China (47.1%) in this survey were educators who had completed their professional qualification from 2010 onwards. In comparison the educators in Australia had a greater percentage of educators (56.3%) who had completed their qualifications from 2000 to 2009. Displaying a similar Pattern (Table 6.2) almost half of the Chinese educators (49.4%) had five years or less work experience. The distribution in the Chinese sample coincided with the big jump in gross enrolment rates in pre-primary education that has occurred since 2010, this growth has been accompanied by a similar growth trend in the qualified early childhood work force (Li et al. 2015). In contrast more than half the Australian sample (51.5%) had over 10 years of work experience. This trend fits Australian reform patterns where the major jump in newly qualified staff has occurred in the cohort working with children under three.

Table 6.1 Year of completion of qualification by numbers and percentage of participants

Period of time	Australia N (%)	China N (%)
1979 and earlier	7(10.9)	0
1980–1989	9(14.1)	5(5.7)
1990–1999	6(9.4)	12(13.8)
2000–2009	36(56.3)	29(33.3)
2010–2015	6(9.4)	41(47.1)
Missing	2(3)	0
Total	66(100)	87(100)

Table 6.2 Years of work experience by numbers and percentage of participants

Years	Australia N (%)	China N (%)
≤1 year	3(4.5)	12(13.8)
2–5 years	9(13.6)	31(35.6)
6–10 years	20(30.3)	19(21.8)
11–20 years	18(27.3)	19(21.8)
>20 years	16(24.2)	6(6.9)
Total	66(100)	87(100)

The survey questionnaire for this study was designed and previously used in an international and comparative study. Permission to conduct the same survey in China was obtained. Australia had already been part of the previous international comparative study. The questionnaire consisted of the four main questions listed in the introduction of this chapter.

(1) What situations can be characterized as learning?
(2) What activities are important for learning?
(3) What are the best conditions for children's learning?
(4) How do preschool teachers understand participation in relation to children's learning in preschool?

Each question had a subset of 6–10 predefined response options, and the educator was asked to rate the importance of each of the options using a scale of 1–4 (1 = most important and 4 = least import). The same number could be given to more than one option. For example, an educator could select a number of options as most important and put the number 1 next to all.

A frequency distribution with numbers and percentage for the educators' responses to each question were presented to enable comparisons across the Chinese and Australian responses. Items have been tabulated in descending order, indicating the most frequently identified most important responses to the least important. To recognize relationships between items within questions, correlation analyses were used.

6.4 Results

Question 1: What situations can be characterised as learning?

This question aimed to ascertain what medium educators considered best to promote children's learning. Learning would be expected to happen in multiple situations across the day and the choices presented in the questionnaire ranged from highly structured activities to free play. Educators were asked to rate the importance

Table 6.3 Situations in preschool that can be characterized as learning

Activities	Australia (%)	China (%)
Situations which contribute to children's social development	74	60
Situations which build on children's own initiatives	81	84
Free play	59	64
Play where children and adults participate together	62	40
Conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve	51	67
Creative activities	48	60
Circle time	16	21
Goal-oriented activities in order to develop reading and writing	12	23

of situations in preschool that could be characterized as learning. Percentage responses for rating of most important are presented in Table 6.3.

Situations which build on children's own initiatives, those which contribute to children's social development, and *play where children and adults participate together* were the top three responses that were frequently rated "most important" by the Australian educators. Whereas in the Chinese sample, *situations which build on children's own initiatives, conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve*, and *free play* were most frequently rated. Educators from the two countries highlighted the importance of *situations which build on children's own initiatives*. *Goal-oriented activities relating to reading and writing* and *circle time* were least likely to be rated as most important situations that characterize learning. This was reflected in the previous European study (Broström et al. 2015) where goal-oriented activities were also least likely to be rated as most important. This is possibly a reflection of the popularity of notions of child-centred learning advocated in most curriculum documents.

6.5 Relationships Between Situations Characterised as Learning

To further investigate teachers' views about children's learning, correlation analyses are presented in Table 6.4. Results are those for which the correlation coefficient was statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level or greater. The top six most rated items were: *situations which build on children's own initiatives, those which contribute to children's social development, play where children and adults participate, free play, conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve, creative activities*.

Table 6.4 Significant relationships between situations in early education institutions that characterise learning

Situations	Situations which contribute to children's social development	Situations which build on children's own initiatives	Free play	Play where children and adults participate together	Conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve	Creative activities
Situations which build on children's own initiatives	C[a]					
Free play		A[a]				
Play where children and adults participate together			A[a] C[a]			
Conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve	A[a] C[a]	A[a] C[a]	A[a]	A[a]		
Creative activities	C[a]	A[a]				
Circle time				C[a]	A[a]	A[a] C[a]
Goal-oriented activities in order to develop reading and writing				C[a]		A[a] C[a]

Note: [a]Reported coefficients significant at $p < .01$
'A' represents Australia; 'C' represents China

We found that *conflict in everyday life which children try to solve for themselves* was significantly associated across two items for both countries.

For both countries *situations which contribute to children's social development* were significantly associated with *conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve for themselves*. For China, the two items, *situations which contribute to children's social development* and *conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve for themselves* were significantly related to *situations which build on children's own initiatives and creative activities*.

For both countries *situations which build on children's own initiatives* were significantly associated with *conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve for themselves*. For Australia, these situations were significantly related to *free play* and *creative activities*.

Free play was significantly associated with *play where children and adults participate together* in both samples. For the Australian educators, *free play* was significantly related to *conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve themselves*.

Play where children and adults participate together was significantly associated with *conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve for themselves* for the Australian cohort. This item was significantly related to *circle time* and *goal-oriented activities in order to develop reading and writing* for those from China.

Conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve themselves were only significantly associated with *circle time* in the Australian sample while *creative activities* were significantly related to *circle time* and *goal-oriented activities in order to develop reading and writing* for both countries.

Question 2: What activities are important for learning?

Some situations may be more significant for children's learning than others. Educators were asked to evaluate what they considered the most important activities children could engage in that would promote learning. The percentage responses for ratings of most important are reported in Table 6.5.

Educators in the two countries rated four items as most important, there were: *play together with other children, self-initiated activities, participate in different activities in everyday life of the preschool* and *the child becomes absorbed in something*. Australian and Chinese educators varied slightly in the order of their preferences. Most of the educators from Australia (70%) rated *play together with other children* as the most important one and those from China (72%) stressed the importance of *self-initiated activities*. This reflects the comparatively high ratings of *situations which build on children's own initiatives* that can be characterized as learning in Table 6.3. Equally, teacher-initiated activities as in *adults explain and show* had low ratings which were similar to the pattern in Table 6.3 where the adult led activities of *circle time* and *goa-oriented activities in order to develop reading and writing* were considered less important.

Table 6.5 Activities that are important for children's learning

Activities	Australia (%)	China (%)
Play together with other children	70	63
The child becomes absorbed in something	54	61
Participate in different activities in everyday life of preschool	62	68
See what adults do and say	46	33
See what other children do and say	46	48
Self-initiated activities	61	72
Participate in activities together with adults	26	45
Be challenged by the adults	36	41
Children are allowed to be in peace and quiet	22	33
The adults explain and show	28	28

6.6 Relationships Between Activities for Children's Learning

The four items most frequently rated as activities most important for children's learning were: *play together with other children, the child becomes absorbed in something, participate in different activities in everyday life of preschool*, and *self-initiated activities* which were correlated with other items to identify relationships. Significant correlations ($p < .01$) are reported in Table 6.6.

Play together with other children was significantly associated with *self-initiated activities* for both countries. For the Australian sample *play together with other children* was also significantly related the item *to be challenged by the adults*. For the Chinese sample *play together with other children* was significantly linked with *the child becomes absorbed in something* and *children are allowed to be in peace and quiet.*

The child becomes absorbed in something was significantly associated with three items in the Chinese sample; *self-initiated activities, be challenged by the adults*, and *children are allowed to be in peace and quiet*.

Participate in different activities in everyday life of preschool was significantly associated with three items in Chinese sample; *self-initiated activities, be challenged by the adults*, and *the adults explain and show*.

Self-initiated activities were significantly associated with *children are allowed to be in peace and quiet* for both samples. For China, these activities were also significantly related to *be challenged by the adults*.

Table 6.6 Correlation between activities that are important for learning

Situations	Play together with other children	The child becomes absorbed in something	Participate in different activities in everyday life of preschool	Self-initiated activities
The child becomes absorbed in something	C[a]			
See what other children do and say				
Self-initiated activities	A[a] C	C[a]	C[a]	
Participate in activities together with adults				
Be challenged by the adults	A[a]	C[a]	C[a]	C[a]
Children are allowed to be in peace and quiet	C[a]	C[a]		A[a] C[a]
The adults explain and show			C[a]	

Note: [a]Reported coefficients significant at $p < .01$
'A' represents Australia; 'C' represents China

Table 6.7 Best conditions for children's learning

Activities	Australia (%)	China (%)
Children experience respect and security from adults	83	87
Preschool teachers are in active interaction with children and support them	75	76
Preschool teachers create conditions for children's well-being	73	78
Children get many experiences	48	40
The children meet challenges adjusted to their level of development	45	59
Good cooperation with parents	57	71
Children's own choices without adult intervention	33	56

Question 3: What are the best conditions for children's learning?

This question was concerned with the adult role in providing for children and encouraging participation in active learning. The first 6 categories look at some aspect of adult support and the 7th category, *children's own choices without adult intervention*, encourages the idea of the agentic child. Children's learning happens across the day, in various situations, so the educators were asked about possible preconditions which might be of importance for children's learning. As indicated in Table 6.7, the Australian sample coincided with the Chinese sample on the top three items that were rated as most important; *children experience respect and security from adults, preschool teachers are in active interaction with children and support them*, and *preschool teachers create conditions for children's well-being*.

The Chinese teachers (71%) rated *good cooperation with parents* higher than those in Australia even though this partnership is a significant part of both curriculum documents.

6.7 Relationships Between Best Conditions for Children's Learning

To identify relationships between the best conditions for learning, correlation analyses were conducted between the four items identified as most important; *children experience respect and security from adults, preschool teachers are in active interaction with children and support them, preschool teachers create conditions for children's well-being*, and *good cooperation with parents*. (Table 6.8). There was only one significant correlation for the Australian sample. *Children get many experiences* was significantly associated with *good cooperation with parents*.

For the Chinese cohort *children experience respect and security from adults* was significantly associated with *preschool teachers are in active interaction with children and support them*, as well as *preschool teachers create conditions for children's well-being* and *good cooperation with parents*. *Preschool teachers are in active interaction with children and support them* was significantly associated with

Table 6.8 Correlation between best conditions for children's learning

Situations	Children experience respect and security from adults	Preschool teachers are in active interaction with children and support them	Preschool teachers create conditions for children's well-being	Good cooperation with parents
Children experience respect and security from adults				C[a]
Preschool teachers are in active interaction with children and support them	C[a]			
Preschool teachers create conditions for children's well-being	C[a]	C[a]		C[a]
Children get many experiences			C[a]	A[a] C[a]
The children meet challenges adjusted to their level of development		C[a]		C[a]
Good cooperation with parents	C[a]		C[a]	
Children's own choices without adult intervention		C[a]		

Note: [a]Reported coefficients significant at $p < .01$
'A' represents Australia; 'C' represents China.

preschool teachers create conditions for children's well-being, the children meet challenges adjusted to their level of development, and *children's own choices without adult intervention* for the educators from China. *Preschool teachers create conditions for children's well-being* was significantly associated with *children get many experiences* and *good cooperation with parents* for the Chinese participants.

Good cooperation with parents was significantly associated with *children get many experiences* for both countries. For the Chinese sample, this condition was also significantly linked with *children experience respect and security from adults, preschool teachers create conditions for children's well-being*, and the *children meet challenges adjusted to their level of development*.

Question 4: How do early childhood educators understand participation in relation to children's learning?

Children are participants in their own learning. The questionnaire used in this research was designed to support theories of the importance of children as protagonists in their own learning and each question contained elements of ideas and types of participation. As reported in Table 6.9, the results for this question suggest

Table 6.9 Teachers' understandings of participation

Participation	Australia (%)	China (%)
The preschool teachers encourage children to make their own decisions	80	84
The preschool teachers create the best conditions for children's independent choices	48	74
To be a part of a group and enter into activities together	66	60
The preschool teachers listen to children and understand their way of thinking	77	91
To be involved in current activities	35	58
To listen	32	82
To have influence on what happens	44	26

variability and multiple understandings from the two countries. Educators from Australia report paying more attention to the teacher's role in children's learning and interactions between participants as the top four items rated as most important were; *preschool teachers encourage children to make their own decisions, preschool teachers listen to children and understand their way of thinking, to be a part of a group and enter into activities together*, and *preschool teachers create the best conditions for children's independent choices*. The educators from China reported their top four items as; *preschool teachers listen to children and understand their way of thinking, preschool teachers encourage children to make their own decisions, to listen*, and *preschool teachers create the best conditions for children's independent choices*. These responses shared common trends with Tables 6.3, 6.5 and 6.7.

A majority of educators from China (82%) rated *to listen* as the most important item for their understanding of participation. A minority of those from Australia (32%) agreed with the choice *to listen* favouring the more adult centred choice of *the preschool teacher listens to children and understands their way of thinking*.

6.8 Relationships Between Understandings of Participation

Since the understandings of participation varied across the two contexts all seven items were correlated and reported in Table 6.10.

The preschool teachers encourage children to make their own decisions was significantly correlated with t*he preschool teachers listen to children and understand their way of thinking* and *to listen* for both samples. The choices of *to listen* and *preschool teachers listen to children and understand their way of thinking* were significantly related to the *preschool teachers create the best conditions for children's independent choices* in the Chinese sample.

The preschool teachers create the best conditions for children's independent choices was significantly correlated with three items in the Chinese sample; *to be a*

Table 6.10 Correlation between understanding of participation

Situations	The preschool teachers encourage children to make their own decisions	The preschool teachers create the best conditions for children's independent choices	To be a part of a group and enter into activities together	The preschool teachers listen to children and understand their way of thinking	To be involved in current activities	To listen	To have influence on what happens
The preschool teachers encourage children to make their own decisions 1	1						
The preschool teachers create the best conditions for children's independent choices	C[a]	1					
To be a part of a group and enter into activities together		C[a]	1				
The preschool teachers listen to children and understand their way of thinking	A[a] C[a]	C[a]		1			
To be involved in current activities			C[a]		1		
To listen	A[a] C[a]	C[a]	C[a]	A[a] C[a]		1	
To have influence on what happens			C[a]		C[a]		1

Note:[a]Reported coefficients significant at $p < .01$
'A' represents Australia; 'C' represents China.

part of a group and enter into activities together, the preschool teachers listen to children and understand their way of thinking and *to listen*.

To be a part of a group and enter into activities together was significantly correlated with three items in the Chinese sample; *to be involved in current activities, to listen*, and *to have influence on what happens*.

The preschool teachers listen to children and understand their way of thinking was significantly correlated with *to listen* in both countries.

To be involved in current activities was significantly correlated with *to have influence on what happens* in the Chinese sample.

6.9 Discussion

As a product of cultural construction, learning and participation are two interrelated key concepts in preschool education. In the study reported on in this chapter we sought to gain knowledge of how preschool educators in Chinese and Australian contexts understood children's learning. The emphasis was on participation so the questions were designed to explore the educators' perceptions and beliefs about the nature of learning, what occupations are optimum mediums for learning, how can children be provided with the best environments for learning and in relation to these how does an understanding of participation emerge from the results of the four questions. Play pedagogy was an important concept when considering children's participation. The curriculum documents that guide educator practices reflected a strong emphasis on play as a preferred instrument to encourage high level language use and generalization of concepts. These documents also promote the idea of an active adult role in children's learning through intentional teaching. Choices offered to the participants in the questionnaire therefore included high levels of child choice as well as structured adult designed activities. Responses from both groups reflected a theoretical understanding of the role of play in early childhood education and the importance of relationships to guide learning.

The Chinese sample tended to have completed qualifications more recently than the Australian cohort and had not been working in the field for as many years. Starting Strong 111 (OECD 2012) identified qualifications and retention as important indicators of quality. Despite these differences there was not a great discrepancy in any of the understandings displayed by the two groups of participants and all seemed to share important beliefs about children's learning as supported by the research literature.

In relation to the four questions there was agreement on many of the ratings and philosophical similarities where patterns differed. In terms of *situations that can be characterised as learning* the comparative results indicated the importance all educators placed on *situations which build on children's own initiatives*. There was a strong response from both groups suggesting all were committed to child-centred education. *Goal oriented activities in order to develop reading and writing* were the least valued by Chinese and Australian educators. Differences in educational

ideology identified in the literature (eg. Huang 2013), meant this coherence was not necessarily expected as the Chinese educators were described as using more traditional methods of group teaching (Hu et al. 2015). The Australian sample paid more attention to *children's social development* and *child-adult interactions* while the Chinese participants more actively embraced the situation of *conflicts in everyday life which children try to solve themselves* and *free play* options. Chinese society is often referred to as a collective society (Rao and Li 2008) and this may have been an influence in the prominence given to the ability to resolve conflicts.

In terms of the most important activities for children's learning the Australian educators preferred the activity *playing together with other children*. This item was also strongly related with the item about *interactions with adults* and *self-initiated activities*. The Chinese educators also supported *self-initiated activities* and the analysis has produced results essentially in agreement with question 1 where *situations that build on children's own initiatives* was the popular choice for both groups.

For the best conditions for children's learning question ideas of *adults providing respect and security*, along with *support* and *well-being* were frequent choices as being of most importance. In Table 6.8 it was interesting to note there was only one significant association for the Australian group and many for the Chinese. The significance of *good cooperation with parents* and *children get many experiences* was the shared association between the Australian and Chinese educators while the Chinese sample had 4 related correlations to *good cooperation with parents.* It would seem the Chinese educators were more in agreement for these items than the Australian cohort.

In this study the Australian educators gave strong support to encouraging *children to make their own decisions* and *to be a part of a group*. The Chinese educators also stressed *encouraging children to make their own decisions* but *listening to children and understanding their way of thinking* was the most frequent choice. Once again, the most rated items were strongly related to more items in the Chinese sample. In terms of understanding of participation in children's learning each group of educators supported children as participatory learners, who had a right to be listened to and should be supported in making independent choices. These ideas are present in the Chinese curriculum guidelines and the Australian curriculum framework. They are concepts that can be present in a number of different approaches to early childhood education. Woodhead (2006) identified a number of perspectives on education in the early years and three are relevant here, as they all provide a vehicle for participatory practice. The three relevant views are; a developmental viewpoint, a sociocultural perspective and a human rights approach. One perspective that does not fit this study is the political and economic approach of human capital development. The post developmental stance is represented in the move away from play as the main influence to what Grieshaber (2010) described as balanced and a move away from tradition. The form the balance has taken is the emphasis on intentional teaching which has the potential to change power relations and beliefs about children's agency. As intentional teaching does not mean rote learning, or instruction, there are implications in this move away from play in relation to educator training and content knowledge to encourage concept development on the intuitive and

scientific levels for children. All the respondents in the survey supported child centred learning. Examples of more formal adult transmission in the learning situation were rated least important consistently.

This comparative study has identified similarities and differences in the perceptions of early childhood teachers in Australia and China. The results reported on here indicate how universal some early childhood curriculum themes are across contexts. Inter-relationships among key items would provide a useful guide for further research, for example, relationships with parents and their role in children's learning. Interviews and observations within the contexts would also provide information on how these themes are realized in different cultures and settings.

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Part 3
Transnational Teacher Education: A Case Study

Chapter 7
Transnational Education and an International Partnership: A Case Study of a Collaborative Articulation Program (CAP)

Josephine Ng

7.1 Introduction

Across the world, the changing nature of higher education (HE) and the demands from globalisation, has increased the mobility of academics and students. An unprecedented number of international activities and collaborations have taken place across borders shifting the HE landscape. Advanced technology, communication and transportation in countries alongside drivers of internationalisation have connected countries with differing economic development. China is now a major trading partner, has seen economic development at unforeseen speed, even though it is slowing, it is still the second largest economy in the world. Considerable attention has been focused on internationalisation but there are limited guidelines and resources that can assist to make sense of internationalisation as a phenomenon in transnational higher education (TNHE) (Turner and Robson 2008; Dai 2018).

Global initiatives have many advantages as international exchanges have integrated and transformed HE space. International students have become an important contributor to the financial and program sustainability for universities, benefiting the national economic and adding to the social development of nations. At the same time, this shift has given rise to new managerialism and commodification of HE institutions (HEI) as students are increasingly viewed as consumers in the engagement of a product known as education (Naidoo 2016; Scott 2016). The increase in international student numbers calls for a need to incorporate intercultural understanding, culturally responsive pedagogies and transferrable skills as academics are working with diverse group of students who will need diverse skills to aid employability at the end of their studies (Bista 2019; Dai 2018; Robson 2017; Wang 2017).

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This section of the book comprising, Chaps 7, 8, 9 and 10, offers an examination of a collaborative articulation program (CAP) of a Sino-Australian joint dual degree partnership using stakeholder lens to explore the multi-layered collaboration within the context of an everchanging internationalisation landscape. International partnerships and project collaboration have created opportunities for overseas deployment of academics for teaching and research. This aspect of academic experience is covered in Chap. 9. Insights about the partnership and voices of policy makers are captured in Chap. 8 to provide background on the different intentions of the parties in the 2 + 2 collaboration.

To steer the dynamics of internationalisation of HE and the arising challenges, leaders of HE institutions have been responsible for supporting international education and in providing support for the delivery of transnational higher education (TNHE) in a constantly changing political and economic contexts. Leaders, academics, managers and agents who are directly involved in TNHE are commonly confronted with complex relationships and the dynamics of change. A large amount of research has informed about factors influencing international partnerships has created practical, operational, political or cultural complications due to a lack of effective communication (Altbach et al. 2009; Helms 2014; Naidoo 2003, 2007; Turner and Robson 2008; Williams 2018). In Chap. 9 the academics argued that leaders of both universities needed to include views from all academics involved in the program delivery in order for them to contribute, as multiple views could make the development of an internationalised curriculum more effective.

7.2 Globalisation, Internationalisation and Transnational Higher Education (TNHE)

Over the last two decades, globalisation has been a key influencing factor for change. Globalisation is contested as a feature in the HE landscape as part of the educational discourse. Turner and Robson (2008, p. 3) reported that with increased activities in international education, the presence of globalisation, "*the influence of local context and the likely outcomes of globalisation processes remain unclear within the discourse*".

Globalisation in its broadest sense is linked to interconnectedness, communication, technology, increased information and trade flows. The term may have different meanings across disciplines (Appadurai 2000). The driving forces of globalisation have helped to open up international education trade causing an increased flow of global mobility amongst academics, students and educational providers. For example, against the backdrop of globalisation, the Chinese government has attempted to build capacity through the establishment of Sino-foreign partnership in the internationalisation of higher education institutions (HEIs).

Altbach et al. (2009, 7) state:

> Globalization, a key reality in the 21st century, has already profoundly influenced higher education. (…) We define globalization as the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology, the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions (…). Internationalization is defined as the variety of policies and programs that universities and governments implement to respond to globalization.

The terms internationalisation and globalisation are often entwined, and their relationship is complex. Internationalisation can be distinctly different from globalisation as the associated activities are managed by institutions, governments, academics and faculty. Internationalisation is a response to the demands of globalisation. It is driven by policies, programs and national strategy (Turner and Robson 2008; Altbach et al. 2009). Globalisation has brought about an increased level of international activity of TNHE. Hence, the fragmented areas, multi layers and dimensions of TNHE, together with present international activities and collaboration require strategies to be developed to overcome the differences between the supply and demand of HE institutions operating through market mechanisms. These exchanges require organisation and internationalisation in HE to be closely related to the daily work and operational decisions of academic managers. The roles and responsibilities of these managers are determinants of how the scope and style of international involvement is enacted between partners. National policy frameworks shape the internationalisation of HE.

The increased focus of the international dimension of higher education at domestic, national, and international levels has made it difficult to derive a definition of internationalisation to encompass all categories of international activity. Knight's (2004) definition of internationalisation has been widely cited by many academics and researchers of internationalisation of HE. Internationalisation is defined as

> … the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary. The notion of "internationalization of higher education' as a "process" explains an international activity that is related to the mobility of students or staff and other examples that reflect cross border studies, curriculum, cultural exchanges and other international studies. (Knight 2004, p. 21)

Within education, such movements have given rise to "*Academic Capitalism*" (Slaughter and Leslie 1997), "*Enterprise Universities*" (Marginson and Considine 2000) and "*Edu- Business*" (Ball 2012) and have impacted on local education economies. Alongside the commercialisation and marketisation of HE the forces of globalisation have heightened the demands for English language competency. The expansion of internationalisation of HE has resulted in an increased level of "knowledge transfer" across borders, basically through collaboration between HE institutions. International partnerships in research collaboration and program delivery or other forms of TNHE between universities, take place between a host institution from one country to another (Sutrisno 2014; Williams 2018). In some cases, universities have established whole campuses in host countries. These enterprising activities in TNHE are aimed at raising funds through student recruitment, research income and consultancy services (Naidoo 2016).

Different forms of challenges are faced in international partnerships due to social, political, historical and cultural differences which can create uncertainties and a lack of consensus to clearly differentiate aims that impact on organisational and operational practices and development (Ng and Nyland 2018). TNHE provisions have not only opened up opportunities for students to gain an overseas education but also possible employment through work visas and migration (Gribble 2008). In this context students become consumers and education is a product offered in the market (Naidoo 2016; Cuthbert 2016). Other TNHE initiatives include student exchanges (Dai 2018; Ng and Nyland 2018) and research collaborations (Wang et al. 2016). The expansion of TNHE has meant there has been a rise in discourses of internationalisation which include the emergence of university entrepreneurship, new managerialism and marketisation of HE (Marginson and Considine 2000; Naidoo 2016).

Naidoo (2016, p. 39) commented:

> Consumerism as a key motif in policy discourses has arisen in response to producer capture, a questioning of the motivations and ethics of academics as well as a desire to make higher education more efficient and responsive to government, business and other stakeholder interest.

Turner and Robson (2008, p. 14–21) categorised the dimensions of internationalisation based on a spectrum of institutional practice, managerial issues, curriculum and pedagogical approaches as below:

(i) International engagement
(ii) Mobility
(iii) Revenues
(iv) International Professionals
(v) Communication
(vi) Knowledge sharing
(vii) Language
(viii) Programming and curriculum
(ix) Academic practices
(x) Reciprocal internationalisation

TNHE is popular but has also emerged as increasingly complex. Across the last three decades, TNHE has become integrated in the internationalisation activities of higher education as universities regard it as an avenue to support financial sustainability in order to cope with reduced government funding and to achieve global positioning. Internationalisation and cross border partnerships have expanded and intensified across HE institutions and other tertiary education. Consequential to the rapid growth of HE, inevitable changes have taken place in policy, rationale of universities, governance, funding models and sources as well quality control and value of education. These trajectories and dynamics, as a context for change in HE between China and Australia, are discussed in Chaps. 8, 9 and 10.

UNESCO/Council of Europe (2002) defines a transnational arrangement as:

> …an educational, legal, financial, or other arrangement leading to the establishment of (a) collaborative arrangements, such as franchising, twinning, joint degree, whereby study programmes or parts of a course of study, or other educational services of the awarding institution are provided by another partner institution. (b) non-collaborative arrangements, such as branch campuses, offshore institutions, corporate or international institutions.

TNHE arrangements come in different forms, for example, branch campuses in the host country, franchises and twinning programs. Historically, offshore educational services were commonly provided by higher education institutions in the USA where students were sent to a study abroad program. As the demands for transnational higher education expanded, the scale has exponentially increased to include other HE providers from UK, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and Japan (Bista 2019). Driven by the needs of globalisation for specialised skills, the rise in demand for appropriate degree programs by students has led to education being treated as a form of trade. This trend has opened up massive movements in HE and is no longer limited to the privileged few or those with scholarships (Cuthbert 2016). The expansion of TNHE, is based on cross border 'trade' relationships and the USA, UK and Australia are countries that are major education service exporters who have benefitted financially from the income generated from international students (Bista 2019; Knight 2013, 2016; Williams 2018). In 2018, international education brought in 32 billion dollars to Australia and created more than 130,000 jobs that have supported the economy (Robinson 2018).

There was no single definition that best described TNHE. In 2000, UNESCO's Council of Europe's (2000, p. 2) *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education* defined TNHE as activities that comprises:

> all types of higher education study programmes or set of courses of study, or educational services … in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based.

The partnership that is the focus of this chapter is a 2 + 2 CAP partnership. The 2 + 2 denotes the two-stage process and the number of years the students have to spend in their studies at the Chinese and Australian universities.

7.3 The Partnership of the 2 + 2 Dual Degree Collaborative Articulation Program (CAP)

Knight (2016) developed a generic framework which indicates there are a range of models of TNHE such as twinning programs, joint articulation programs, franchise programs and other collaborated programs. These programs include articulation programs that come with many challenges in terms of cultural integration, differing accreditation requirements and operational issues. Common twinning program models are the 2 + 3, 2 + 2 and 1 + 3 in which the number denotes the number of years of studies to be spent in the partner institution. In the case study presented

here, the model of a 2 + 2 joint undergraduate degree program between a Chinese and Australian university is the focus.

There are two key categories of TNHE as demonstrated in Knight's (2016) framework, the first one involves "collaborative" engagement and building relationship between a local and a foreign Higher Education institution (HEI) and the second category is about "independent" provision and relationship between the local and the foreign HEI. The first category of collaborative provision is closest to the characteristics of the focused 2 + 2 program described in this book. Characteristics such as jointly designed, one qualification with badges from both universities and collaborated across two or more institutions. Knight (2016, p. 37) stated that definition of a particular transnational education (TNE) model needs to critically consider the reality of different forms or types of TNE offered "within and among countries". Therefore, the underlying principle of a conceptualised framework for any particular TNHE in a joint partnership needs to be:

> relevant to both sending and host countries; and it needs to be both robust and flexible, so as to accommodate countries and institutions which are at varying stages of TNE development and have different rationales driving their TNE involvement (Knight 2016, p. 37).

In adapting Knight's framework of collaborative provision for joint degree program, the following characteristics of the joint program between the Australian and Chinese university are described below:

> The 2+2 program curriculum is jointly designed, delivered, and monitored by both the Chinese and Australian partners. Different combinations of qualification are provided depending on both the Chinese and Australian regulations.

The 2 + 2 program aligns closely with Knight's (2016) "*collaborative*" category involving two partners, an Australian and a Chinese university to deliver a dual degree within their undergraduate early childhood education (ECE) programs. Opportunities to undertake the 2 + 2 as a pathway articulation were offered to the Chinese students to experience overseas education within their study scope as they become part of the 2 + 2 student cohort. There are compliances to be met as the 2 + 2 program is regulated by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

Recent research interests have been focused on TNHE knowledge transfer and other related challenges (Sutrisno 2014; Wang et al. 2016) but studies that investigate students' learning trajectories in joint articulation degree programs are still limited (Bista 2019; Dai 2018; Wang 2017; Zhu 2016). Despite the increased complexity of such joint partnerships there is heightened interest in establishing international dual degree programs. For purposes of this study, there is a need clarify the terminologies of joint degree program and dual degree program.

Joint degree and dual degree program are defined by (Helms 2014, p. 6):

> A degree program that is designed and delivered by two or more partner institutions in different countries. A student receives a single qualification endorsed by each institution.

> Dual degree program is a degree program that is designed and delivered by two or more partner institutions in different countries. A student receives a qualification from each of the partner institutions.

According to Knight (2011), the international dual degree bears the following characteristics:

(a) The number of institutions collaborated in the delivery of the program
(b) Number of qualifications / degrees awarded
(c) The duration for completion
(d) The program structure and organisation
(e) Accreditation regulatory bodies
(f) Number of countries

Literature on international partnerships has included brand alliances (Naidoo and Hollebeek 2015), curriculum development (Leask 2015; Wang 2017), quality assurance, equivalences and differentiated and conceptualised purposes of partners (Sutrisno 2014; Wang 2017; Williams 2018) and student experiences (Yan and He 2015; Gu 2016; Dai 2018) and cultural adaptation (Wang 2017; Bista 2019; Gu 2009).

The dual degree award is instrumental as a marketing strategy in the expansion of internationalisation in building partnership alliances and global networks (Naidoo and Hollebeek 2015). Knight describes such programs as "*one of the most complicated and controversial issues of TNE programs…..is troublesome as it puts the integrity of the qualification in jeopardy*" (2016, p. 40) and she calls for further examination of the "integrity" of dual degrees. The term "*discount degrees*" was used to describe the dual degree given the risks associated to the HEIs (Knight 2016, p. 40).

The dual degree feature of the 2 + 2 program discussed here involves details about regulatory requirements, compliance and the perspectives of participants, policy makers, academics and students. The alignment of the curriculum toward the dual degree award of the 2 + 2 program has implications on the future and sustainability of the program and partnership. In view of the TNHE policies and regulations of both China and Australian HEIs, the 'import/export model' of the 2 + 2 created complications in the development and design of curriculum, qualifications, and the implementation/delivery process (Hu and Willis 2017). The Australian university will be referred as the exporter and the Chinese university will be importer. In the 2 + 2 program, an education agent, appointed by the Chinese university, was involved as a broker in developing the partnership for the Chinese and Australian universities. Complexity arises in terms of communication with the involvement of a third-party agent and other challenges were faced when trying to balance regulatory demands.

The Chinese MoE has included a compliance of the "*four one-thirds*" rule in the delivery of the joint curriculum. Under the "Implementation Measures" for cooperation, the "*Four One-Thirds Rule*" applies to the foreign HEI or exporter, who must undertake at least one-third of the teaching at the Chinese HEI. There are expectations that the import of foreign resources, international ideas, curricula and innovative teaching shared by the foreign partner will allow skills and knowledge to be transferred to HEIs in China this will help to promote economic development (Iftekhar and Kayombo 2016). There are expectations from the Chinese university on the "four one-thirds" rule for skills and knowledge to be transferred to HEIs in

China through the import of foreign resources, international ideas, curricula and innovative teaching shared by the foreign partner and this will promote economic development at the same time (Iftekhar and Kayombo 2016). Though the Chinese MoE aimed for "four one-thirds" rule to promote closer academic collaboration between the foreign and Chinese universities in order to design curriculum to meet expected outcomes of the program, it has given rise to continuous challenges in the overseas teaching deployment of the Australian academics. Tensions emerged for the Chinese students and academics due to the additional layering of the classes to accommodate the foreign component teaching (Ng and Nyland 2016).

Theoretically, articulation education is delivered by two HEIs from different countries under certain specified terms in the agreement. This 2 + 2 twinning model involved two different educational contexts. It comprised of a 2-stage process of a pathway for students to transit their study from one country to another country. In usual circumstances, an undergraduate early childhood degree program requires 4 years duration either at the Chinese or the Australian university. If students prefer to pursue to study abroad, they need to apply to a foreign university on their own or via an educational agent. International students undertaking this type of arrangement will not have a dual qualification, although the qualification might be recognised in both countries. There are identified benefits and risks, intended and unintended consequences in such TNHE development. In the joint twining 2 + 2, there are two distinct approaches included in the program by the providers. These are "*articulation*" and "*validation*" of the TNHE joint program (Knight 2016). The 2 + 2 program is contractually binding and is known as the Collaborative Articulation Program (CAP). "*Articulation*" means that the 2 + 2 involves articulating the number of credit transfer from the Chinese university into the Australia university for prior recognition for students to gain advanced standing to enter into year 3 level at the Australian HEI. As such, the CAP 2 + 2 requires some form of "validation" by the exporter (Australian university) given that credits are transferred from one HEI to another institution in another country. In the 2 + 2 joint program, the CAP offers a dual degree award to students from the Chinese and Australian HEIs when all the specified requirements are met. This comprises of successful completion in the initial first 2 years of the program at the Chinese university and last two years of study at the Australia university.

(1) The Importer-China's Approach to 2 + 2

For the purpose of this 2 + 2 program we refer to the Australian university as the exporter and the Chinese university as the importer of education. There are four broad goals identified by the Chinese university in the partnership, namely, (i) build capacity through the partnership and exchanges, (ii) human capital development and resources, (iii) generate revenue and (iv) further international and intercultural relationships to lead to other future collaboration such as research.

Since China implemented an open-door policy in 1978, there has been speedy economic growth with reforms initiated from the early 1980s. In the 1990s the development in TNHE expanded dramatically as universities in China encouraged international collaboration in tertiary education. Chinese universities began to

consider internationalising their curricula. In 1993, the Notice on "Cooperation with Foreign Institutions and Individuals in Running Schools" (CFCRS) was promulgated. In 1995, there was the inclusion of the Interim Provisions for CFCRS by the State Education Commission, eventually known as the Ministry of Education (State Council 1995). The specifications of the comprehensive activities, awards of diplomas and degrees, management, bureaucracy and policies were included in the Interim Provisions of the CFCRS. The expansion of TNHE in China was further scaled up with the entrance of China into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on December 11th, 2001. The establishments of foreign partnerships in the education sector and services were expanded (Ong and Chan 2012). Aligned with the WTO commitments, in March 2003, the State Council launched the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on CFCRS. This was followed by a detailed release of measures for the implementation of CFCRS by the Chinese MOE (State Council 2003). The World Trade Organisation has a General Agreement on Trade and Service (GATS) that has emerged as one of the most significant protocols for China to align to in their engagement and establishment with foreign institutions (Hu and Willis 2017).

There are three milestones of official issue on foreign cooperation governing of international activities and partnerships in China. The primary purpose for developing transnational education in China is to enhance the overall educational system, to diversify educational supply, to build capacity for colleges and universities, and to attract and develop human resources, while the secondary purpose is to supplement insufficient financing and the promotion of international understanding (Gu 2009; Mok and Han 2016a). The milestone for the issues of important documentation are:

(i) The first document is the *"Interim Provisions on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools"* ('the Interim Provisions') launched by the Chinese language by the then National Education Committee in 1995. The National Education Committee changed the name to the Ministry of Education.
(ii) In 2003, the State Council of China launched the *"Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCRS)"* ('the Regulations') in both English and Chinese language. The State Council of China defined the *"cooperative nature of TNE in China is reinforced in the Regulations where CFCRS is defined as "the activities of the cooperation between foreign educational institutions and Chinese educational institutions in establishing educational institutions within the territory of China to provide education service mainly to Chinese citizens"* (State Council of China 2003, Article 2)".
(iii) In 2004, the "*Implementation Measures for the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese- Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools*" ('the Implementation Measures') was issued by the MOE that replaced the Interim Provisions (MoE 2004).

In the 2004 document, cooperation programs are defined as "*Chinese education institutions and foreign education institutions cooperate not in the form of establishing educational institutions, but cooperate in the areas of disciplines,*

specializations and curriculum within the territory of China to provide education programs mainly to Chinese citizens" (MOE 2004, Article 2).

One of the rationales to engage foreign partnership collaboration between Chinese and HEI of a foreign country is to promote innovation as well as higher education marketability. CFPRS aimed to improve the level of higher education by internationalising and attracting foreign educational resources to China (Iftekhar and Kayombo 2016). A key measure of quality is a requirement that all cooperative undergraduate and above, programs be examined, evaluated, monitored and approved by the Chinese MoE (Mok and Han 2016b; Hu and Willis 2017). There are various popular delivery models of the joint collaborative program, such as 1 + 3, 2 + 2, 3 + 1 or 4 + 0 (Dai 2018; Knight 2016; Ng and Nyland 2018; Williams 2018).

The Chinese university regarded the partnership of CAP with an established foreign university as a strategy to enhance the quality and standards of the HE. Students and academics from both the Chinese and Australian universities were active actors involved in the teaching and learning of the joint 2 + 2. However, quality issues in joint international program are difficult to measure and control due to barriers like contextual knowledge and the involvement of many stakeholders who have different levels of knowledge, experience, pedagogical approaches and interests (Hu and Willis 2017; Knight 2006; Williams 2018).

Partnerships with foreign universities are envisioned to support human capital development and advance innovation, education ideas and practice, teaching methods, research and management, were promoted. In the marketisation of HE, through collaboration between China and Australia, the Chinese government made international partnerships accessible to Chinese families by setting low fees, in contrast to those charged by foreign universities under the Regulations of CFCRS (State Council 2003). The number of CFCRS HE institutions and programs increased exponentially. By 2013, there were more than 1300 Sino-foreign cooperative institutions and programs approved by the Chinese government. Though there were regulations to encourage lower tuition fees some universities were driving up fees to make profits and there were quality issues in many instances. Such concerns led the Chinese MOE to suspend approvals of CFCRS programs (Iftekhar and Kayombo 2016). Research such as van Damme (2001) has contended that key challenges arise due to quality issues resulting from the internationalisation of HE. This needs to be handled carefully as it will impact future demands and development of articulation programs. Quality assurances of TNHE have become problematic given its complexity and the need to meet multi-layered requirements linked to different expectations and intentions in an international partnership (Williams 2018; Yang 2014; Ziguras 2016).

Rui Yang (2014, p. 156) states,

> While the central government approves or charters the establishment of joint education programmes in line with the existing legal frameworks and guidelines, a lack of consistent oversight after approval has left the responsibility for quality entirely in the hands of the dedicated teaching staff and programmes coordinators.

Alignment with the "Outline of China's national plan for medium and long-term education reform and development (2010-2020)" (State Council, PRC 2010) was a

strategy used to build capacity of the workforce through joint collaborations and partnerships with foreign universities. The Australian and the Chinese university entered into a contractual agreement in 2011 to jointly deliver an undergraduate ECE program using a 2 + 2 CAP model and the program is regulated by the Chinese MoE and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). Upon completion of the program, the Chinese students will be awarded a dual degree which enables them to work either in Australia or China given the dual accreditation status of the program. The 2 + 2 CAP program offers opportunities for employment in China and Australia, both of which have shortages of trained early childhood teachers. Other regulatory issues like teacher registration in Australia and the compulsory teaching profession qualification certificate in China need to be negotiated by the students on graduation.

As required, a part of the Chinese university education program, the 2 + 2 program has to include education core courses such as psychology and foundation concepts of education. Some of the core courses include developmental psychology, general psychology, psychology for children's learning and educational psychology. In the ECE specialisation a piano playing course was included for students to acquire basic piano playing skills and knowledge of children's songs and games. Skills like the ability to play the piano offers an advantage for employment prospects in kindergartens and early years settings in China. To meet the dual degree award, requirements specified by ACECQA for the 2 + 2 program at stage one before students transferred to the Australian university the students had to meet entry requirements including minimum English standard, accredited 16 equivalent courses for advanced credits and 40 placement days to be conducted in early childhood setting in China.

Details of the experiences by Chinese academics and students of the 2 + 2 program are discussed in Chaps. 9 and 10 respectively.

(2) The Exporter-Australian Approach to the 2 + 2 Program

To strengthen global ties and to grow the international education market, in 2015, the Australian government launched their first National Strategy for International Education 2025. It specified a 10-year plan for Australia to be a "global leader in education, training and research… to be more adaptive, innovative and globally engaged" (DET 2018). Building from the excellence of Australian international education, the government aimed to keep "abreast of the developments in relevant countries is vital to realising our potential future growth. We need to accurately predict labour market opportunities where we can offer quality education experience that meets the needs of local industries" (DET 2018, p. 5). Partnership arrangements with "local providers, onshore presence of Australian education provider or through distance learning" and the expected growth "continue to come from China and India" (DET 2018, p. 5). The strategy aimed to improve market share through enhanced international relationships with emerging as well new markets.

For the Australian university as discussed in Chap. 8, key criteria for the partnership was to generate economic revenue for the institution and to provide sustainability for the program. As for the Chinese university, the aim was to align with the government's Sino-foreign policy and cooperation programs. This approach to

internationalise the curriculum and Chinese student experiences continues to take place through the expansion and development of TNHE activities.

There is no standard system or a 'one size fits all' method to monitor and measure quality assurance for international programs. An accreditation process is meant to clarify requirements to be met that are pitched against the level of quality standards and outcomes of the program. Exporters/providers and importers/receivers of transnational education often do not have much control over the set of criteria stipulated by external governing authorities and need to validate the qualifications where credits are recognised and transferred as advanced standing in a joint degree program (Gu 2009; Williams 2018).

The objectives of establishing a system of quality assurance are meant to set standards, procedures and requirements for cooperative institutions and programs. Accreditation is also a way to ensure that the Chinese partner understands when a program is likely to gain international recognition and to promote dialogue within the international education community (Williams 2018). The establishment of program accreditation is part of the Australian governance structure of higher education. Before being submitted for national accreditation a program undergoes levels of approval within the individual institution delivering the program. Under the early childhood NQS (National Quality Standard) there is national legislation, mandated curriculum for children's education services, national regulations and national quality assessment. ACECQA (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority) is the body that maintains and overlooks these systems while individual states might have extra requirements for teacher registration (ACECQA n.d.). Another body AITSL (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership) determines professional teaching standards (AITSL n.d.). These must be incorporated into all education degrees. For tertiary institutions there is the AQF (Australian Qualification Framework) which includes vocational and tertiary qualifications through to a doctorate. The dual degree must be delivered at level 7 on this framework.

Under the AQF each qualification varies in accordance to the level of qualification applied for, such as diploma, undergraduate or postgraduate degree program. The outcomes specified for each level of Australian program is aligned with the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF).

The AQF provides the standards for Australian qualifications and policy requirements (AQF 2013, p. 9):

(i) The learning outcomes for each AQF level and qualification type
(ii) The specifications for the application of the AQF in the accreditation and development of qualifications
(iii) The policy requirements for issuing AQF qualifications
(iv) The policy requirements for qualification linkages and student pathways
(v) The policy requirements for the registers of: – organisations authorised to accredit AQF qualifications – organisations authorised to issue AQF qualifications – AQF qualifications and qualification pathways
(vi) The policy requirements for the addition or removal of qualification types in the AQF

(vii) The definitions of the terminology used in the policy

Australian HE programs are required to be externally accredited every 5 years including the approved 2 + 2 program.

In the assessment of qualifications by ACECQA and the determination of equivalence, ACECQA listed the following criteria based on 4 key focused areas (ACECQA n.d.):

- Qualification requirement
- Age focus of qualification
- Professional experience
- Curriculum specification.

In the 2 + 2 program the focus is on birth to six and there are total of 80 days professional experience to complete across the whole 4 years program. In China, students need to complete 40 days of placement in which 20 days are considered for advanced credits when students transferred to the Australian university. This means that there will be a balance of 60 days placement for students to complete across a range of early childhood settings to prepare students adequately in their learning. In terms of curriculum specification, there are a number of focused areas that the curriculum needs to fulfil for to graduate as a qualified early childhood teacher or equivalence. For example, key areas include:

(i) Child development and care
(ii) Teaching pedagogies
(iii) Education and curriculum studies
(iv) Family and community contexts
(v) History and philosophy of early childhood
(vi) Early childhood professional practice

A complicating factor when designing the degree between the two countries was the extra, generic courses that were compulsory in China. A number of compulsory courses had to be included in the 2 + 2 program that are not contextually relevant for the early childhood specialisation program to meet the teacher registration and teaching qualification requirements in China. Compulsory courses included Military, Physical Education at four different levels, Higher Mathematics, Chinese Modern History, Fundamentals of Marxism, basics of Morality and Law, Mao Zedong Thought and Introduction to the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics. With these additional courses to be included at the stage 1 of the curriculum the students were overloaded in their first two years at the Chinese university. To meet the requirements of the MoE, a large number of courses also had to be included to meet requirements for a teaching qualification. There were 16 approved specialisation core courses., the “four in one-thirds rule” and to enter the program the students needed English preparation for International English Language Testing System (IELTS). This balance was difficult for the students and one of the Chinese academics, who helped design the joint degree thought the lack of fine arts in the Australian program was a disadvantage.

7.4 Conclusion

The chapter has introduced the model of the partnership discussed in this section of the book A case study was conducted to gain insights into the experience of a CAP program for the participants. Interviews were conducted in China and Australia and are reported in the next three chapters. These partnerships have become significant in the world of international education, internationalisation of education and globalisation.

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Chapter 8
Early Childhood Teacher Education: An International/Transnational Experience

Josephine Ng and Berenice Nyland

8.1 Introduction

This paper reports on a Chinese-Australian higher education initiative that has been designed to allow early childhood pre-service teachers from China the opportunity to study for two years in each country and gain a dual teaching qualification. The background to the project is twofold as the two countries had different motives for entering the partnership described here and therefore expected outcomes have differed. For the Australian university the driving force has been the international student market and the opportunity to generate income (Access Economics 2009). The Chinese university, the initiator of the proposal, was the proposing partner as the initiative reflected current Chinese early childhood education policy and was supported through major projects such as Project 211 (Fang 2012) which aimed to enhance China's own higher education services as well as developing partnerships with overseas universities to expand knowledge and skills available. International partnerships such as the degree arrangement described here are becoming an increasingly common activity in the world of global education (Knight Knight 2008). There are economic, political, social and cultural advantages to such exchanges as well as challenges.

Evaluation is an important part of any enterprise and this paper is the first part of a research venture to explore how this partnership was developed, how the original aims have been realised and what is the potential for sustainability and further growth? The partnership is now well into the first phase of delivering dual qualified

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early childhood teachers with the first cohort having completed their studies. Academics from Australia have delivered six courses into the undergraduate degree program in China with further courses to be taught on an on-going basis. There has been no development in relation to joint research. Starting from the beginning we revisit the original premise for the project from the viewpoint of the importing partner. Participating academics in the Chinese institution have been interviewed about their knowledge, role and expectations for the partnership and in Part 1 of this chapter we examine the interviews of the three leading academics who were major initiators of the scheme. In Part 2 the perspective of the leading academics involved in the initiative is discussed. The main questions asked were: How was this project developed and; what is the long-term potential for capacity building from this initiative?

We therefore present a review of the relevant literature, a description of the context for this stage of the research and details of the project. Research data consists of relevant documents, the research literature and interview transcriptions. Discussion centres on capacity building in relation to perceived benefits, implementation challenges and the future of the project.

8.2 Literature

Nomenclature is an issue with the literature on international education and as the research described here has elements of both transnational and international education we use both terms. Knight (2008, 2011) comments on the growing dimensions of international education and these include both the host country and activities overseas. For this paper, we differentiate between activities by the country which is the exporter and the importer of the education services. Although two years of the degree is delivered in China, mainly by the Chinese university with some courses taught by visiting Australian lecturers, Australia is the exporter and China is the importer. Terminology has been an acknowledged problem in this area as changes in provision of services and overlapping terms create uncertainty.

> The relationships and nuances of meaning among "cross-border," "transnational," "borderless," and "international" modes of education are causing confusion (Knight 2008, p. 2).

Transnational, or cross-border, education has been an expression used to refer to programs that Australian institutions have traditionally delivered offshore, usually with a partner in the host country. As international education markets increase so too does the size and shape of transnational arrangements.

> In the last decade, however, new types of cross-border post-secondary education have emerged. Cross-border education does not only include international student mobility, but also the mobility of education programmes and institutions across borders (Vincent-Lancrin 2005, p. 2).

Online learning has also had an impact but Marginson (2004) contends that many early attempts at online distance, transnational education programs were expensive

and often not successful as they needed to be 'customised for cultural and linguistic variations' (p. 74). These comments are supported by the 2015 Australian Government's consultation document on international education which acknowledges the challenges of online delivery (Australian International Education 2015). The issues facing online delivery include resourcing, capital investment, academic training and employers favouring students who have not studied inclusively online, so they have had the opportunity to develop interpersonal skills.

Countries like China, with a growing middle class and national strategies to develop a knowledge economy make up a large component of the international student market with Chinese students comprising 37.6% of international students in Australia in 2013 and of those, 212,553, or 86% were in public institutions (Project Atlas Australia 2015). Many Chinese international students are self-funded and have migration strategies associated with their education. The Australian government has been supportive of employment opportunities for a skilled workforce upon graduation (Tan 2012). There is a shortage of early childhood teachers in both Australia and China so the opportunities for the students studying in the program described here would be expected to be enhanced employment choices. The arrangement that students can gain a dual qualification by studying between two countries is potentially beneficial for both Australia and China and is an example of the additional approaches to international education being explored. The model discussed in this paper is known as a Collaborative Articulation Program (CAP) and it is connected to the reform initiatives of the Chinese government as a proposal for the CAP program was presented to and approved by, the national Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) (Sun and Boncella 2007).

In the CAP model that is the focus of this study the Australian university is the exporter of the education, but the location is both China and Australia. This particular model has changed patterns of mobility and delivery for students (Guruz 2011) and has subjected the teaching curriculum in both universities to considerable pressure as the two degrees had to be mapped together to become an appropriate degree for external accreditors in both China and Australia. Contextual relevance was therefore an issue. China is also becoming an exporter of transnational education (Yang 2008). That Australia could import education services from China by sending Australian students to study in Chinese institutions has become a growing suggestion for this partnership.

Yang (2008, 2014) also explains that China's international activities in higher education have been driven by reforms that have been aligned with economic growth and market reform. This is very much the case in early childhood teacher education as the Chinese government has undertaken an ambitious reform agenda in recent years (Liu and Pan 2013) and intends to increase access and quality of early childhood services across the country by 2020 (Zhou 2011). Some reform initiatives are listed below as the context for this research is foregrounded by the Chinese government's aims to increase access and quality of higher education as well as the reform agenda for early childhood education. Therefore, the context for this paper is the emphasis on Chinese universities responding to calls to improve quality provision and the education reform environment, especially for early childhood education.

8.3 The Context for this Research

The Chinese partner university in this research was one of 100 higher education institutions selected as part of project 211 to develop standards for education quality and research (Huang 2015; Yang 2014). Other aims include social and cultural benefits for both the importing and exporting countries. Because of the listing in the national 211 project this university is designated a leading university (Huang 2015). Started in 1995 the 211 project has been supported by the central government to create universities that are internationally competitive in teaching and research and exemplars within China. The university in question is also one of a small number of normal universities that are under the governance of the national MoE. The CAP is a fee for service program and aspects of the CAP, like the number of students enrolling, come under the jurisdiction of the MoE. English classes are supplied and some teaching in the first two years in China is done in English by visiting Australian academics. Students who enter this program, but do not succeed in gaining a high enough *International English Language Test score* (IELTs) to study in Australia, will still have the advantage of having studied at an elite university and will not be bonded to the MoE when they complete their studies.

In terms of policy for the reform of early childhood education in China there have been a number of initiatives introduced in recent years. One that has been very significant was China's 2010 *Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)* (Zhou 2011). Following this the content of teacher training programs was specified in 2011 in the promulgated documents *Curriculum Standards for Teacher Education* and in the 2012 *Kindergarten Teacher Professional Standards.* The first of these documents prescribes a national curriculum for preservice and in-service teacher training and indicates what should be included in college and university teacher education courses (Hu and Cui 2012). The *Kindergarten Teacher Professional Standards,* released in 2012, was a direct product of the 2010 *Outline* (Pang 2012). This standards document identifies sixty-two areas in which early childhood teachers are expected to be knowledgeable and competent. Recent policy documents released have been joint statements from the MoE and the Ministry of Finance (MoF). A notice on drafting national training plans for school and kindergarten teachers was released in March 2014 and in July 2015 these ministries announced *Rules for funding for early childhood education development.* Quality and content of early childhood teacher training is a priority focus for the Chinese government as their agenda for economic and educational reform is enacted. It is within this context of a leading university and an education reform agenda that this CAP was developed.

8.4 The Research

This paper is part of a case study of a joint project between two universities with an agent as a third party. Case study as a methodology suggests useful tools for studying complex situations within a specific context. Case study methods are valuable

for evaluating programs which is the aim of the present research. The research is therefore qualitative, socio/cultural in nature, as perceptions on experience within the institution of international education are sought from a number of stakeholders holding different positions within the organisations involved in the project. Context is important and the questions being explored are 'what' and 'how' type questions that Yin (2003) recommends as suitable for a case study. In this of the research we report on the aims and experiences of the key players in the Chinese and Australian institutions that initiated the CAP. The experience of academics teaching into the program has also been explored as these teachers are important players in supporting the initiative (Ng and Nyland 2016). This paper reports on the experience of three key stakeholders from China and two key stakeholders from Australia who were significant in the initiation and early implementation of this CAP project.

8.5 Part 1: The Chinese Experience

8.5.1 The Participants

Chapman and Pyvis (2013) suggest it is important to hear the voices of stakeholders in 'all aspects of policy and practice in transnational programs' (p. xviii). With this in mind we designed interview questions for the senior academic participants in the two universities. In Part 1 the interviews with the Dean, Associate Dean and the Deputy Dean in the education department at the Chinese university are discussed. The Dean had been instrumental at a policy level with supporting the CAP, the Associate Dean had prepared the original proposal for the MoE. She had worked with the agent who recommended the Australian partner, set up the liaison and this agent had the organisation to arrange exchange of contracts, the English classes and other details. The Associate Dean also taught into the undergraduate program. The Deputy Dean was the undergraduate program manager with responsibilities for accreditation, curriculum design and delivery as well as the professional practice aspects of the degree. She was also the academic who travelled between the two countries most frequently.

8.5.2 The Research Questions

As the aim of this research was to undertake a case study of the CAP in order to evaluate how aims are being met and to explore questions about the sustainability and potential for growth of the CAP we asked the questions:

How was this project developed?
What is the long-term potential for capacity building from this initiative?

8.5.3 The Interviews

Given the particular stakeholders interests reported on here and these players' involvement in the CAP, interviews were designed individually. In the case of the Dean, government policy and educational reform were a focus. The other two interview schedules were similar to those used for teaching academics but included extra questions related to the different roles these interviewees had in relationship to the establishment and implementation of the CAP. Extra questions also included queries about their knowledge of the education systems in both countries and the student experience of studying abroad. When designing the interviews, we had access to the original contracts that were drawn up between the two universities and could ask these interviewees to revisit aims and expectations of the CAP. Interviews were conducted in a mix of Chinese and English. One of the researchers speaks Mandarin, an interpreter was always present, and the interviewee was welcome to answer in English or Chinese or a mix of both. Interviews were transcribed and translated where necessary.

Logan, Sumsion and Press (2014) have written about the insights to be gained from 'elite' interviews. They suggest that by interviewing those who have been part of policy making there may be understandings to be gained about influences that could impact in decisions on policy and implementation. These authors define the term elite 'to refer to high profile personnel who have access to specialised knowledge' (p. 712) and relate this to those who have extensive networks and hold a strategic position. That the Dean is in such a position is supported by Huang's (2015) discussion of leaders in the 211 universities. The Dean's interview was therefore divided into three parts which were; policy, implementation and experience of the CAP. He answered in Chinese and the answers were translated.

8.6 Findings

8.6.1 The Dean's Interview

In relation to policy the Dean was asked about national policy and the strategy of forming relationships with foreign education institutions, in this case universities with early childhood teaching degrees. We asked was the CAP model the main one that had been adopted by the MoE and what government and university regulations needed to be addressed when the proposal was designed. In relation to policy and relations with foreign universities the Dean explained:

> To answer this question, we need to be situated in the context of education development in China. The direction of development in past decades has been to reform and open up. To be consistent with the reform and opening up policy internationalisation, or cooperating with foreign universities, has been one of the most important aspects of educational development. … An important way to enhance international cooperation is to set up cooperation

> programs with foreign universities, within which there are many forms. … The purpose of the MoE in issuing international education cooperation policies is to enhance education development, as well as to facilitate communication between Chinese and foreign education systems. The cooperation should be a win-win relationship. As for the purpose of our cooperation I think the main purpose is to improve the quality of our graduates.

In regards the quality of the students the Dean thought this was especially relevant for the present project because of the demand for early childhood teachers.

> For the early childhood education program, I think the demand for kindergarten teachers is enormous. This is why many universities started to establish the early childhood education major. We are a key normal university affiliated to the MoE, therefore, our graduates should be different from graduates from other universities.

The Dean also commented on the different forms cooperation with foreign universities has taken. Initially the Associate Dean had approached the university with a proposal for a 4 + 0 relationship meaning that students would study in China for four years with Australian academics coming to China to teach. The proposal was changed to encompass two models, the 2 + 2 CAP as well as the 4 + 0.

In terms of direct government support, he said:

> We have received three types of support. First is policy support. That is, the government promulgated certain policy which allowed us to establish such a program. … Second is financial support. For example, the government allocates money for the students who enrol in the cooperation program as well as others who don't and allows us to charge a higher fee for the cooperation program. … The third type of support is supervision. Through evaluation the MoE ensures that out program is healthily developed. I suggest you discuss this with the Associate Dean who has applied for a research project on this international cooperation and received funding.

In relation to design of the project and regulations the Dean referred us to the Associate and Deputy Deans. He did comment on requirements for entering the teaching workforce in China.

> The reality of the teacher labour market in China is that we prepare more teacher candidates than schools need. So, to be qualified as a teacher the graduate needs to obtain a teacher certificate no matter which university s/he graduates from. Graduates from key normal universities used to be exempt from the teacher certificate examination but the policy changed this year and everyone needs to obtain the certificate through examination. So, when they are back from Australia, they would still need to obtain a certificate.

The Dean thought the project was working reasonably well:

> This is the fourth year since the program was established. I would say that every project lacks experience at the beginning. The biggest challenge we have is how to deal with the relationship among the three parties. Besides the Australian university and us, the third party is the agent. After a few years of collaboration, I think we are getting better at cooperation and communicating with each other.

For the future:

> All the international cooperation projects are required to be evaluated by the MoE after two years and only 20% of the evaluated programs have passed with no condition. Our project was passed with no conditions.

Challenges the Dean acknowledged was the need for students to acquire improved English skills. The agent is in charge of delivering the English courses and the university has been communicating through the agent to address problems like constant turnover with the English teachers. The demand for so many courses to be taught in English by Australian academics each year he could see was a stretch for the partner institution. A complicating factor he said is that the agent is responsible for the eight courses to be taught into the 4 + 0 model while the Australian university is responsible for teaching the 2 + 2 students for four courses. A major problem is the low uptake of student numbers going to Australia for the two years tuition.

On employment chances for the students the Dean said they would have a better chance of a job:

> … because they have overseas experience. The kindergarten sector in China has developed dramatically. Although many centres have limited resources, there are some high-end kindergartens who emphasise teaching English. Our students have great and significant advantages when applying for jobs at these high-end kindergartens. I think some of the students may choose to continue to study or want to find a job in Australia.

8.6.2 The Associate Dean's Interview

The Associate Dean is an active researcher with interests in policy, financial policy, management of early childhood education, children's learning and science education. She was the head of the Department of Early Childhood Education at the university and on the university teaching committee. The Associate Dean prepared the applications for the 4 + 0 and the 2 + 2 partnership proposals for the MoE on behalf of the university. After a successful evaluation by the MoE in 2014 she applied for research funds to promote the enterprise. This application was also successful. For the original proposal for the 2 + 2 program the Associate Dean worked through an agent to provide assistance and guidance in selecting and contracting a foreign partner. This agent also provides English language tuition for the students in China and arranges English language assessment tests. For the agent, the preliminary liaison with the Australian university was done officially through the Transnational Education department. Like the Dean the Associate Dean answered in Chinese and her comments were translated.

The Associate Dean was asked about the CAP.

> I am the one who applied and implemented the program. Also, the three courses I teach are part of the curriculum of the 2+2.

We asked about the steps for applying for the CAP and gaining approval as well as the role of the government. On the latter, the answer was similar to the Dean's explanation.

> The government is involved in two ways. One is to issue policies that approve/facilitate the 2+2 program and the other is to evaluate the program regularly. If we pass the evaluation the government will provide some reward.

On the positive evaluation, she said:

> Our future is bright. Our program is a national one and the government requires that the program exists for at least ten years.

She further added that in terms of the ten-year plan:

> We are making plans. We will initiate many reforms next year. The details of the plan need to be discussed with the university first.
>
> I would like to see more exchange opportunities for teachers and students from both sides and more cooperation on research. I expect to extend our cooperation to Master and Doctoral degree levels, not only at the undergraduate level. We have discussed this with our vice president and s/he agreed. We can set up research units and schedule regular visits between the two universities.

The Associate Dean had worked with the agent during the establishment phase of the project and the role played by the agent was part of our inquiry.

> They, the agent, are only a management organisation and they know nothing about early childhood education and research. Their duty is to provide services to facilitate the process of student visa applications, English learning and other related affairs. They also arrange meetings between the two universities to sign agreements and memos.
>
> To use a metaphor the agent is like a matchmaker who is an essential agent. Once we have met we need to communicate directly as a couple. The direct communication is especially important for the teaching and research aspects of our cooperation.

As a major figure in the delivery of the undergraduate degree the Associate Dean was asked about the design of the early childhood teaching degree, in regards to the relationship between theory and practice, assessment policies and relationship to national curriculum. She said *'yes'* to the degree being part of the national curriculum and described the practicum arrangements. She also discussed how university policy had changed in 2014 and examinations were no longer the main form of assessment.

> There are now three assignments during the course that weigh 60% of the assessment while the other 40% depends on the final examination. There are three assignments, 20 marks for each. If the student actively participates in the class s/he will get extra marks. Also, there are extra marks for attendance but these extra marks should not exceed 5.

When asked about challenges:

> First challenge is students' English skills. Another is how to schedule their specialised courses and English courses. It is hard to balance between the two types of courses. I think English skills is still the biggest concern of ours given it is the tool.

The final part of the interview dealt with possible advantages of studying abroad which the Associate Dean was enthusiastic about as she had been a visiting scholar in America and thought the '*experience helped me to get to know the early childhood system in America*'. For the present cohort of Chinese students, she thought '*they will benefit in terms of professional development, English skills and international vision. These three aspects will all be improved'*.

8.6.3 The Deputy Dean's Interview

The Deputy Dean assisted the Associate Dean in the preparation of the original proposal for the CAP and the university approach to the MoE. She took much of the responsibility for the implementation of the degree at the Chinese end and was the main liaison between the agent and academics from the two universities. Professional visits have been made to the Australian university on a number of occasions. The Deputy Dean's research interests are early childhood curriculum, especially play, cooperation with parents and professional development. Within the degree, she teaches 'Children's play', is responsible for arranging temporary lecturers, supervises student's research projects and liaises with centres to arrange student placements.

The Deputy Dean was asked about her role in developing the CAP:

> I think it was in 2011. We prepared the application documents and sent them to the university who helped us apply for this program with the MoE. The program was approved by the MoE in 2011 but we started to enrol students in 2012.

Whose idea was it to set up the partnership?

> The Associate Dean, colleagues from the Foreign Affairs Office of the university asked if she would apply.

Who chose the Australian partner?

> The agent. They have a close relationship with the Foreign Affairs Office of the University and they told us there is an Australian university that is very good.

We asked about the national early childhood education curriculum in China and the Deputy Dean said that she teaches two compulsory courses, one of these is 'Children's play'. She used this course to explain assessment.

> The university requires the course assessment to be divided into two parts: minor assignments during the course and a final examination. The former has a 60% weighting and the latter 40%. We cannot change the weight part but we can design the activities for the 60%. Participation is just a little part of it. In my courses, I give the students many assignments. Take 'Children's play' as an example, I give the students 6-7 assignments. We just finished the presentation assignment and another is an observation and a discussion of the ideas (theory) underneath the practice observed.

The Deputy Dean discussed the problems of organising curriculum when there are a number of concurrent programs running and students have different needs. The requirement that students should study compulsory politics courses makes it difficult to ensure enough time in other areas, especially for students preparing to go abroad. She pointed out that the different countries require different skills in their teacher workforce so skills like painting and music, the arts are no longer emphasised in Australian teacher training must be included in the first two years of the Chinese degree.

> In the first two years, we must spend some time on politics courses. This is required by Chinese law that every student should know about politics. There are also some students who will not go abroad, so we need to think about what are the aims of the course. There is a free teacher education policy (program) that six normal universities directly supervise under the MoE. These students are fee exempt and are required to work in the schools/kindergartens in their home provinces for ten years. But the 2+2 students are not enrolled as fee exempt and must pay fees. So, they can make a choice and go to any city they want. There are two aims: one is for students who go abroad, the other is for students who stay here. There are some conflicts that we need to balance. This is why in the first two years the focus is a little confused. In most of the kindergartens they want teachers to play the piano and paint. So, they spend a lot of time learning these skills. In your country, I think they do not have enough time to learn these skills.

English skills were once again emphasised as a main challenge for the 2 + 2 degree as well as better preparation for studying abroad.

> English is a problem. Many students, including us, are not good at English. We cooperate with the agent to improve students' English. I think for the students English learning is a problem. But I know this is the responsibility of the agent. I think the agent has a good relationship with your university, especially in English learning.

> Also, your colleagues and us, need to inform students what the program is about, what it requires, and what they should know before they go abroad. So, we gave some lectures with people from your university, our university and the agent. We encourage students to go abroad. It's a good chance for them to get to know a different culture and education system.

The evaluation of the CAP project and the research project of the Associate Dean were mentioned as positive features for the future of the partnership.

> The name of the project is 'Australia and China cooperating to cultivate excellent preschool teachers'. This will last for ten years. If this 2+2 program can go smoothly it is a good chance to improve our teachers and research in the two countries.

This academic was the one who has maintained contact with the Chinese students abroad and commented on the possible benefits of their experiences. She also thought the experience should advantage them on the employment front.

> I keep contact with some students and they told me what they want to do next. They want to get a master degree and some want to work in Australia. So, I think those students who want to go to Australia could at least gain professional development, know different cultures and make friends. By living by themselves they can learn how to cook and become independent.

8.7 Discussion

The differences between the three interviews were an illustration of the roles these players had in the CAP. There were, however, similarities in the information supplied, especially in regards a shared focus. This was a project designed to provide the university with a particular educational service that supports both the university's aim to be competitive globally and the MoE policy of developing collaborative

partnerships. The project, therefore, is embedded in the economic and political environment of education reform in China, both for higher education and early childhood education. When considering the original premise of the 2 + 2 project it seemed that this was deemed on track by the three interviewees, though all perceived some problems. The Dean spoke in broader policy terms of the opening up and reforms that would improve the quality of graduates. The Associate Dean was already planning how to extend the relationship and had achieved research support to do this. The Deputy Dean was the most grass roots in her approach and did describe some of the challenges faced when providing for different cohorts of students.

The strategies used to establish the partnership involve the central role of the agent and this touches on two discourses. One is the literature on how important networks are to build partnerships in China (Ai 2006) and the other is the role played by diplomatic strategies in relation to the significance given to engagement with the outside world that has been a driving force for China in the pursuance of partnerships (Feng and Huang 2014) since the 'Open Door Policy' of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 (Hutchins and Weir 2006). In the story of this partnership the two overlap. The Dean referred to the 'opening up' at the beginning of his interview as a way of explaining the CAP as strategic policy. The Associate Dean was suitably connected to propose the initiative as she had colleagues in the Foreign Affairs Office of the university, the agent was connected to the Foreign Affairs Office, the Transnational Education Department at the Australian university and had a contract with the private arm of the Australian university that provides English tuition. The agent was an important part of the Associate Dean's network. Such connections in China are termed guanxi and have been described as working in a similar way to social network theory (Hammond and Glenn 2004). Without these connections, this project would probably not have happened. An issue that emerged as a threat to the project mentioned by these three key interview figures was its sustainability in terms of low student uptake which was thought to be a twofold issue; one was the low numbers approved for the program by the MoE and the Dean suggested the need to apply for a higher intake, the other was the quality of the student's English. A third point was that all appeared committed to continuing the partnership with an emphasis on also introducing research partnerships. This was expressed strongly by the Associate and Deputy Deans.

The questions presented in this paper:

How was this project developed?

The process of applying and setting up this project has been described. The driver for the Chinese university was its standing as a 211-designated university and connections made the CAP possible.

What is the long-term potential for capacity building from this initiative?

The three interviewees all thought there were advantages that would accrue to the participating students through the program in relation to the international

experience and their English skills. The latter would be valuable for gaining employment in Australia and also for 'high-end' centres in China. The Dean was the one who focused most on the students in general terms saying that an aim of the initiative was to improve the quality of graduates. This is probably the closest to the original aim of the project as the stated purpose in the first agreement, signed in 2012 was:

> [The Australian university and the Chinese university] have agreed to enter into a collaborative arrangement. The purpose of the collaborative arrangement is for both parties to jointly develop advanced educational activities and materials and to provide the opportunity for students to benefit from the provision of internationally recognised education programs.

An advantage of this present arrangement for the Chinese students is that the degree has full teaching accreditation status in both countries. This is desired by the MoE but not a compulsory requirement (China Higher Education 2014) and the fact that this degree is a formal qualification in Australia has given the CAP status in the eyes of the MoE who have awarded the Chinese university funds to further develop the venture. However, low uptake is an issue, especially for the Australian partner who entered the relationship with an express aim to raise revenue.

8.8 Part 2 – The Australian Experience

In Part 1 the views about the joint partnership initiative were discussed from the perspectives of the Chinese key stakeholders and Part 2 will detail the intentions and discuss the challenges faced in the "two plus two" CAP program from two key leaders of the Australian university. Once again interviews were conducted with the same research questions in mind.

8.8.1 The Australian Context

The main bodies in Australia that determine program and teacher quality and determine standards are the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). The Australian university must comply with program content and standards established by these external bodies as well as approving the program through its own internal channels (ACECQA n.d). A major challenge faced in the dual accredited award for the program emerged in the first two years of study as there are so many different accrediting bodies that have criteria that must be matched across the two jurisdictions. Students must meet criteria from the Australian ACECQA, AITSL, the Chinese MOE and teacher registration requirements from both Australia and China. In Australia registration also differs across states. An underpinning assumption for the "two plus two" program was that students would have flexibility and choice to either stay and work in Australia or return back to China. They would

be able to gain registration as qualified teachers in both places. Australia also has complicated regulations around English language competence and particular skills areas. The two-year degree has created problems for the students from China as the Australian government distinguishes between two and four-year sojourns and have recently changed English requirements (AITSL 2017). This has disadvantaged the Chinese students to an extent.

8.8.2 The Interviews

The voices from the key Australian stakeholders – the Ex Head of Department who was the initiator of the joint collaboration but did not oversee the implementation of the project due to retirement and the New Head of the Department who was the one who implemented the project when the first cohort of students entered third year level at the Australian university. In this Part 2 of the chapter perspectives of the Australian stakeholders' experiences are presented to provide insights into this experience from the Australian view.

8.9 The Findings

8.9.1 Interview with Ex Head of the Department (EHD)

When EHD was asked how the project was developed, she stated,

> Early childhood was an area that the university was frequently being approached by overseas universities and other groups to try and set up joint arrangements. Whereas primary and secondary are not particularly easy to offer offshore. it was a huge growth area within Asia and it was an area where we had good expertise so it seemed to be something that we could do.

The EHD reported that key staff from the international partnership department in the university approached her about the collaboration with the Chinese university. The partnership idea potentially helped to align with the strategic direction of the Australian university and the push to have a global presence. In addition, the reduced government funding to support university has created a need for the university to generate income from student enrolment. Therefore, the idea of a yearly stable pool of international students' mobility would assist in generating revenue for the university.

The EHD stated, the collaboration could be viewed as a 'way of *expanding our programs and developing an international student presence …'*.

When asked about the selected CAP model that was adopted, the EHD replied, *'It's the only model so far. I think the Chinese government or Minister for Education had sort of approved in principle the CAP type program'*. To EHD, the "two plus

two" as opposed to the four to zero arrangement was viewed as a "fair way of splitting income…students only paid us for the two years they were with us. And it gave them a chance to build their English language skills …before they then come to Australia…..'.

EHD continued to state that,

> The initial approach with the two plus two, was just that they wanted a way of valuating themselves by giving the students two degrees which we had quite a bit of discussion about…. whether the students could basically double dip with the same content and get degrees from two institutions.

She stated a prominent challenge that emerged later was that there was *'no guidance around accreditation requirements in the early days'*. After she retired, when the first cohort of Chinese was preparing to complete their last years of study in Australia, then the issue of external accreditation had to addressed so the Chinese students would have an option to work in Australia. Further to some of the challenges described were the lack of cultural understanding and differentiated level of knowledge and expectations. A key concern was the language barrier which further hindered the communication flow especially in areas such as curriculum development of the first two years of study at the Chinese university. As a result of the curriculum reform at the Chinese university, there were *'different versions of their course structure….. and was a real concern'*. The Australian program was re-accredited and also changed its structure. Difficulties were faced in what could be counted as advanced credit for courses that students successfully completed in their first two years of study at the Chinese university and what type of program structure in the Chinese curriculum could be considered relevant to Australian requirements.

EHD stated,

> And I mean that was incredibly difficult because their course structure that needed a certain amount of marks is assumed taught and English and basic studies…There was the imperative of being under some pressure to get some programs- some of our programs being taught offshore.

Supplying staff to teach into the degree in China has been a logistical difficulty. When asked about the sustainability and future of the partnership, EHD replied that there were hopes to *'grow research together…and to learn from their ways of doing things too, particularly if we wanted to grow our delivery of early childhood in China or other Asian countries…..one program isn't enough to—as an international presence ..we were still exploring opportunities in other places'*. She believed that the program would provide students with the opportunity to improve their English and graduates to be more employable.

8.9.2 Interview with the New Head of the Department (HD)

As stated earlier, the HD was the one who implemented the project and received the first cohort of students into the Australian university. He was not the one who initiated the development and finalised the agreement of the partnership, curriculum,

program structure and terms of the collaboration. His research expertise was in the vocational education sector and he had to appoint an early childhood coordinator to advise him.

In accordance to his interpretation of how the "two plus two" partnership was developed, he believed it stemmed from the previous Vice Chancellor's push for *'strategic vision for the institution around being an international institution…'*. To the understanding of the new HD, the intention of the joint partnership was central to the need to drive enrolment numbers where there was less dependence on commonwealth funding. To cope with the competitive domestic market saturated with players, he stated that *'we could probably grow through going offshore and attracting international students….partly distinctiveness, partly financial'*.

When asked about challenges faced, he stated when the original staff who initiated the project and decision makers left the university, confusion and challenges emerged. He said, *'we're not exactly sure, so that policy background is a little opaque and unclear…The CAP agreements….were the brainchild of the formal leader of the international branch of the university and there have been many staff changes'*.

The change of department head created confusion. The new HD stated,

> Shortly after I arrived, I was approached and told, you know, we had this new program to deliver. And actually understanding and unpacking all of that wasn't straight forward because we didn't really have anyone with a grasp of the providence of that….I didn't really know what we'd promised.

The new HD cited the confusion resulting from the lack of information and documentation which created misunderstandings of the expectations for the "two plus two" degree to gain external accreditation approval from ACECQA. This was not originally required but was necessary if the Chinese students wished to work in Australia. He stated that the pressure to complete the external accreditation within a short time was also not easy with the new cohort arriving to Australia. He commented that the Department was not given any support from the university in terms of funding to enhance and develop the initiative properly unlike the Chinese university where support came from the government grant of the Project 211 award. The HD may have been thinking here about the research funding the deputy dean had achieved as research support in the Chinese university.

When asked about the CAP model, he commented that there were different models of partnership that a university can adopt. He understood that CAP arrangements were regulated by the Chinese MOE aim to build capacity for their early childhood workforce. To the new HD, he stated that the student numbers vary with the model used and this is a new challenge. The HD reported that '*CAP agreements haven't been very successful because they tend to be with an institution and the number of students coming don't tend to be sufficient…too demanding. … the expectations are very high and so delivering on the promise is a challenge*.'

He went on stating that,

> … this one has been a lot of work because of the external accreditation requirements and the expectation that these students will gain registration to teach and so working through all the details of the learning that they do in China and how that counts against the ACECQA standards and the learning that they will do here in Australia and how that all comes together to create a qualification that we can say, hand on heart, they meet the ACECQA standards. That's enormously challenging.

In relation to the collaboration, he commented that that there were two joint management committee (JMC) meetings each year. Key decision makers/leaders from both universities attended the meetings to address key concerns, recommendations and plan 'next steps' agenda.

The HD stated,

> I don't know quite what to do about that committee really. We need to have it but it's a long way to go just for a one hour meeting…. language issues—partly because of the language issues, you don't really get a sense of what actually is going on and we don't effectively communicate in terms of building the initiatives.

When asked about the sustainability and future, he commented that,

> …we've offered Australian accreditation and not all CAP agreements have that. …..less reliance on the course where they're to cover the ACECQA standards and if we had that then we could be more flexible about what we contributed in terms of curriculum over there. So that would be easier for us.

As to what he would consider useful for future partnership arrangement, the new HD replied that,

> So, my interest is in obviously bringing sufficient numbers of Chinese students into our program who have the required level of English and can benefit from our program, who will learn stuff and who may or may not go back and transport some of the information back to their home country. That's it for me.

8.10 Discussion – The Questions

The questions presented in this paper for Part 2, the Australian experience:

How was this project developed?

In accordance to the initiator of the project from the Australian university, the EHD, she reported that the Australian university was frequently approached by potential overseas partners to consider the delivery of a joint ECE degree through their international department who connected with the agent of the Chinese university. This joint project was developed with a vested interest to generate income from a stable pool of Chinese student enrolments. The joint partnership aligned with the Australian strategic alignment to increase their global profile and in the hope to increase research collaboration in the future.

In relation to the model adopted, EHD stated that the Australian university was offered one model for the collaboration. The CAP was the only model offered and it was the 'two plus two' CAP model. This model, as reported by both participants, has been an ongoing challenge to deliver to the students a degree that is an accredited teaching qualification.

What is the long-term potential for capacity building from this initiative?

As stated by EHD, the initial hope of the partnership was to 'grow research together' besides generating revenue for the university, and other future goals is to have more than one joint program in China and other Asian countries.

Both interviewees, EHD and HD viewed the learning experiences and the acquisition of English Languages skills to be an advantage for the international students. Neither mentioned the local students. However, there emerged many challenges that need to be addressed. For example, cultural understanding, communication and language barriers, the demands and rigidity of the CAP were some of the challenges. Other expectations from the Chinese.

university in meeting the MoE requirement of teaching components by foreign academics have created challenges for the Australian university in the deployment of academics and the low number of student enrolment.

The challenges faced by the Australian participant, EHD can be viewed from her statements and words in her answers when discussing the partnership and the joint program during her interview. These included, *"guidelines", "different versions of course structure" and, "incredibly difficult"*. This resulted in misunderstanding and communication of the intentions, expectations and requirements of the joint partnership. For example, the need to gain external accreditation from the Australian side was not clear. The Chinese university had already gained approval for the 'two plus' program from the MoE. The Ex Head of Department, EHD maintained that throughout the meetings and negotiation of the joint program that the need for external accreditation was not an explicit issue as the Chinese partner seemed to be interested in preparing their graduates for employment in China.

Alongside some of the challenges faced by the EHD were expectations expressed about the complication of different versions of courses and program structure. The handover, due to the change of leadership gave rise to circumstances where the new HD was challenged in not gaining an understanding of previous discussions about the collaboration. This posed barriers to advancing and building partnership and building relationship. The new HD used words such as "opaque" and "not so straight forward" to refer the complexity of the "two plus two" CAP program.

The lack of information and documentation resulted in an insufficient understanding of the joint project. The findings of HD's interview demonstrated emerging challenges faced in his attempts to try to make sense of critical situations such as the pressure to gain external accreditation from the Australian authority within a short time. The inherited agreement had been silent on this and the MoE had not stipulated it was necessary but the students would not have been able to work in Australia without this negotiation. There was ongoing confusion about the need to meet the MoE foreign teaching component and the challenges of deployment of staff and resources to the Chinese university.

Conflicts and challenges from international partnerships can be problematic. As argued by Yang (2014), conflicting forces present in the divides of differing ideologies and parties need to develop strategies to overcome these challenges to develop the international partnership. Literature such as (Ng and Nyland 2016; Yang 2014) state that the expansion of venture models of internationalisation has given rise to tensions due to diverse culture, varied pedagogical approaches, expectations, communication barriers and different values.

The joint degree program partnership with the Chinese university through a CAP initiative has produced mixed results. The nature of the CAP and evaluative reviews from the Chinese MoE meant a high level of expectations from the Chinese university. The high number of courses that students need to undertake to achieve dual accreditation in both countries as well the requirement to complete other courses to meet the Chinese teacher registration are demanding. There are also IELTS standards to meet before being able to register in Australia. The high number of courses requires students to have the financial means to pay fees. The dual degree award requirements to meet the Chinese and Australian teacher registration, the MoE criteria including foreign component courses, Australian accreditation, basic computer skills and English ability for a minimum IELTS score are costly. This has created a situation of where students from the CAP arrangement have increased financial burden to pay for the high number of courses including English, and a greater demand of time in the first two years to successfully complete the entry requirements to the Australian university. Consequently, there has been a low uptake of students for the "two plus two" CAP arrangement.

In any new development, there are general risks associated from the business perspective and in the maintenance of the partnership relationship alongside cultural and language barriers (Marginson, 2004) and in this case the change of leadership between initiation and implementation of the joint program created complications.

8.11 Overall Implications from Part 1 and 2

The history of CAP projects generally has been problematic. In 2007, due to quality concerns, the MoE promulgated *Circular number 14* (2007) which further regulated CAPs and made it necessary for MoE approval to be sought to establish a CAP and the program would be reviewed on a regular basis. *China Higher Education* (2014) also reports that by 2012 in some provinces joint and articulation programs were struggling to recruit enough students. This has been the case for the CAP discussed here. Reasons include increased opportunities for students to negotiate their own applications to foreign universities. There is a slowing demand for student recruitment agencies as universities establish their own recruitment offices in foreign countries and the internet has made it easier for students to direct their own arrangements. In Australia seven of the 'Group of Eight' universities and more than half the other Australian universities now accept the Gaokao, the Chinese University

entrance examination (China Higher Education 2014). This changing environment has created a much more competitive context for schemes like the CAP and this could have long-term impact on numbers.

All the Chinese participants mentioned the difficulties in studying at a higher education level in a second language. Not all the students who wished to participate in the CAP program were able to access the opportunity because a significant number did not achieve appropriate levels in the international English language test. The Australian university has raised the required English levels for applicants since the CAP started and the teacher registration body now requires the testing of English skills for all international students who have studied in Australia for less than four years before they can gain professional registration to be employed as a teacher. This changing regulatory terrain provides constant challenges.

One benefit of dual accreditation is that it provides flexibility for those who may like to stay and work in Australia after their study, and it allows graduates to go back to teach in China. However, these benefits do not come easily. The findings from the Australian perspectives indicated a number of questions that need to be answered on accreditation requirements of two countries. More importantly, a need to have a well-designed program to allow a smoother transition for students coming to complete the last two years of their study in Australia, this requires considerable efforts between the expertise in ECE to successfully come together in a cross-border collaboration to achieve the outcomes for students.

Concerns will continue to exist in terms of communication, cultural understanding and regulations from both countries though all agreed that the joint program has its advantages such as graduates having better employability and employment opportunities. The influencing factors from the environment including policy, government legislation and regulation can further impact the program and partnership, for example, the mandated requirement of teacher registration with English standards testing for those who do not have at least four years of education in Australian. The level of IELTS needed was raised after the agreement of the joint partnership was signed and the acceptance of two cohorts of students took place. Early childhood teacher registration in Victoria also did not exist when the original contract was signed. This introduced another level of regulation. In collegial and collective commitments from the new leadership and management of the Australian university, amendments to the program for the two-stage process were made to ensure a smoother transition for the students. Positive relationships built between both universities have helped to ensure a forward-looking partnership in the long term as expressed by the Dean of the Chinese university and the new departmental head.

The Chinese Dean also stated, ‘After a few years of collaboration I think we are getting better at cooperation and communicating with each other’. From the findings, the new Australian head of department commented about the partnership and program, ‘It’s still not perfect but it’s a lot better than what it was 12 months ago’ and he continued, ‘…if we had our time again, it will be a different program’. His view of “different program” demonstrated the ongoing and emerging challenges from the CAP arrangement.

The emphasis on developing research partnerships that the Associate Dean and Deputy Dean espoused in their interviews was not an original aim of the CAP and has not been pursued in the time the partnership has existed. As the Associate Dean pointed out, the connections that made the CAP possible were not connections that had the expertise to establish joint research. Whether such a relationship is built is a future consideration that is yet to be considered although all three participants thought this would be a positive step in the relationship.

Strategic partnerships have been an important part of Chinese policy and education has been no exception. Increasingly the country has put emphasis on the quality of the partnership, as evidenced by *Circular number 14* (2007) and careful monitoring of projects by the MoE. The CAP described here has the potential to provide a high-quality exchange because the Australian partner has designed a program that is a fully accredited qualification in Australia. However, the international education landscape is rapidly changing and the lack of uptake by students suggests this model may no longer be the best for individual interests. The model as it stands may need to offer different opportunities.

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Chapter 9
Transnational Education: Perspectives of Academics

Josephine Ng and Berenice Nyland

9.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the perceptions and experiences of participating Chinese and Australian academics in the delivery of the dual degree 2 + 2 program. Findings will inform on how the internationalisation of Higher Education (HE) has shaped the practices of academics' and influenced perceptions of the academic identity.

The driving forces of globalisation and internationalisation of HE has seen a shift in the work and therefore the identity of academics from traditional teaching and research roles. Turner and Robson (2009, p15) have stated that "*basic conceptions of the meanings of internationalisation within academic working practices help to illuminate the diversity of its impact on identity, orientation and experience, set as they are in a wide variety of local and particular contexts*". Data for this chapter consists of semi-structured interviews and explores the experiences of these participants in the dual degree.

Cross border movement of academics has become increasingly common (Chen 2017; Knight 2015; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005). The changing phases of the HE global landscape in which academics operate have become more complex as student cohorts are becoming more diverse. Different arrangements for delivering programs, onshore, offshore, online have also increased in diversity. Naidoo (2009) asserted that universities are a driving force for national economic development and a means for building capacity through human capital development. Nations around the world have considered the quality of HE a way to improve competitiveness and one aspect of this is global reputation. The response to globalisation has given rise to business and entrepreneurial universities (Clark 1997) and academic capitalism

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(Slaughter and Leslie 1997) as universities continue to commodify HE and drive profit through international partnership for international students.

This chapter will contribute to this section of the book by providing insights into academic experiences in the delivery of the joint dual degree discussed in Chaps. 7–10. The findings include Chinese and Australian academics. The inherent challenges and issues faced by the academics in the collaboration of a transnational educational 2 + 2 program have been discussed. Critical reflections and insights from this discussion can inform policy and practices that can assist governance bodies, executive managers and academics involved in this project in the future. Academics are often situated at the crossroad between complexity and transformational change in the HE environment and are faced with challenges such as additional workload to cater with larger number of diverse group of students as well as working in unfamiliar environments and across languages (de Zilwa 2010; Sutrisno 2014; Zhu 2016).

When HEI is heavily reliant on international student enrolment for revenue, academic job security can be impacted with changes in global financial markets, disasters; natural or man-made and even trade wars. The maelstrom of globalisation as a driving force for the global economy and knowledge have constrained academic freedom and autonomy to be innovative alongside pressure for accountability for the quality of student experiences (Chen 2017; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005; Williams 2018; Zhu 2016). de Zilwa (2010, p.3) described globalisation as a *'double-edged sword'*.

This chapter examined major themes of academic experiences of the 2 + 2 dual degree between the Chinese and an Australian university. This is a qualitative research. Interviews were conducted with 8 academics from the Chinese university and 5 Australian academics. The participants selected had taught at least one cohort students at the Chinese university or the Australian university or had taught both locations.

The guiding research questions were:

(i) What were the perceptions of the participating academics to their experiences in the engagement and delivery 2 + 2 dual degree program?
(ii) What understanding of internationalisation of HE did these participants have and did they have ideas about implications for the 2 + 2 dual degree program?

9.2 Literature

The rapid change advanced by globalisation to drive the knowledge economy has positioned the academic profession at the centre of internationalisation processes. Academics have had to orientate themselves to the change academia (Marginson et al. 2011). As higher education institutions (HEIs) undergo radical changes in the TNHE space, often the role and responsibility of academic staff will

be expanded. There are expectations from academics to deliver the desired educational outcomes when HEI become more entrepreneurial. Alongside the massification of HE, there are other emerging requirements that need to be fulfilled, such as meeting the needs of local and global communities. Knowledge production is a main focus in joint or brand alliances of international partnerships (Naidoo and Hollebeek 2015) and has resulted in creating new identities for academics (Koo and Pang 2016). Central to the development of human capital and economic growth, internationalisation of HE has become a key driver to be included in strategic action plans issued by governments. Commonly having objectives aiming to enhance their competitiveness, capacity, innovation and productivity through excellence in education (Chen 2017; Koo and Pang 2016; Marginson and Sawir 2006). There will be expected additional responsibility for academics to be agents of change in the internationalisation platform to account for the implementation and delivery of teaching in the joint programs and at the same time to building research networks for income.

Academics are increasingly faced with the challenges of classroom diversity, often large numbers of international students and at times different types of curriculum in different locations. Professional training for academics requires new teaching practices to deal with and meet the diverse needs of international students with differentiated learning styles (Chen 2017; Li and Wang 2015; Wang 2018). Strategies are required to develop in teaching methods that will enhance and promote intercultural competences and inclusive practices in order to deliver the desired outcomes for the program (Leask 2015; Wang 2018).

Leask (2015, p. 3) contended,

> Internationalisation of curriculum is situated at the intersection of policy and practice in universities and the cause of fascination, frustration, confusion, and fulfilment for students, academic staff, and university managers.

In examining the interview data for this chapter, findings support the above quote as the Australian academics indicated there had been frustrations, confusions and key challenges when they were asked to teach at the Chinese university.

According to Leask (2015), there are consequences of disengagement by the students when academic staff lack the knowledge and skills needed for an internationalised curriculum in the joint program. In her 2009 publication, Leask distinguished the product as the differences between an internationalised curriculum and the process as the internationalisation of curriculum. Her definition of

> Internationalization of the curriculum is the incorporation of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program study (p. 209).

With the expansion to include the mobility programs, Leask (2009, p. 209) added,

> An internationalized curriculum will engage students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity and purposefully develop their international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals and citizens.

The growth of international education market has opened many opportunities for partnership and joint degree program delivery across borders amidst the emergence of discourses of the commodification of HE and the rise of entrepreneurship. Turner and Robson (2008, p. 5) reported that *"internationalisation has been characterised as both an energizing catalyst for international knowledge-sharing and a negative neo-liberal ideology force, transporting the worst corporate managerialism into academic life"*. Universities have to devise ways to integrate a global dimension to the delivery of programs in their response to the needs of a diverse groups of international students (Chen 2017; Knight 2015; Wang 2018; Zheng 2008, 2009).

9.3 The Research

This study utilised a qualitative and interpretative research methodology to examine the perceptions of the participants in both Chinese and Australian universities. The interview questions were categorised into background, information of the 2 + 2 program, preparation for early childhood education and care (ECEC) teachers, internationalisation and the future. Data was collected by conducting through semi-structured interviews with additional open-ended questions. This allowed the interviewer to probe and explore individual academic perceptions. Interview duration was approximately one hour and at times extended to one and a half hours according to the response of individual participants. The interviews were undertaken by two Australian researchers. The invited participants had taught into courses of the 2 + 2 program. The Chinese academics were those who taught into the program for the first two years of study in the Chinese university. The Australian academics were those who had either taught into the 2 + 2 program in both China and Australia or at the Australian university.

Participant consent was given for the interviews to be recorded and notes were taken during each interview. The data collected was transcribed and the notes were encoded for analysis. All the Chinese academics spoke in Mandarin except for one who was the program manager and also an academic. The transcribed data in Chinese was translated to English. The results of the interviews were organised into themes and also aligned with the major themes of the overall study. Pseudonyms were given to each participant.

Voices of the academics from the Chinese and Australian universities were cited. The research questions addressed in this chapter were:

(i) What were the perceptions of the participating academics to their experiences in the engagement and delivery 2 + 2 dual degree program?
(ii) What understanding of internationalisation of HE did these participants have and did they have ideas about implications for the 2 + 2 dual degree program?

The emerging themes arising from the research questions are presented in this chapter:

(i) Engagement in the delivery of the 2 + 2 dual degree program

(a) Curriculum, pedagogy, differentiation and challenges
(b) Placement of professional experience

(ii) Internationalisation of the program and implications of 2 + 2 program

9.4 Participants

The interview questions were categorised to collect comprehensive information aligned to the research questions and major themes:

Table 9.1 The Participants: academics from the Chinese and Australian universities

Pseudonym	Country	Qualification	Teaching HE experience	Courses taught
Cao	China	PhD	21	Pedagogy of early childhood education, development of early childhood education, law and policy of early childhood education
Chong	China	PhD	11	Philosophy, pedagogy, research methods
Lu	China	PhD	7	Curriculum design, pedagogy
Moh	China	PhD	5	Curriculum instruction, educational psychology
Rem	China	PhD	5	Art education
Song	China	Master	25	Practicum, curriculum, health and hygiene
Wen	China	Master/PhD candidate	20	Management language and literature
Wong	China	PhD	14	Play, play environments, family education
Alina	Australia	PhD	8	Inclusive education, language and literature, music and movement
Ana	Australia	Master	5	Child development, theory and practice birth – 2 and 2–8, children and society, STEM, maths, assessment, reflective practice, professional issues
Elaine[a]	Australia	Master/PhD candidate	8	Management, EC curriculum, professional issues
Jillian[a]	Australia	Master/ Doctoral candidate	5	Child development, language and literacy, STEM, orientation to teaching
Rebecca[a]	Australia	Master/PhD candidate	3	Issue and context, theory and practice 2 to 8, Math

[a]denotes lecturers who have taught in the degree in both Australia and China

9.4.1 Background of Participant

(a) Highest level of education, previous position/job, number of years at the HEI, position held, research interests, course (s) taught/coordinated and other roles undertaken (eg, practicum coordination or visit).

(1) Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Teacher Preparation in Australia & China

(a) Understanding of early childhood teacher preparation in their country and teaching experience,
(b) Understanding of comparative approaches to ECEC
(c) Assessment strategies used for the 2 + 2 program

(2) Information of the 2 + 2 Program and Partnership

(a) Understanding of what the 2 + 2 double degree program entails
(b) Level of involvement in 2 + 2 program
(c) Expectations of the 2 + 2 program (Australian and Chinese perspectives)
(d) Challenges and key concerns
(e) Differences in teaching at Australian HEI and Chinese HEI

(3) Understanding of Internationalisation, Internationalised Curriculum and their Focuses

(a) Internationalisation and curriculum
(b) Benefits of the 2 + 2
(c) Areas of improvement
(d) Student experience
(e) Sustainability and future of the dual degree 2 + 2 program

9.5 Findings

Background information indicated that all the academics had relevant qualifications and substantial teaching experience to engage in the delivery of the program. The data reported that the Chinese academics had more years of teaching experience (eg., 25, 17, 14 and 11 years) with higher qualifications than the Australian academics. From the interview conducted, all Chinese academics, except Song, reported that they had overseas training and attended study abroad programs. The HEI destinations for the study were mainly the USA and UK. The duration for the overseas professional development ranged from a minimum six months to a maximum of two years. Those that undertook overseas training said that it had helped them to support the students who were enrolled in the 2 + 2 program. The experience gained from their study abroad programs enabled them to understand the importance of cultural understanding and the type of challenges that the students would face in terms of communication and cultural difference. Three Chinese academics commented that they had never been to Australia and may not be able to support the students in some areas due to their lack of knowledge of Australia as a destination for study.

The next section discusses the findings for the emerging first theme:

(I) Engagement in the Delivery of the 2 + 2 Program

(a) Curriculum, pedagogy, differentiation and challenges

As in the literature of internationalised curriculum cited in Leask (2015), academics need to understand the joint curriculum in order to engage and support international students in teaching and learning across the two contexts. When the participants were asked about their knowledge and understanding of the 2 + 2 program, findings demonstrated that both the Australian and Chinese academics had limited knowledge about the program except one for Chinese academic, Cao, who stated that she knew the 2 + 2 very well given she was the one who had developed and implemented the 2 + 2 program.

Some of the voices from the academics were captured:

Song:

> I know such a program exists and I think it meets students' demand…….. nothing more

Moh:

> Yes, I know a bit. Because there are only two such programs and our university think highly of it. The president of the university…..mentioned it. I heard that it's pretty good. In our school of education, it has been mentioned a lot.

Moh's comment that the program was "*mentioned a lot*" but he had limited understanding could mean that academics were not involved in the development or design of the curriculum.

Cao:

> I am the one who applied and implemented the program. So, I am afraid nobody is more familiar with this project than I am in our school and in the university. Also, the three courses I teach are part of the curriculum in the 2 + 2 program.

Wen and Chong reported that they basically understood that the 2 + 2 meant students study their first two years in China and last two years in Australia. Wen further commented that she understood that some Australian academics will come to their university to teach.

Chong stated that there was also a 4 + 0 program in which the students stay for four years and do not go abroad. He said students were confused on which to choose, either 2 + 2 or 4 + 0.

Similarly, all the Australian academics reported a lack of understanding of the 2 + 2 and the curriculum. Below, some of the voices from the Australian academics:

Alina:

> I don't think I know enough in terms of how it's technically organised… it's like the students do two years of training in China and two years of training and learning in our (Australia) setting.…I don't have much insight exactly what they've done in their previous two years and what they are really building on…….no insight of the exact model.

Ana, Jillian and Elaine stated that they understood that there was an agreement but gave similar comments to the Chinese academics about their limited understanding of the curriculum and courses to be taught. Elaine and Rebecca stated that

Australian academics will be deployed to teach tin China for some courses and the students will receive two degrees to allow them to teach in Australia and China. Rebecca, Jillian and Elaine were academics from the Australian university who had taught in China and Australia.

The inclusion of a curriculum from a different context in the 2 + 2 made it difficult for the academics to understand students' previous studies and what knowledge they were building on. In addition, the barriers of communication because of language differences made it difficult for academics to share their ideas of the curriculum. Only one Chinese academic was confident to be interviewed in English. Cao stated that though she had spent a number of years at Georgia university in USA, she lacked the practice to speak English and so she had lost her English. As for the Australian academics, they did not have any idea of the first two years curriculum as the material was taught in Chinese and they had no knowledge of the early childhood degree requirements in China. Leask (2015) contended in her research about internationalisation of curriculum in joint programs that when there is a lack of clarity of the curriculum, or when the when the academic lack the skills to deliver the joint program, they are most likely to be disengaged and challenging and will take a narrow focus on the material they present. To attain the student outcomes and objectives of the international dual degree program for the collaboration between the two universities, "*a clear framework to underpin work in the area of internationalization seems necessary*" for international engagement "*to be translated into institutional policy and practices*" (Turner and Robson 2008, p. 5).

All the Chinese academics informed the interviewers that the university issued a statement that they should change all their assessment components to include more participation and to move away from tests and examinations. At the same time there was a shift to weighting of 60% for participation and 40% for examination. Although the examination component still existed Academics were given the choice to design their assessments for participation on ways they wish to adopt.

The interviewees indicated that they had all included "attendance" as part of the participation component. This was to prevent absenteeism. Academic Wen responded that "Attendance is another strategy".

Chong explained how he included attendance into the 60% assessment component for participation,

> I think it's a good change. Attendance is vital. I check if everybody attends the class for at least 6 times. If they are absent for 3 times, they will receive 0. So, attendance is vital… Then I ask them to write at least one paper (essay). They can express their thoughts and opinions on certain issues. Then class participation and discussion. Personally, I pay more attention to who can raise a question, who can notice a problem related to the class lesson.

Another academic Wong used the same strategy of attendance and incorporated 6–7 tasks when students attend. If they are absent, they do not get any marks. Academic Song used the attendance too towards participation mark, but he faced a challenge for the "attendance" participation activity.

Song said,

> It's very hard to assess the undergraduates because we have a very big class size, over one hundred, and too many contents to include in the course. I asked a few questions and a few students reply. It's very difficult to use participation as an assessment strategy…

An Australian academic Rebecca, learned about the Chinese university's assessment strategy while teaching there, she commented,

> I think one of my big learning curves was coming in and discovering how different their assessment was as well.… different assessment strategies.… have written formal essays or occasionally a test. A lot of blanking on this but technical things where they have to do something of actually act something out….there are many methods and ways that students can do their assessments.

Australian academic Elaine commented about the assessment task she gave to the students when they were at year 3 level in Australia. She said,

> ….. it was almost like when we get them straight from year 12 (high school) and not been spoon fed… They've had not had to be independent learners before, and they struggle with that.…. first they were like, "Yeah no exams!!"….they go "Oh you know, we only have to come to university for 3 hours weekly for this one course"….at the beginning they think it's really easy but when the assignments come, they don't realise how much time it takes to actually read, think and find information (research).… So, I think they struggled with that to start with.

Inputs by academic staff from both institutions of the joint program were relevant and significant for the development of strategies to achieve successful outcomes of student learning. It seemed that academics from both sides had no opportunity to collaborate in relation to curriculum, shared discussion or learning about different pedagogical approaches and contents. From the statement made by Elaine about the struggles faced by the students during their year three level at the Australian university, a key concern was that there was not much support to help these students transit smoothly into the new curriculum or the different context (Ng and Nyland 2016; Wang 2009; Zhu 2016). Leadership of internationalisation need to support staff in their continuous efforts of development, design, assessing and implementing initiative and curriculum. Opportunity for staff exchange and communication need to be created as well as development for staff to integrate the curriculum from both contexts.

Having unclear guidelines of change, for example, the issues confronted by the Chinese academics when the university changed the weightings of the assessment component to include participation, makes practice difficult. The shift to move away from examinations to more participation was adopted to support what the Chinese thought was Western practice. There was no exchange of ideas about assessment and the Australian university did not attempt to change practices. Finding indicated that the shift from years of examinations to include student participation in the Chinese university required collegial efforts in the assessment designs as most of the Chinese academics' interpretation of participation differed from the academics of the Australian university as viewed by Rebecca. Attendance can be a big problem in the Australian context so a discussion around participation

and attendance could have been valuable. From critical perspective of assessments to build competencies requires *"transformative and intercultural and intrapersonal learning that is generated by internationalised experiences"* (Robson 2017, p. 371).

In particular, in a program such as the 2 + 2, teaching and assessment activities need to include a wide range of different cultural contexts of learning. For example, seeking examples from a comparative education approach or case studies with diversity from different places rather than a single one case study near home will help students to acknowledge diversity and also to prevent students "*to retreat into cultural silos*" (Leask 2015; p. 100). When there are opportunities for students to gain multicultural/international perspectives for rich learning, intellectual engagement through learning and assessments will enable students to re-think their "*situatedness in the world*" and the "*political meaning of intercultural experiences*" (Rizvi 2009, p. 264–265). Even if the students had not encountered diversity in the first two years of study the act of going overseas, living and studying in a multicultural environment provided many opportunities.

Three of the Chinese academics reported that they do use a comparative approach to teach in the 2 + 2 program. Song stated that he had never been overseas, like the rest of the academics, but he introduced information from books he read. However, those who went overseas spoke about showing videos of other countries and Moh stated that *"it will broaden their horizon, they can see a lot of cases…"*. The other Chinese academics used the same statement, *"broaden their horizon"*.

The Australian academics, Jillian, Rebecca and Elaine went to the Chinese university to deliver some courses in intensive mode to meet the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) 'foreign component' teaching requirement for the first two years of the 2 + 2 program. Jillian lamented that the lesson was delivered in an intensive mode across two weeks for one course and three weeks for two courses. The students found that adapting to the three-hour block of intensive teaching challenging for them as they were used to have 15 min break for each 45 min lesson. The bell will ring to alert everyone about the 15 min break. She stated she later understood why the 3-h was long for the students after she realised about their overloading and cramping of courses in the first two years to meet the double degree requirements. She commented that at times, she only had six students attending as opposed to the first day of 45 students given this course did not account for marks or participation but simply to meet the MoE requirements. This is an example of the Australian academic not showing awareness. One of the researchers had previously taught at the university and on the first day when the bell rang asked what it meant. The students had a break every 15 min as they were used to.

Rebecca reported that she realised that she had no understanding of what the prior knowledge level of the students had. She was surprised that the students did not have any ideas about observation methods and the purpose of child observation. Hence, she quickly adopted a teaching strategy to support the students and it required "*tact …… I went right back to the start. I think that definitely worked better. But it's interesting coming and not realising the context already of what they've done before*".

Elaine claimed that due to lack of clarity about the curriculum and information of prior learning that students had, made it complex to know how to address requirements of joint accreditation. She said,

> When I went (China) for the first time, I knew nothing. I kinda think now when I look back, I knew absolutely nothing. I kinda just went "Right I'm going to teach" … I'm still learning about what they do....So, I'm still getting my head around that.

Elaine lamented about the challenges of understanding the curriculum of the 2 + 2 as not having knowledge of their prior learning and the sequencing of courses in terms of pre-requisites. Her frustrations were expressed:

> I mean we (Australian university) have our course guide that we're supposed to teach from our course guide, from what is accredited and this is the course we are going to teach..… well I'm just going to teach that for two weeks, whether or not they are going to understand it, I can't do that. It's hard, so I get there and then I plan a certain amount but then it's kind of, get there, see how they are going, look at their faces then think "is it going? what do they need" then we try and adapt it to that… still meet the course outcomes while I'm there.

Elaine asked the students for their Chinese curriculum, course learning outcomes and all the standards but they could not tell her. She stated that the students were in the same boat as her as *"they've got as much stuff as we've got"*.

Given the need to meet the dual degree accreditation of the Australian and Chinese requirements during the first two years, a large number of courses that students undertook had created challenges about the sequence of the courses. This resulted a heavily overloaded timetable. The foreign teaching component for all students (including those not in the 2 + 2 but from the 4 + 0) as required by the Chinese MoE were reported by Jillian, Elaine and Rebecca who taught in China. This overload was commented upon by Elaine,

> I was there last time, they layered all of my sessions on top of their normal timetable…. some days we had, you know I was still teaching at 9:40pm at night, and half of those students were asleep or trying to stay awake, and I could sing and danced at that time of the night and it wouldn't matter. And so I think the quality of what they could possibly take in at that time of night over those two weeks, …. it's hard to not feel like I'm wasting my time and wasting theirs.

Rebecca asserted that she tried to include interesting activities such as group interactions as strategy to keep these students interested but was hindered by the furniture in the room. The non-movable long table and chairs hindered her planned activity to promote interactions. She had 40 students for the first day as someone from the university came to check on the attendance on the first day. There was a day she had only 8 students.

Chinese academics, Ren, Wong, Chong and Song agreed that to accomplish the student outcomes successfully for the 2 + 2 dual degree components, students need to undertake sufficient and relevant learning for the context and the overload was not helpful. Chong felt that as they had too many courses to study in the first two years, in addition the English preparation for entry requirements to the Australian university, they "are also not well prepared in terms of the core courses…this is a main concern".

Ren said,

> First, they have too many courses. They are required to take many courses (in the first two years) due to their overseas study plan and English courses take up a lot of their time. They are heavy loaded….

All the Chinese academics reported the biggest challenge for the students would be English and they were also worried about the cultural adjustment to the differences in the Australian system.

Song commented,

> Our system pays a lot of attention to knowledge and teachers are responsible for delivering systematic knowledge to students through lecturing and helping them understand. I suppose Australian system is different and may emphasize more on student-initiated learning. Therefore, learning methods may be different. Chinese students may get used to listening and expect their teachers to lecture after decades of schooling.

The complications of overloading the students due to an attempt to meet all MoE and Australian requirements of the dual degree award from both jurisdictions have created tensions and challenges for academics and students. In the 2 + 2 program, there was an assumption that quality assurance is controlled by meeting the accreditation criteria stipulated by the Chinese MoE and the Australia Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). Findings indicated that joint programs need to have concerted efforts, consulted with collegially from relevant academics and expertise will support student learning outcomes. Zheng (2009) reported that international joint programs approved by the Chinese MoE have less flexibility to change or make amendments to the curriculum design and mapping. The Australian content was also externally approved and could not be changed. The 2 + 2 was an approved program from the Chinese MoE and it was complex given there were a number of courses that were not contextually relevant and added on requirements of foreign component teaching within the 2 + 2 further complicated the understanding and delivery of curriculum to meet the outcomes. This created an additional load for students (Zheng 2009; Ng and Nyland 2018). The findings indicated there were concerns in the intensified learning delivery mode during the first two years which was not ideal for student outcomes and motivation of learning. Intensives have become common in Australia, or even block mode teaching, is a sign of global forces and universities trying to meet demands, cater for as many students as possible with minimal numbers of teaching staff is a phenomenon faced by the Australian and Chinese academics.

Marketisation and changing policy for collaborative articulation programs have consequences for the intrinsic value of education. Zheng (2009, p.51) reported that "marketisation of higher education must be balanced by safeguarding the quality of education" and he asserted that Chinese universities often have the "us and them attitude" and not a functional approach to address issue, hence the "response is not complete". As Australian universities have been contented to chase the dollar and have allowed their own standards to be threatened by grade creep and alternative entry arrangements to programs, it would appear there are issues for all partners in these international associations.

(b) Placement of professional experience

In the 2 + 2 program, the students have to fulfil a total of 80 days placement requirements across the 4 years early childhood education undergraduate program as specified by the Australian governance body, ACECQA. The students had completed 40 days placement in the Chinese context, assessed as equivalent to 20 days by ACECQA and therefore needed 60 days of placement in the Australian context. Given that the students entered placement at year 3 level in Australia, a level of knowledge on technical issues, like child observations was required. Findings indicated that the students faced challenges when they entered into placement in early years settings in Australia as their theoretical and technical knowledge did not meld easily with the Australian program. This was a problem with mixing two four-year programs together. As Australia also has a graduate diploma program of one year that covers Australian requirements utilising that program, at least partially, may have created a better mix.

The Chinese academics in the interviews reported how they tried to prepare the students for their placements. For example,

Cao:

> Our students have many opportunities to observe in schools/kindergartens and have two practicums: one for 40 days in kindergarten to meet the 2+2 requirements, another for 2 months. Teachers always take students to schools/kindergartens to observe the teaching practices, play videos in the class, and discuss teaching-related cases studies

Findings indicated that not all the Chinese academics interviewed were involved in the supervision of students for the ECEC practicum. Moh reported that he only supervised students enrolled in the general education major but not those in the preschool sector.

Wong:

> Every year, there are certain kindergartens cooperate with us. There are some really good kindergartens that are very far from our universities. Considering the financial issue (cost), we usually send students to kindergartens nearby. …. I teach children's play so I bring my students to kindergarten and observe what happened in practice regarding play. We have assignments that require student to do observation. I think this is one way to fit in the structure of the degree.

Song:

> The undergraduate students are required to conduct a four-week practicum in the kindergarten.… they are expected to teach, organize activities, manage the class, and instruct children's daily routine and play. They usually do their practicum at the best kindergartens of the region. Our university is the leading institution in the field of education in our region. We have a great influence on regional kindergartens because many kindergarten teachers and directors have been trained at our university. Therefore, local kindergartens are very supportive for the students' practicum.

It was noted that the statements made by Song and Wong did not necessarily line up as Wong stated the good kindergartens were too far but due to cost, they allocated the students to nearby kindergartens. The quality of the nearby kindergartens was not commented upon.

Wen:

…..practice opportunities can be added into courses, such as kindergarten observation, watching kindergarten-related video, and introducing my working experiences at kindergarten. In addition, the students have a few weeks placement in the kindergarten.

Moh:

I have supervised internship for more than 10 cohorts of undergraduate students. I've also done teacher training, consultation and lecturing for kindergartens, professional conferences and professional forums and have participated in curriculum development of kindergartens.

Chong:

In many courses, the practical element is very rare. As teachers, we try our best to fit these experiences into our class. If we want to improve students' practical experience, …. that take up too much time and energy …..a lot of barriers restrict the practical experience for students.

Chong shared how rare the practicum component was in many courses. This is a similar picture to Australia where only selected courses have a practical component.

The prior learning from stage 1 (first two years) at the Chinese university is significant for the 2 + 2 students and should be designed to ensure continuity and a smooth transition to stage 2 of their program at year 3 level in Australia. Therefore, it is important for joint program to help academics from both countries to gain understanding of the curriculum, cultural understanding and pedagogies as well expectations of desired outcomes of the 2 + 2 program.

Comments made by the Australian academics suggest challenges in transitioning the students into year 3 level placement in an early childhood setting.

Elaine:

…they did however many days in a kindergarten setting over in China, like 20 days.

I'm not sure that that really gave them much experience …. it didn't really help them much for their first placement here. It was really like their first placement here ever. It was very hard for them, they couldn't get their head around that this is education and this is learning ….they didn't have much understanding of play based learning.

Alina:

Placement…complex… there are a lot of unknown "territories" ……needs strong foundations ….because they have such different social cultural context. They're doing two different degrees….. doing different kinds of placement (China and Australia). That's really tricky because it's so intense, there's not much time for different pace of learning and passive learning. There's a lot of spoon feeding.

Elaine:

I'm not sure the placement (in China) was the best designed way to do it, but that's the way it went. I actually visiting quite a few of them here (Australia). They were used to being with their group but was individual at a centre (Australia). There was a lot of criticism from the centres about their language and their skills, they expected a higher skill level than they had for year three students with a higher understanding. Um..so that was probably pretty hard for them….lot of the mentor reported back that there was no understanding about aller-

gies and not to use the same spoon for vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Things like that which they don't really have in China.

Ana:

….in China, you know that they've got 4 to 500 children in one centre…. Whereas, our centre can be much lower numbers and very different environment …...they saw the diversity here, of children, compared to China, which would be more mono culture.

Elaine:

I went to visit them … at a preschool placement (Australia), some of them had the 3 to 5 kind of room, and a long day care, some of them had just sessional kinder. They were still getting their head around the differences in the settings that we have…..…the babies round, and most of them didn't enjoy it.…… So, they were frightened to pick them (babies or toddlers) up….. that took a while.

An issue in comparing the Chinese and Australian academic reports here is the different focus and some attitudinal emphasis emerging. All the Australian academics mentioned the Chinese placement, some in judgmental language although they had not experienced these centres. The Chinese all described their actions within their own environment and did not comment on Australia. As mentioned earlier a more genuine partnership where academics could share their work and ideas may have led to more collaborative comments.

(II) Internationalisation of the Program and Implications for the Academics

The Chinese academics were asked about their understanding of internationalisation and the implications for the 2 + 2 program,

Moh stated that the Chinese university paid a lot of attention to internationalisation of curriculum. From his understanding, the internationalisation of curriculum should be in three parts, first, to include important theories not only from China but also from other countries. Second, to include various research methods from different countries across borders and last, to use cases from other countries such as America.

Cao stated that the university has two strategic focuses, internationalisation and informationalisation. Song referred to internationalisation as working on a project to internationalise education. He stated that nothing has been "concrete" and they are still exploring the topic.

Wen linked the term to internationalisation of curriculum. She believed that,

to broaden students' horizon, although we may not teach in English, internationalization of curriculum can be achieved through adding teaching contents and ideas for other countries and through international comparison.

Chong reported that his university stresses internationalisation by sending a lot of teachers overseas as visiting scholars or visiting professors. He said,

….second, internationalise the teachers, then internationalise through foreign text books. Three, the university encourages us to teach some courses in English and encourage us to introduce some textbooks written in English

Chong's statement about internationalisation was supported by (Wang 2009, p. 58) who suggested the following activities would encourage internationalisation: (1) study abroad, sending students, scholars and faculty members for advanced study and research collaboration, (2) integrate the international dimension through the use of foreign textbooks and development of English programs and (3) cooperation with foreign tertiary education institutions in transnational programs. Internationalisation has become popular and universities have begun to develop strategic policies to strengthen such initiatives.

Wang (2009) cited Zhan's (2004) research on internationalisation experiences at Shandong university and reported that the expansion of internationalisation of HE was often included in the strategic plan at Shandong university. Internationalisation was expanded through activities such as, (1) teaching with internationalised curriculum, mode, and methods and using English as the medium of instruction, (2) research participation to be joint collaborations with international institutions, including establishing research centres with famous experts (Joseph Tobin and James Heckman are visiting professors at Chinese universities), (3) catering for overseas students, conducting international schools for foreign students in English, (4) employ more overseas professors, teachers with global experiences and strengthen international research and (5) improve international of management staff with an eye to adopting relevant international practices.

As for Wong, she said,

> I think internationalization of curriculum does not only mean we should know what do you think… but also that we should let you know what we think. For example, in our culture it is very difficult for teachers to manage a big group. So, the best form of internationalization is that we get to know each other.

For the Australian academics the participants did not answer the question so directly and seemed to largely equate the idea of internationalisation of the curriculum with the university enrolling international students. Jillian expressed a desire to be culturally sensitive and regretted there was no more sharing but she was talking about content within the curriculum.

> ….today saying to them 'it doesn't have to just be English rhymes, you can use your rhymes from your culture'. And I say this is an example that children should be able to hear their own languages. But I don't think we include their way, their curriculum and their understanding enough, it's very Australian centric.

Alina also thought in terms of the students themselves and the courses they were experiencing. She saw the international student market as business and then commented on the implications of diversity among the student cohort. She acknowledged that *"I try to go beyond just to bring in the aspects of where the students come from"*.

> Ah well to be honest from what I have experienced in terms of the statistics of how many students that come from international background and they're classified as international students, meaning they have to have a certain English proficiency, meaning they have to attend 80% classes and all that and have face to face more than not, there's a very—significant number of them for international background. And I think there is a lot of online

> information that is flowing about international students….. I thought even just the fact that we have that as a professional development it is telling that we are aiming to attract more international students. So I'm not sure….. that was a business aspect.

Ana suspected there might be more to the question.

> Is that what you think that question is about? And…internationalisation of curriculum…. My expectations would be that it really does help unite at a global level in a way as a profession where work global level, being advocates for young children. So, it connects us at a worldwide, global level about children and you can think about things like united nations umm…….To me that suggests that they are looking outside their own country in looking at other approaches and that is a good thing as we are coming together to discuss the other approaches for children around early childhood,

Rebecca had taught in China and had done professional experience (PX) in China as an undergraduate as well as being involved with the 2 + 2 students in Australia. When asked about internationalisation she queried:

> Do we actually have an emphasis on internationalisation for curriculum here [Australia]?

She did add that she thought it was important to consider internationalisation in the context of "other countries and thinking about how early childhood is done in other countries".

These responses to the question of internationalisation suggest the Chinese academics have been informed of their university's plans about as part of the strategic plan of the university. The Australian group were aware of the push for international students, knew it was a business plan and mainly restricted their comments to ideas of diversity. Despite these varying views of internationalisation there were significant implications for academics at both universities. There were complications of the delivery, curriculum, the demands in meeting the program accreditation of two different jurisdictions, worries about overloading the students and lack of knowledge of teaching and content in the partner university. An important function of internationalisation in HE is to ensure that there is intercultural understanding and communication among academics and students (Robson 2017). There was little interaction with academics across the two institutions.

9.6 Critical Analysis

When discussing the double degree, the four Chinese academics, Chong, Moh, Ren and Lu thought the students would not be adequately equipped with relevant knowledge and understanding for the fulfilment of the program. They also thought it would be challenging for the students to transit smoothly to the partner institution without appropriate preparation. Chong said due to having to meeting education requirements in China, the students may not have enough understanding of "core courses" required in the Australian context. He said, "there are some disconnections … their performance in Australia may be affected. I know a little about it … study for two years in our university … and then spend two years in your

university … they get two degrees". He was referring to the number of core ECEC specialisation studied in the first two years in China and was concerned that the students may not be adequately prepared for Australia as they had to study general courses for the Chinese degree. The courses had a poor overlap as well as content courses like art and music are no longer emphasised in Australian tertiary programs but compulsory in China. From the Australian academic comments there was little knowledge of what the students were bringing. The Chinese academics did not feel confident of how they could prepare the students. Moh contended that since most of the Chinese academics knew little about Australian cultural context it was difficult to help the students for the new institution, "so, we may not sufficiently prepare our students for their oversea study given we don't have the knowledge … there are not many opportunities for them to practice".

Wen's comments were similar to Song, she said,

> I think there are two main challenges. First, the students should have good language skills in order to communicate overseas. Second, there are culture differences. Our students are familiar with Chinese education system which features on cramming and emphasises on systematic theory teaching. I think Australian education system may be different and pay attention to students' participation and discussion in the class, not so much on systematic theory learning. Therefore, students may feel challenged in learning when there.

Rebecca strongly believed that gaining understanding of the culture, she would be able to support the students. She said,

> ……..while the students may say yes …… that could be something totally different to what we would be delivering in that area**.** Therefore, there might be ***holes*** in things. There might also be extra things but we might assume knowledge that isn't there.

Academics from both countries expressed a wish to make connections with their counterparts but there were no opportunities created for them to do so. As described in Chap. 7 a number of the Australian academics went to China to deliver courses in English, but this opportunity was not utilised. The Chinese academics said they did not know who came from Australia to teach and there was no introduction. The Australian academics said while they were in China, they never met other academics as their teaching programs were organised by an agent working between the two universities. The Australian academics were sometimes invited to a welcome dinner with the agent and the program manager. The Chinese program manager, Wong stated,

> …the program is about teaching….. Some teachers are from your university came…. So, we should establish a good relationship. We should contact more often to share teaching resources and discuss common interests….

The other partnership that did not occur was the opportunity to establish a relationship for future research collaboration. As phrased by Rebecca, *"Very up in the air, very up in the air…. I think it would take a lot of work to really strengthen it, not necessarily the relationships but certainly the research side of things"*.

All Australian and Chinese academics believed that the 2 + 2 dual degree program would provide better job prospects for the students. The Chinese academics said the program can sustain as the dual degree provide them with flexibility as they

can return to work in international schools or centres that pay good salaries. This needs to be investigated. At present most of the 2 + 2 students remaining in Australia have gone on to further study. If they are working in early childhood setting, they are mostly working to support their studies and are not employed as teachers. There are a few exceptions but as registration is onerous only those who wish to pursue a career of early childhood teacher have taken this road. We have little information on those who have returned to China. Chapter 3, in this volume suggests that the private sector in China is changing so the assumption these students would be employed in the high-end private sector, for example, international schools, may not be valid.

9.7 Conclusion

From the literature on internationalisation, there is often no universal approach to internationalisation or definition (Kirk et al. 2018; Leask 2009, 2015). In this study, prominent challenges identified centred around the requirements of the dual degree, lack of clarity about curriculum and the delivery of teaching given the different educational and cultural contexts. There was no involvement on the part of most of the academics in the mapping and design of courses and desired outcomes and without shared aims, *"disconnects"* will arise stemming from the lack of understanding in the conceptualisation of the 2 + 2 program (Kirk et al. 2018; Ng and Nyland 2018; Sutrisno 2014; Wu and Naidoo 2016).

This commitment leading to an organisational purpose is significant in achieving effective coordination, integration and a successful collaboration. This requires managerial support. Whenever there is an identified marketing strategy, such as the dual degree program, concerted efforts and consensus to empower the alliances between the international partners are needed (Wu and Naidoo 2016).

In a research conducted by Wu and Naidoo (2016, p. 1135), it was acknowledged that senior management needed to include academics as part of their responsibilities in recruitment activities and *"to address this disconnect if they are to maximise the likelihood of their international strategy being implemented successfully"*. Findings of this study indicated a lack of understanding and knowledge of the 2 + 2 program by the Chinese and Australian academics.

The intended and actual learning outcomes of the "*internationalised*" curriculum as contended by Leask (2015, p. 11) may differ as the *"development of these perspectives may or may not be supported and assessed"*. The desired outcomes of the 2 + 2 program aimed to meet the accreditation requirements of the Chinese MoE and the Australian regulatory body, ACECQA to allow the students to stay in Australia or return to China, as ECEC teachers. Amendments to the curriculum to ensure students had appropriate qualifications to meet the demands of the Chinese and Australian governments needed a *"process of contextualization and localization. It is not internationalization of the curriculum"* (Leask 2015, p. 12). This did not occur. As with many processes the staff who were to deliver the services were not part of the planning and organisation, this was done through university bodies

and the agent. The quality of academic exchanges is vital for the negotiation of social and transformative change in the area of internationalisation. Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 202) call for:

> a new imaginery which recognizes all human beings need to think locally, nationally and globally—a form of cosmopolitan citizenship that emphasizes collective well being connected across local, national and global dimensions.

This chapter presented the engagement by the academics from the Chinese and Australian universities in the joint 2 + 2 program. To understand academic and student experiences in an international program, there is a need to review the drivers of internationalisation and how HEIs are motivated. Given the findings indicated a lack of clarity, information on curriculum, student prior learning and the characteristics of the joint dual degree program it reflects the need to include leadership and horizontal management processes to support the academic and student experiences. Internationalisation of HE has shaped the practices of academics and influenced perceptions of the academic identity. Findings have informed the need for policy development, practices and future collaborative international research.

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Chapter 10
Student Choice and Experience in a Joint Program at an Australian and a Chinese University

Josephine Ng and Berenice Nyland

10.1 Introduction

In the last three decades, digital technology, advanced information, communication and transportation has brought a more interconnected and globalised world. Universities around the world have expanded their roles in the involvement of transnational education though internationalisation of higher education (Tan 2009). Expansion of mobility of ideas, courses, students, academic exchange, programs and partnerships in joint international programs have grown dramatically. Policy implementation from governments across nations have aimed to promote cross border relationships in fostering partnerships in the transnational national education (TNE) (DET 2016). Such initiatives have become major economic considerations with international education being the third biggest export for Australia.

HE institutions across the world have identified the value and benefits international students have brought to their institutions and national economy. The UK, USA, Canada, and Australia are examples of jurisdictions that have acknowledged both the economic and social benefits linked to international students. As a consequence of reduced funding from government, universities are now competing for students to raise their revenue through different forms of recruitment and marketing strategies to intensify domestic and international student recruitment that support universities to sustain and grow. This trend is also developing in countries like China or Japan.

The rationale of student choice in a particular HE international program and destination is multi-faceted and complex. Coupled with the rise of commodification of HE in which students are viewed as consumers and education as the product with

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an increased focus on outcomes. The expanded growth in overseas partnerships to deliver HE and the vested interests between the partners, have becoming more complicated. In this chapter, the experiences of Chinese students in a 2 + 2 joint program (see Chap. 7) were explored to inform the factors influencing Chinese students' choice in a joint early childhood program between a Chinese and an Australian university.

Student mobility is not new, although traditionally limited, the scale of student mobility has increased as countries have become more receptive to receiving international students due to advantages accrued through economic, skilled migration and cultural exchange. This shift of student mobility has dramatically increased in the twenty first century as universities compete on the international platform to increase international student enrolment. Despite a growing research interest in international students' choice of destination to pursue HE (Levatino 2017), very limited research has examined the flow of students from a collaborative joint degree program. A particular 2 + 2 model of a joint international early childhood program between s Chinese and an Australian university is the focus of this chapter.

In this chapter the research findings of an in-depth qualitative study using semi-structured interviews as a data collection method are discussed. The participants were Chinese students who were completing their final semester at the Australian university. The purpose of the study aimed to examine students' choice and experience of the 2 + 2. Findings could inform policy and provide understanding of the factors influencing student experience and the implications for quality education, programs, recruitment strategies and skilled migration issues.

10.2 Background

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that since 2016, there has been a 22% jump in the value of international education. This accounted for total AU$32.2 billion revenue in 2017 (Robinson 2018). This revenue provided jobs for 150,000 Australians and supported communities and the regional economies. Australia is now the third largest exporter of education after the USA and UK (Robinson 2018). Market competition for numbers of international students as a result of reduced government funding has skyrocketed and universities have encountered challenges in meeting other demands involved with the value of education, expectations of academics and employers in the world of business and industry. In discussing this situation, Slaughter and Leslie (1997, p. 8) proposed that we are seeing the rise of "academic capitalism":

> To maintain or expand resources, faculty had to compete increasingly for external dollars…which was referred to variously as applied, commercial, strategic, and targeted research, whether these moneys were in the form of research grants and contracts, service contracts, partnerships with industry and governments, technology transfer, or the recruitment of more and higher fee-paying students. We call institutional and professional market or market-led efforts to secure external moneys academic capitalism.

Recent trends have indicated the expansion of international partnerships and that the recruitment of international students is often viewed *"only from an economic point of view means the quality of higher education is cheapened – and the students themselves are commodified"* (Gould 2017). Robertson (2011, p. 2198) stated in an "*exploitive system*", international students are viewed as *"cash cows"* when they fall under the *"hands of unscrupulous agents and educational providers"*.

In exploring factors influencing student choice it appears the reasons for choice are varied and have shifted over time. For example, earlier research conducted by Soutar and Turner (2002) found that factors influencing choice were course suitability, academic reputation, job prospects and teaching quality. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) also reported that both recommendations from and having friends in the host country were identified as factors influencing the selection of a particular destination. Parent's/relative's recommendation became increasingly important, other factors such as having a friend/ relative in the host country influenced choice. Aligned with this study, Pimpa (2003, 2005) explored Thai students studying in Australia and reported five reasons for their choice. Peer/reference groups such as parents, relative and agents were the strongest influencing factor for their choice of country. Pimpa (2005) asserted that peer groups had more influence on choice for undergraduates' decisions than graduates. In other research, conducted by Michael, Armstrong and King (2004) on 219 international students' choice, it was found that quality of education ranked highest, peer group and families next, third was program contents and last, affordability/cost. The recent trend of having features like "*double, combined, dual and "vertical" degrees stand out in the recruitment market*" (Hopkins 2016). To many leaders and policymakers, these double degree and joint programs through international partnerships are viewed as "*a natural extension of mobility programs. For others, they are perceived as a troublesome development leading to double counting of academic work and the thin edge of academic fraud*" (Knight 2011, p. 299).

The joint 2 + 2 program in early childhood education (ECE) between the Australian and the Chinese university served different purposes for the partners. For the Australian university, the driving forces for the joint partnership were global positioning and financial income through the recruitment of international students (Ng and Nyland 2018). For the Chinese university, they aimed to build capacity through the drive for a knowledge economy and to raise teaching standards. Both universities hoped that the 2 + 2 program would help to meet an "*international and intercultural dimension*" through exchanges between academics, students and research collaboration between the Australian university and a university in China (Ng and Nyland 2016, 2018). Internationalisation provides opportunity for cultural and social exchange (Gould 2017).

The dual degree award purportedly offers benefits and also comes with challenges, due to having two different curriculum, as each institution aims to meet the accreditation and regulatory requirements of their country. That challenges existed is affirmed by an academic (A) who taught into the 2 + 2 program and was interviewed as part of the research evaluating the program (Ng and Nyland 2016) (see Chap. 9).

> I think there are some disconnections …students didn't have certain basic courses that are required in Australia but not in China, their performance in Australia may be affected.

10.3 The Collaborative Articulation Program (CAP)

Since the reforms of late 1978, China has focused on an open market system towards economic development. China is the second largest economy in the world and is building the capacity of its citizens, through internationalisation and participation in the international community, to support economic and social development.

Higher education institutions play a critical role in supporting China's national strategy to develop their future workforce. Through National projects titled 211 and 985, at the time this partnership was formed, the Ministry of Education had ranked and selected universities to become part of a prestigious group of high ranked institutions. The Chinese university in focus was of one of 107 universities who participated in the National project 211. The university received funding from the Central government to build capacity for teachers and to raise the image and standards for the university. Reforms through 211 and 985 aimed to build capacity of teachers at undergraduate level (Fang and Wang 2014; Dai 2018). One of the initiatives the university introduced was the 2 + 2 collaborative articulation program (CAP) that is the focus here. If students applied for the 2 + 2, they must pay fees for all four years of tuition. A benefit was that they could get into the 211 ranked university with a lower score than local students who would be given free tuition but would not have the opportunity to study abroad. The prestige of an institution is important to Chinese parents and at least two of the participants in this research reported applying for the 2 + 2 as a means of getting into a high ranked university.

Senior managers of the Australian university believed that the partnership with the Chinese university would provide revenue and raise the international standing of the university's education faculty. Students would spend the first two years of the program of their study in China and the last two years in Australia. The Chinese and Australian universities entered a contractual agreement to deliver the 2 + 2 ECE program. The courses in the 2 + 2 program aligned with the Australian 4-year onshore program. The first two years of the program was made up of courses from the curriculum of the Chinese university, this included 16 approved courses, 12 compulsory courses, English courses and 8 courses from the Australian university to be taught by academics, in English, from the Australian university. The Australian academics taught the entire Chinese cohort of early childhood students, not just those enrolled for the 2 + 2. The research reported on here was undertaken as an evaluation of the partnership (Ng and Nyland 2016, 2018).

10.4 Overview of the Students' Courses and Study Experience in China and Australia

A challenge faced by the students attending the Australian university for the first time was the mid- year intake for 2 + 2 Chinese students. This timing stemmed from the different schedules and semesters between the universities. Complications arose

as the students overloaded a "collection of courses" to meet requirements across institutions, industry, internal and external certification. This had potential quality implications. Besides meeting ministry requirements, the program must meet the regulations stipulated in the provisions of professional teaching standards and codes of practice in both jurisdictions.

As discussed in Chap. 9 the delivery of the program by academics from both countries greatly influenced the quality of the 2 + 2 program. This is an important issue supported by McBurnie (2008, p. 193) who stated that:

> …students who receive substandard education; the host-country that receives suboptimal human resource development, with damaging implications for nation- building; (and) the provider institution- and by extension the provider country- that suffers a damaged reputation and financial loss.

10.5 The Research

The research utilised a qualitative research methodology of a case study approach (Yin 2017). The following descriptions of student experience were gained through field work, observations and personal discussions with different cohorts of students. The aim was to evaluate the program, not in terms of the benefits perceived by the university bodies but to explore the experiences of participants, students and academics, both Chinese and Australian, in order to promote the partnership, improve practical arrangements and indicate our willingness to engage in research.

Semi- structured interviews were conducted with five student participants who had 4 years of experience in the 2 + 2 program of study in both China and Australia. The interviews were conducted by an external person who did not have any relationship to the students. A visiting Chinese scholar with a good command of Chinese and English. This was to avoid a situation in which, participants felt compelled to answer questions based on the expectations of the interviewer. Interviews have many advantages as, they are flexible to allow probing into the context to gain an understanding of the perceptions of the participants. A limitation for these interviews were the students comparing themselves as first and second-year students with what they gained from their studies in third and fourth year.

The table below summed up the background of the participants who were interviewed. Each interview lasted 45 min to an hour. Pseudonyms, Chin, Lin, Nam, Tian and Rui were used to protect the identity of participants.

Table 10.1 Chinese student participants

Question	Chin	Lin	Nam	Tian	Rui
Age	22	22	21	21	23
From	Hubei	Hubei	Jingzhou	Henan	Hubei
Previous job in China	No	Pianist at centre for children	Tutor for junior high school students	Swimming teacher in kindergarten	None
Part time job in Australia	No	Waitress in a restaurant	Relief educator in Early childhood centres	Waitress (once but quitted)	Waitress in a restaurant
Require financial support	No need to work	No	No	No	No but I chose to work for extra spending money
Who supports your study?	Parents	Parents	Family but expected to pay them back when I graduated	Family	Parents
Highest education level of parents	Father (F) PhD Mother (M) PhD	F & M: Bachelor degrees	F: Senior High School M: Junior High School	F: Bachelor degree M: Associate diploma	F & M: Senior High School
Parent occupations	F: Lecturer in economics in Wuhan University, M: Physicist	F: Engineer M: Teacher	F: Own business: Locksmith M: Assistant	F: Own business	F: Doctor in own clinic M: Nurse

The cohort was small, so we were able to look at all the answers to the interview questions and selected themes in relation to frequency they were mentioned by the participants as influencing their experiences. The following themes emerged:

1. The students wanted to explain how and why, they chose the dual program of study
2. Application and meeting the IELTs requirements (International English Language Test)
3. The students were keen to study overseas and why Australia was a choice. This theme had two parts:
   (a) Learning experiences in China and Australia
   (b) The challenges of professional experience (PX), in China and Australia.

10.6 Theme 1

(i) Why did the students choose Australia and the 2 + 2 program?

Students reported that they understood very little of what the 2 + 2 program entailed. The common response given by all participants was that that they had basic understanding that the 2 + 2 program required them to spend their first two years of study in at the Chinese university in China and the last two years at the Australian university. All participants reported that they chose the 2 + 2 based on the recommendations from their parents who viewed the program as beneficial and could offer good prospects for their future. Both universities enjoy a good reputation, though the Australian one was not in the 'group of 8' but parents were particularly impressed with the opportunity to access the Chinese university which had a prestigious ranking through the National project 211. The system has been reviewed in recent years and the Chinese MoE has reduced the number of universities with such rankings. The new award is known as 'Double Top' (Peters and Beasley 2018).

A student (Chin) stated that her parents are professors at a Chinese university and the government awarded the National project 985 to the university which her mother worked at. Chin's mother thought she would not meet the entry score of her university but believed that the focused university of the CAP was still a good university, having been awarded the 211 and Chin would be able to get in as the dual degree was less competitive against local students seeking scholarships to study in China for four years. Chin explained the ranking system of universities and the importance they held for her parents. She explained,

> So, before I went to "Gaokao" exam [Streaming exam], my parents said I may not get into any of the 985 universities as the marks to enter there are much higher than the 211 universities.

Chin stated that her parents understood that her score was not high enough to gain entry to the university of 985 project award and encouraged her to select the 2 + 2 with a lower score entry and also attached a benefit of dual degree award. Though Chin preferred to go for a qualification of primary school teaching, she followed her mother's suggestion to study ECE and registered for the 2 + 2. Chin also stated,

> My parents would like me to go for the 2+2 in Australia first and then after I graduate, go to England to pursue Master of primary teaching as we have a close relative in England…..

Another student reported that her parents advised her that,

> 2+2 early childhood program…. broaden my horizon… Actually, I wasn't keen to enter this (2+2), my parents told me to enter the 2+2 first and decide later ……it is not like an ordinary university program and we can get two Bachelor degrees….the 2+2 offers me choice in future…(Tian).

She considered the award of two degrees to be beneficial due to its flexibility to allow her to work in either country when she graduates. Her parents had plans to join her in the future. She said,

> My parents hope that I stay in Australia and later bring them over to live in Australia as the environment is much better (Tian).

Nam said her mother assured her the 2 + 2 was a good program. For Nam, she considered the low entry score for the 2 + 2 helped her gained entry to a reputable Chinese university. The entry score for the 2 + 2 was much lower than the score required for the local Social Work, Art or Science program. Nam's father convinced her to undertake the 2 + 2. Her father told Nam that she has characteristics and *"instincts made for an ECE teacher"*. She agreed with her father and said that, *"I really have the patience playing with young children!"*

A common phrase used by all the students was that the 2 + 2 helped "*to broaden her perspectives and learnin*g". Another student, Rui, agreed that the university's ranking influenced her choice and her parent's support of this choice.

> ….my parents asked me to select the 2+2 program due to family expectations as they think I can learn more and broaden my horizon ….My parents appreciate the 2+2 program and they picked the program for me. They like me to come to Australia to study…. the 2+2 gives me the opportunity to study in overseas (Rui).

All students reported that they wished to go abroad and had picked Australia as a destination. Lin stated that the 2 + 2 helped her to be gain access to Australia and she had picked it as a destination where she wanted to work and live. Having an agent to support the complexity of the application made it convenient for her to achieve her goal. Lin loves Australia and will take the opportunity to travel around the country.

Students stated that their parents were worried about their safety, but they felt Australia as a destination for study abroad is safer than those in the USA and UK. Two key reasons emerging for the selection of 2 + 2, were parents influence and the opportunity to enter a high ranked Chinese university, which was also a wish of the parents. The 2 + 2 offered the opportunity to enter a reputable university with a lower entry exam score. Finding showed that the reputation and ranking of the university is one of the key factors for selection and an important consideration by parents. The Chinese university was prestigious and the overseas one has a sound reputation. Tian and Chin had been keen to pursue a Science major and primary teaching career but dropped the idea to obey their parents' recommendation for the 2 + 2. Chin's parents suggested that she can pursue the primary teaching degree during postgraduate studies at a later stage but go for the 2 + 2 ECE program in Australia. This could be related to migration opportunities. Pre-primary teachers are on the Australian skilled migration occupation list.

Tian commented that "*the 2+2 offers me choice in future*" of either working in China or Australia. She further reported that her parents had intentions for the future.

> …they hope I stay in Australia and later bring them over to live in Australia as the environment is much better.

All the participants reported that the 2 + 2 offered flexibility to work/live in either Australia or China, hence, they viewed as having the "*competitive edge in the job*

market" (Tian), "become 'international' in outlook" and to overcome the limitations of their own parochialism" (Chapman and Pyvis 2013, p. 38).

Tian considered studying in Australia would provide her a better lifestyle. She said,

> …...the living experience is cosy and relaxing…a good environment for learning and travelling.

The research conducted by McCrohon and Nyland (2017, p. 22), found that students came to study in Australia as the physical environment was "better and the local people were less rude". Aligned with other studies conducted on international students in Australia (Ruhanen and McLennan 2010; Nicholls 2018; Bista 2019), lifestyle was viewed as a significant factor influencing the choice to study abroad. Rui commented,

> I want to quickly get a job in Australia…. And to complete a Master degree program. I will gain a job in Australia and live here to have more experience…(Rui)

Rui added only if she could not get a job in Australia,

> There is a possibility that I may go back to China because of the unknown in terms of regulations of the Permanent Resident policy.

Research such as McCrohon and Nyland (2017), Robertson (2011) and Gribble (2008) reported that significantly, in a commoditised HE environment alongside the marketisation of universities these students were hopeful they could stay in the host country and eventually gain permanent residency and jobs in Australia upon graduation.

Most of the participants considered the 2 + 2 program as not too expensive in comparison with the local 4 years program. Rui stated,

> …not so expensive than the local program. To me is not expensive if we go overseas as opposed to other majors staying in China.

Chin, Lin and Rui agreed that the value of the 2 + 2 was much higher than other programs because it had the benefit of a dual degree. In contrast to the local program of 4 + 0 (4 years in China), students considered the 2 + 2 was not expensive in terms of "value for money" and the attached benefits of potentially improved employability with better future prospects. Other comments included that they did not regret coming to Australia. The majority of the participants chose the 2 + 2 program as it was convenient to have a direct connection between their Chinese university and the Australian university. The students stated that it was daunting to arrive and live in an unfamiliar country. Other benefits included the opportunity for English immersion to gain competence in English language to create better pathways for future employment (Nicholls 2018).

10.7 Theme 2

(ii) Application process to study in Australia and the challenges faced in meeting the entry requirements, eg meeting minimum IELTS score.

All interviewees stated that they started learning English at primary three level in China, but they did not have opportunities to practice their English language skills. To successfully gain entry to the third year at the Australian university, students in the 2 + 2 had to meet the entry requirements of 192 credit points of a list of approved Education courses, 40 placement days, 100% pass in the Chinese compulsory courses for teacher registration in China and a minimum English proficiency score on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The 100% pass for the Chinese compulsory courses was later changed to 60% to help increase the transfer rate of eligible students to Australia.

All students reported that they took more than one English test to pass. Most found the oral and writing tests difficult. Tian commented about the preparation for IELTS,

> …the learning for the test is not to learn to improve my English but based on test to learn my English….the test is based on how much you practice on past test papers to improve and pass.

Nam said that she tried to read a lot of English texts but failed and passed the second time after she practiced on the previous test material. She said,

> "I do a lot of practice, took the test myself then passed IELTS the second time".

So far there had been a total of four cohorts transferred to the Australian university since the partnership was established in 2012. There had been complications in applications and the actual transfer process. As a result of the curriculum reforms at the Chinese university, the stage 1 curriculum faced a number of changes, for example, modification to the subjects, course titles and code numbers differed. There were arising discrepancies between the approved courses which caused complications for students meeting the entry requirements who were trying to enter the Australian university in year 3 of the degree.

As the partnership involved an agent communication was challenging as students and academics commented that they had only a basic understanding of the 2 + 2. Chin stated that as well as not having much information of the 2 + 2, there were other challenges to be faced in regards the program management by the agent and the Chinese university. Chin described the process as "very problematic". She also commented that in the first two years the Chinese university "*keeps changing*" the plan and the overall 2 + 2 study program was confusing as a result of abundant choices of electives and the number of compulsory courses. Commonly, there are promotional strategies employed by universities and agents to help disseminate information to students. Brochures, websites, open days, social media (eg, facebook), media, prospectus and other networks are utilised. A large number of international students depend on education agents for information and recruitment so

there was a need for the students to engage the designated agent who had the contacts and expertise to assist them in the complex application process for student visas (Bista 2019).

10.8 (II) Perspectives of Studying the 2 + 2 Program in China and Australia

10.8.1 Learning Experiences

Lin reported on negative and positive experiences from both stages of her study. She stated that the delivery of the first two years curriculum was overwhelming and overloaded because of the requirements of the dual degree. The first two years of study in the 2 + 2 meant students had to fulfill 16 approved courses equivalent to the first two years of the Australian onshore degree, 12 compulsory courses for Chinese teacher registration and preparation courses in English. Chin commented on *"compulsory"* courses like Mao Zhedong Thought, Introduction to Chinese Socialism, Morality and Basic Law and Physical Education 1–4. There was also a Chinese Modern History unit that was a requirement for teacher registration. She stated,

> …some of these courses are very short, you have 1 or 2 points. I got headache, don't know how they give credit but I know we have to complete some of the required courses before coming to year 3 level.

Lin explained why the Chinese university required them to stay at the campus hostel. No time was to be wasted and also the hostel had no cooking facility, so students ate all their meals in the canteen on campus. As they had so much on campus study, with so many course and classes to attend, she felt that it helped to stay in the hostel and eat in the canteen. She commented that the Physical education course was really tough, and they had to complete 4 different modules for teacher registration. Having done all this she wasn't even sure whether she would return to China to work.

The Australian academics who taught in English, in China, for a number of courses shared the same sentiments about overloading for students during stage 1 of the 2 + 2. One academic, Jan, observed students dozing off, chatting, using their mobiles and Ipads and generally displayed a lack of focus. The cohort of early childhood students included those who would not move to Australia. Jan reported that that she had a cohort of fifty to sixty students in her class but only six turned up on the second day of teaching as many had to attend other tests. This situation happened often due to the slotting in of additional courses taught by the English-speaking academics. The foreign academics were often frustrated by the "lack of response and disengagement" from the Chinese students which the academics put down to an overloaded study schedule, double booking of classes and the MoE

requirement that some classes be taught in English being an add on instead of programmed into the existing study load. The academic Jan said:

> I felt they were disrespectful when they did not response and lack of interest, half asleep but when I learned about their long studying hours without breaks including having to attend classes on most Saturdays, I started to feel sorry for them.

There was general consensus among the Australia academics that the university was trying to do too much to meet dual degree requirements and the consequences were a huge overload for students. In an "Inside Higher Education" post Redden (2014) reported on a similar situation existing for students enrolled in joint China/USA degrees.

> … joint and dual degree programs may be serving primarily as a mechanism for U.S. institutions to recruit international students. Particularly in the case of dual degree programs in which each institution sets its own requirements and awards degrees independently, there may be little interaction between the two partner institutions and their faculty, or any engagement beyond the transfer of credits back and forth.

This could be an inherent problem. Knight (2004, p. 11) stated, "internationalization is also about relating to the diversity of cultures that exist with countries, communities, and institutions". Through the model of internationalisation, the curriculum is viewed as "backbone of the internationalisation process" (Knight 1994, p. 6).

One of the outcomes arising from the overload was stress. The students found they were not motivated in their studies during their first two years because of extreme hours and large numbers of classes. Chin said that she was "*not self-motivated enough*" in China. She did not like the study in the first two years of the 2 + 2 but enjoyed the hostel living and spending time with her friends and made good friendships with her housemates. Knight (2011, p. 305) stated though accreditation and quality assurance are importance, these aspects of delivery also pose significant challenges as "*it is more difficult to assure the quality of courses offered by a partner university*". She queried "*whether regional, national or international accreditation is the best route for international collaborative programs*". In contrast to learning experiences in China Chin and the other students reported they enjoyed the "researching" part of their classes in Australia. They stated that they had more frequent visits to the library in Australia. In China they did little research but spent considerable time memorising from textbook for exams.

Rui and Chin agreed that the Australian assessments helped to build confidence especially having to present their research. Chin agreed and said that she was more self-motivated towards her learning in Australia. She was able to initiate ideas and opinions. The negative aspect that she found challenging was the need to learn how to reference using an APA format required by the Australian education faculty. Nam stated that assignments with presentations benefitted her in the honing of her research skills, paraphrasing, and improved her English. She had more spare time in Australia to explore her interests and have a better work life balance. The shift from an exam and memorisation system to one that required research and problem-based learning was something she enjoyed. Through this approach to learning she thought there was more opportunity for personal growth and development (Gould 2017).

Nam commented that she had been a passive learner at the Chinese university, absorbing information through the program which was very compact, and she had little spare time to reflect on her learning or doing other things.

Tian said that she did not have a strong impression of any particular course that she had liked at the Chinese university, but she named a few courses in Australia that she enjoyed. Chin, however, stated she like educational psychology very much in China as the lecturer was good at explaining things but did not like the tasks as most were very much exam focus. She said:

> …… always exam and exam… need to recite back to what we learn in the books and class.

Chin preferred Australian teaching methods and reported,

> I learned many theories at the (Chinese university) …..i did not understand why I need to study so many theories like Piaget, and have no ideas of concept… until I took a course here (Australia) 'linking theories into practice in early childhood'…I finally able to pronounce 'Piaget' and understood why I need to learn about Piaget.

Chin began to understand the importance of linking theories and concepts into practice. This aspect of learning was shared by Rui. She realised that she could construct meaningful learning and apply theories into practice during her placement at Australian early-years centres. As the students were third year university students these analytical abilities might be that their years of study were also beginning to make sense.

Rui reported on her learning experience in Australia,

> I like many subjects…..i like to gain new knowledge, learning more from those related to practice…. Diversity in culture and learning about inclusive education that in China we don't really have that.

She commented on the diversity of the Australian population.

> … in China, we don't get to socialise with other types … majority, Chinese.

Rui stated that learning support was available, and the Australian lecturers were helpful. She could bring her tasks to facilities such as the study and learning centre for review and proof reading of her tasks before submission. She found the language barrier challenging and learned to manage the differences in teaching. Hofstede (1986, p. 313) noted that those who came from a collective society, eg China, emphasise "*'how to do', whereas, those who come from an individualistic society like Australia, emphasise 'how to learn' as they expect to learn 'how to learn'....*". This may also be a stereotype. In the 2018 PISA ranking, Macau and Hong Kong came in third and fourth in Mathematics, Science and Reading with China (Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang) ranked first place. Australia came in below China, Macau and Hong Kong (Australian Council for Educational Research 2019).

Rui stated she used to be frightened of children with disabilities but after she came to Australia, she was able to change her image of children with special learning needs through studying a course on inclusive education. She enjoyed the Australian living experience and described these experiences as "*cosy and relaxing*". All students stated that they would go traveling to other parts of Australia

during breaks. One student, Chin, stated she was fascinated with the sky. She looked at it and took many pictures of the blue bright sky. Another issue, students were keen to discuss, was their practical experiences.

10.9 Professional Experience (PX) Placement at Early Years Learning Centre/Kindergarten

There was tension experienced by the Chinese students during placement. Before the professional experiences attached to work integrated learning courses, all students stated that they were worried and tense about their first placement in Australia. They were keen to be placed in the first semester when they arrived to give them time to adapt to the new environment.

In the Australian university in the 2 + 2 partnership the professional experience (PX) has been conceived as a work integrated learning component of the pre-service teacher education. In China, professional experience in China's pre-service teacher education system was not a focus until 2007 (Campbell and Hu 2010). This shift in emphasis was announced in the national policy change during 2007. Practicum became part of the curriculum and is integrated into the final semester of the teacher education program (Yan and He 2015). Fundamental to the practicum experience, it consisted of observation and receiving guidance from a mentor, or supervising teacher. In the Chinese context of professional experience students reported a lack of communication between the university and the centre who hosted the pre-service teacher preparation, limited quality centres/schools for practicum and qualified mentors to guide student educators to build confidence in linking theories into practice (Guo 2005; Jin et al. 2020; Zhan 2008). In 2009, educational reforms included strategies to overcome challenges in the drive to develop quality programs for Chinese teacher education, in particular establishing a connection to link practicum with subject matters in the program (Campbell and Hu 2010; Jin et al. 2020). The regulations listed by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) have been discussed and listed in other chapters of this volume (see Chaps. 3 and 4). Australia has also been through similar reforms in recent years (see Chap. 7). In terms of work integrated learning the CAP students received preferential treatment as they were visitors to the country and not familiar with the Australian early childhood system. In the partner university in Australia local students must arrange their own placements and often receive no more support than a phone call from the university during their placement. The 2 + 2 students had their placements arranged and received extra support.

In the 2 + 2 program, the Professional Experience (PX) requirements were aligned to the 4 years onshore program in which a total of 80 days PX have to be met. In order to include regulatory requirements from both countries the 2 + 2 includes 40 days of placement in China at an early childhood setting (Chinese ECE centre/kindergarten). From these 40 PX days completed the Australian university

gives a credit of 20 days. The remaining 60 days are attached to 4 courses to be conducted at Australian early years settings. Ten days must be completed in a birth-2 setting.

Students commented they did not have very good memories of their 40 days placement in China, they reported that they were treated like maids/servants, performing all the cleaning of children and tidying the environment. They felt that the reasons for that treatment were the lack of communication between the university to the centre to clarify the program expectations of the learning outcomes. In addition, they stated they were not prepared adequately for the practicum due to lack of knowledge of effective techniques on child observations to understand the connections of observation tools to assess children's learning. More importantly to build skills in linking theories and practice. Consequent to the lack of relevant practicum for prior learning they faced challenges when transiting to year 3 level placement in Australia. On the record, there were a number of students from the 2 + 2 who failed their PX courses in Australia. There was positive feedback from students about the information handbook provided. In contrast the students said the Chinese professional handbook offered limited support information.

Chin thought the learning experiences helped her to change her image of children as she continued to attend her placement in Australia, as opposed to her work experience in the Chinese early years centre. She said:

……we are just like helpers at the centre …...to make up the days.

Chin had the opportunity to engage in a rural placement experience in a country town in Australia and reported that she thoroughly enjoyed the visit as the centres *"do more art classes…"*. The trip had given her an interest in Aboriginal culture, and she came back to the library to borrow books about Australian Indigenous culture.

Nam stated the placement design and schedule in the Australia context benefitted her in terms of building practical and relevant knowledge but faced challenges in terms of transiting directly into the placement upon arrival due to language use, practice and an unfamiliar context. Nam further commented that she gained positive experiences at placement due to most of the mentors at the Australian centres being supportive and willing to answer queries. She was still struggling with the concept of intentional teaching based on play. She stated coming from a culture with an exam and memorisation focus hindered her understanding of play. This is not just a problem for Nam. Although a popular feature of the Australian framework intentional teaching is an American import that is still contested in many play programs.

Chin reported that she did not understand the rationale for learning a large number of theories and concepts and the application of linking theories into practice during her first two years of the 2 + 2 program at the Chinese university. Academics in the educational sector often introduced theories to their students and expected them to understand how to apply these concepts to practice (Wrenn and Wrenn 2009). Meaningful construction of knowledge takes place where students are given the opportunity to apply their knowledge (Douglas 2014; Wrenn and Wrenn 2009).

Nam enjoyed the placement in Australia. She reported that the requirement to complete the 40 days placement in China was

> "……cramped due to meeting all the criteria …..and we also have lots of classes to attend and complete before coming here".

She was pleased to have the chance to visit a primary school in Australia during session ten of *"Transitions in Early childhood"* course and such direct contact with the school helped to extend her understanding of transitions. She said that most of the Australian centres said they were play-based but she wondered how children from sessional kindergartens "can be smoothly transited from ECEC to primary as they are part time". Practicum was relevant for ECEC teachers in their early professional development. The increased focus on English skills at the Chinese university, during their first two years of study, compromised the time students had to build practical knowledge through teaching experience.

The students reported that they had mixed feelings when coming to Australia about coping with education conducted in English. This was followed by psychological and physical stress when they started university. When on placement, they were nervous. Most were pleasantly surprised. Only one student in this group reported getting an unsympathetic mentor who did not provide positive support during her infant PX for birth to two course.

10.10 Other Life Experiences

All the students stated that they learned to be independent in aspects of daily life like searching for a house, cooking, shopping and working. They did say they missed the hostel living on campus in China. In addition, Chin said, "*we don't have to cook, every meal we can eat at Canteen there*". Other benefits of living on campus included shared learning, information and friendship building as each dorm catered for 4 students from the same program. Unlike living in Australia, when they first arrived, they had homestay with a local family, or they managed to share accommodation with other Chinese or international students from different universities and programs. In 2017 the university partnered with a developer to supply campus accommodation for international students. Having a campus accommodation was aimed at increased student' safety and to extend their social networks. At the same time the new accommodation created challenges in terms of affordability. McCrohon and Nyland (2017, p. 19) stated, *"like employment, accommodation is a significant issue for international students in a commoditised education environment"*.

Lin stated that not living in accommodation with other international students had limited her opportunity to mix with local Australians. As to forming a group for projects in class, she stated that most of the Chinese students work among themselves and likewise the Australians. Unless the lecturers formed their project groups at random. She thought she was not good at making friends with the Australians or other international students though she found them interesting. She often mingled

with her Chinese friends and was concerned that her English would not improve without the opportunity to mix with English speaking friends. Lin stated that besides attending classes, she learned English from watching American movies on television. All participants were keen to make friends with the Australian students but felt barriers existed. Nicholls (2018) stated that the importance of social environment affected the undergraduate students more than the postgraduates.

To prospective Chinese students, the motivating factor of having a good social life was viewed as important as having a quality education. Social interaction is important and recent research (Spencer-Oatey et al. 2017) that explored the issue in the UK took a more multi-dimensional approach than those who concentrate mainly on cultural differences. The language barrier was important for many and social habits like drinking and clubbing, something the Chinese international students tend not to do, was a barrier to social cohesion. Personal attributes were also important.

All participants agreed that despite some of the challenges faced in the 2 + 2 program, they felt that they were equipped with relevant knowledge to be ECEC teachers and believed that they would have a better chance of employment in China. The students shared that living in Australia had helped them manage and plan their daily schedules independently. Chin believed that she had gained a new identity through having to deal with a new environment and meeting different people.

Nam did not think their level of ability, knowledge and opportunities for employment would be the same for those who had studied in Australia for 4 years. She felt that the 2 + 2 graduates would have a better prospect if they returned to China to gain employment. The majority of the participants said that they would have an edge in gaining employment in an international school or centre in China, due to their level of English. An exception to this was Chin who commented that the salary in international schools is much higher and many of these international schools in China prefer foreign teachers. Rui compared the 4 years onshore ECEC degree in Australia as opposed to the 2 + 2 program, she stated that if one wished to work in China, the 2 + 2 program will be in demand as they had studied in two different contexts. She stated that in comparison to an international student studying 4 years in Australia, the advantages are *"not so obvious"*. Rui commented:

> In comparison to those who have not attended overseas education, I felt I learned a lot in life and study. The experience is rich to study and living overseas.

All participants stated that they would introduce the 2 + 2 to their friends as they thought it a good program. From initial observations the majority of the students across the early cohort, engaged in the 2 + 2 program, continued to live in Australia, either working or pursuing postgraduate studies. However, it is now apparent that an increased number of Chinese graduates have preferred to return to China in search of a better future and job prospects. This is a growing trend (Chen 2017).

10.11 Conclusion

As China aimed to develop the quality of early childhood teacher education through their HE system one policy was to increase the flow of students studying abroad. The Chinese students who participated in this research reported increased confidence in their professional knowledge and competent levels of English. The Australian university has gained knowledge of the Chinese early childhood system and become more aware of local concerns. That the Australian university had mainly a commercial rationale initially has not prevented a relationship developing and a useful collaboration across educational institutions, regulatory bodies and the agent has been established. The nature of the dual degree award created challenges with quality issues due to integrating the collection of courses that were the responsibility of each university. The dual degree functioned as a selling point for students and parents who thought there were attached benefits to the program in terms of future prospects for their children.

Examination of the student learning experiences exposed challenges resulting from different teaching approaches, cultural sensitivity, intercultural communication and their struggles as to adapt to the pedagogy differences in services where the students did their PX, in both China and Australia. Management and program designers, from both universities, need opportunities to work together to reconcile learning contents across the two platforms. Besides implementing teaching strategies and appropriate learning content, this program can promote rich shared learning of knowledge and professional experience associated with cross cultural learning that should be mutually beneficial for all participants. As the partnership continues joint collaboration to build effective PX and a suite of courses to suit international and local needs can be built. It is also recommended that future research to explore professional practicum between the universities would assist in this development. This has become of increasing interest for the Australian government as well and student mobility from Australia to other countries is encouraged through the New Colombo Plan (DFAT 2019).

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Part 4
Conclusion and Implications

Chapter 11
Conclusion and Implications

Josephine Ng and Berenice Nyland

11.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter reflects on the discussions and findings presented across the three sections of this book. Comparative perspectives have been discussed from a number of viewpoints including the research literature and three empirical projects. In the first section of the book we have emphasised the importance of context which includes policy directions, historical/political/economic circumstances and social attitudes to children and education. In Chaps. 2 and 3, we have listed events and policies in early childhood development in the two countries that indicate similarities and differences for direct comparisons. Policy is designed to bring change and is a response to a perceived situation that requires development to improve the services. The second section started with a discussion on curriculum as a policy document and examples of implementation are given. Directors in Chinese preschools were interviewed on their interpretation of the curriculum guidelines and whether they were a practical tool for improving daily practice. As teachers are considered to be important change agents the research in Chaps. 4 and 5 was based on surveys with Australian and Chinese early childhood educators who were working directly in services. We divided the surveys between educators working with children under three and over three years. This is a common international division and the under three survey was slightly problematic as Australian regulations identified children under two as an age category. In China services for under three children are not as developed as the preschools, which are increasingly accepting children as young as two because of a lack of places. The third part of the book is a

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case study of a partnership between the two countries and this research explored possibilities and issues within a particular partnership model.

Findings from research on early childhood education and care plays a significant and important role in fostering improvement in education, care and wellbeing of children to inform policy and practice. Early childhood education and care services have become a priority in the political, economic and social agendas of countries like Australia and China. Policy reforms have implications on human capital development and are a driver in designing strategies to build capacity for the future workforce. Findings in the first and second sections of the book suggested that the future development of early childhood educator training and improved workforce conditions are required to underpin policy implementation and reforms. Part 3 is an example of the possibilities and challenges that exist when building long-term relationships across borders, especially when external factors play a role in the form that partnerships can take. In this conclusion we look at each section separately and comment on what understandings have emerged and lessons that may be useful for future initiatives.

11.2 Part 1: The Context

The commitment to drive the quality of early childhood pedagogy and practice has been a shared experience across the two countries. Travelling ideas were common and some of the intersections were very nuanced. We explained this partly because of the international nature of the development of early childhood education. It was interesting to see how much policy directions coincided. The impact of the movements in global educational reforms on early childhood education teaching practice, curriculum and provisions were provided from an Australian and Chinese perspective and, while details differed, we could understand the focus of the reforms. Deeper insights of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and its development and the connections between history and current practice was highlighted. The use of a socio-cultural approach helped frame these discussions and gave a glimpse of what is meant by the notion of "*Chinese characteristics*".

11.2.1 Lessons Learned

This section of the book reported on impressions from two Chinese researchers and an Australian researcher. Data was drawn from secondary sources and a picture of early childhood development in both countries was presented. Lessons from this exercise indicate how much there was to learn about each country, how nuanced many of the differences were and how many ideas had a common foundation. Looking across the history of ECEC in each country, from the establishment of the first preschools, we can see how dynamic some of the moves have been. These are

multi-dimensional and the synthesis of traditional and international approaches is something emerging that gives Chinese ECEC a unique aspect. This mix can be seen in the images of children section in Chap. 2 where the example of children's picture books gave insights into the use of historical material and shared a global repertoire. That traditional Chinese stories are re-emerging on the international scene was noted. Australian children's authors are well represented on the global scene but Australian children's literature from colonial days and the early days of federation no longer have resonance with the Australia of today. These graded distinctions can also be seen in the research on curriculum and educators' views on children's learning in Part 2.

11.3 Part 2: Curriculum Reform and Practice

Findings from the interviews conducted with Chinese directors and staff from Australian early childhood centres to explore the role of formal curriculum documents in early childhood education reform were discussed in Chap. 4. Insights into the role of national curriculum documents as instrumental for change and quality improvement in the early childhood context were gained from these discussions. Curriculum documents often contain different meanings and interpretations, this could be seen in the content of the Australian and Chinese curriculum. Curriculum in ECEC has been contested and the difficulties of producing a national document that can guide practice is not an easy task. The Chinese directors were very straight about issues of interpretation. Ambiguity was a problem with both documents, but more definite guidelines could possibly have a negative impact of quality. Certainly, the Australian designers of the curriculum document were aware of the dangers of being too prescriptive. Given this, it was interesting to see that views of Australian and Chinese educators' views on children's learning, Chaps. 5 and 6 was again nuanced. The staff in both countries, working with the children in the 3–6 age group, were working under the auspices of a formal curriculum but their answers to the surveys reflected more their teacher training than the content of the two curriculum documents. In the under three section of the surveys there were larger gaps in agreement. In this case the Australian educators were working to the Australian curriculum but no such guidance exists in China for this younger group of children. They are also less likely to have advanced early childhood training. Of the Chinese staff who responded to the under-three survey many did not appear to be working with children. From their qualifications we concluded that a number were more likely to be directors or managers.

Early childhood teachers are regarded as important change agents to transform education through curriculum reforms and implementation. At the forefront of reforms through policy and curriculum change, both directors and staff of the Chinese and Australian ECEC centres respectively found that these curriculum documents were problematic, and they complained of a lack of clarity and being too abstract to interpret. Understanding and clarification of the information provided in

these documents should be paramount for teachers to be able to interpret content and take responsibility to achieve the outcomes for children based on the expressed intentions of the curriculum documents.

The education and care of children below 3 and 3–6 years old identified that teachers supported child centred learning and the more formal adult transmission in the learning situation were not considered as the most important. There were a couple of surprise results from the Chinese staff suggesting that ideas about routines, groups and shaping children's experiences in the early years would be topics worth investigating as elements of everyday practice. These Chaps. 5 and 6, shared similarities and differences in the exploration of perceptions of early childhood teachers about young children and how to create optimum conditions for learning between the staff in Australia and China. Findings stated that there were shared ideas of some early childhood curriculum themes across different contexts, for example the American Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). Inter-relationships with parents and the role of parents in working with educators to promote children's learning would provide a focus for further research to understand how these themes are realised in different cultural context and environments. Children's, parents and educator rights could have different connotations.

11.3.1 Lessons Learned

Findings and statements from the research literature, reported that curriculum documents are reflections of political intentions and societal beliefs on education and care. These have implications for those working with these documents and may have an influence on practitioners and directors who think the curriculum documents lack clarity. Does this mean the educators are free to interpret them to fit their own theories of childhood and early childhood education? This point would link directly to the discussion in Chap. 3 that argues for the need to improve aspects of the early childhood workforce like remuneration, qualifications and social status. That the Chinese directors seemed not constrained by the curriculum guidelines and many had bought commercial curriculum packages suggested these issues are very real. The Australians were more coherent in their approval of the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) but this can be explained by a number of factors. There was widespread in-servicing when it was introduced, the document favours process outcomes and claims to be non-prescriptive in terms of theoretical approach. This suggests that how a reform is introduced is important and how well the group that are expected to implement it are educated will have implications for practice.

The importance of comparative study of early childhood policy across borders has allowed the sharing of ECEC knowledge, reform policies and understanding about the trends of policy implementation in driving ECEC. The common complaints about policy implementations across the two countries were similar in many ways. This begs the question of how effectively such documents can be implemented when they require interpretation and the design of implementation strategies may

not align with the personal ideologies of some staff. Do early childhood preservice programs teach 'the curriculum', that is teach to the test or is a wider more sophisticated theoretical and philosophical understanding required. Comparative studies provide insights of relevant lessons that can be learned from one country to another including the type of policies and ideas that can be adapted, borrowed, tweaked and implemented to the local and national contexts. Part 2 discussed ECEC reforms that involved formal curriculum statements and educators' ideas about appropriate teaching practices for young children. As most countries around the world have followed Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) policy suggestions and developed curriculum guidelines the success, or otherwise, of these policies could be investigated in the international environment. This could help countries also identify what is important in the local context and culture.

11.4 Part 3: Building Collaborative Partnerships

The collaboration of an international partnership, a 2 + 2 Collaborative Articulation Program (CAP), between an Australian and a Chinese university on the delivery of joint initial teacher education was reported in Part 3 and findings showed key challenges when considering the experiences of the stakeholders involved directly in the initiative. The quality of ECEC through international partnership is difficult due to the complex situation of a dual degree program award. The preparation of a stable ECEC teaching workforce with combined program delivery conducted by Chinese and Australian academics created many challenges and misunderstandings. The link between cost and quality is often conflicting and difficult to resolve. Findings drawn from the research conducted called for continual critical reflections in terms of support for participants, a stable political environment in which to make decisions, teaching space and effective communication protocols that needed to be developed between the two universities. The stable political environment refers to the situation that many international students and their families, make decisions about overseas study based on assumptions about employment chances in either the host country, or their home country, on completion of their studies. Changing rules on the part of both countries were an issue for the students in this cohort but were not considered to be part of the program design.

In this third section of the book, the challenges of the dual degree program were explored from the lived experiences of the leaders, academics and students. Literature describing the scope of engagement and issues related to the development of the joint partnership of a dual early childhood degree program in transnational higher education (TNHE), driven by consumerism and market demand has identified problems. In a broader context of economic benefits to the Australian university and the importer, the Chinese university, the growth and development of TNHE were discussed. A call for deeper understanding of building relationship through socialisation and the need to develop effective formal and informal communication through lateral collegiality, instead of a top down approach, is needed for successful implementation of the 2 + 2 program. There is a need to build trust and promote

cooperation with transparency to avoid the disconnects between the stakeholders. The layers of bureaucracy involved in the program accreditation of the 2 + 2, across the two different jurisdictions did not necessarily support a quality program. Academics reported lack of communication, little information exchange and lack of clarity about the 2 + 2 program. These issues created a number of challenges. Consequences of the dual degree, based on the voices of students in Chap. 10, demonstrated the intensity of the curriculum of the dual degree had led to a lack of motivation from some students even though they viewed the dual degree would be valuable for future employment prospects.

11.4.1 Lessons Learned

Key comparative points have been discussed in the chapters of this book. In this section implications are drawn for pedagogies and practices, professional experiences, a more culturally responsive curriculum, the role of ECEC teachers and the development of strategies on joint partnerships in driving effective curriculum and initial teacher education.

There were positive stories told as well negative experiences encountered across the chapters reporting on the CAP. Common challenges were faced often due to the lack of communication, dissatisfaction and disconnections giving rise to misunderstandings. Such challenges occurred locally, nationally and globally according to the literature.

Strategies are needed to address the following commonly identified issues arising issues for ECEC teachers at centres and academics at universities during the initial teacher training program. Strategies are needed for:

(1) developing intercultural understanding and cultural sensitivity due to different expectations among stakeholders at centre/institutions
(2) coming to term at a common goal and agreement among stakeholders to achieve outcomes for children's learning
(3) achieving effective communication process and the need to provide clarity and relevant information
(4) designing and delivering curriculum to have a balance of localised and globalised contents and pedagogical approaches to meet different cultural contexts
(5) supporting teachers to attain transferrable intercultural skills to teach in a different environment
(6) acquiring professional development for the delivery of quality ECEC
(7) developing proper coordination to achieve efficiency across different systems
(8) overcoming differentiated expectation of outcomes due to different vested interests
(9) overcoming barriers of communication due to language and culture
(10) consideration of a more horizontal collegiality among staff in decision making process rather than top down approach.

A TNHE partnership is highly complex and to achieve a desired result for initial teachers there is an urgency to promote effective intercultural communication between both sides. Collaborative actions and exchanges between the Chinese and Australian academics have to take place to properly deliver meaningful teaching and learning experiences for students. The 2 + 2 partnership findings did not optimise the opportunity for exchanges. Workload and remuneration, training and induction were issues that needed to be addressed and in addition, a team of Australian academics were required for ongoing teaching assignments at the Chinese university, in order to meet the MoE's condition for the "four one-thirds" rule. These teaching deployments were a continual challenge due to low numbers of on-going staff. Heavy study overloads for students in the 2 + 2 had created challenges for the academics and left many students exhausted and unmotivated due to program accreditation requirements of the dual degree program. Limited communication took place among academics from both sides and barriers of language further complicated the communication process.

As a majority of the 2 + 2 decision making process was made by senior leadership there were problems in identifying student and staff needs and in developing primary strategies to develop the program. The "*export of programs, no matter how sound those programs are themselves, inevitably produces legion risks to qualify that have to be recognized and addressed"* (Pyvis 2008, p. 237).

In terms of practicality to overcome some of the risks associated with the joint 2 + 2 partnership the following suggestions are included:

(i) Guidance for academics who are delivering the 2 + 2 courses and at the same time, develop measures to control and maintain quality
(ii) Provide support for workload to advance course development and induction programs for academics on cultural understanding and teaching in a different context and opportunity for them to engage in exchanges that may also lead to research collaboration
(iii) Provide sufficient support for transnational program development, research, teaching and the need to acknowledge the overseas partnership management and teaching contribution as a motivation for ongoing engagement
(iv) Conceptualised learning in the internationalised curriculum and the need to invest time and efforts to derive in appropriate learning contents and courses to achieve quality outcomes for students
(v) Continuous engagement and collaboration between academics from both universities to develop appropriate learning contents, shared learning about knowledge of cultural differences, practices and approaches to learning to ensure input of resources to optimise learning and to rule out overlaps of same contents
(vi) Develop intercultural sensitivity and knowledge of the differentiated needs of academics and students, clear barriers of cultural misunderstanding and arriving to terms at common goal in the preparation of students to meet the globalised needs of work and life ready

(vii) Investment in research on international partnership and student experience to gain deeper understanding on support mechanisms for both student and academic wellbeing and outcomes
(viii) Develop an appropriate communication process across stakeholders from both universities
(ix) Continuous review of the partnership to understand barriers and challenges faced, to define goals and expectations clearly, to address operational risks and at the same time to develop strategies to mitigate arising risks.

11.5 Conclusion

Global educational reform and accompanying movements have given rise to issues and concerns that are problematic and continue to surface as the world continues to change and introduce reforms aimed at strengthening the provision of early childhood education. Challenges include inequality of access, for families and the need for high quality services to support economic development as well as personal wellbeing and improved life chances. Australia and China are so different in terms of magnitude, culture, size and population and it is often challenging to explicate what differences are relevant.

Globalisation and global education through policy and reforms have created ample opportunities and perils for ECEC and teaching. Comparative research can have implications for policies and engagement with ECEC practices and initiatives with an aim of motivating the drive to develop a competent future workforce. There is always a struggle to do this within a framework where the return on investment is cost effective. Improved life chances for individuals and disadvantaged groups are significant outcomes for improved early childhood education but hard to measure if governments and higher education institutions are looking for short-term rewards.

Challenges faced by ECEC teachers in contemporary society will continue to exist, in Australia and China, given the economic and political imperatives of the ideas and expectations of global and economic transformation.

In relation to TNHE, Pyvis (2008, p.237) commented that,

> ….education quality needs to be protected at every step of the enterprise, from acquaintance with the education culture of a particular market, through the structuring of partnering relationships, through program marketing to students, through recruitments of transnational educators, through curriculum design and articulation and through teaching/learning approaches.

In Chap. 3 Liu concluded his chapter with the following:

> There are many issues that China and Australia share as each country develops policies to develop a strong early childhood sector with staff who will be part of the reforms. There are many concerns that could not be mentioned here, for example, both countries have a rural/urban divide, albeit of very different natures. However, how one country pursues a need can have lessons for other countries. Comparisons are useful. Often comparisons remind us of our own goals and there are many ways to achieve these. Australia and China are so differ-

ent in terms of size – population and landmass – and it is challenging to know what lessons may be relevant or applicable.

What does emerge is the importance of having these conversations.

Reference

Pyvis, D. (2008). Transnational education in Mauritius. Quality assurance for program exporters. In D. Lee & M. Wallace (Eds.), *Teaching in transnational higher education. Enhancing learning for offshore international students* (pp. 227–237). Abingdon: Routledge.

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