Interest-based Language Teaching:
Stimulating Australian students’ interest in learning Mandarin

Jing Yuan

Bachelor of Arts (English)
(Beijing Language and Culture University, 2009)

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

Master of Education (Honours)

Centre for Educational Research
College of Arts
University of Western Sydney

Supervisory Panel:

Professor Michael Singh (Principal Supervisor)
Dr Kevin Watson (Associate Supervisor)

January, 2011
DECLARATION

I declare that except where due acknowledgement has been made this research thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

Jing YUAN
15 January, 2010
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout my studies and the writing of this thesis, I received a great deal of help, which made it possible to present this research in its current form. First and foremost, my sincere gratitude goes to my principal supervisor, Professor Michael Singh, who provided significant guidance in my learning to be a teacher-researcher, and helped me through every stage: doing this research, learning to teach, and writing this thesis.

Secondly, my sincere gratitude also goes to Dr Dacheng Zhao, who made my life in Australia smooth and special. In addition, heartfelt thanks are also due to the other research educators in the Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) Program: Associate Professor Wayne Sawyer, Dr Kevin Watson, Dr Katrina Zammit and Dr Joanne Orlando, who helped resolve problems that emerged in the research and teaching process.

As a Volunteer Teacher Researcher, I would like to thank the three parties who initiated this international cooperative program: Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau, The New South Wales Department of Education and Training (Western Sydney Region) and the University of Western Sydney (Centre for Educational Research).

I sincerely appreciate the help provided by Cheryl Ballantyne, Evelyn Mark, Evelyn Man and all teachers who organised the language methodology training and familiarisation with Australian education and culture, teaching and schools.

I am also thankful for the support and help from the schools where I taught Mandarin, which provided me valuable opportunities to experience teaching and Australian school life. With their help and eager participation I was able to conduct my research in a professional way so that it fitted in seamlessly with my teaching. They truly facilitated my professional learning.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest love and gratitude to my dear parents for their understanding and support, which sustained me through the duration of my studies in Australia.
CONTENTS

DECLARATION .............................................................................................................................. ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iii
LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................. viii
LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................................. ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ................................................................................................. x
AUTHOR’S PUBLICATIONS ............................................................................................... xi
ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................... xii

Chapter 1 ................................................................................................................................. 1

Teaching Mandarin through interest-based language teaching ..................................... 1

1.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
1.2 Background ................................................................................................................ 1
1.3 Research questions .................................................................................................. 4
1.4 Significance and value of this study ........................................................................ 5
1.5 Overview of the literature ......................................................................................... 8
  1.5.1 The National Picture .......................................................................................... 8
  1.5.2 Interest-based language teaching ...................................................................... 9
  1.5.3 Students’ interests ............................................................................................ 10
  1.5.4 Professional learning by teacher-researchers .................................................. 10
1.6 Overview of the research method ............................................................................ 11
1.7 Thesis statement ...................................................................................................... 13
1.8 Structure of this thesis ............................................................................................ 14

Chapter 2 ............................................................................................................................. 16

Interest-based Mandarin teaching .................................................................................. 16

2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................... 16
2.2 A national priority and Australia’s challenge ......................................................... 16
  2.2.1 National policy context .................................................................................... 16
  2.2.2 Challenges of getting students to learn Mandarin ......................................... 18
2.3 Interest-based language teaching ............................................................................ 20
  2.3.1 Defining and debating “interest” ..................................................................... 20
  2.3.2 Individual and situational interests .................................................................. 21
  2.3.3 “Interestingness” .............................................................................................. 22
  2.3.4 The importance of “interestingness” in choosing a subject ......................... 26
  2.3.5 Interest-based language teaching ................................................................. 28
  2.3.6 Factors affecting students’ interest in learning Mandarin ............................ 30
2.4 Design of Mandarin Lessons .................................................................................... 32
  2.4.1 Children’s interests and subject-centred curriculum .................................... 32
  2.4.2 Topic interests .................................................................................................. 35
2.5 Various language teaching strategies ....................................................................... 36
  2.5.1 Cultural activities ............................................................................................. 37
  2.5.2 Games and language activities ....................................................................... 39
  2.5.3 Rewards ........................................................................................................... 41
2.5.4 Artistic activities .......................................................................................... 43
2.5.5 Audio-visual tools and the internet ............................................................. 44

2.6 The professional learning of beginning teacher-researchers .............................. 45
  2.6.1 Teacher development .............................................................................. 46
  2.6.2 Teacher identity ..................................................................................... 46
  2.6.3 Classroom management ......................................................................... 48
    2.6.3.1 Structure .......................................................................................... 49
    2.6.3.2 Instruction ....................................................................................... 50
    2.6.3.3 Discipline ....................................................................................... 51
  2.6.4. Teacher’s authority .............................................................................. 53

2.7 Interrelationships among “三驾马车” .......................................................... 55

2.8 Conclusion .................................................................................................... 56

Chapter 3 ............................................................................................................. 57
Research method: Teacher as action researcher .......................................................... 57

3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................... 57
3.2 Teacher-as-researcher strategy ...................................................................... 57
3.3 Action research project .................................................................................. 60
  3.3.1 Characteristics of action research .......................................................... 62
  3.3.2 Action research for teacher-researchers’ professional learning ............... 65

3.4 Rigour of the action research ........................................................................ 67
  3.4.1 Credibility and Reliability ...................................................................... 67
  3.4.2 Validity .................................................................................................... 69
  3.4.3 Generalisability of the research .............................................................. 70

3.5 Action research design .................................................................................. 72
  3.5.1 Site selection and sampling: the school context ..................................... 72
  3.5.2 Research ethics ..................................................................................... 73
  3.5.3 Participants ............................................................................................ 75

3.6 Data collection and generation ..................................................................... 76
  3.6.1 Questionnaire ....................................................................................... 78
  3.6.2 Interviews ............................................................................................ 79
  3.6.3 Journal writing ..................................................................................... 81
  3.6.4 Structured/unstructured observation .................................................... 84
  3.6.5 Students’ feedback .............................................................................. 86

3.7 Data analysis ................................................................................................ 87
  3.7.1 Analysis of reflections and other qualitative data ..................................... 88
  3.7.2 Chinese concepts .................................................................................. 93
  3.7.3 Analysis of questionnaires .................................................................. 95

3.8 Summary ....................................................................................................... 96

Chapter 4 ............................................................................................................. 97
Students’ interests in Mandarin and Mandarin lesson design .............................. 97

4.1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 97
4.2 Students’ pre-intervention questionnaire ....................................................... 97
  4.2.1 Descriptions of the participant students .............................................. 97
  4.2.2 Analysis of students’ everyday interests .............................................. 98
  4.2.3 Analysis of students’ topic interests in Mandarin ............................... 100
  4.2.4 Students’ topic interests and everyday interests ................................... 101
7.4 Limitations and delimitations of this study .................................................. 177
7.5 Implications for practice ............................................................................. 179
7.6 Recommendations for further research .................................................... 180
7.7 Reflections on becoming a teacher-researcher .......................................... 181

REFERENCES .........................................................................................................183
APPENDICES ..........................................................................................................189
Appendix 1. University of Western Sydney Human Ethics Approval ..............189
Appendix 2. State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP) Approval .190
Appendix 3. Dialogue Sheet (Students) .................................................................191
Appendix 4. Information Sheet (Parents/Caregivers) ........................................192
Appendix 5. Participant Consent Form (Students’ Parents/Caregivers) ..........195
Appendix 6. Participant Information (Classroom teachers) ............................196
Appendix 7. Participant Consent Form (Classroom teachers) .........................198
Appendix 8. Semi-structured interview schedule (Classroom teachers) .........199
Appendix 10. Post-intervention questionnaire for students ..............................203
Appendix 11. Unstructured observational feedback (classroom teachers) .......205
Appendix 12. Summary of key themes and categories in fieldwork diary .........206
Appendix 13. Timeline for the research: key milestones .................................207
Appendix 14. Schedule for Language Teacher Training (NSW DET) .............208
Appendix 15. Sample Lesson Plans .................................................................209
Appendix 16. Open-coding of journal entries .................................................211
Appendix 17: Open-coding of interviews .......................................................212
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Questions about students’ interest in learning Mandarin........................... 79
Table 3.2 Journal types .................................................................................................. 84
Table 3.3 Meaning of codes in Values Coding .......................................................... 93
Table 4.1 Distribution of participating students by year level .................................... 98
Table 4.2 Gender distribution of participating students .......................................... 98
Table 4.3 Students’ everyday interests ..................................................................... 99
Table 4.4 Students’ Mandarin topic interests ......................................................... 100
Table 4.5 Students’ topic interests and everyday interests .................................. 102
Table 4.6 Students’ choice of Chinese cultural activities ......................................... 103
Table 4.7 Sample of Mandarin lesson design ......................................................... 104
Table 5.1 Categories of student feedback ............................................................. 120
Table 5.2 Lesson feedback from participating students in Class A ..................... 121
Table 5.3 Lesson feedback from participating students in Class B ..................... 124
Table 5.4 Lesson feedback from participating students in Class C ..................... 126
Table 5.5 Mandarin lessons and students’ feedback .............................................. 130
Table 5.6 Result of intervention questionnaires in Class A .................................. 136
Table 5.7 Result of intervention questionnaires in Class B .................................. 136
Table 5.8 Result of intervention questionnaires in Class C .................................. 137
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 “三驾马车”/san jia ma che/ ................................................................. 14
Figure 2.1 Three approaches to interest research ............................................... 23
Figure 2.2 Perspectives of interest ...................................................................... 24
Figure 2.3 Interrelationship among “三驾马车”/san jia ma che/ ......................... 56
Figure 3.1 Observation schedule ........................................................................ 85
Figure 3.2 The relationship between different data sources ................................. 88
Figure 3.3 A conceptual map of the research evidence ........................................ 91
Figure 4.1 Student interests considered in Mandarin lesson design .................... 102
Figure 4.2 Student’s work sample for “ma” ......................................................... 106
Figure 4.3 Student’s language game work sample ............................................. 112
Figure 4.4 Samples of students’ artistic works ............................................... 116
Figure 6.1 Chinese clover ................................................................................. 157
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DECS: Department of Education and Children’s Services
DET: Department of Education and Training
NALSSP: National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program
NSW: New South Wales
NSW DET: New South Wales Department of Education and Training
NMEB: Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau
NEAF: National Ethics Application Form
SERAP: State Education Research Approval Process
ROSETE: Research Orientated, School Engaged, Teacher Education
SA: South Australia
UWS: University of Western Sydney
VTR: Volunteer Teacher Researcher
AUTHOR’S PUBLICATIONS


ABSTRACT

This study responds to, and engages with Australian government initiatives to have more students exit Year 12 with fluency in one of the key Asian languages (Indonesian, Japanese, Chinese and Korean) sufficient for engaging in trade and commerce as part of their further studies (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010). Specifically, it provides an account of an investigation into how to use interest-based language teaching to stimulate Australian primary school students’ interest in the learning of Mandarin, exploring strategies for enhancing their interest in learning this particular language.

This thesis aims to answer the following three research questions: How can lessons be designed to make connections between students’ interests and their study of Mandarin? What factors constrain and/or stimulate Australian students’ interest in the study of Mandarin? How can beginning teacher-researchers from China adapt to the Australian teaching environment and develop their professional learning about classroom management in order to stimulate students’ learning of Mandarin?

Concerns about the decreasing interest of students in the study of Mandarin throughout their years of schooling, raise the question of how to stimulate their learning of this language, given that the choice of this subject is an elective and so depends largely on students’ preferences. Interest-based language teaching is the focus of the research reported in this thesis, which involved the design of lessons based on students’ everyday interests and their interests in Mandarin and China’s culture to create ‘interestingness’ (Michelsen & Sriraman, 2009) in these lessons. To improve students’ Mandarin learning and to increase their interest in its study, a variety of motivational language teaching strategies, such as games, artistic activities and audio-visual tools, were used. Also, the role of my professional learning in achieving the goal of this research project was explored.

Action research was the main method used in this study, and involved planning, enacting, evaluating and reviewing the strategies of interest-based language teaching through a cyclical spiral, seeking improvement in quality teaching. As a beginning Volunteer Teacher-Researcher (VTR), I was concerned to document and analyse my
experiences through action research in order to enhance my students’ interest in learning Mandarin, to facilitate their learning of the language and to extend and deepen my own professional learning. By critically reflecting on my teaching and students’ learning, I was able to progress my professional learning and enhance students’ interest in learning Mandarin. The data were collected from mixed sources in order to enhance the credibility and validity of this study. The data set included pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, interviews with classroom teachers, feedback from students and classroom teachers, and my fieldwork journal.

From this research project, the interest of participating Australian students in the study of Mandarin was slightly improved. Accordingly, this thesis argues that for beginning VTRs from China to stimulate Australian students’ learning of Mandarin, ongoing professional learning is required, to design ever more effective lessons, including consideration of students’ learning experiences and reflections upon their teaching.
Chapter 1

Teaching Mandarin through interest-based language teaching

1.1 Introduction

The research reported in this thesis focuses on why and how teacher-researchers try to stimulate Australian primary school students’ interest in learning Mandarin. This chapter begins by providing background information about this research, explaining how I as a teacher-researcher came to this research focus. My personal background as a teacher-researcher influenced the way the research in this thesis was constructed. This information may help readers to have a better picture of the theoretical context for this thesis. This chapter then outlines the research questions related to the focus of this research and the value of this project is explained. An overview of the literature and research methodology is provided before the thesis statement is given and the structure of the thesis outlined. Together this should provide a clear view of the research.

1.2 Background

Like most of the children of my generation in China, I started to learn English when I was in Year Four. English was a language that we knew nothing about. English-speaking countries seemed so remote from our lives and we could not get very much information about them from television. “Hello” was the first English word I learned. This new and special greeting word was repeated for days amongst us students. For a few weeks I was extremely curious and enthusiastic about learning English. However, I gradually lost interest in English lessons. My teacher taught us in what I took to be a typical Chinese way. It seemed that every class followed the same pattern. We read, repeated, recited, copied new words, and repeated all this again. I began to dread English. I was really not interested in “desk, table, eraser, and ruler”.
Every time I struggled to remember English words, I had a great deal of trouble. I was a good and smart student when I was at primary school. I achieved well in all my subjects except for English. I could barely achieve a “pass” in this subject. Not surprisingly, at the end of primary school I received a “bad” result for English. If English were not a compulsory subject at high school, I probably would not have studied it. But all students in China have to learn English in junior high school (Years 7-9) as well as in senior high school (Years 10-12). So, I took up my English books again after a two-month holiday, reluctantly.

Miss Lai was our English language teacher. To me she was also a typical Chinese teacher who paid attention to vocabulary and grammar. I spent plenty of time reading and writing English. However, she would use something interesting to motivate us to study English. She would play videos such as Family Album, U.S.A (Cooperman, 1991) and beautiful English songs for us; she chose English names for each of us, and she even brought Western food into our classroom. Therefore, I came to expect that in every English lesson she would show us new things. Miss Lai knew us so well; she was always keen to know what we were interested in. Even a grammar lesson became interesting, because of her little “gifts”. During my time in secondary school, I came to believe that English was not that difficult to learn and I actually came to like English, because it was far more interesting when compared with other subjects.

After finishing senior high school, I went to Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU) to pursue university education. I selected English as my major. Beijing Language and Culture University is an excellent university. Its main task is teaching the Chinese language (Mandarin) and culture to foreigners, which it does by creating a wonderful atmosphere for learning. In our college, almost every Chinese student had an English language tutor. I had several tutors. I met my tutors once or twice a week for language exchange. This was a way for me to practise oral English and to learn Western culture and philosophy; they also learnt Mandarin from me. Gradually, I became interested in teaching foreigners Mandarin. Also, to develop my English, I decided that going abroad would be one of the most efficient ways to achieve this. So, I decided to go abroad. Luckily, there was a perfect chance waiting for me.
Eighteen months ago, in July 2009, I travelled to Australia to become a Volunteer Teacher-Researcher as part of a collaborative international project. This project is based on a memorandum of understanding between the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau (NMEB), the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), Western Sydney Region and the Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney. Each year, NMEB selects 10 volunteer teachers to work as Volunteer Teacher-Researchers in the Western Sydney Region. The 10 volunteer teachers are required to teach Mandarin in local primary and secondary schools while pursuing a Master of Education (Honours) at the University of Western Sydney. The DET conducts a language teaching Methodology class for the VTRs to help them adapt to the Australian teaching context and to learn the latest in second language teaching methods. This project will last for 5 years (2008-2012), and I belong to the second group of VTRs.

As a VTR, I taught Mandarin in an educational community in the Western Sydney Region. My classes ranged from Kindergarten to Year 8. As part of the orientation program that was conducted, I visited several schools. I observed several Mandarin classes conducted by some experienced Mandarin teachers. I was amazed by the free style of their classrooms. Unlike the typical Chinese way I was used to, where the teacher dominates the class, here in Australia students can speak out any idea they come across, and the teacher is more of a leader of the class instead of an authority or source of knowledge. The whole class produces knowledge together. On one campus, we met two Chinese-Australian girls, who told me they learned Chinese last year, but that they quit this year. They could barely speak any Chinese. Ang (2001) describes herself as a person with Chinese physical characteristics but who cannot speak the Chinese language. I felt a little sad because I had been told that the purpose of learning Chinese was to encourage Australian students, including Chinese background students to learn Mandarin to Year 12. If they quit learning it at an early stage, they would learn little.

Then I started to teach in the schools where I was a volunteer teacher-researcher. In my first few lessons, I taught my students about Chinese culture, like paper cutting, cooking and clothes. I found that when I was teaching some “boring” things, my students would not listen attentively. They would talk with classmates, sleep, or even
move around. They were not like students in China, who would do everything the teacher asked them to do. Australian students have their own ideas and stick to these. If they do not like to listen, they do not. However, when we taught “exciting” things like Kongfu, they were very quiet and concentrated during the lesson. This phenomenon deeply impressed me. When I recalled my own experiences of learning English, I found that if a teacher could bring something that made me curious or something that related to my interests, like an English language movie, I would be very willing to learn it. Consequently, I decided to focus on researching how to stimulate my non-background students’ interests in learning Mandarin.

As a beginning second language teacher-researcher, I planned to make full use of my eighteen months in Australia to improve my teaching skills, to adapt myself to Australian schools, to develop my research ability, and to fill gaps in my knowledge of teaching Mandarin to non-background speakers. The language teaching methodology class provided by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (Western Sydney Region) focused on communicative language teaching, programming and planning, quality teaching and other aspects of being a qualified language teacher. Meanwhile, my teaching at one secondary school and one primary school enriched my teaching experience and helped me shape myself as teacher–researcher. During my teaching, I realised the need to consider the background, interests and needs of my students in order to stimulate them to learn Mandarin. My task was to design lessons with the topics and activities that engaged students’ interests for the purpose of promoting the study of Mandarin.

1.3 Research questions

Initially, I planned to set out to investigate how to make use of students’ everyday interests to promote their study of Chinese language (Mandarin). However, after getting to know the Australian students with whom I was working, I found that it was difficult to adapt their daily individual interests to learning a second language, since their interests were mostly in various entertainments. Therefore, the key idea of stimulating students changed from adapting students’ everyday interests to using topics and activities that students are interested in as a basis for language learning.
The main research question underpinning the thesis is: Is it possible to stimulate non-Chinese background students’ study of Mandarin by using interest-based language teaching?

Three contributory research questions were developed to help answer the main question:

1. How can lessons be designed to make connections between students’ interests and their study of Mandarin?
2. What factors constrain and/or stimulate Australian students’ interest in the study of Mandarin?
3. How can beginning teacher-researchers from China adapt to the Australian teaching environment and develop their professional learning, especially of classroom management, in order to stimulate students’ learning of Mandarin?

1.4 Significance and value of this study

Australia’s language education policy encourages Australian school students to learn Asian languages:

[Asianism] is marked by an assertion of priority for the teaching of the key languages of select Asian countries, tied specifically to the North and South East region of Asia, and accompanied by economic, diplomatic and strategic justifications; sometimes Asianism invokes wider social and cultural changes for Australia itself, at other times it is a more restricted discourse embedded within short-term thinking about strategic and economic calculations of national interest; Asianism has had ambivalent relations with domestic multilingualism (Bianco, 2008, p. 347).

It is Australian’s national priority to teach the key languages of selected Asian countries. Mandarin is one of these key languages. As a result, more and more Australian students are beginning to learn Chinese in primary and secondary school.

However, not many students who opt for a Mandarin course continue to learn it when they move to the next stage; this is so, even for those who are Mandarin speakers or of Mandarin speaking background. The number of DET students studying Chinese in
primary schools was 15,291 in 2009; however, this number dramatically decreased in high schools, especially by Year 12, where only 680 students were still learning Mandarin (Mark, 2010, p. 2). In addition, 90% of the primary students who were learning Mandarin were background students, and of those learning Mandarin in Year 12, the percentage was 87. Therefore, the number of students who continue to learn Mandarin decreases across the year levels and most of the learners are background students. Being a volunteer teacher researcher, I felt obligated to encourage more students to be interested in the sustained learning of Mandarin. The decreasing interest in learning Mandarin in Australian schools is an issue of national concern.

The NSW Department of Education (2009, p. 1) states,

The objective of the NALSSP is to significantly increase the number of Australian students becoming proficient at learning the languages and understanding the cultures of our Asian neighbours—China, Indonesia, Japan, and Korea. It also aims to increase the number of Asian language classes offered in schools, increase the number of qualified Asian language teachers and develop a specialist curriculum for advanced language students. . . . The aspirational target for the NALSSP is that, by 2020, at least 12 percent of students will exit Year 12 with a fluency in one of the target Asian languages sufficient for engaging in trade and commerce in Asia and/or university study.

The decreasing number of students studying Mandarin by Year 12 represents a waste of the public money invested in this area. Moreover, for the students who discontinue learning this language, the time they spend on the language turns into a limited opportunity. Therefore, getting more students to sustain their learning of Mandarin is a major task confronting Chinese language teachers.

Language learning is not only about the language itself; it also concerns students’ attitudes towards the target language. Empirical research indicates there is a strong correlation between students’ interests and their selection of subjects: “enrolling for a subject at a stage when it becomes optional is an obvious way of expressing one’s interest” (Gardner and Tamir, cited in Trumper, 2006, p. 51). Thus, an interest-based
approach to language teaching may be an efficient way to achieve Australia’s national priority goals and contribute to effective teaching and learning. It has many advantages: connecting the needs and interests of students to Chinese language and linguistics learning, and promoting an understanding of students’ own language and culture in relation to Chinese language and culture. Instead of aiming for the ‘native speaker’ norm, language teaching can aim for a bilingual norm (Li, 2005). Helping students to develop ways of finding out more about Mandarin by analysing evidence of their interests, and creating a shift from catching interest to holding that interest in the study of Mandarin, are central points of this research.

This study responds to Australian Government initiatives to encourage more students to learn one of the key Asian languages, Chinese Mandarin (Department of Education, 2009, p. 1). It was the intention of this study to contribute to knowledge in the gaps in research relating to students’ interests and how this can be used to stimulate the learning of Mandarin in Australia. The teaching of the Chinese language in the Western Sydney Region is still at an early stage. Many of its schools have no qualified Mandarin teachers, and the curriculum resources for teaching Mandarin are inadequate. This is the situation in the schools where the VTRs work. The volunteer teacher-researchers from China are playing an important role in this period of transition, stimulating more students to learn Mandarin in Western Sydney schools. Meanwhile, they learn a great deal in becoming second language teachers as well as educational researchers. These teacher-researchers understand their importance in triggering the teaching and/or learning of Mandarin by students and schools in the Western Sydney Region.

This study was undertaken in the context of the Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) Program, which was developed through an international partnership between the NMEB, UWS and the NSW DET (Singh & Zhao, 2008). The ROSETE Program aims to promote international cooperation in the education of teacher-researchers. All the volunteer teacher-researchers gain second language teaching skills, knowledge of Australian educational culture and skills in educational research through the courses provided by NSW DET, the NMEB and the Centre for Educational Research at UWS. As a result, ROSETE is of mutual benefit to both Australia and China. The Chinese teacher-researchers learn
about how to teach a second language and how to conduct educational research according to international standards in a Western country. This offers another perspective on teaching and research that will be of benefit to China. Further, local Australian students have the opportunity to learn Mandarin and Chinese culture, which provides them with a different view of the world. It was the intention of this study to contribute to knowledge about how to engage the interests of students in the study of Mandarin, so as to contribute to Australia’s “Asia literacy” agenda.

1.5 Overview of the literature

This section provides an overview of knowledge relevant to the research problem addressed in this thesis.

1.5.1 The National Picture

The National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010) is an initiative of the Australian Government for encouraging students to learn Mandarin as well as other selected Asian languages. The Australian government wants to have more people who are capable of doing business with Asian people in Asian languages rather than English. Australia will be more influential and become a truly multicultural country due to its promotion of Asian languages.

Asian languages and studies will equip the students of today with the skills to excel in the careers of tomorrow in our increasingly globalised economy. A greater cultural understanding and the ability to engage with our regional neighbours in their own language will help to build a more productive and competitive nation. This is beneficial for our economy, community, and individuals, creating more jobs and higher wages and overall better opportunities for all Australians (South Australia Department of Education and Children’s Services, 2009, p. 2).

Many Australian students are not yet fully aware of the benefits a second language can bring them. The development of Asia literacy (Henderson, 2003, p. 23) in Australia can help students to understand Asian countries and their cultures better.
It is expected that more job opportunities and a more prosperous economy will be realised in the future as a result of NALSSP. However, the decision to continue to learn an Asian language is made by students alone. Therefore, how to encourage more students to learn the language through to Year 12 is the problem awaiting a solution.

1.5.2 Interest-based language teaching

Good language teachers make use of students’ interests to stimulate and sustain their learning in areas that are deemed to be appropriate. One criterion of quality teaching is the degree to which students want to engage in learning through activities of which teachers approve. One explanation is:

If you [the teacher] can generate interest . . . in a child in the particular subject then obviously that’s going to make it more pleasurable and more effective (Pall cited in Nelson, 2000, p. 211).

Interest can be understood as a motivational tool for directing and engaging students’ learning. Such interest rooted in students’ life and reflects how they identify themselves and construct their world view. One definition of interest proposes:

The term ‘interest’ usually refers to preference to engage in some types of activities rather than others. An interest may be regarded as a highly specific type of attitude: When we are in interested in a particular phenomenon or activity, we are favourably inclined to attend to or give time to it (Gardner & Tamir cited in Trumper, 2006, p. 48).

Interest can be a major influence on students’ attitude towards studying a particular issue. If students study knowledge and skills they are interested in, they are likely to be better disposed to concentrate on these and continue to do so. As a result, focusing on selected student interests provides a useful tool for teacher-researchers to orientate students to find more about their own life, which they can then relate to what they have to learn. Interests are selected from students’ life experiences. These are embodied in students’ daily routines, preferences and hobbies, and are a part of
students’ lives, making them the people they are. Interest-based teaching may also help students to discover their capabilities for language learning, making them more confident and far-sighted. Learning content that students are interested in, and using different strategies designed to create interest-based learning experiences, is expected to help students to change from just having their interest caught momentarily, to holding that interest for the long-term study of Mandarin.

1.5.3 Students’ interests

After analysing factors affecting students’ interest in their studies, Trumper (2006, p. 51) argues that students’ background interest, attitudes towards the subject, opinions about the subject and out-of-school experiences that relate to the subject, are four factors that affect students’ interests in learning. Although teacher-researchers might be able to create very good learning environments for their students, it is not easy to change students’ uninterested disposition to learning. Students have their own distinctive characteristics, and many live in socio-economically disadvantaged communities, and this creates challenges for promoting their interest in studying Mandarin. Therefore, looking into what constrains and promotes their interest in the study of Mandarin is important.

1.5.4 Professional learning by teacher-researchers

Teaching and learning cannot progress when the students are not paying attention: “How daily interactions are carried out—the nature of how students relate to one another and their teacher—is a crucial element in determining whether school is a successful experience” (Henley, 2010, p. 19). Enjoyable learning experience in Mandarin lessons is an elementary condition for building students’ interests in the study of the language. Appropriate teaching practices are a vital element in determining students’ learning and influencing their long-term interest in the study of Mandarin. Knowing how to control students’ behaviour to focus their attention on what is to be learnt is a challenge: “Behaviour problems disturb teachers and students, negatively affect the teaching/learning process, and ultimately hinder academic achievement” (Manning & Bucher, 2007, p. 5). A chaotic class wastes
students’ valuable learning time and does not provide good learning experiences for them, and therefore undermines their interest in the study of Mandarin:

When students are engaged in their lessons, disruptions are minimal. Conversely, monotonous, dull lessons create boredom, which in turn leads students to seek out distractions. Effective classroom managers are enthusiastic, they know their curriculum, they take their students’ need and interests into account when planning, and they use a variety of teaching methods (Henley, 2010, p. 19).

Students tend to be more focused when they find a lesson interesting, if not fascinating. A vapid lesson can have students looking to fulfil their interests by focusing their attention on things besides learning. Successful classroom management may help to reduce or minimise disruptions. As a part of lesson plans, classroom management strategies should build on the needs and interests of students. Classroom management is fundamental to stimulating and sustaining students’ interest in the study of Mandarin.

1.6 Overview of the research method

This thesis is based on an action research project. Action research is an interactive inquiry process that balances problem solving actions implemented through a collaborative process with data-driven analysis, to better understand underlying causes enabling improved future planning for personal and organisational change (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). In this study, the teacher-researcher tried to use a diverse data set to investigate the foregoing research questions. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in this study. Qualitative methods helped me as a teacher-researcher to improve my teaching continuously and find effective teaching strategies for promoting students’ interest in learning Mandarin. The key data in this qualitative study were from my reflective journal, where I recorded information about my teaching in a NSW primary school. This data gives readers a more personal insight into my professional development as a beginning Mandarin teacher. Students’ feedback, as well as the classroom teachers’ observations, was among the other data sources used in this study. It provided suggestions about how I could improve my teaching to engage students more in learning. Findings from the interviews with the
classroom teachers after the last action research cycle were an important data source for triangulating findings from the other data sources. Quantitative data was generated to measure the effect of my interest-based teaching on students’ desire to learn Mandarin. Pre- and post-questionnaires about students’ interests and their willingness to learn Mandarin were conducted.

My reflective journal as a teacher-researcher provided important evidence for this action research project. Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 102) argue that “the researcher’s feelings can be an important indicator and, therefore, a source for reflecting”. The reflective journal helped me to formulate questions to get at key issues in my teaching experiences. In the reflective journal, I not only took into consideration my immediate situation, but also looked into participants’ perspectives on these issues. In this way, I was able to better comprehend students’ learning, together with my own teaching.

Pre- and post-questionnaires were used to collect self-report data provided “by a selected group of research participants” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 373) to investigate students’ interests, to find out the effect of my lessons and to collect ideas about how I might improve my teaching. The answers the students provided were important for planning my Mandarin lessons. The information obtained from these questionnaires allowed me not only to make necessary adjustments to my lessons, but also to provide rich data that facilitated the research process. In addition, by comparing the results before and after, I was able to see the degree of impact that the Mandarin lessons had on students’ interest in the studying of this foreign language.

Student feedback revealed their views about my teaching. As suggested by Richardson (2005, p. 401), “Student feedback can provide diagnostic evidence for teachers and also a measure of teaching effectiveness for administrative decision-making.” By analysing students’ feedback, I was able to identify advantages and disadvantages in my teaching, and provide a stimulus for fixing problems. Another advantage of using student feedback was that the students were motivated by feeling involved in the decision-making about their learning.
The classroom observational feedback provided by the classroom teachers assisted to improve the rigour of this action research. The credibility of this research was enhanced as a result of these participants’ consciously observing events, activities, and the context of my teaching over a period of time. Consciously observing and taking note of events placed a premium on what was actually happening, rather than describing it from memory, or from an interpretation of what people “think” happened (Stringer, 2007, p. 58). This observational feedback entailed the readers recording what had happened in my particular classes, helping to evaluate and dig out “covered” truths.

Interviews were conducted with the classroom teachers at the end of this action research project. Interviews “permit researchers to obtain important data they cannot acquire from observation alone” (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009, p. 370). Through interviewing the classroom teachers, I discovered how they thought about my effort to stimulate the students’ desire to learn Mandarin and how I might better contribute to the learning of Mandarin in Australian schools. Semi-structured interviews were adopted, to make the respondents feel comfortable about answering the questions by engaging them in conversations with a purpose.

1.7 Thesis statement

This thesis argues that for beginning teachers from China, stimulating Australian students’ interest in the learning of Mandarin requires an ongoing professional development process of designing ever more effective lessons, considering students’ learning experiences, and reflecting upon their teaching practices.

To stimulate the learning of Mandarin it is important for Chinese teacher-researchers to improve their teaching practice progressively by designing Mandarin lessons that motivate students, by engaging their background knowledge, students’ interests and desires. A teacher’s performance in the classroom and lesson designs, drive students’ interest in the study of Mandarin. There is a Chinese concept “三驾马车” (san jia ma che), which is useful for elaborating on this thesis. “三” /san/ is the Chinese number three; “驾” /jia/ is a quantifier; “马” /ma/ means horse; “车” /che/ means vehicle.
This concept literally means “a gharry with three horses”. In ancient China, only the emperor or a superior general could sit on a gharry pulled by three horses. Now, this concept is used to describe three powerful forces that drive things forward. In this thesis, designing interest-based Mandarin lessons, students’ learning experiences, and teacher’s performance, are the three forces driving Australia students’ learning of Mandarin (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 “三驾马车” /san jia ma che/

1.8 Structure of this thesis

This thesis is developed through the following Chapters. Having provided an overview of the thesis in this Chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the research literature on interest-based language teaching, students’ situational interests, the professional learning of teacher-researchers and various second language teaching strategies.

Chapter 3 describes the design of this action research project and explains and justifies the details of validity, generalisation, sample, data collection and analysis. Ethical issues have also been carefully considered in terms of the principles and procedures for undertaking data collection and analysis.
Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are evidentiary chapters based on analysis of the data from the reflective journal of the teacher-researcher, students’ feedback, classroom teachers’ observations, interviews with classroom teachers, and pre- and post-questionnaires completed by participating students.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion chapter and summarises the key findings of this research project. It also presents the limitations of this study, implications for practice and policy, and recommendations for further research.
Chapter 2

Interest-based Mandarin teaching

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to find out how to stimulate primary school students’ interest in the study of Mandarin by using interest-based language teaching. The process of this research was on combining three interrelated forces, namely: this teacher-researcher’s professional learning, students’ interests, and the design of Mandarin lessons. The review of the literature presented in this chapter begins by identifying the importance of promoting Australian students’ interest in learning Mandarin. Following this, the concept of students’ interest, and factors affecting students’ interest in Mandarin, are explored from different perspectives. Then it gives details about how to design interest-based Mandarin lessons according to students’ everyday interests and their interests in the study of Mandarin. Afterwards, a variety of stimulating teaching strategies are explained, followed by analysis of the role of teacher-researchers’ professional learning in promoting students’ Mandarin learning, and their interest in such learning. The final section outlines the interrelationships between the three forces of “三驾马车”/san jia ma che/.

2.2 A national priority and Australia’s challenge

This section examines Australia’s national Asian language educational policy and the challenge it faces.

2.2.1 National policy context
Due to the rapid development of Asian countries and their close relationship with Australia—economically, culturally and geographically—the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) has been promoted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2010) to encourage school students to become Asia literate with respect to selected Asian countries. NALSSP represents significant progress in Australian education. By encouraging students to learn Mandarin as well as other selected Asian languages (Indonesian, Japanese, Chinese and Korean), the Australian Government hopes to have more people who are capable of doing business with Asia not just in English, but in these key Asian languages. The expectation is that Australia will then be more influential in Asia and be a more multicultural country due to its promotion of Asian languages:

Asian languages and studies will equip the students of today with the skills to excel in the careers of tomorrow in our increasingly globalised economy. A greater cultural understanding and the ability to engage with our regional neighbours in their own language will help to build a more productive and competitive nation. This is beneficial for our economy, community, and individuals, creating more jobs and higher wages and overall better opportunities for all Australians (SA DECS, 2009, p. 2).

More job opportunities for Australians and a more prosperous Australia economy are expected to be realised as a consequence of NALSSP. The initial aspirational target for the NALSSP was that by 2010, at least 12 percent of Australian students would exit Year 12 with fluency in one of these key Asian languages sufficient for engaging in trade and commerce as part of their further study (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 1). Nevertheless, Australian students are not necessarily aware of the benefits that an Asian language is expected to bring them. Therefore, the development of Asia literacy in Australian schools is a key means for helping students to gain a better understanding of these Asian countries and their culture, as well as of learning one of these target languages.

This policy of promoting the learning of Asian languages enjoys financial support A substantial amount of capital has been injected by Governments to promote Asia literacy. Increasing the number of students who learn these key Asian languages
through high quality programs is one of the aims of National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program. The Australian Government has:

committed funding of $62.4 million over 2008–09 to 2011–12 for the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) to increase opportunities for school students to become familiar with the languages and cultures of our Asian neighbours, namely China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea. This commitment recognises the importance of Asian languages and studies of Asia in ensuring young Australians are equipped with the skills to allow them to compete in the globalised economy of the future. . . . The objective of the NALSSP is to significantly increase the number of Australian students becoming proficient at learning the languages and understanding the cultures of our Asian neighbours—China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea. It also aims to increase the number of qualified Asian language teachers and develop a specialist curriculum for advanced language students (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010, p. 1).

Mandarin is becoming more and more important for Australians due to China’s resurgence as a global economic and political power, and its frequent economic and cultural interactions with Australia. “To develop the present relationship with this country, China, to great mutual economic and social benefit would require a solid pool of Australians in a range of sectors who deeply understand China and who can speak Chinese well” (Orton, 2008, p. 5) The funds provided by the Department of Education are intended to help schools to have more high-quality Asian language teachers and language curriculum resources. The preparation of teachers of Asian languages is intended to ensure that students receive a good Asian language education in order to achieve the national goal of students continuing to learn these key Asian languages through to Year 12. NALSSP has already had an influence, with an increasing number of schools offering more Mandarin classes and with more qualified Mandarin teachers being produced. Some schools offer bilingual programs.

2.2.2 Challenges of getting students to learn Mandarin

Although the support from government policy and investment is substantial, relying solely on policy and money is not enough to turn the national goal into a reality. The
decision to continue learning an Asian language is made by students. Clyne’s (2008) study argues that Australia has long been a monolingual English speaking country and Asian languages have never been regarded highly by many Australians. Many English-only Australian students may start to learn Mandarin temporarily, but they may quit learning the language before Year 12. In Orton (2008)’s study of Chinese language education in Australian schools, she found that:

The number of these first language users is likely to remain stable, and they total only half the proposed 2020 target of 8,000. Any increase in the numbers taking Year 12 Chinese will need to come from increasing the number of classroom second language learners. Although the numbers already learning Chinese as a second language in Australia would be sufficient to meet the proposed 2020 target by 2009, 94% of these learners drop out before Year 12, usually once the language is no longer mandated (Orton, 2008, p. 5).

Further, in 2009, the number of primary students in NSW who were learning Mandarin was 22 times more than those studying it in Year 12, and more than 85 percent of all these Mandarin learners were background speakers (Mark, 2010, p. 2). As a result, the decline in students’ interest in learning Asian languages and their decision to quit studying it before Year 12 is a waste of the government’s investment of public funds. What is more, for the students who discontinue learning a language, the time they have spent studying the language will be wasted.

There are some key challenges for NALSSP (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 2) including the decline in the valuing of language learning by students, school, parents and community; lack of any requirement to include studies of Asia across the curriculum in any jurisdiction; bias of English-only students against studying a language because of their fear of competing against native speakers, and the perceived negative impact of language study on the tertiary entrance score. Dealing with these challenges, one of many possible solutions for promoting the goals of the NALSSP is to stimulate “student demand” (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 2). This solution draws attention to the students who are the direct learners and beneficiaries of learning Asian languages. If Australian students’ demand for learning Mandarin is increased, NALSSP will move forward positively and smoothly.
Therefore, confronting the challenge of stimulating more students to learn Mandarin and keeping them doing so through to Year 12 is a key issue. Teacher-researchers might investigate ways of increasing students’ demand for learning the language.

2.3 Interest-based language teaching

This section reviews the literature on the concept of “interest” and students’ learning.

2.3.1 Defining and debating “interest”

Interest can be understood as a motivational tool for stimulating students’ learning. Interests are rooted in students’ lives and also reflect how students identify themselves and construct their world view. A definition of interest proposes:

Interests are domain-specific, behaviour and experience activating and steering motives, which are generalized, serving as structures of orientation and appearing in a specified manner as preferences for activities. Interests are essential elements of the structure of self-concept and are fully integrated in the individual’s self-concept (Todt & Schreiber, cited in Michelsen & Sriraman, 2009, p. 233).

For teacher-researchers students’ interests are a useful tool for engaging their life experience in ways that can be related to what they have to learn. Interests are developed from students’ experiential knowledge, gained through their everyday lives. It is embodied in students’ daily routines, preferences and hobbies. Interests are not only a part of students’ lives but also make them the particular people they are. Therefore, students’ interests are drivers that push them forward. It is students’ interests in the study of Mandarin that can keep them continuing to learn it. Also, cultivating students’ interest in the study of Mandarin can provide them a different perspective on the world. It may also help students to discover their intelligence for learning a foreign language and make them more confident and far-seeing.

There is, however, a debate over the definition of “interest”, as it varies according to the views of different researchers. Interest has been defined as that which people want to do or want to find out more about:
The term ‘interest’ usually refers to preference to engage in some types of activities rather than others. An interest may be regarded as a highly specific type of attitude: When we are interested in a particular phenomenon or activity, we are favourably inclined to attend to or give time to it (Gardner & Tamir, cited in Trumper, 2006, p. 48).

This differs from Michelsen and Sriraman’s (2009) definition of interest as a motivational tool. Trumper (2006) regards interest as one’s favourable attitude to engaging in an activity such as learning Mandarin. According to this conceptualisation, an interest can be a major influence on students’ attitude towards a particular issue. If students are doing something they are interested in, they tend to have positive attitudes about it. Consequently, they might be disposed to concentrate on it and be willing to continue doing it. Conversely, if a task is not what the students are interested in, negative attitudes and emotions will be developed. Then, it will be difficult for them to make efforts to do it, and this will most likely result in their discontinuing it. Therefore, interest can be regarded as one’s attitude towards a particular issue which motivates spending time with it. The students in my classes aged from 9 to 11 years and very easily distracted. Even a trivial matter that happened in the classroom could attract their attention. Therefore, when exposed to a difficult and boring language class for a long time, they felt very distressed. As a result, making Mandarin the focus of students’ interest would have to be very difficult to maintain, let alone increasing their demand for learning Mandarin.

2.3.2 Individual and situational interests

Two types of interest have been a key focus for research in education. One is situational interest, while the other is individual interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). The differentiation of these two types of interests can be understood in terms of the extent to which the interests influence students’ learning:

Situational interest refers to focused attention and the affective reaction that is triggered in the moment by environmental stimuli, which may or may not last over time. Whereas individual interest refers to a person’s relatively
enduring predisposition to reengage particular content over time as well as to the immediate psychological state when this predisposition has been activated (Hidi & Renninger, 2006, p. 113).

While situational interest is temporary and driven by the environment, individual interest is long-lasting and embedded in one’s daily life. Nevertheless, these two types of interest are closely related to each other. Situational interest can be changed into individual interest if students keep working on the interest after it has been inspired. Thus, individual interest can be relatively more valuable, due to its contribution to students’ long-term engagement in an activity, a task or a career. An interesting Mandarin class may stimulate students’ situational interest in the study of this language. However, it will be more meaningful and durable if the class can arouse students’ individual interest in learning more about Mandarin. In order to encourage more students to continue choosing to study Mandarin to Year 12, making an effort to trigger students’ individual interests is an important focus of teacher-researchers.

2.3.3 “Interestingness”

According to the previous definitions of two types of interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006), individual interest is a characteristic of a person, while situational interest is a temporary psychological state. In addition to situational and individual interest, and related to the other two, is “interestingness”: a characteristic of the learning environment (Michelsen & Sriraman, 2009, p. 233). These three types of interest are the major concepts explored in contemporary interest research. As a characteristic of the learning environment, interestingness possibly leads students to be interested in a subject individually:

the development of situational interest is a possible pathway to the development of a more stable individual interest. . . .

We are therefore mainly concerned with “interestingness” as a contextual factor that leads to situational interest (Michelsen & Sriraman, 2009, p. 233).

Interestingness is a bridge for converting lack of interest into situational interest, and thus a bridge for relating situational interest to individual interest. For students who
have no interest in any one subject, the interestingness of the learning setting can possibly inspire their situational interest in it. For the students who have already gained situational interest in a subject, the interestingness of the lesson consolidates their interest and may turn their situational interest into individual interest. Figure 2.1 shows the interrelationship between these three types of interest.

![Figure 2.1 Three approaches to interest research (Krapp, 1999, p. 24)](image)

In this research project, students’ interests in Mandarin as a school subject can be regarded as a combination of individual interest in Mandarin and of a short-term situational interest in certain topics and activities intended to create interestingness in Mandarin lessons. Therefore, the interestingness of Mandarin lessons is a key to achieving the goal of stimulating students’ individual interest in learning Mandarin, which seems to be an essential condition for encouraging more students to learn Mandarin and to continue to do so over the following years:

The shift from catching to holding a person’s situational interest requires a learning environment that actively involves the students and makes the content of learning meaningful for the students according to their actual goals (Michelsen & Sriraman, 2009, p. 233).

Holding a student’s situational interest in the study of Mandarin means that interest might last longer and become an individual interest. In order to realise this goal, the interestingness of the learning environment is of considerable importance. An
interesting, informative and meaningful Mandarin lesson may not only provide students a pleasurable learning experience, but also inspire their interest in the study of Mandarin. As the duration of this research project was only one and a half years, it was unrealistic to try to identify whether individual interest in the study of Mandarin was embedded in students’ long-term interests. However, it was likely feasible to investigate the possibility that attractive Mandarin lessons could create interestingness in the learning settings and make students feel interested in the language. Situational interest in learning Mandarin may be inspired by this approach, providing a basis for acquiring individual interest in learning the language. The following Figure 2.2 shows the integrated relationship among these concepts of interests.

![Figure 2.2: Perspectives of interest](image)

Figure 2.2: Perspectives of interest (Bikner-Ahsbahs, cited in Michelsen & Sriraman, 2009, p. 233).

Figure 2.2 shows that individual interests involve a relationship between a person and an object, and situational interest concerns the relationship between the person and the situation, which can dissipate when the situation does not occur or is not sustained. However, the interestingness of the learning environment is a key mechanism teachers have for relating the situation to the object, and may transform situational interest into individual interest. Therefore, students’ individual interests in
the study of Mandarin might be met by continuously working on the interestingness of Mandarin lessons.
2.3.4 The importance of “interestingness” in choosing a subject

Students’ individual interests have been found to be a powerful influence on their choices in life. They drive students to decide whether to continue or discontinue a certain task. Hidi and Renninger (2006, p. 112) argue that interest is a motivational variable that refers to a psychological state of engaging or reengaging people with particular classes of objects, events, or ideas over time. Also, it seems reasonable to claim that students’ individual interests impact on their choice of subjects because their preference for subjects reflects their interests. Students’ interests are a prime factor influencing their choice of a subject:

since enrolling for a subject at a stage when it becomes optional is an obvious way of expressing one’s interest (Gardner and Tamir, cited in Trumper, 2006, p. 51).

Further,

much of what people in the industrialized world do in their daily life is probably partly governed by their interests (Sjorberg cited in Trumper, 2006, p. 51).

Empirical studies of the factors affecting students’ interest in science for example, indicate the need to satisfy their emotional desire in order to encourage them to sustain learning a subject:

Perhaps the strongest message that emerges from our study, and many of the studies cited earlier, is the need to concentrate on ways to develop students’ affective responses so that they find personal satisfaction in doing science and want to continue with it (Trumper, 2006, p. 54).

Students’ “personal satisfaction” in learning a subject can be influenced by the interestingness of the learning setting, which stimulates students’ situational interest in what is to be learnt. When students are satisfied with the lessons in a certain subject, they are likely to be inclined to continue to select it as a subject for further study. In the research project reported in this thesis, one of the goals was to have more students eager to continue learning Mandarin in the following years.
Students’ interest in the study of Mandarin, whether it was individual interest or situational interest, was seen as creating momentum towards achieving this goal.

The decreasing interest of students in the study of Mandarin (Mark, 2010) raises the question of how to re-create their inclination to learn this language, since the choice of this subject is an elective and so largely depends on students’ preferences. A Brazilian study which investigated the correlation between students’ interests and their subject preferences found:

The majority of the justifications given by the students for their preferences have direct relation with their natural inclination, based on a subjective feeling of liking or disliking a given subject . . . The majority of the answers, independent of gender, were related to subjective factors, both for what they liked and for what they disliked (Lannes, Rumjanek, Velloso & Meis, 2002, pp. 158-174).

The choice of subjects selected by students indicates their feelings towards and against particular subjects. In order to stimulate more students to keep learning Mandarin, teachers have a responsibility to make them feel comfortable with studying this language. In Western Sydney, the only chance for most of these students in the Region to engage with Mandarin is in Mandarin classes. For this reason, the atmosphere of the classroom becomes a central focus for stimulating their sustained interest in learning this language. What happens in the classroom can influence students’ attitudes toward the study of Mandarin. Good learning experiences may have a long-term impact on whether they continue to study this language. Hoffmann’s (2002) study of students’ interest in physics indicates that the “interestingness” of the learning environment:

is of special importance for students with a low and not yet stable interest in physics, as well as for stimulating the development of interest in this field. The interestingness of the learning environment might stimulate situational interest, and situational interest might also induce individual interest (Hoffmann, 2002, p. 449).

In an “interesting” learning environment, students may find learning comfortable and easily gain access to knowledge. In such a case, their situational interest with respect
to a given subject can be stimulated through the nature of teaching/learning experiences. If interest can be created and wisely promoted, it is possible to make a challenging field of knowledge the object of one’s own individual interest. Therefore, the learning environment is crucial for the development of a long lasting interest in the study of certain subjects.

2.3.5 Interest-based language teaching

The concept of interest has gained considerable attention in educational research during the past twenty years (e.g. Renninger, 1992; Krapp, 1999; Hoffmann, 2002; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Trumper, 2006; Henley, 2010). Students’ interest in a certain topic, subject or domain promotes advantageous learning outcomes (Katz, Assor, Maymon & Meyer, 2006). As “interests” change according to the state of being, it can be either a source of motivation or a stumbling block affecting students’ engaging deeply and over an extended period in a new subject. If language teachers can take advantage of students’ interests, these interests can become a tool to stimulate them to learn and better understand. During my initial observations of the classes of experienced teachers, which helped me to scope the feasibility of this research project, I found that these teachers knew much about their students’ interests. They could predict whether a topic would arouse students’ situational interest or not. They were also capable of changing their teaching strategies according to the state of or changes in students’ interests. In other words, a good teacher can fully make use of students’ interests to connect with the learning required in the class.

Empirical research indicates there is a strong correlation between students’ interests and their study of languages: “enrolling for a subject at a stage when it becomes optional is an obvious way of expressing one’s interest” (Gardner & Tamir, cited in Trumper, 2006, p. 51). Also, a study conducted in Melbourne, which aimed to find out students’ motivation for choosing Chinese as an elective reported that “a lack of interest in the subject was the major contributing factor to the decision to quit Chinese language learning” (Ren, 2009, p. 21). Therefore, an interest-based approach to teaching Mandarin may be an efficient and effective means to achieve national priority goals and contribute to sustained learning. Connecting the interests
of Australian students to Mandarin language and linguistic learning would seem to have many advantages. This might entail promoting an understanding of students’ own language and culture in relation to Mandarin and Chinese culture. Finding out what topics relating to Mandarin and Chinese cultural activities might be of interest to students, as well as using a variety of teaching strategies in which students have an interest, forms the basis of interest-based language teaching. Here, “topic interest” is taken to be an outcome of students’ individual and situational factors. Ainley, Hidi and Berndorff (2002, p. 546) use the term “topic interest” to mean a “relatively enduring evaluative orientation toward certain topics, a form of individual interest”. This indicates that before students start to learn about the topics selected by themselves, they have already established an interest in them. Therefore, in the research project from which this thesis has been derived, interest-based language teaching refers to student-centred Mandarin lessons based on topics of interest to students that are integrated with their everyday interests.

Instead of aiming for a native speaker norm, this interest-based language teaching project set out to “offer an appealing alternative” whereby students could reframe their own competence “to reimagine themselves in a new and much more positive light and to position themselves differently with regard to their languages” (Cook cited in Pavlenklo, 2009, p. 262). The research reported in this thesis aimed to stimulate students’ interest in finding out more about Mandarin by analysing their everyday interests and planning lessons that would catch and hold their interest in the study of Mandarin. Adapting Mandarin lessons to students’ interests was also expected to meet their intrinsic needs for control and power. Henley (2010, p. 120) points out that:

Other intrinsic needs described by educators who view motivation from a developmental viewpoint include the need for control (Glasser, 1996), the need for generosity, (Brokenleg, 1999), and the need for fun (Mendler, 1992). Teachers try to meet intrinsic needs in a variety of ways, including providing successful experiences to meet students’ need for mastery and allowing student choice to meet students’ need for power and control.
In a student-centred curriculum, teacher-researchers take students’ needs and interests as priorities. Students’ intrinsic interests include the need for control. By involving students in making decisions about their Mandarin learning, their interest in self-control can be met.

2.3.6 Factors affecting students’ interest in learning Mandarin

There are many internal and external factors that influence students’ interest in learning Mandarin. In measuring students’ interests in a certain subject, Trumper (2006) argues that students’ attitude towards the subject, their opinion about the classes conducted for the subject and their out-of-school experiences are key variables related to their interest in studying the subject. In addition, individuals’ beliefs about their competence in a certain field of study are important factors in their learning achievement, since “when people are confident, they are most likely to put time and energy into learning, and persist rather than give up when experiencing difficulty” (Patrick, Mantzicopoulos & Samarapungavan, 2009, p. 168). Ren (2009, p. 24) also states that a lack of interest in Mandarin and previous bad experiences of learning are the major reasons behind students’ choice to discontinue learning the language. Putting these factors together, it might be expected that students’ interest in the study of Mandarin and their willingness to continue learning it can be influenced by their attitude to Mandarin, their opinion about Mandarin lessons, their out-of-school experiences with Mandarin and their self-perceived competence in Mandarin. Among these factors, students’ attitude towards Mandarin, their opinion about Mandarin lessons and their self-perceived competence in Mandarin are all closely related to the Mandarin lessons provided by teacher-researchers.

Trumper (2006, p. 40) argues that the quality of teaching of a subject is a significant determinant of students’ attitude towards and opinion about the subject. This emphasises the importance of the interestingness of Mandarin lessons in promoting students’ interest in learning the language. Students’ attitude towards and opinion about the learning environment of the target language shapes the value they attach to the subject. Their judgements about a subject are based in part on their feeling about the class as much as the subject. In research conducted to evaluate students’ interest in the study of physics, researchers found that:
Value predicts decisions about which subjects students continue learning and which occupational paths they are unlikely to continue with it if they find it uninteresting, unpleasant, or too costly in time or effort (Patrick, Mantzicopoulou & Samarapungavan, 2009, p. 169).

If we disregard for the moment external factors such as students’ out-of-school experience, students’ attitude towards Mandarin and opinion about Mandarin lessons are likely to be two important factors that influence their decision in continuing learning this language. Their attitudes and opinions in this regard are directly revealed through their behaviour in Mandarin lessons. The interestingness of Mandarin lessons helps students to develop positive attitudes and opinions towards the study of Mandarin, whereas negative experience depresses students’ positive feelings about the subject. Positive learning experiences created by the interestingness of the learning environment may help to stimulate their situational interest in the study of Mandarin. Therefore, it is important to improve students’ attitude towards Mandarin, their opinion of Mandarin lessons, their out-of-school experiences of Mandarin and their self-perceived competence in Mandarin in order to promote their long-term interest in learning Mandarin.

In addition to considering students’ experience in Mandarin lessons, their social and family backgrounds also have to be taken into consideration, since these out-of-school experiences form an important part of the drivers or inhibitors affecting their desire to learn Mandarin. Manning and Bucher (2007, p. 7) think that students’ lack of enthusiasm and misbehaviour in school can be traced to their home environment:

Society sometimes contributes to students’ misbehaviours. Some students see sarcasm, ridicule, and violence as a way of life or as a means of responding to others . . . In other cases, misbehaviour can be rooted in familial causes. Students who experience family disruptions often vent their anger and frustration at school (Manning & Bucher, 2007, p. 7).

Most students are influenced by parents’ ideas on learning a language. If their parents do not regard education as important for their children, this influences students, unconsciously or otherwise. As a result, some students devalue learning
Mandarin and give less effort to learning it (Manning & Bucher, 2007, p. 7). In this situation, they may quit learning the language when they are confronted with other choices. In other words, these socio-economic influences may prevent students from making learning Mandarin a matter of individual interests. Moreover, in a study conducted to find out what factors discouraged students in their choice to continue Chinese learning, it was found that “family members greatly influenced their quitting Chinese Second Language Learning” (Ren, 2009, p. 21) which means, if students’ parents disapprove of continuing to learn Mandarin, students are likely to quit learning it. However, Leese (2009, p. 71) believes that regardless of students’ background and prior experience, the teachers need to make sure all students are supported and educated to encourage their engagement in learning. As a result, teacher-researchers have to change students’ unreconstructed ideas by making arduous efforts to improve their attitudes towards and opinion of learning Mandarin.

2.4 Design of Mandarin Lessons

This section displays how to design subject-centred, interest-based Mandarin lessons by incorporating students’ everyday interests and their interests in Mandarin.

2.4.1 Children’s interests and subject-centred curriculum

Good language teachers make use of “children’s interests” to stimulate and sustain students’ involvement in learning activities that are deemed to be of value to them and socially valued. One criterion for judging quality teaching is the degree to which students want to engage in learning activities of which teachers approve:

If you [the teacher] can generate interest in a child in the particular subject, then obviously that’s going to make it more pleasurable and more effective. I haven’t looked at any learning theories or anything like that for that thing, but I’m just thinking about my own experience and just looking at the experience of teaching and learning situations (Pall cited in Nelson, 2000, p. 211).

A pleasant and interesting lesson could bring students an enjoyable experience of learning a subject, which may increase students’ desire to learn that subject and find
out more about it. Currently, there is no national curriculum\(^1\) for the teaching and learning of the target Asian languages. As a volunteer teacher-researcher in a primary school, I could decide what to teach to students during this one and a half years through reference to the Board of Studies NSW (2003) Chinese K-10 syllabus. The research project reported in this thesis made students’ interests in the study of Mandarin its focus, creating opportunities for them to decide what they might learn. In other words, it was mainly a “children centred” (Nelson, 2000) curriculum.

The curriculum has varied historically. Nelson (2000) argues that curriculum may be divided into two main types: subject-centred and child-centred. Australia’s traditional subject-centred curriculum is critiqued for its lack of concern about students’ interests; this curriculum emphasised the importance of predetermined knowledge. However, the advantages of a child-centred curriculum have been increasingly recognised worldwide:

\[\text{[A subject-centred curriculum] sees curriculum as a body of content or subject matter leading to certain achievement outcomes or products. [student-centred curriculum] views curriculum in terms of the learner and his or her needs; the concern is with process, i.e., the climate of the classroom and school (Ornstein cited in Nelson, 2000, p. 48).}\]

The subject-centred curriculum regards knowledge as the source of lesson planning and the basis for judging students’ achievement. Curriculum-prescribed knowledge is used to decide what students should learn and achieve. In contrast, a student-centred curriculum is based on learners’ interests and needs. It is students’ interests and needs that influence the planning of the curriculum and the assessment of students’ learning. This kind of curriculum emphasises the learning process, especially the learning environment. Moreover, it is argued that student-centred curricula can deepen and extend students’ individual interests in learning because of their incorporation and engagement with these interests:

---

\(^1\) The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is now involved in the curriculum development process for the national languages curriculum. ACARA has been assisted by a reference group to develop the national language curriculum. The initial advice paper was to be drafted and available for targeted consultation at a national forum, by around August 2010. From http://www. acara.edu.au/languages.html
when the interests and needs of learners were incorporated to the curriculum, intrinsic motivation resulted . . . advocates believe that learning is more successful if the interests and needs of the learner are taken into account (Ornstein cited in Nelson, 2000, p. 48).

Because subject-centred curricula focus on knowledge as an end in itself, this may or may not be irrelevant to students’ daily lives. In this case, students may easily get distracted when the content of the curriculum is not what they expect, and they might be reluctant to learn it. Therefore, when encouraging students to learn Mandarin, a key may be to involve their interests in learning, including their interest in deciding what to learn. A student-centred curriculum is designed by analysing students’ needs and interests, which are then made central to the curriculum-in-practice. Because this curriculum is based on what students are interested in, students may find the learning process much easier and more appealing.

By inspiring students to learn Mandarin and to continue doing so, by analysing and privileging their interests, a student-centred curriculum begins. However, solely to emphasise students’ interests and needs may lead to a lack of knowledge acquisition. When learning a language, students need to learn what they are interested in knowing and to learn the language. Overall, it might be better if a curriculum were based on the principle that students need to learn certain knowledge that is represented in such a way that it engages students’ interests. In order to achieve this goal, it may be useful to critically reflect on our teaching and through a rigorous research process that informs modifications to lesson plans in ways that cater for students’ interests. Such a student-centred curriculum might be:

developed around the individual needs and interests of children with the teacher taking cues from observed behaviours and responding with experiences for the child . . . As the child’s interests are reflected, the teacher brings in new materials, plans related field experiences, and nurtures individual development through opportunities that have high appeal to a particular group of children or to individuals within the group (McCarthy cited in Nelson, 2000, p. 49).
This means that the lessons are designed “around” students’ needs and interests instead of designed “for” transmitting knowledge. To arouse students’ interest in learning Mandarin is not the end goal, as that is a short-term goal, but instead it is to find a way to sustain their learning through to Year 12. The content and the various strategies used for teaching Mandarin should find efficient ways to convey knowledge of language, but it is essential that the lesson attracts students’ interests. Thus, getting to know students and repeatedly reflecting on evidence of what happens in the classroom may increase serious engagement with their interests and what they are learning.

2.4.2 Topic interests

A curriculum may appear to be colourless to students unless elements of what they like are inserted. The adoption of a student-centred curriculum by adding topics that students are interested in might be an effective pedagogical move to foster the “interestingness” of the classroom learning environment. Extended and meaningful opportunities for students to engage in the study of Mandarin in the classroom may promote both a liking of this language and self-perceptions of their competence in this subject. As soon as they find Mandarin is interesting and not difficult to learn, they may become more confident about learning this language.

Teachers may benefit from gathering to discuss what they will teach next, and deciding what their priority for teaching is. Even so, they may ignore what students really want to learn and are eager to know. Actually, students have their preferences for what they would like to study. Even students in primary schools have their ideas about what they would like to study at school and what is important for them to learn: the expression “learner needs” can refer not only to what learners need to do with the language once they have learned it, but also to what they need to do in order to actually acquire the language. In all cases, it was found that the more learners were consulted in decision-making as to the kinds of things they should be learning to do in a foreign language and the more they were involved in evaluating their own linguistic progress and in determining which problem areas they needed to work on most, the more active and motivated
they became and the better they learned (Widdowson cited in Lombardo, 1988, p. 9).

Students need to be motivated when they are learning. Typically, teachers have their special ways to inspire students to behave better and learn more. One frequently used strategy is to let students decide the topics of their learning, just as researchers do when selecting their research focus. When students are involved in making decisions about their studies, they tend to be highly stimulated. A student-centred curriculum is adapted to meet students’ interests, so it is more agreeable to them and thus, much more likely to stimulate their learning. As a result, “topic interest” (Ainley, Hidi & Berndorff, 2002, p. 546) is used to have students make judgements about what they expect to learn in Mandarin lessons. Ainley, Hidi and Berndorff (2002, p. 547) argue that:

Topic interest is not necessarily the same as either situational or individual interest. A strong existing individual interest in the content of a text will increase the likelihood that individual interest factors are contributing to topic interest. In summary, given the basic interactive nature of interest, both the characteristics of the person (individual factors) and the features of the environment (situational factors) can potentially influence topic interest.

Topic interest is influenced by students’ individual and situational interest. The topics students select to learn indicate their interest, and therefore, they are more likely to enjoy the learning process, for instance, when they are studying Mandarin through these topics that interest them. In other words, by learning Mandarin through the topics students are interested in, students’ individual or situational interest in the study of Mandarin may be able to be stimulated by the interestingness of the learning environment. As a result, by using students’ topic interests, it may be possible to promote their interest in the study of Mandarin.

2.5 Various language teaching strategies

The student-centred curriculum sculptures the shape of the Mandarin lesson according to the topic interests of students, forming fresh approaches to teaching. There are some teaching strategies that provide nutrition to the Mandarin lesson
which keep the body working efficiently to enhance students’ interest in learning Mandarin. The following teaching strategies give details about techniques and strategies that beginning teacher-researchers may use to create interestingness in Mandarin lessons and promote students’ Mandarin learning.

2.5.1 Cultural activities

South Australia’s Department of Education and Children’s Services (2009, p. 5) suggests that an intercultural approach which relates the foreign culture to the student’s own culture helps to increase student engagement with language education. In this way, students relate an unfamiliar language and culture to their own language and culture. As a result, better language engagement may be achieved:

> Intercultural language learning seeks to develop both proficiency in the target language and deeper cultural, linguistic, and personal knowledge . . . Language learning is a deeper, conceptual activity that involves explicit discussion and analysis of language, culture, and learning- it is a process of dialogue and reflection based on language and the culture that is embedded in it and communicated through it (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 4).

Sometimes, a teacher-researcher may teach grammar more than the language itself. However, just as babies learn their mothers’ language in a natural and authentic environment, students may learn better if they are exposed to the cultural context of the target foreign language. In this kind of environment, students are not forced to learn an unfamiliar language but instead, they are able to understand the language as it is culturally embedded. Furthermore, they are able to compare and contrast the culture of the target language with their own, and this is expected to greatly enhance their understanding of both of these cultures. Learning the culture can make students feel comfortable about the language and thus, they may be able to learn it more efficiently. Li Li (2005) uses her own language acquisition and teaching experiences to explain key features of second language education:

> . . . it seems whether a second language is closely related to the first one or not, it might be better acquired in a natural and authentic language environment assisted with proper teaching approaches . . . Rather than teaching
language itself, introducing culture and religion will greatly help avoid semantic errors when language learners are from very different cultural backgrounds like China and the UK (Li, 2005, p. 93).

In China, students begin to learn English in primary school, or even in kindergarten. However, due to teachers paying too much attention to the language itself and the lack of an English language environment, after many years’ study, students may not speak English fluently (Bolton, 2008, p. 9). Their reading competence is generally better than spoken competence. Consider babies for example: they acquire their native language first through listening and speaking, while writing is the last thing they learn of their native language. That is the reason why people learn the language much faster when they live in a country that speaks the language. In addition, cultural differences create more troubles than language differences in daily life; people may misunderstand each other even when they know the target foreign language well. Thus, creating a learning environment in which students feel comfortable is more important than infusing them with grammar and lexicology. Moreover, in a safe learning environment in which there are interesting cultural activities that students like to participate in, they are more likely to take the risks to experience a foreign culture and improve their learning of both the language and culture. Intercultural language activities can be adapted to promote students’ cross-cultural understanding and stimulate their interest in the study of Mandarin. Dervin (2010, p. 155-156) defines intercultural competence as follows:

the expected outcome of the insertion of interculturality in language learning and teaching, is a vital competence in our contemporary world. If one introduces this competence in one’s teaching, one needs to develop ways of making sure that it is developed. Over decades of research on the competence, several phrases have been used to describe it: “crosscultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, multicultural competence, transcultural competence, global competence.

When learning a language, students are necessarily and inevitably brought into contact with the target culture and knowledge of the language. Learning a language like Mandarin can be exciting but challenging, if not tiring. Adapting cultural and language learning activities may mitigate weariness and inspire students to learn
more about the language as well as its culture. Cultural learning has an important role in helping students to build their intercultural competence and stimulating their interests in learning Mandarin.

2.5.2 Games and language activities

When learning a foreign language, students may easily lose their focus, especially for young students. Ren (2009, p. 25) found in his study that “one of the top demotivating factors for the students was that Mandarin is hard to learn”. Mandarin is different from English, and can seem mysterious to Australian students at the beginning. However, after having regular Mandarin lessons, their anxiety about learning Mandarin gradually faded away as Mandarin became a “normal” subject for them. Then however, learning the language may become less alluring and more of a burden to them. At that stage, it is vital to grasp students’ attention in order to stimulate them to continue learning the language. Games which attract students’ attention present a possible way forward. Kumar and Lightner (2007, p. 53) argue that “games in the classroom can be a useful tool, one of many different methods and techniques used to involve students with their learning”. With respect to the effectiveness of using games in language lessons, Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1991, p. 1) observe that:

Language learning is hard work. One must make an effort to understand, to repeat accurately, to manipulate newly understood language and to use the whole range of known language in conversation or written composition. Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 1991, p. 1).

In Australia, ways of practising Mandarin are limited, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Students have few opportunities to practise Mandarin or experience Chinese culture, except for their Mandarin lessons. Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1991, p. 1) argue that games may help teachers to create an environment that makes learning a second language meaningful for students. Students try to understand the language in order to participate in games that interest
them. They need to be able to speak or write in response to others, and to express their own ideas or provide information:

The contribution of drilling lies in the concentration on a language form and its frequent use during a limited period of time. Many games provide this repeated use of a language form. By making the language convey information and opinion, games provide the key feature of “drill” with the opportunity to sense the working of language as living communication (Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 1991, p. 1).

By drilling important features of the language through games, students’ memory and understanding of the language can be enhanced. Games can be used to provide an intense and meaningful language practice and may become a central focus of a teacher’s routine practice. Kumar and Lightner (2007, p. 53) contend that “participation in an activity requires the use of content by the learner; thus ensuring students are working with the ideas that are being taught, and applying them”. In addition, language games offer opportunities for practising the skills that are required in learning a foreign language:

Games can be found to give practice in all the skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), in all the stages of the teaching/learning sequence (presentation, repetition, recombination and free use of language) and for many types of communication (e.g. encouraging, criticising, agreeing, explaining) (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 1991, p. 1).

Of course, not all games or activities always work, or work equally well; there are exceptions. Some games or activities turn into a disaster even though they are begun with good intentions. If students’ learning level and ability are not taken into consideration, the task designed by teacher-researchers may appear to be complicated for students. No matter how interesting the task is, students will not find it enjoyable and may complain about it. Moreover, they do not learn the language or gain further understanding when confronted with such difficult tasks:

It is essential to choose games which are appropriate to the class in terms of language and type of participation. Having chosen an appropriate game, its character and the aims and rules must be made clear to the learners. It
may be necessary to use the mother tongue to do this. If the learners are unclear about what they have to do, chaos, and disillusionment may result (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 1991, p. 6).

An appropriate game has to accord with students’ learning level, build upon the language they have learnt and be integrated with elements students find interesting. Although some games may appear to be tricky and complex, they can be understood by students, with detailed explanations from teacher-researchers. Therefore, it was vital for the games to have a middling level of difficulty and be clear to students. Only in this way could the effect of keeping students’ concentration and promoting and consolidating students’ learning of the games, be brought into play.

2.5.3 Rewards

By way of analogy, a classroom may be regarded as a body that is composed of various systems: a teaching system, a learning system, a system of teacher-student relationships, among others. Among all these systems, a reward system is primarily designed to motivate students’ learning. In almost every classroom, there is a reward system established by the teacher to carry students’ learning forward and make the learning environment more competitive and lifelike: “Reward systems for students are one among many innovations being tried across the country to jumpstart an increase in student motivation and results” (Raymond, 2008, p. 3). Rewards are popular among young students. As a motivational tool, a reward system can provide the extrinsic motivation to develop students’ enthusiasm for learning Mandarin. Tileston (2010, p. 9) argues that the reward shows students as eager for recognition and to realise their self-worth. It is an extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivational device. He also states that:

Extrinsic motivation is triggered by outside sources rather than from within. These outside forces may come in the form of a reward, such as candy, money, or stickers. There is nothing wrong with extrinsic motivation itself: We all work for pay checks and for recognition, for example. The problem with extrinsic rewards comes when it is the only or primary factor in motivating students to learn (Tileston, 2010, p. 9).
Students may be stimulated to learn Mandarin by using a classroom reward system. Furthermore, a reward has the function of shaping students’ behaviour in the classroom. In order to gain the reward, the students have to be made aware of how the reward system works. By explicitly acknowledging the rule, they are expected to consciously or unconsciously engage in practices that correspond to it. Raymond (2008, p. 16) argues that:

The rules of the reward system are more consistently applied, which in turn leads to a more uniform signal of expectations for students both for behaviour and for learning, which are well documented antecedents to achievement. At the same time, having strong confidence in the effectiveness of a reward system is likely also to improve its impact by reinforcing the expectations of the adults who employ it with students.

When conducted correctly and when students are informed properly, they may behave in the ways required by their classroom teacher—they may become more eager to answer questions, to behave in a good manner, and to learn, in order to be well thought of by their teacher. The positive outcomes from using a reward system are expected to be improvements in students’ learning and motivation, even though the reward may seem unexceptional. Nevertheless, some scholars are worried about the negative aspects of a reward system. Students may think the purpose is to get a reward; they might ignore the possibility that learning itself could be rewarding. Ash (2008, p. 3) worries that the use of external rewards may dampen students’ internal desire to learn. Manning and Bucher (2007) are also concerned that the use of external rewards in the classroom to motivate students may depress their internal desire for learning:

the more people receive rewards for doing something, the more likely it becomes that they will lose the intrinsic motivations to continue the behaviour that produced the reward. Thus, when a student works for the extrinsic reward (e.g., homework pass, token, or sticker) rather than the intrinsic reward (i.e., taking self-satisfaction in having appropriate behaviour), the intrinsic motivation begins to disappear and the individual learns to perform the behaviour solely to get the reward. Other educators believe that students might first be motivated by extrinsic rewards, but they eventually will perform the desired behaviours without the reward or with only an
intermittent reward. In other words, as the behaviour is shaped, the motivation becomes intrinsic rather than extrinsic (Manning & Bucher, 2007, p. 30).

The negative effects of external reward systems need to be carefully avoided, or at least to be mediated or mitigated. It is significant that students acknowledge that they are learning not for the reward, but to know Chinese language, culture and knowledge. In my classes, most students were not intrinsically interested in learning Mandarin. Therefore, rewards were used as a tool to stimulate their extrinsic motivation in learning, with the aim being to inspire them intrinsically.

2.5.4 Artistic activities

Incorporating students’ needs and suggestions into language teaching may help meet students’ desire to participate in decision-making about their learning. Experienced teachers have students using drawing or colouring to express their ideas, and encourage them to do so. For most primary school students, colour and pictures are part of their everyday interests, especially at school. To meet students’ interests, Henley (2010) identified several approaches to meet students’ need for fun, such as incorporating music and art in the class, or adapting television game show formats for classroom use. These kinds of activities were focused to work and have a positive effect on students’ enthusiasm for learning. Henley (2010, p. 120) observes:

Other intrinsic needs described by educators who view motivation from a developmental viewpoint include the need for control (Glasser, 1996), the need for generosity, (Brokenleg, 1999), and the need for fun (Mendler, 1992). Teachers try to meet intrinsic needs in a variety of ways, including providing successful experiences to meet students’ need for mastery and allowing student choice to meet students’ need for power and control.

Brooks (2009, p. 10) regards drawing as a social tool that mediates new knowledge and current understandings. Drawing is important for young children, providing them:

with their first means of making a permanent, tangible, concrete, and communicable record of their ideas so that most young children have a strong desire to draw. Drawing, and mark making, are also among the child’s
first efforts at abstraction and the use of a symbol system. Facility with abstractions and symbol systems are essential for school-based literacy like mathematics, information technology, reading and writing (Brooks, 2009, p. 9).

Drawing and colouring provide children opportunities to express their thoughts, feelings and interests via images. There are no fixed criteria to mark their work. They are free from being judged right or wrong. What is more, they are able to share their drawings and colouring to communicate with classmates, teachers and parents. Brooks (2009) argues that drawing helps students to understand and use new knowledge and carry it forward:

Drawing allows the children to recognize each other’s thoughts and ideas, link them to their own and to carry these thoughts and ideas forward to future projects. At an intercontextual level drawing links cultural practices and concepts with ways of being or actions taken. Drawing allows children to explicitly link previous experience with new learning. Drawing helps children to trust their own knowledge and provides a vehicle to work together to jointly construct a mutual understanding. (Brooks, 2009, p. 22-23)

Drawing helps children to have a better understanding of new knowledge by linking it to their personal experiential knowledge. Such a combination is a common tool in classrooms, whether it be science, English, mathematics or Mandarin. For instance, students may learn Chinese animals by drawing and colouring pictures of them and their names in Han zi; in this way students engage in ways of learning with which they are quite familiar. By skilfully adapting drawing and colouring to Mandarin classes, the students’ language learning may be promoted.

2.5.5 Audio-visual tools and the internet

As noted by Henry (2010), adapting television game show formats for classroom use meets students’ need for fun. With the development of new high-speed technologies, television and the Internet have become popular and effective tools to assist students’ learning. Teachers and students can easily access the Internet as needed during lessons, which is very convenient for teachers, enriching their curriculum resources
and expanding students’ knowledge. Also, the students like programs on television as well as the Internet, since they are eager to know more via appealing pictures, animations and videos. These technologies encourage students to concentrate on the lessons and to learn more knowledge. Tsai (2008, pp. 17-18) argues that Internet technology helps teachers to meet students’ needs for control over their own study and gaining more valuable knowledge:

The Internet technology has shaped many profound insights for the development of so-called constructivist learning environments. For instance, the Internet-based learning environments, with hypertextual structures of presenting information, provide more flexible ways of learning to fulfill individual needs. Students also can have more alternatives of and control over their learning time and pace, as well as the learning objectives and outcomes. Through the Internet, students can navigate and search abundant on-line information and then acquire useful materials and relevant knowledge.

Regardless of the positive effects of new technology on teaching and learning, some teachers are worried about its negative effects on students. On the one hand, the Internet is what students are interested in and is a useful tool to link their everyday interests to their study. On the other hand, the masses of information on the Internet and television can distract students from focusing on their studies. Even so, with new technology, teachers may create a new and engaging classroom learning system that is able to bring students into a fascinating, informative world. It can fulfil students’ interest in exploring new knowledge and make intellectual life in the classroom abundant.

2.6 The professional learning of beginning teacher-researchers

The professional learning of the beginning teacher-researchers involves them critically reflecting upon and analysing evidence of their practice in the classroom.
2.6.1 Teacher development

Teachers’ professional learning typically starts with a concern about improving their teaching skills and then shifts to a consideration of how to improve students’ learning. Teachers’ professional learning has a far-reaching influence on students’ learning and their interest in the study of Mandarin (Timperley, 2008, p. 6). Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg and Pittman (2008, p. 417) relate teachers’ professional learning to students’ educational achievement:

Teacher professional development programs, by and large, seek to increase teachers’ professional knowledge, improve classroom practices, and ultimately foster student learning and achievement gains.

Teachers’ practices are closely related to students’ behaviour and learning outcomes. Teachers’ professional learning helps teachers with “understanding the links between particular teaching activities, the ways different groups of students respond, and what their students actually learn” (Timperley, 2008, p.8). As a result, the development of teacher-researchers’ professional practices and knowledge has a substantial impact on the effectiveness of Mandarin lessons. An interesting lesson plan needs a mature teaching practice that motivates students. If teacher-researchers are equipped to bring good lesson plans and various teaching strategies into play, make their lessons absorbing and have students’ long-term interest in the field of study in focus, then they can better facilitate students’ learning and cultivate their interest in the study of Mandarin. Therefore, one of the essential elements for promoting students’ interest in learning Mandarin is teachers’ professional learning. Beginning teacher-researchers have little experience in how to teach, to communicate with students, and to obtain students’ attention. As a result, one important goal of this research project was to deepen and extend my professional learning as a beginning teacher-researcher in a range of ways.

2.6.2 Teacher identity

A beginning teacher-researcher who comes to Australia from overseas with no experience of teaching in this country may regard herself as a student rather than a
teacher. This self-determined identity as a student may block her learning and becoming a professional teacher, let alone feeling as though she is a member of the school staff. In the process of building an identity as a teacher-researcher, the recognition of other colleagues is vital:

in order to avoid a feeling of alienation and split personality, it is important for a teacher to find her true professional identity and to maintain this identity as something pure, solid and stable... and thereby recognise him-or herself as the same person across situations and independent of specific context (Søreide, 2007, p. 24).

For a teacher-researcher, being recognised as a teacher by other teachers at the schools helps to form, inform and reform one’s identity, giving those beginning their career more confidence to deal with teaching and research. Piot, Kelchtermans, and Ballet (2010, pp. 264-265) explain the influence of teaching colleagues’ acknowledgement on beginning teachers:

Recent research on beginning teachers shows that the striving for order and discipline by beginning teachers also needs to be interpreted in terms of self-interests: teachers want to be acknowledged by their colleagues as being able to command respect from students, thus establishing social recognition of their identity as teachers.

In this interest-based language teaching research project, students’ interest was the central focus of investigation. However, a teacher’s own interest also affects students’ learning. One of the most important interests and needs of someone beginning their career in education is their identification as a teacher-researcher. Being welcomed and recognised by other teachers at school makes it much easier for beginners to seize their identity as teacher-researchers, which fulfils their interest. As a result, they are more willing to find more ways of shaping their teaching to meet students’ interests and to improve their learning. Therefore, the interest of a teacher is related to students’ interests. Students’ interests cannot be fully taken into account unless the teacher can find ways to meet his/her own needs as a teacher.
2.6.3 Classroom management

Manning and Burcher (2007, p. 5) contend that behaviour problems in the classroom have a negative impact on both the teaching and learning processes, blocking the way to success. A chaotic class loses students’ valuable learning time and can never provide a good learning experience for them and therefore, undermines students’ interests in study. As a result, it is necessary to create a classroom management plan as part of one’s lesson plan, to organise and implement it:

When students are engaged in their lessons, disruptions are minimal. Conversely, monotonous, dull lessons create boredom, which in turn leads students to seek out distractions. Effective classroom managers are enthusiastic, they know their curriculum, they take their students’ need and interests into account when planning, and they use a variety of teaching methods (Henley, 2010, p. 19).

Students tend to be more focused when they find the lesson is fascinating and interesting. A vapid lesson “forces” students to look for interestingness from things besides what they are meant to be learning. They will be off-task and think or do things irrelevant to their study. In this case, classroom management strategies may help to reduce disruptions in the classroom to a minimum and promote the learning process. However, classroom management is not just about supervising or correcting students’ misbehaviour in the classroom in order to make them listen and learn. It is a combination of elements within the classroom as much as the school as a whole. Further, Manning and Burcher (2007) explain that classroom management should not be equated with discipline.

Management looks at the organization and operation of a classroom including classroom arrangement, the individuals in the classroom, the behaviour of the teacher and students, the instructional strategies used by the teacher, the interactions of the students and teacher, the atmosphere of the school, and the community in which the school is located (Manning & Burcher, 2007, p. 15).

Manning and Burcher (2007, p. 4) define classroom management as:
strategies for assuring physical and psychological safety in the classroom; techniques for changing student misbehaviours and for teaching self-discipline; methods of assuring an orderly progression of events during the school day; and instructional techniques that contribute to students’ positive behaviours.

Classroom management includes not only managing students’ behaviour during a lesson, but also assuring students’ safety, and ways of ensuring that the teaching and learning process is well structured and cumulative. In other words, classroom management targets both students and teachers themselves. A good classroom management plan enables students to learn in a smooth and productive environment, and to achieve this the teacher manages to conduct each lesson in a logical sequence, while managing the students’ behaviour and discipline, and also managing to keep his/her teaching well-organised. This interactive view is consistent with Henley’s (2010, p. 18) ideas about classroom management:

How teachers structure their daily classroom program, the way they communicate with students, and the creativity they put into their lessons has as much to do with student behaviour as the characteristics of individual students.

These three core activities of structure, instruction and discipline comprise the everyday work of classroom management. They interact and influence each other. A failure in any of them may result in poor learning and teaching outcomes. As will be seen in the evidentiary chapters, in my teaching I made mistakes in all three of these aspects and this led to failures in the teaching of Mandarin and in students’ learning of the language.

2.6.3.1 Structure

First, structure refers to the framework of the class, and is evident in how a lesson progresses. Structure is necessary to organise a smooth teaching process, including transitions between and the arrangement of learning tasks for students. Henley (2010, p. 19) defines structure as the: 

organizational practices, routines, and procedures that form a platform for daily activities. Structure involves such
concrete issues as how desks are arranged and influences such abstract concerns as group dynamics. Structure evolves with time. It is flexible and responsive to learners’ needs. Flexibility allows for changes that will improve the learning climate.

If, by way of analogy, a lesson is thought of as a human body, the structure is the bones of the lesson. A poor class structure can never make for successful teaching. A suitable structure makes use of the always limited teaching time, meets students’ learning needs and helps the teacher to deliver the content in an appropriate environment. A key element that belongs to the structure required for effective classroom management is preparation for a lesson. It may seem insignificant, but it plays an important role in structuring lessons in practice. Manning and Bucher argue that students’ misbehaviours may be caused by the inadequate preparation and disorganisation of their teacher. To set the classroom for success, Manning and Bucher (2007, p. 15) provide advice about good preparation:

Arrange your room; obtain the supplies that you need; review the faculty/staff handbook; go over the school procedures; prepare all the materials you will need; making a seating chart for the classroom; prepare a checklist of supplies that students should have and make it available to parents and local business.

Good preparation helps the teacher to keep his/her students on task. When all the teaching materials and curriculum resources are prepared in advance and every incident that may happen in during the learning/teaching process is taken into consideration as part of the lesson plan, then it is less likely that there will be misbehaving students in the classroom.

2.6.3.2 Instruction

Instruction is an equally important part of managing the classroom. Making good use of every instructional opportunity can help teachers to strike a balance between variety and challenge, and increase students’ engagement in learning. Henley (2010, p. 19) explains that instruction has to be grounded in teachers’ knowledge of the curriculum and human development as it relates to students.
An elementary teacher who subjects students to a steady diet of drills and lectures is clearly unaware that the students’ cognitive development requires regular doses of concrete learning experiences accented by learning centres and other activity-based methods.

Instruction should be based on understanding students’ characteristics and learning development. This is necessary to ensure students gain good understanding and achieve learning goals. Therefore, a teacher has to get to know his/her students well, especially their capabilities for learning. Furthermore, when dealing with the whole class, the students who fall behind need to be given more attention. Designing activities and games that suit most students is one of the key principles of teaching. For example, if the learning process is too slow this could cause boredom among higher-level students. Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1991, p. 5) contend that it is important for teachers to control the learning process and keep a balance that is acceptable for most of the students.

“Control is the greatest in teacher-led class or team games, especially those entailing listening or repeating; it is least in interaction games played by groups or pairs of learners on their own. In guided activities, some of the language that is required is provided by the teacher or by the content, while the rest of the language is provided by the learners themselves. In free activities, all the language is provided by the learners.”

A lesson without well-organised instructions leads to student confusion, and to their having less interest in learning the content. To take students’ learning needs into consideration, teacher-researchers may design their instruction in ways that students might better understand. The analysis of evidence in the ensuing chapters shows that as a result of clear instructions in the Mandarin classes, the students had a clearer idea about their learning and less feeling of discomfort. Under these circumstances, they were able to enjoy their lessons.

2.6.3.3 Discipline

Discipline is an important and obvious part of classroom management. It happens in every classroom and is embedded in students’ daily routines. It is sometimes
assumed that discipline is the most effective way to keep students under control. However, discipline is not just a matter of asking students to do the right thing in the classroom. Henley’s (2010, p. 19) definition of classroom discipline indicates there is a variety of means to lead students to develop good behaviour:

Discipline refers to the approaches and strategies teachers use to guide and promote constructive student behaviour. Discipline is as immediate as correcting misbehaviour and as far-reaching as developing a trusting relationship.

In classroom management, discipline is the most direct way of putting students’ classroom behaviour right. During the learning process, some students’ misbehaviour may affect the whole class and cause a lesson to degenerate into chaos. In this case, even the students who are very interested in the lesson will be disturbed and they will be not able to continue their learning. Consequently, a good learning atmosphere is ruined. At this time, discipline acts like a quick behaviour modifier to re-engage students in the learning process, restoring their interest in the lesson. It helps to pull a turbulent class quickly on to the right track.

In addition, classroom discipline also includes anticipating potential problems, resolving minor inattention and disruptions before they cause bigger problems, as well as being aware of the classroom space and safety (Henley, 2010, p. 19). Being a Chinese volunteer teacher-researcher, I was not responsible for managing the class, as there was always a classroom teacher present when I was teaching. However, I still needed to maintain classroom discipline, since the classroom teacher did not always notice a problem or did not want to interrupt my teaching all the time. Therefore, I needed to develop ways of disciplining, as part of my professional learning: “The actions of educators, the policies they establish, their instructional expertise, and their beliefs about students have a direct impact on classroom management” (Manning & Bucher, 2007, p. 14). The techniques a teacher-researcher establishes to keep students on task shapes the learning state of the class and expands and develops the disciplinary strategies used to affect teaching and learning processes.
To sum up, structure, instruction and discipline are three indispensable elements of classroom management. Missing out or neglecting any one of them may lead to behavioural problems, which are contrary to productive and interesting lessons. Therefore, by managing the classroom successfully, beginning teacher-researchers learn to produce lessons that make students feel pleasure and thus, increase their interests in learning.

2.6.4. Teacher’s authority

In a classroom, the most important relationship is between the teacher and his/her students. The teacher-student relationship strongly relates to teacher’s teaching and students’ learning. A terrible relationship affects emotions on both sides and for students it determines how they feel about and their interest in, study:

“How daily interactions are carried out—the nature of how students relate to one another and their teacher—is a crucial element in determining whether school is a successful experience” (Henley, 2010, p. 19).

Building a healthy and productive student teacher relationship helps to make learning successful. However, for beginning teacher-researchers who have not fully identified themselves as teachers, one of the more important sources of professional identification comes from their students. During teaching time, students’ disobedience of beginning teacher-researchers’ instructions hinders the process of building a professional identity. Chinese students grow up in an environment where teachers are highly respected and have unconditional authority in the classroom. Of course, this has been criticised, since teachers cannot be absolute authorities (e.g. Vithal, 1999; Amit & Fried, 2005). In Western countries, teachers are regarded as “leaders” or “captains”, while teachers in China are regarded as “gardeners” (园丁 yuan ding) who control and cultivate their students. Gao (2008, p. 156) argues that teachers in China are provided with the security to confirm their authority:

[Chinese] cultural traditions provided teachers with the security to assert their professional identities and professional authority, which was crucial for them to attain and maintain the cooperation of students in the pedagogic
process. Within such an educational tradition, teachers emerged as extremely powerful authority figures. The reverence Chinese students have towards teachers has been frequently cited as an important cause of their reticence in class (Gao, 2008, p. 155-156).

Chinese students’ compliance with their teacher may cause problems, such as supposed losses of creativity and initiative. In Western countries, the teachers need to earn students’ respect and obedience. This helps to build a supposedly equal relationship between teachers and students, supposedly giving the students more freedom and space for creativity, which is very beneficial for creating new knowledge. However, to keep students learning and make sure they are led by the teacher is also important:

While a grasp of the important underlying psychological bases of much adolescent behaviour may help to reassure teachers that challenge to their authority has, to a certain extent, a functional basis, it remains the teacher’s task to ensure that students learn in an environment that is conducive to sustained engagement and reflection (Elliott & Stemler, 2008, p. 76).

When a teacher gains some “authority” from their students, it is easier for him or her to ensure that all students have productive and smooth learning experiences. This helps to keep students’ interests in learning a subject. In conceptualising the development of teacher authority in the classroom, Elliott and Stemler (2008, p. 85) argue that non-verbal behaviour in varying forms can be more effective and more powerful for managing students:

The teacher’s use of space, and visual behavior, in the classroom sends out powerful messages about their confidence and sense of professional authority. The more the teacher facilitates visual links with the students while projecting a powerful voice, the more his or her behavior is likely to be perceived as dominant.

Rather than calling out, teachers employ non-verbal classroom management strategies to exercise their professional authority and give students a feeling of greater pressure to correct their misbehaviour. After one’s authority as a teacher is
developed, students are more willing to respond to one’s instructions and pay more attention to the lesson.

2.7 Interrelationships among “三驾马车”

The interrelationships among the three forces “三驾马车” /san jia ma che/ are shown in Figure 2.3. The teacher’s professional learning, students’ learning and interests in the study of Mandarin, and the lesson design, are closely related to each other. The teacher-researcher’s professional learning affects the effectiveness of the lesson plan and students’ learning, therefore influencing students’ interest in the study of Mandarin. Students’ interests and learning were the basis for designing Mandarin lessons and had either positive or negative effect on the teacher’s teaching performance. Furthermore, the Mandarin lesson designed to use various teaching strategies is expected to promote students’ learning and the teacher’s teaching. Consequently, the interrelationships between these san jia ma che determine students’ overall interest in Mandarin learning.

---

2 When teaching Mandarin, teachers in New South Wales are encouraged to use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the professional foreign language teaching method. Analysing the needs of students and making plans is very important in CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). A communicative approach is different from traditional second language teaching methods such as the grammar translation method. CLT tends to explore the interests of students and use different ways to engage these in different situations. Sitwell’s (1987) Communicative Approach advocates engaging students’ needs in teaching and using strategies to adapt to different classes. The idea is that it is useful to know the background of students and develop lesson plans that allow for different ways of communicating different student experiences.
2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the literature that informed the development of this study. It has focused on four aspects: the concepts of interest and interest-based language teaching, design of interest-based language teaching, various language teaching strategies from promoting students’ interest and learning, and teacher-researchers’ professional learning. In Chapter 3, the research methodology used in this study is explained and justified. Reflections, questionnaires, interviews and observational feedback were the main methods used for data collection and served as the data source to provide the evidence for the findings from this study.
Chapter 3

Research method: Teacher as action researcher

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research methods and strategies used for the study reported in this thesis. It explains and justifies the selection of the research strategy. Issues of validity, the ethical conduct of the study and the generalisations possible from this study are described. In addition, this chapter also gives details about the research design, including the research setting, the participants, data collection and analysis principles and procedures.

3.2 Teacher-as-researcher strategy

As a beginning teacher of Mandarin, I tried my best to become familiar with the Australian education system and its culture. Each school class is unique, which means that a variety of language approaches need to be tested and verified against the interests of students in a particular class. Therefore, I needed to look into each class, find its characteristics and figure out the most suitable approach for investigating ways of improving my teaching of it. I expected to develop and improve the quality of teaching strategies and content by researching one or more of these classes. I was inspired by Stenhouse’s (1975, p. 143) comment: “The idea is that of an educational science in which each classroom is a laboratory, each teacher a member of the scientific community.” Educational research and professional learning need teacher-researchers to investigate their teaching practices as a way of creating a better understanding about how to stimulate the teaching and learning of Mandarin. As a teacher-researcher, I want to find out what might constitute relevant content and strategies to promote students’ learning of Mandarin. What students were taught and the way they were taught were the primary concerns for me in this
study. Understanding the students was crucial to improving in my teaching through research. Developing an identity as a teacher-researcher helped me to find ways to inspire Australian students by continuously reflecting on and analysing evidence of my teaching practice.

Researching the classroom is one crucial step to making progress in improving one’s quality of teaching. All reasonable curriculum research and development, whether it is worked out by an individual teacher or whether it is a national program, needs teachers-researchers in order to test ideas in practice and to create a better understanding of teaching and learning. Stenhouse (1975, p. 143) comments: “All well-founded curriculum research and development, whether the work of an individual teacher, of a school, of a group working in a teachers’ centre or of a group working within the co-ordinating framework of a national project, is based on the study of classrooms.”

A teacher-researcher should choose a curriculum that suits his/her class. By reflecting on evidence of the effects of lessons, one can revise one’s teaching content and strategies. Being a teacher-researcher, I have used this thesis to contribute new knowledge about content and strategies for teaching/learning Mandarin, and this may provide the basis for curriculum revisions. By way of analogy, this process is like an experiment, where the classroom is the laboratory. The view that all teachers should also be learners by being researchers is an integral claim of this thesis. Teachers continuously need to learn more about teaching methods and their area of teaching, and to do so in a systematic, thoughtful and tactful way. As learners, teachers engage in educational research as professionals:

If we could get general acceptance of the proposition that all teachers should be learners and create a public research methodology and accepted professional ethic covering this situation, we would have a basis for observing the teaching of colleagues which greatly reduced the element of threat in the situation (Stenhouse, 1975, p.156).

Teachers may be experts in their teaching area, but not absolute, unquestioning authorities. Teachers can learn more from both public and personal theories, their students and colleagues. Teachers should also be learners, and should use their
knowledge of teaching to create new research-based knowledge that can be made public and used to improve education.

Teacher-researchers need to reflect on the evidence of their practices. It is crucial for teachers to make a connection between their teaching practices, reflections, and their personal theories in ways that make these public. Teachers develop their personal theories when they have studied public theories and have taught for a number of years. Critically reflecting on what they have done in class helps teachers to develop a deeper understanding of their personal teaching theory and revise their teaching approaches and content. Meanwhile, making a personal theory public is beneficial to the profession:

. . . we should value practitioners’ personal theories and encourage them to make explicit their tacit theory to help them theorise from their practice, at a number of different levels of reflection . . . Personal theories need to be revealed (at different levels) so that they can be scrutinized, challenged, compared to public theories, and then confirmed or reconstructed. “Personal” and “public” theories need to be viewed as living, intertwining tendrils of knowledge which grow from and feed into practice (Griffiths & Tan, 1992, p. 71).

Public theories and personal theories should not be regarded as two separate entities, because public theories are rooted in personal theories. Teachers’ personal theories are based on their critical reflections about the evidence of their practices, which they can then publicise. During the first stage of the teaching and research reported in this thesis, I studied various theories of education and teaching strategies and tried to take them up in my daily teaching practices. Then, by critically reflecting on and analysing evidence of their effects in my Mandarin lessons, I revised and improved the quality of my teaching, its content and my skills and strategies, all of which helped to promote students’ learning and their interest in the study of Mandarin. Meanwhile, I made progress in my own professional learning and developed my personal, theoretical understanding of Mandarin teaching and of researching Australian students’ learning of Mandarin. As a result, my personal theories may contribute to public theory through this thesis and other teachers may benefit from
this. Furthermore, my contribution to knowledge about quality teaching content and strategies may result in improvements to the curriculum-in-practice.

3.3 Action research project

As a beginning teacher-researcher from overseas, I knew little about either the Australian educational system or teaching practice in Australian classrooms. What was more, I came across a major problem—students’ lack of interest in the study of Mandarin—the subject I was volunteering to teach them, and the reason why I had come to Australia. On the one hand, I wanted to solve this problem at the school in which I worked as a volunteer. One the other hand, I also wanted to improve my teaching in order to promote students’ learning and interest in the study of Mandarin. These two purposes provided the target for my research method, namely: action research. After comparing the research strategies of case study \(^3\) and autoethnography \(^4\), I chose action research as my research strategy since

The purpose of action research is to provide teacher researcher with a method for solving everyday problems in schools so that they may improve both student learning and teacher effectiveness. Action research is largely about developing the professional disposition of teachers, that is, encouraging teachers to be continuous learners—in their classrooms and of their practice (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2008, p. 486).

---

\(^3\) "A ‘case’ can be seen as a bounded system comprised of an individual, institution, or entity, and the site and context in which social action takes place, the boundaries of which may not be clear and are determined by the scope of the researcher’s interests. The ‘study’ of a case requires the researcher to select methods and tools appropriate to the case” (Hood, 2009, p. 69). A case happens in a particular setting, with certain participants. For the case, the researcher chooses methods that are regarded as useful or important to investigating the case, and monitors developments. However, the case study does not see the teacher-researcher’s development as an upward spiral of development.

\(^4\) Autoethnography takes the researcher herself as the subject, and the experiences of the researcher as the research content. Autoethnography is one’s personal exploration of one’s first-hand experience of teaching: “The autoethnography was my personal interpretation of my teaching experience. As it comprises stories of the past and is descriptive, stories can be wrong by memory recall. But they don’t ‘threaten the project of personal narrative’, for the storytelling is not for ‘a neutral attempt to mirror the facts of my past teaching work’. The stories are ‘only within the memory-politics surrounding the accuracy of recovered memories’” (Ellis & Bochner cited in Song & Taylor, 2005, p. 146). Since this project was not of my own memory about my own teaching, the autoethnography was not a suitable research strategy.
Therefore, I decided to use action research as the main method to conduct my research project, which involved an "upward spiral of systematic study of my own teaching practices. I chose action research as my research strategy as it offers a step-by-step problem-solving, problem-posing process. This action research project involved planning, enacting, evaluating and reviewing the strategies of interest-based language teaching through an upward spiral seeking improvement in quality teaching. Of course, action research is a flexible process that need not progress exactly according to the plan, nor achieve goals without rethinking them or making fundamental changes during the research cycle (Stringer, 2007, p. 9). During the action research project on which this thesis is based, I experienced ups and downs. Sometimes, I went the wrong way and sometimes I stayed where I was without making any progress. But action research is designed for this purpose. It helped me to examine my teaching practice closely and facilitated the problem-solving process.

Action research is concerned not only with how to solve a problem; how a problem comes to exist is an essential element in the investigation. This means that I needed to establish, as far as possible, what causes things to happen, rather than focusing on the situation as it is now. For this reason, it was important to understand how people viewed the issues and the reasons for their responses (Stringer, 2007, 19). Specific questions about students' everyday interests and willingness to learn Mandarin were administered. Numbers were employed to measure the actual effect of interest-based language teaching, in terms of having students express a desire to study Mandarin. Qualitative and quantitative analysis were employed in this study. Pre- and post-questionnaires about students' everyday interests and their willingness to learn Mandarin were administered. Numbers were employed to measure the actual effect of interest-based language teaching, in terms of having students express a desire to study Mandarin.

The aim of this research was to investigate ways of solving the problem of Australian students' lack of interest in the study of Mandarin through the systematic study of my own teaching practices. I chose action research as my research strategy as it defines action research as "a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems". Stringer & Tan (1992, p. 77) define action research as "a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems".
continue learning Mandarin. Qualitative methods helped me as a teacher-researcher to improve my teaching strategies continuously. Classroom teacher observations were a source of suggestions about how I could make use of students’ everyday interests so they would be more involved in the learning process. Further, interviews with the classroom teachers helped to triangulate the other data sources and examine the effect of the whole project.

3.3.1 Characteristics of action research

Action research progresses through a cyclic process, being an interactive approach to inquiry that balances problem posing and problem solving actions. It is implemented in a collaborative context using data-driven conceptual analysis to understand underlying causes that enable the better planning of future professional and curriculum changes (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). There are many well-known versions of action research, and they include different levels of reflection. However, most of these levels of reflection show a similar process: of progress which begins with action and ends with action:

. . . numerous books on action research display this graphically by representing the cycle of action research as a simple progression through action, observation, evaluation and planning, which then becomes a spiral over time (Griffiths & Tan, 1992, p. 77).

Action research is an ongoing cyclical process of investigation of moving from action to observation or data collection, to analysis and the planning of new, more informed action. What students are taught when learning a language, and in what way they are taught, were the primary concerns of this study. At the school, I observed other teachers’ teaching as well as keeping a fieldwork diary of my observations of what was happening during my own lessons. Through action reflection and analysis, I was able to draw on evidence of my teaching content and strategies in order to revise and improve the quality of my teaching plans and strategies. Well-informed, well-thought-out teaching content and strategies were developed by researching and teaching my classes as a teacher-researcher.
Action research takes the principle that a particular setting requires a specific method. Research techniques need to be modified to fit different situations. “Action” and “research” are meant to help each other:

Action research is a paradigm that reflects the principle that reality is constructed through individual or collective conceptualizations and definitions of a particular situation requiring a wide spectrum of research methodologies. Characteristically, action research studies a problematic situation in an ongoing systematic and recursive way to take action to change that situation (Pine, 2009, p. 30).

Action research aims to solve problems that emerge in real situations. Because solving a problem is an ongoing process, action research tries to achieve an anticipated goal by using measures that are assumed to be helpful in the situation. In teacher action research, teacher-researchers recognise problems in both teaching and students’ learning. They look into the problem and find a practical solution for the problem. Then, when they are putting the plan into action, they continuously change the plan according to evidence of the changing situation:

Action research is a process of concurrently inquiring about problems and taking action to solve them. It is a sustained, intentional, recursive, and dynamic process of inquiry in which the teacher takes an action—purposefully and ethically in a specific classroom context—to improve teaching/learning. Action research is change research, a nonlinear, recursive, cyclical process of study designed to achieve concrete change in a specific situation, context, or work setting to improve teaching/learning (Pine, 2009, p. 30).

Action research changes, according to changes in the situation being investigated. Teacher-researchers make plans before taking action so they can be well-informed. However, the problem may change when a plan is put into action. The previous plan may have to change as more is learnt about the problem, or as a new problem emerges. Action research is a flexible research strategy that means teacher-researchers can revise their plans after due consideration of the real situation.

---

5 In a flexible research design, “thoughts and attention will have to be given to the purpose(s) of your research; to theory; to the research questions to which you seek answers; to the methods of data collection; and to the sampling strategy which will be needed to get these answers” (Robson, p. 164).
Students in primary schools are dynamic and changeable. Their interests may shift over time or they may become interested in topics other than Mandarin. By using action research, I was able to get a better sense of the real situation and work out new plans to adapt to changes in students’ learning.

Action research combines research with action, where theories are developed and tested through practice. Teacher-researchers contribute to educational change and innovation by using their first-hand experience of teaching as the source of evidence for their research. Through action research, teacher-researchers can test public and/or personal theories in reality. They are able to recognise and modify teaching strategies as well as the teaching content for students based on the collection and analysis of evidence. Pine (2009, p. 21) states that:

In educational action research, teachers, who traditionally have been the subjects of research, conduct research on their own situations and circumstances in their classrooms and schools. They conduct their research according to Lewin’s basic dictum, “No research without action—no action without research” (as cited in Marrow, 1977, p.10.) teachers are privileged through the action research process to produce knowledge and consequently experience that “knowledge is power.” As knowledge and action are joined in changing practice, there is growing recognition of the power of teachers to change and reform education from the insider rather than having change and reform imposed top down from the outside. Through action research, “teachers transcend the truth of power through the power of truth” (Whitehead, 1989).

Teachers are the key group of people who actually know much about what is happening in their classroom on a day-to-day basis. Their knowledge about teaching content and strategies can be updated every day. By becoming a teacher-researcher, I developed the capability to investigate whether a curriculum and teaching plans suited my students. As a beginning teacher, I studied a variety of educational theories and techniques, worked to get to know my students and sought to put these teaching theories into practice in an appropriate way. In my research, I made use of students’ interests to stimulate their study of Mandarin, and also evaluated the effects of certain lessons so I could improve my lessons and teach my next class to see how it would go.
Action research enables teachers to look into their own classrooms and use a different monitoring process for data collection to identify, solve and pose problems about their own teaching. Their aim is to improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning. Thus, research is necessary:

Action research is productive for classroom practitioners as it focuses on issues and questions related to immediate practice and application. It involves exploring and discovering more about a specific issue which has significance for a teacher in relation to his or her own classroom and students. Because it is a flexible and open-ended approach to inquiry, the teacher can select the methods used as needed and change them as new insights emerge and different techniques are required. Action research uses mainly qualitative research data-collection methods, but particularly observation, interviews, questionnaires, and diary studies, and may also use discourse analysis (Burns, 2009, p. 115).

Different classrooms present differing situations and problems. No single teaching or research method can be applied in every classroom, which means that, in order to improve the quality of teaching theory and practice, teacher-researchers should investigate their own classrooms, critically reflect on evidence of their own practice and theory, and identify effective ways to achieve better teaching results. This form of research provides teachers a variety of ways to measure the real situation of a classroom and help themselves to evaluate and improve the quality of their own teaching.

3.3.2 Action research for teacher-researchers’ professional learning

Action research plays an important role in teacher-researchers’ professional learning. As a cycle of continuous self-examination and improvement, action research helps teacher-researchers gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum, their teaching, their students and their learning. Pine (2009, p. 92) argues that teacher-researchers can develop and sustain their professional standing by producing theories and knowledge that help students’ study:
Action research can be conceived as a form of professional development characterized as an ongoing process of systematic study in which teachers examine their own teaching and students’ learning through descriptive reporting, purposeful conversation, collegial sharing, and critical reflection for the purpose of improving classroom practice (Pine, 2009, p. 93).

Action research enables teacher-researchers to examine their own teaching theories and practices in a variety of ways. As an ongoing process of self-improvement, action research helps teacher-researchers to find productive ways to establish what they need to learn and to improve. Pine (2009, p. 94) regards teacher action research:

As a process of professional development, action research empowers teachers to study their own circumstances, transform their experiences, develop and articulate craft knowledge, take purposeful responsibility for improving practice, and secure ownership of professional knowledge.

As a beginning teacher-researcher I have learnt a variety of teaching techniques and strategies through this research. Initially, in the given teaching context, I did not know how to use these teaching strategies, not to mention which strategies might best suit my students. By taking advantage of the adoptive process of action research, I was able to use different, efficient ways to evaluate my teaching and my students’ learning through a continuous process. I was able to examine whether my curriculum plans were practicable in her classes. By analysing the effects of teaching techniques and strategies over and over, a teacher-researcher might be able to establish a better way to convey essential knowledge in more efficient ways. Therefore, action research provides a good opportunity to gradually become a quality professional teacher-researcher.

Knowledge is traditionally viewed as being produced by and coming from, external sources of authority, and teachers may take this for granted, especially if they see this as a basis for teacher/student interactions. However, action research raises the possibility that teachers’ knowledge can be shaped by studying their own actual teaching and learning situations. Pine (2009, p. 97) emphasises the importance of this for the efficacy of practice:
Action research assumes that significance and meaning lie in the actual situations of teaching and learning. It also assumes that knowledge of, about and for teaching and learning should be determined by what teachers and learners actually do. This suggests that if effective teaching and learning are to occur, teachers must have a central role in the development of knowledge that affects the care, education, and development of children.

In action research, knowledge is not determined by nor restricted to that of official authorities. Instead, it comes from and is generated through teachers’ actual practices of investigation and theorising evidence of their own practices. Knowledge is produced and critiqued in real contexts. Teachers analyse evidence they collect or generate as a way of getting to know their students better. In this process, students’ learning needs are taken into consideration and teaching strategies are modified by teachers to suit students’ construction of knowledge.

3.4 Rigour of the action research

3.4.1 Credibility and Reliability

In this study, different methods were used to collect data in order to provide credible and reliable findings. It is an advantage if action researchers are able to triangulate different sources of data so as to enhance the credibility of their research:

Triangulation is the process of using multiple methods, data collection strategies, and data sources to obtain a more complete picture of what is being studied and to cross-check information. The strength of qualitative research lies in collecting information in many ways, rather than relying solely on one, in such a way that the strength of one compensates for the weakness of another (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2008, p. 377).

In the process of collecting and analysing data, it was vital in this study to have multiple sources of data:

As has become apparent in the description of each of these data sources, no one data source is inherently preferable
across all studies. Each has its strengths and limitations, and the idea is to match what it is you want to study with the data source(s) that are most likely to produce meaningful answers. If you are able to work with multiple data sources simultaneously, you will reduce the likelihood of falling into the epistemological traps that each of these data sources might set for you (Thorne, 2008, p. 86).

In this action research project, the data collected was triangulated to enhance its reliability and credibility. By using evidence from different sources, I increased the likelihood that analysis was trustworthy.

A common procedure used to ensure the rigor of action research is triangulation, a process in which multiple forms of diverse and redundant types of evidence and perspectives are used to check the validity and reliability of action research outcomes (Pine, 2009, p. 82).

The credibility of action research is enhanced when a variety of sources of evidence are used: “the researcher’s ability to take into account all of the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2008, p. 376). As Stringer (2007, p. 58) states, the incorporation of views from multiple sources enables one to shed light on the meaning and significance of evidence by looking at it from different data sources. In this research project, evidence was collected from classroom teachers’ observations and interviews, students’ feedback journals, and the reflective journal I kept as a teacher-researcher. This made it possible to triangulate the data, so I was able to look at a single issue from students’ as well as teachers’ perspectives. Students were the research subjects, and teachers helped me to evaluate my teaching from a professional perspective. By using these multiple sources of evidence, it is hoped that the credibility of my research has been enhanced and thus is more persuasive.

This research attempted to minimise error so that reliability would be enhanced. Of the four types of triangulation, including investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation (Pine, 2009, p. 82), this study focused on data triangulation. By consistently examining data from different sources during the whole action research process, the reliability of this research project could be enhanced: “Reliability is the degree to which study data consistently measure
whatever they measure” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2008, p. 378). To maximise the reliability of this study, I ensured that the multiple data sources were collected in a consistent way. The designs of Mandarin lessons were based on students’ questionnaires. After each lesson, I collected feedback and comments about the lesson from the classroom teachers and my students. Also, I engaged in systematic reflection after each lesson so that what was learnt from one lesson could be incorporated into the next lesson to improve students’ Mandarin learning and interest in learning the language. This consistency in the data collection process improved the reliability of this research.

3.4.2 Validity

Like all research, the validity of teacher action research is open to questioning: “validity is the degree to which data accurately gauge what we are trying to measure” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 373). Valuable action research helps teacher-researchers to reconstruct our ideas, knowledge and theories. The validity of teacher action research has to be decided at every step in the research process. Pine (2009, p. 81) argues that this means that the influence of action research can be wider, instead of being restricted to local settings:

If it is worth the investment of our time and energy, then it must help us: to grow in understanding, insight, and knowledge; to check and question our opinions, beliefs, and assumptions; and to lay out a more solid foundation for our practice. Winter (1989) suggests that the issue of validity in action research is represented by the question not of how we can ensure that our findings are valid but rather of how we can ensure that our procedures are specific and rigorous.

In order to enhance the validity of this research project, I developed a detailed research proposal to explain and justify every step I took in this research project. This proposal was reviewed by the Confirmation of Candidature Panel, the University of Western Sydney’s Human Ethics Committee and the NSW DET, as part of the State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP) Approval. To achieve my goal, I made sure every detail in this research was checked and verified. The validity of the findings from this research project is rooted in these procedures.
3.4.3 Generalisability of the research

Generalisability refers “to the applicability of findings to settings and contexts different from the one in which they were obtained” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2008, p. 378). A key purpose of educational research is to explore issues of teaching and learning and what affects these. Whether the findings can be applied to another context is a concern of educational research:

Qualitative researchers do not believe that the only credible research is that which can be generalized to a larger population. The power of qualitative research is in the relevance of the findings to the researcher or the audience of the research, although the findings may have some applicability or transferability to a similar setting (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2008, p. 378).

This study was designed to study a particular issue in a specific circumstance. It was carried out in four classes in a primary school using various methods to generate or collect data. The data were generated, analysed and interpreted in relation to this particular research setting. Therefore, the significance of this research is limited to this particular context, but may be relevant to other contexts having similar circumstances.

Evidence from action research is generalisable and has implications for other contexts. If a new teaching strategy or curriculum works well in one place, it could be worth trying in another place, taking into consideration whether it has a similar or different background. Specifically, I have learnt much from this study for use in my teaching in Ningbo when I return to China. Lomax (cited in Pine, 2009, p. 89) argues that the generalisability of action research is very reasonable and practicable:

I do believe it important that action research projects have an application elsewhere, and that action researchers are able to communicate their insights to others with a useful result. The way in which this can be done seems common sense to me. The action research process needs to be made transparent so that a knowledge outsider has sufficient
information to judge whether the research is relevant to their situation.

The problems I confronted in Australian classes may provide implications, suggestions or possible solutions for other beginning Chinese teachers in Australia who experience similar issues. Therefore, the curriculum or teaching strategies used in this research project, whether successful or not, are worthwhile to be considered by other Chinese teachers. Pine (2009) argues that evidence and conclusions from action research projects are generalisable:

if an action research study finds that a particular instructional or curriculum change works well, then it makes sense to recommend that other teachers try implementing the innovation if they are faced with a similar situation to another with similar contexts and circumstance could be considered a form of provisional testing rather than an unqualified recommendation (Pine, 2009, p. 90).

Action research undertaken by a teacher-researcher can be of benefit to other teachers elsewhere. They may have the same problem, due to a similar school context. If a teacher-researcher is able to create knowledge of an appropriate solution or to find explanations for a problem, the evidence and conclusions from action research can be enlightening. The results may be applied in other school contexts, as other teachers can learn much from the experience. In the same way, my school context and circumstance have features in common with schools in the same area or other areas of Australia. Although there has been much research into students’ interest (e.g. Renninger, 1992; Ainley, Hidi & Berndorff, 2002; Trumper, 2006; Katz, Assor, Maymon & Meyer, 2006; Henley, 2010), there are few if any studies of students’ interest in learning Mandarin in Australia. As a visiting Mandarin teacher, it is the hope of the teacher-researcher that this research can make some contributions to the area of teaching Mandarin in Australia and inspire more research in this area. Also, the research and teaching of the teacher-researcher in an Australia context can be valuable experience and background for her future teaching in China.
However, while this action research provides evidence-driven findings, the study is based on a small sample of students and teachers in one primary school. Conclusions may not be readily generalisable to other contexts.

3.5 Action research design

This part outlines the research design, explaining key components of the study and how they connect with and interrelate to each other.

3.5.1 Site selection and sampling: the school context

The purpose of this study was to find out how to use interest-based language teaching to stimulate students’ interest in the study of Mandarin. A public primary school in New South Wales, Star Public School\(^6\), was the context of this research. In educational action research, the teacher-researcher cannot establish a plan without being aware of the site where the research will take place. Pine (2009, p. 18) holds that it is vital to keep in mind that the classroom is a key element in research. Incidents and life in a classroom cannot be adequately understood without regard to the school context:

> The relationship of an event to its context is like the relationship of a word to the sentence in which it appears. While it is possible to consider the meaning of a word separate from any sentence—as in a dictionary definition—the meaning of the word, in any instance of use, will both determine and be determined by its context (Mehan cited in Pine, p. 19).

Star Public School, with about 300 students and 20 teachers, is located in an economically disadvantaged area. People in this area are relatively poor compared with other areas. Many of my students live in single parent families. Some of the students had a learning disability or behavioural problems. Mandarin was not taught in this school prior to my arrival. Therefore, my Mandarin teaching was expected to have a positive impact on the students and the school. The learning situation at this

---

\(^6\) This is a pseudonym, so are the names of the school teachers in this thesis.
school was quite distinctive, due to the characteristics of this region, the school and the students:

Each school has its own history, programmatic and behavioural regularities, role definitions, time perspective, culture and modal process of change. An understanding of these elements is a necessary precondition for studying educational change, the impact of an educational innovation, and classroom teaching and learning (Pine, 2009, p. 20).

Each school is unique because of its own history, regulations, responsibilities, values, educational culture and mode of change (Pine, 2009, p. 20). What happens there has some correlation with the characteristics of the school itself. Mandarin lessons were initiated in this particular school because of all the components of which the ROSETE Program is composed, including an inter-organizational partnership, the volunteer teacher-researchers, and Australia’s Asia literacy program. As a teacher-researcher, I was not able to figure out the implications or the significance of my work as a volunteer teacher-researcher without getting a sense of the whole picture, or at least some sense of the larger context. In this study, I refined my research questions as a result of developing my knowledge of the school and its context. I designed my Mandarin lesson plans in accordance with the school culture and the embryonic stage of Mandarin learning at this school. Then, I turned the plan into action in the classroom and made subsequent changes according to what happened in this context. Getting to know the school and its context so as to have a deep understanding of the learning setting had inevitable consequences for my action research. Understanding the school context was a priority for doing this research.

3.5.2 Research ethics

Ethical considerations play an important role in all research. In the process of this action research, I took ethical issues into consideration: “In research the ends do not justify the means, and researchers must not put the need or desire to carry out a study above the responsibility to maintain the well-being of the study participants” (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2008, p. 20). Before collecting data I considered a range of ethical issues:
Not only were these linked with the quality of action research, but they were also related to doing research in a morally and professionally responsible way. It was important to ask permission of all those concerned and explain how I would involve them, outline your overall aims, and indicate how I will collect data and what I will do with them. Finally, I would to ensure the anonymity of those involved when writing up and reporting the research (Burns, 2009, p. 121).

In order to avoid or minimise ethical issues arising from this study that may trouble any participant, I conducted this action research by strictly following the ethical principles of the UWS and NSW DET ethics committees. As a result, this research received ethics approval from the UWS ethics committee and from DET (see Appendices 1 and 2).

The target population of this project was Year 5-6 students from a public primary school. Prior to the collection of student work samples, the administration of the questionnaires and the conduct of interviews, a letter of invitation was provided to each participant to obtain informed consent and written permission from participating teachers and students’ parents or caregivers (see Appendices 4, 5, 6 and 7). The caregivers or parents of the participating students decided whether their child would take part in this research project. All students from the three classes were invited to become involved in the research process, which was undertaken during routine Mandarin lessons.

Paper-based work samples and questionnaires were securely stored in my office, along with audio-recorded interviews with the teachers, written feedback, and my reflective journal. These data will be stored for five years after the research project. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, hard copies of data were stored in a locked cabinet in my office when not being used for analytical purposes. Electronic data was stored on a separate hard drive on my office computer and to ensure security of this data, it was accessible only via my private password. Pseudonyms have been used for the publication and reporting of results when teacher and student data is included or referenced, as in this thesis. None of the information used in this research is in an identified or re-identifiable form.
My University research educators have the right to deal with this information in accordance with ethical guidelines. I am the one who owns the information resulting from this research. No one has imposed limitations or conditions on the publication of the results arising from this project. As noted, no personal information about the participants will appear in any written publications arising from this study. The stored information from this project will be disposed of after the five years. E-copies will then be deleted from the computer files and paper copies will be disposed of using document shredders.

3.5.3 Participants

In this research project, there were two groups of participants. One group consisted of teachers (n = 3). The teacher participants were the teachers of the classes in which I, as the teacher-researcher, conducted the Mandarin lessons. They were present at each of the Mandarin lessons and were able to provide immediate feedback based on their observations. They were part of the Mandarin program in the Western Sydney Region and showed considerable interest in my research project. As teacher-researcher, I also worked with the teacher participants in planning, teaching, implementing, evaluating and reflecting on the cycles of action research undertaken in these classes. The other group was formed by the student participants (n = 45). The student participants were recruited from my Mandarin classes. They were the direct participants in this research activity. One main aim of this research was to stimulate them to learn Mandarin, and to encourage them to continue learning Mandarin the next year. It was expected that when their individual interests were used to stimulate Mandarin learning, their interest in the study of Mandarin would increase. Together, these teachers and students were key participants in this project.

In the primary school where I was volunteering, I was assigned 8 classes, three Stage 3 (Year 5 and Year 6) classes, three Stage 2 (Year 3 and Year 4) classes and two Stage 1 (Year 1 and Year 2) classes. In all Stage 1 and Stage 2 classes, I was overwhelmingly welcomed by the students. The students in these classes were always eager to learn Mandarin and were well-disciplined when having lessons. However, in the three Stage 3 classes, the students sometimes showed their
unwillingness to learn Mandarin. These students were the oldest students in the school and were more mature in having their own opinions about learning Mandarin. Therefore, the three Stage 3 classes were selected by the teacher-researcher as the primary participants for this study. I tried to stimulate their interest in the study of Mandarin with the hope it might be motivational in the long-term.

After receiving National Ethics Application Form and SERAP approval, I asked the parents of the Stage 3 students and the students themselves, for their permission to participate in this action research project. From the three classes I received parents’ permission to select 45 parental permissions out of 75 children to be research participants. As a result of following the necessary ethical procedures, the sample consisted of 45 students from one primary school in the Western Sydney Region. The school caters to children from predominantly lower middle class backgrounds. The sample was composed of 24 boys and 21 girls, ranging from Years 4 to 6. Though I had no specific intention to recruit Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, there was one student participant who identified as being from a Torres Strait Islander background. All the students, including non-participating students, received a 60-minute Mandarin lesson each week, although some students missed several lessons for various reasons. Data were collected from three different classes, incorporating three classroom teachers, all of whom were very experienced primary school teachers.

This interest-based language teaching program, which aimed to stimulate students’ interest in the study of Mandarin, was conducted over a 10-week period. The participant students completed pre-and post-intervention questionnaires, which aimed to investigate their individual interests and their interest in the study of Mandarin. They were also invited to provide feedback after each weekly Mandarin lesson. Three teachers from each class provided their observations and feedback for each lesson and were interviewed after the 10-week program. All students who had written permission to participate in the study were observed by the teacher-researcher as well as their classroom teachers.

3.6 Data collection and generation
A mixed method approach was used to generate data from the participants in this project. The data collected included: students’ work samples from my Mandarin lessons; pre- and post-intervention questionnaires (see Appendices 10 & 11); interviews with classroom teachers and written feedback from the classroom teachers and students. These evidentiary sources were seen as useful and appropriate for systematically recording information about the impact of the changes in interest-based language teaching. In addition, I kept a fieldwork journal where I regularly recorded my observations and reflections about my teaching and students’ learning. This meant I could triangulate fieldwork data from different sources.

It is hard to get an all-round picture through one single method. The adoption of multiple methods in this study may help to make up for this deficiency. In any one research project, Gillham (2008, p. 7) argues for the adoption of multiple data collection procedures:

Because of the difficulty of getting a comprehensive picture via any one method in social research, during the past 20 years or so there has been increasing interest in the complementary strengths of different methods. . . . The notion of taking multiple perspectives on a complex social phenomenon is a commonsense one. Interviews, national level statistics and demographic patterns can combine with participant observation (Gillham, 2008, p. 7).

Adoption of multiple data collecting methods was a way of improving the rigour of this research study. In this study, I tried to look at the research questions using evidence from diverse perspectives. Therefore, as noted above five main data sources were used to answer the research questions.

During the action research process, student participants opted to complete the questionnaire with the assistance of the classroom teacher and myself. Their everyday interests and their interests in the study of Mandarin were documented, and analysis of these provided ideas for integration into my Mandarin lessons. Through the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, I was able to see the degree to which the Mandarin lessons had had an impact on students’ opinions about the study of Mandarin. All students, including those not participating in this study, were involved,
as it was their normal classroom teaching/learning activities that I planned and conducted in association with their classroom teachers. They were observed by both the classroom teacher and myself during Mandarin lessons. Work samples were collected and analysed from those for whom I had received permission to do so. The classroom teacher who oversaw the classroom management helped the students identify their everyday interests and conducted classroom observations to provide feedback about my teaching as well as the learning behaviours of the students. After the 10-week research program, the teachers were also involved in individual interviews, which lasted approximately 30 minutes. It was explained that the results were going to be used to see how the use of interest-based language teaching had changed, and if it led to improvements over the year. This research caused minimal disruption to the class; they were made to feel comfortable in learning the language, especially when they experienced difficulties with the language itself.

3.6.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire aimed to find out about students’ everyday interests and their interests in the study of Mandarin. By analysing and comparing the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire data, I was able to assess the effectiveness of the interest-based language teaching approach: “A questionnaire is a written collection of self-report questions to be answered by a selected group of research participants” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 373). With the help of the participating classroom teachers, the participating students completed questionnaires (pre- and post-) which consisted of 15 items aimed at finding out their everyday interests and topics of interest to them concerning Mandarin (see Appendices 11 & 12). To survey students’ “topic interests” (Ainley, Hidi & Berndorff, 2002), I selected the topics listed in the Board of Studies NSW (2003) Chinese K-10 Syllabus for beginners. The students then selected the words or phrases from the list topics that they would like to learn about during the 10-week program. The information obtained from the pre-intervention questionnaire allowed me to make the necessary adjustment in my lesson plans and provided rich background information that facilitated the teaching and learning process.
Students undertook the interest-based Mandarin lessons for 10 weeks. After 10 weeks the students completed the same questionnaire, to gauge their interest in the study of Mandarin. Of the 75 questionnaires administered, 45 valid forms were received and processed. The questionnaire used 5 scale points to measure each answer (see Table 3.1).

### Table 3.1 Questions about students’ interest in learning Mandarin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Mandarin is very important to me.</td>
<td>a. strongly agree  b. agree  c. neutral  d. disagree  e. strongly disagree</td>
<td>Attitudes/value towards Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin is an interesting language.</td>
<td>a. strongly agree  b. agree  c. neutral  d. disagree  e. strongly disagree</td>
<td>Interest in Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese culture is interesting.</td>
<td>a. strongly agree  b. agree  c. neutral  d. disagree  e. strongly disagree</td>
<td>Interest in Chinese culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always have out of school experiences in Mandarin and Chinese culture?</td>
<td>a. strongly agree  b. agree  c. neutral  d. disagree  e. strongly disagree</td>
<td>Out-of-school experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mandarin lessons you had before are interesting.</td>
<td>a. strongly agree  b. agree  c. neutral  d. disagree  e. strongly disagree</td>
<td>Opinion about Mandarin lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can learn Mandarin very well.</td>
<td>a. strongly agree  b. agree  c. neutral  d. disagree  e. strongly disagree</td>
<td>Self-evaluated competent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to continue learning Mandarin the next year.</td>
<td>a. Yes  b. no  c. do not know</td>
<td>Likely long-term interest in learning Mandarin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.6.2 Interviews

Interviews were used in this research project since they “permit researchers to obtain important data they cannot acquire from observation alone” (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009, p. 370). Through interviews I was able to explore, look into and examine the
interviewee’s responses, gaining insights into their experiences, feelings, attitudes and values which cannot be captured solely through my observations. In this action research project, it was important for me to know how participants felt about, and whether they valued, what I was trying to do. From their perspectives, I was able to gather more evidence to enrich this research. Stringer (2007, p. 69) regards interviews as a vehicle for guiding reflection by interviewees about a research project in which they participate.

Interviews provide opportunities for participants to describe the situation in their own terms. It is a reflective process that enables the interviewee to explore his or her experience in detail and to reveal the many features of that experience that have an effect on the issue investigated. The interview process not only provides a record of participants’ views and perspectives but also symbolically recognizes the legitimacy of their experience.

The interviews helped me to find out how my teaching plan and strategies went in the classroom and the effects of my Mandarin lessons. They provided evidence for improving my teaching. Moreover, the interviews helped the classroom teachers to think deeply about interest-based language teaching in terms of their own teaching experience and methods.

I considered three different types of interviews for this study, namely: structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews. Unstructured interviews, which are similar to informal conversations, made it possible for me to obtain more information and to clarify my understanding of the research setting. The goal of these informal interviews was to find out about the experiences and the feelings of the participants, rather than to get answers to the questions that I posed (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009, p. 370). I recorded notes of these conversations in my fieldwork journal.

In a structured interview, a researcher has a particular set of questions listed in a specific order and aims to get answers to the same questions (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009, p. 370). The purpose of interviews in this research project was not only to get answers to the specific questions I had been prepared, but more importantly, to
explore more information about the answers that teacher-participants gave me, through follow-up probes. As a result, semi-structured interviews were used. This type of interview is not restricted to a prescribed plan, nor is it loose and unfocused. As the interviewer I freely changed the order of the questions based on the overall flow of the interview. I used semi-structured interviews to make the respondent feel comfortable about answering all the questions and to know they were taking part in a purposeful conversation:

A semi-structured interview, then, is one where the interviewer has a clear picture of the topics that need to be covered (and perhaps even a preferred order for these) but is prepared to allow the interview to develop in unexpected directions where these open up important new areas. At the end of a really successful interview the interviewer will at least have covered all the intended topics and the respondent will feel that they have participated in a “conversation with a purpose”. Part of the skill in using this form of interview, therefore, lies in allowing the interview to develop naturally so that the respondent does not feel that they are simply replying to questions (Richards, 2009, p. 186).

The semi-structured interviews conducted for this research were directed by a desire to cover all aspects of the interview schedule (see Appendix 9). The style of interview I used was free flowing but with clear purposes, namely: to find out the advantages and disadvantages of the interest-based language project, and how I could improve my teaching to inspire and enhance students’ interest in studying Mandarin. Respondents seemed to feel free to talk and share their opinions without feeling that they were simply answering questions. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, ready for analysis.

3.6.3 Journal writing

Reflection was a vital data generation step in the process of this action research project. It provided a record of my thinking about my classroom and stimulated my further thinking. Through critical reflection, teacher-researchers can focus on what happens in their classroom and the effect of their teaching on students’ learning. Pine
(2009) argues that reflection is undertaken to guide the subsequent actions of teacher-researchers:

All teachers pedagogically behave in their classroom according to the personal theories they hold; that these personal theories, by and large, are not conscious; and that through the process of reflection, teachers’ personal theories can be brought to the surface, examined, and questioned in terms of how they affect teaching practice (Pine, 2009, p. 182).

Teacher-researchers engage in public educational theories and develop their own theories of teaching and learning. They design lessons based on teaching principles derived from their own empirical research. However, their personal theories and teaching plans are not perfect; like all research, they are open to critique and scholarly disputation. Therefore, by critically reflecting on their teaching, they can revise and improve their teaching theories and strategies. Pine (2009, p. 180) contends that reflection on action means that reflection occurs after the action or event. It is a post-mortem of the action. Reflection on action involves taking time to consider any number of questions after the action in the classroom has been completed . . . In reflection on action, teachers look for patterns and contradictions and critically examine beliefs and ideas that frame or have informed the completed action. Reflection on action enables us to think back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowledge in action may have contributed to an outcome, expected or unexpected.

Typically, teachers construct their lesson plans according to the requirements of the state or national curriculum. They put lesson plans into practice in the classroom and then, plan for the next lesson. All their teaching practice follows in this pattern. However, rigorous reflection based on analysis of primary evidence, tends to be excluded from their daily practice. In some cases, they might not be concerned about how their teaching affects their student’s learning in their classroom; pressed to teach-to-the-test, they do not feel the need to solve teaching/learning problems in the classroom. My reflective journal entries remind me to take time to think and re-think my teaching; to dig out problems and consider why they existed, and to design the next lesson after careful consideration of these problems. I designed the Mandarin
lessons in a way that could arouse students’ interest in learning Mandarin. After each class, I wrote journal entries with my reflections and details about each lesson, and tried to find out the problems and strong points in my teaching. By analysing the evidence for effect and themes, I expected to be able to make use of the results to benefit other classes and later Mandarin lessons.

Reflective journal writing was an important data collection procedure. By journalling, I was able to record what had happened during the lesson and my personal feelings about it, and to identify problems. Pine (2009, p. 180) regards teacher-researchers’ reflections as a safe place where they can have a conversation with themselves and examine their emotions and ideas:

> Journaling offers a rich means for describing practice; for recording and examining beliefs, assumptions, questions, and challenges; and for expressing feelings and identifying problems. A journal can be a place for releasing tensions and clarifying feelings. A journal also can serve as a historical document providing opportunities to review journal entries written at different times and places in one’s teaching and to honestly assess how challenges and problem situations were confronted then and how they might be handled now. Journal entries can be helpful in planning future actions, generating research questions, developing new insights about teaching, making connection between thought and action, making connection between the classroom situation and broader frameworks, assessing the effectiveness of teaching strategies, and determining how well students are learning.

While writing journals, teacher-researchers reflect on their teaching. It enabled me to become conscious of my teaching practices as well as students’ learning. I could perceive things I had not noticed or never thought about before. During the process of writing, I tried to remember what happened in the classroom, to recall my feelings towards those issues and interpret the significance of the things that happened during that lesson. In this way, reflections were carefully made while my personal feelings were also explored. As a result, my reflective journals are the main data source for this research project.
Following advice (see Table 3.2) from Burns (2009), the first three types of reflective journal were used in my reflective journal, as they suited this study’s aim and timing.

### Table 3.2 Journal types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of journal</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Timing of entry</th>
<th>Question(s) addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factual journal</td>
<td>To record observations, incidents, or events in a factual way</td>
<td>Immediately after the lesson/event</td>
<td>What is happening here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive journal</td>
<td>To note factual events and personal reactions to them</td>
<td>As soon as possible after the lesson/event</td>
<td>What is happening here? What are my perceptions/attitudes about the happenings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective journal</td>
<td>To capture “stream-of-consciousness” ideas, thoughts, reflections, insights, feelings, reactions to lesson/events</td>
<td>Quite soon after the lesson/events, following thinking about and processing what occurred</td>
<td>What are my responses to/interpretations of what has happened? What meanings can I make about these happenings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily/weekly log</td>
<td>To construct an accumulative record of daily or weekly events</td>
<td>At the end of the period of time when the events took place</td>
<td>What happened in sequence throughout my teaching day/week?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memoir journal</td>
<td>To develop an account of your development as a teacher and theories about your teaching</td>
<td>At a time in the research process when you want to articulate your values and theories as a teacher</td>
<td>What and who influenced my development as a teacher and my teaching philosophies?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Burns (2009, p. 121)

3.6.4 Structured/unstructured observation

Observation was employed as a data collection procedure to enhance the rigour of the research. The credibility of research can be enhanced when participants consciously observe events, activities and their context over a period of time. Consciously observing and taking note of events places a premium on what is actually happening, rather than describing it from memory, or from an interpretation of what people “think” happened:

Observation in action research is more ethnographic, enabling an observer to build a picture of the lifeworld of
those being observed and an understanding of the way they ordinarily go about their everyday activities (Stringer, 2007, p. 58).

As part of this study, the classroom teachers were invited to observe my Mandarin lessons, to provide feedback about them and suggestions for improvement. The classroom teachers were asked to complete the following Figure 3.1.

Date  Time  Subject  Participants  Number of students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Behaviour of teacher</th>
<th>Behaviour of students</th>
<th>Other event</th>
<th>My personal feeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1 Observation schedule

These teacher observations presented reliable and credible data. As Gillham (2008, p. 1) explains:

Observation has one overpowering claim to validity: it deals not with what people say they do but what they actually do to the extent that behaviour is open to observation, and insofar as observation is as objective as it seems to be.

The data collected from these observations recorded the students’ behaviour in the classroom. However, these observations had other advantages. They also helped me to discover problems in my class:

As a process for informing and improving teaching practice, observation is used to collect data about students, to document learning and growth, to individualize instruction, to address special needs of learners, to evaluate instructional planning, to study the classroom learning environment, and to assess one’s own professional growth. More significant, observation is a

The teachers’ insightful observation helped me to find techniques I could adopt. Their observations recorded what happened in my particular classroom setting, and helped me to evaluate my teaching. Whether it is structured observation or unstructured observation, the aim is to present a real picture to readers. At the beginning of this research, I was not sure what method would lead to the most useful evidence, and the teacher’s observation helped me to better analyse my teaching and the students’ learning.

3.6.5 Students’ feedback

As suggested by Richardson (2005, p. 401), “student feedback can provide diagnostic evidence for teachers and also a measure of teaching effectiveness for administrative decision-making”. Student feedback constituted a source of evidence for assessing the quality of my teaching. It was used to inform my attempts to improve the quality of teaching, because collecting such feedback does not necessarily lead to such improvements.

The students’ feedback indicated their views on my teaching. Teaching can be improved by professional instruction, but also by listening to students’ feedback. Students’ feedback provides insights into my classroom performance. By thinking about their feedback I wanted to find my advantages and disadvantages in teaching, and identify ways to fix the problems. Furthermore, by making use of the feedback from my current students, I could prevent the same teaching problem happening in the future and provide ideas for other Chinese teachers. Furthermore, another advantage of using student feedback is that students can be motivated by being involved in the process of deciding about their learning.

Moreover, since students see their feedback as being incorporated into the curriculum, this could generate more active participation by students in developing their competencies that could enhance students’ commitment to learning and learning outcomes. In short, student feedback is valuable because students constitute an important, albeit
Students were the central participants in this action research project. Their feelings toward each lesson reflected the effectiveness of my Mandarin lesson design. Since students wrote their feedback in a straightforward way after each lesson, their feedback was fresh and reflected their immediate reactions. On the one hand, by providing feedback about my Mandarin lessons, the students recognised their importance in this project and thus, could be better motivated. On the other hand, their feedback helped me to look into my teaching and the students’ learning from their perspective, thereby contributing to the long-term goal of stimulating their interest in the study of Mandarin.

The time at which the students’ feedback was collected was important. I collected students’ feedback booklets after each lesson, then analysed their feedback and revised my lessons plan accordingly. Richardson (2005, p. 403) believes that:

> It would seem sensible to collect feedback on students’ experience of a particular educational activity at the completion of that activity, since it is presumably their experience of the entire activity that is of interest. In other words, it would be most appropriate to seek student feedback at the end of a particular course unit or program of study.

As I collected students’ feedback as soon as possible after each lesson, their impressions about the lesson were vivid, providing useful and in-depth feedback on the lessons. After analysing their feedback, the booklets were returned to the students the next lesson. Together with my own observational reflections, as well as the teachers’ and students’ feedback, I was able to get an all-round picture of my teaching and ideas about what to improve and how to do so.

### 3.7 Data analysis

A key data source for this study was my fieldwork journal, where I recorded my observations and reflections. Other data for triangulation purposes included
interviews with teachers, students’ and teachers’ observational feedback, and the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. The relationship between these data sources is illustrated in Figure 3.2:

![Figure 3.2: The relationship between different data sources](image)

3.7.1 Analysis of reflections and other qualitative data

In order to clarify and untangle the evidence in my reflective journal, two procedures were used to achieve this goal: the open-coding of all the evidence and developing criteria for the selection of key evidentiary excerpts for detailed analysis. As Stringer (2007, p. 98) explains, these two key analytical processes:

provide the means to distill the data that emerge from the ongoing process of investigation. The first is a categorizing and coding procedure that identifies units of meaning within the data and organizes them into a set of categories that typify or summarize the experiences and perspectives of participants. The second data analysis process selects key experiences or transformational moments and unpacks them to identify the elements that compose them, thus illuminating the nature of those experiences.

The first analytical process entailed the open-coding and categorisation of the primary evidence. It was useful when analysing open-ended written data like my journal writing. This procedure helped me to organise this data by providing a thorough overview of the whole data set. The major analytical task was “to identify
the significant features and elements that make up the experience and perception of the people involved in the study” (Stringer, 2007, p. 98). Open-coding helped me to identify themes and patterns which emerged from the qualitative data (Burns, 2009, pp. 122). By searching for words, ideas or themes that frequently emerged in the data, I was able to identify which parts I might ignore as irrelevant to my research question and those I needed to give more serious analytical consideration to (see Appendix 17).

One way of organising and analysing open-ended written data from my journal was to look for emerging themes or patterns: “Are certain ideas or words frequently repeated? Do particular students or activities come to the fore? Did my attention seem to focus on particular issues, events, locations, classroom setups, or behaviours?” Therefore, this step in the data analysis involved reconceptualising the data:

At the first level of abstraction, where everything is coded in order to find patterns within the incidents in the data. These incidents are constantly compared and merged into categories and the researcher goes back and forth while comparing data, constantly modifying and renaming the categories. Open coding is extremely tedious since this is repeated for every new transcribed interview or new field note. In reality, it fractures the data (Valanides, 2010, p. 61).

This analytical step involved assigning a key concept to each reflection. Sometimes this involved identifying a key word from the reflection to capture the main point. Alternatively, I chose a term which summarised the main ideas in the reflection. These terms formed the key categories from the open-coding.

I analysed each piece of data—the reflections, interviews with teachers, students and teachers’ feedback—in order to identify points of similarity and dissimilarity. Through this analytical process, it was possible to distinguish among data which were conceptually different, to define characteristics of the data and to put evidentiary excerpts into categories. This analytical procedure, termed axial coding, involved taking the categorised conceptual data and identifying properties such as:
the conditions that give rise to them and the contexts within which they are typically embedded. It requires a formal texting procedure as these relationships are considered, drawing on existing data and ongoing data collection to verify the extent to which proposed connections hold true (Thorne, 2008, p. 145).

The next analytical step involved extracting evidentiary excerpts from the data I had coded and categorised that were relevant to answering the research questions. These excerpts were selected because they revealed noticeable impacts, either positive or negative, on the experiences of participants. This process was undertaken to illuminate core categories to which other subcategories could be related. From this analytical process I was able to build a framework from which to generate the original contribution to knowledge made in this thesis (Thorne, 2008, p. 145).

Some incidents that happened in the Mandarin classroom were beyond all my expectations. These “critical incidents” were among the key issues that I needed to pay close attention to, since I had not thought about them before. In this study, critical incidents were those situations in which I, because I come from a different educational culture, experienced “misunderstandings caused by their different cultural backgrounds” (Herfst, Oudenhoven & Timmerman, 2008, p. 2). These incidents were either negative, such as an incident that resulted in a challenging outcome or a positive incident that provided a beneficial opportunity. Therefore, it proved worthwhile to analyse these critical incidents.

In order to analyse the evidence from classroom teachers’ interviews, four procedures were adopted, namely: open-coding, making a list of the key categories, building a conceptual map and selecting key excerpts for detailed analysis. Open-coding was the first procedure for untangling the data. Given the research focus, all the data were divided into units of analysis based on key ideas derived from the interview questions. These interview questions were developed to find evidence to answer my research questions. Most of the interview questions were focused, except for some questions intended to establish rapport and obtain background information. Therefore, each unit of analysis addressed the key points in the interview schedule (see Appendix 18).
Then, after open-coding, the key categories were generated. By analysing the interrelationship between the key categories, together with the key categories emerging from the open-coding of my reflective journal, a conceptual map of the evidence was created (see Figure 3.3). The map provides a logical picture of the findings derived from the data analysis. Furthermore, the key evidentiary excerpts were selected for further analysis and combined with other data for triangulation.

Figure 3.3 A conceptual map of the research evidence

Values Coding
Values coding was used to further analyse the teacher interviews: “Values coding is the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes and beliefs, representing his or her perspective or worldview” (Saldana, 2009, p. 89). Each of the constructs values (V), attitudes (A) and beliefs (B) has a different meaning but Values Coding subsumes all three. According to Saldana (2009, p. 89-90), a value is

the importance we attribute to oneself, another person, thing or idea”; [an attitude is] “the way we think and feel about oneself, another person, thing or idea”; [and belief is] “part of a system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world.

However, when coding I found that Saldana (2009)’s advice was unhelpful for distinguishing between a ‘value’ and a ‘belief’, although I could distinguish between attitudes and the other two terms. Saldana’s (2009) definition of belief was so vague as to suggest that belief includes values and attitudes; thus, the distinctions between these definitions were not clear. I looked for synonyms for these concepts, and I generated the following synonyms as a way of clarifying the distinction between these concepts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synonym</th>
<th>V (value)</th>
<th>worth, price, cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A (attitude)</td>
<td>manner, position, feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B (belief)</td>
<td>faith, principle, conviction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, when I used these synonyms for analysis, it was still confusing and the analysis did not progress smoothly. Then, I looked for Chinese meanings for these concepts. By using back-translation (English to Chinese to English), I further clarified the meaning of these concepts and was able to better distinguish one from the other. Table 3.3 presents the Chinese meaning and my refined understanding of these three concepts.
Table 3.3 Meaning of codes in Values Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes of Values coding categories</th>
<th>Saldana’s Definition</th>
<th>Chinese meaning</th>
<th>Refined definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V: (values)</td>
<td>the importance we attribute to oneself, another person, thing or idea</td>
<td>价 (jia, price) 值 (zhi, value) 观 (guan, view) 价值观 (jia zhi guan):</td>
<td>One’s view of the real price of something worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the importance of something, person or idea to someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: (attitudes)</td>
<td>the way we think and feel about oneself, another person, thing or idea</td>
<td>态 (tai, condition) 度 (du, consideration) 态度 (tai du):</td>
<td>the way we feel and think about someone, something or a certain idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: (beliefs)</td>
<td>part of a system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world</td>
<td>观 (guan, look at/view) 点 (dian, feature) 观点 (guan dian):</td>
<td>one’s objective perception of the social world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.2 Chinese concepts

In the process of analysing the evidence, Chinese concepts were used as analytical tools. These Chinese concepts were drawn from my experiential knowledge and were used to extend my analysis and deepen my argument.

I used these Chinese concepts for four reasons. First, the Chinese concepts used in this thesis have been used for a long time in China, and Chinese people still like to use them today as a matter of accepted intellectual practice. Although they may be regarded as “old” or “traditional” ideas in western countries, because of their thousand-year history, these Chinese concepts are not ‘out-dated’. Chinese intellectual culture, philosophy and wisdom are embedded in these concepts, which are a vivid and interesting feature of the Chinese language. Therefore, integrating Chinese concepts in this study may serve to mitigate ignorance of non-Western
knowledge in Western countries and enhance the exchange of concepts and theories between China and Australia.

Second, as a Chinese teacher-researcher, I grew up with these concepts and am very familiar with them. I have used these concepts in my daily life in conversations with other Chinese people. Also, in my teaching and research, I often come up with some Chinese concepts that make my ideas clearer and persuasive because such a concept “bears more historical colour, carries more literary allusions and is rendered more through analogy, whether metaphor or simile” (Yang, 2007, p. 15).

Third, being bilingual, I speak English as a second language and express my thoughts in English. I also have the advantage of being able to use Chinese concepts to better understand what I am teaching and researching. Singh (2011, p. 1) is concerned that “conceptual and theoretical knowledge from non-Western countries and people is a major absence in Western doctoral education”. He argues that the “bilingual capabilities” of international students from Asia and elsewhere should not be marginalised and that their intellectual resources should be shared (Singh, 2011, p. 3). By employing Chinese concepts, this thesis contributes to the “transnational knowledge exchange” (Singh & Han, 2010) of Chinese conceptual or theoretical knowledge through Western education and research.

Fourth, as a Chinese teacher, I recognised the importance of Australians learning Chinese language and culture. Chinese concepts express key aspects of the language and culture, “adding to it beauty and colour by virtue of its richness and originality” (Yang, 2007, p. 10). In order to further promote Chinese learning in Australia and worldwide, it is valuable to use Chinese concepts to modify the out-dated ideas held by Western people that Chinese concepts are “old” and can be marginalised as knowledge.

Singh (2010) and Singh and Chen (2011, p. 6) have identified “key moments” in the process of converting “old Chinese sayings” into analytical tools for interpreting evidence, including evidence of Australian education, and also the process of extending one’s argument. The key moments used in this study are:
1. conceptualise
2. contextualise
3. challenge
4. connect

The first moment involves selecting Chinese concepts and “providing a literal translation of the Chinese characters” (Singh, 2011, p. 7). The second moment is concerned with explaining the history and the current usage of the concept in modern China. The third moment is to use the Chinese concept to challenge or question Western knowledge, including where appropriate, Western constructions of China. The fourth moment entails “making transnational intellectual connections by showing how Chinese concepts can offer a better understanding of the issue under investigation”, by reflecting on the importance of such intellectual connections (Singh, 2011, p. 7). These four moments are used to create Chinese concepts used to analyse the evidence in this thesis.

3.7.3 Analysis of questionnaires

To analyse data from the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, the following procedures were considered:

To count the number of times particular incidents, behaviours, or utterances occur . . . Another common means of quantification is through using closed-response items in questionnaires, where participants are asked to provide answers to closed (yes/no/maybe), rank = ordered (list in order of preference, 1, 2, 3, and so on), or interval (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) scales. You can then present your data as tables, pie-charts, or bar-charts that show numbers and percentages (Burns, 2009, pp. 124).

By quantifying this data from the questionnaires it was possible to be clearer about the results and it was easier to evaluate them. In order to get an indication of any changes in students’ interest in learning Mandarin as a result of my interest-based teaching program, each item in the questionnaire was compared and evaluated against later responses from the post-intervention questionnaire. The aim of this data
analysis was to discover to what degree this project had impacted on students’ desire to study Mandarin.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined and justified the research methods used in this research project. Issues of research design, ethics, validity, reliability and credibility have been addressed, and the procedures for data collection and analysis have been explained. Mixed-data sources were used in this study to provide a trustworthy evidence base, with statistical findings from questionnaires to further support understanding of the qualitative data. Chapter 4 details the procedures for designing interest-based Mandarin lessons.
Chapter 4

Students’ interests in Mandarin and Mandarin lesson design

4.1 Introduction

As an interest-based language teaching project, one of the primary purposes of this research was to design Mandarin lessons which integrated students’ interests to promote their interest in the study of Mandarin. Therefore, the analysis of evidence and argument developed in this chapter shows how I designed and modified my lessons in a continuous way. This chapter analyses evidence that addresses the first contributory research question: How to design lessons which make connections between students’ interests and their study of Mandarin? This chapter describes and analyses data from mixed sources, but mainly focuses on my reflective journal, students’ questionnaires and their feedback. Descriptive findings and analysis were generated for each set of data.

4.2 Students’ pre-intervention questionnaire

4.2.1 Descriptions of the participant students

The questionnaire was completed by 45 students from Year 5 (n = 18) and Year 6 (n = 18), although few from Year 4 students (n = 9) completed it (see Table 4.1). These students were the primary beneficiaries and participants directly involved in this action research. Their age ranged from 10 to 12 years. However, among these 45 participant students, there were 2 who only completed one of the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. The ratio of males to females among the participating students was close: 8:7 (see Table 4.2).
Table 4.1 Distribution of participating students by year level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 6</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Gender distribution of participating students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Analysis of students’ everyday interests

With regard to the use of interest-based teaching, the classroom teachers affirmed its positive effects on stimulating and maintaining students’ interests in learning. The teachers believed that their knowledge of students’ prior learning was very important in promoting students’ further learning. It not only helped the teachers in designing their lessons, but also made it possible to link students’ lives to their learning.

But I always obtain their prior knowledge to any subject or content area that I’m teaching. And then I find out what they know first. In that process, they share with me their interests about a certain thing (Jane, 2010, p. 2).

Having students share their interests and knowledge, and providing them opportunities to ask questions, means that teachers can find out students’ individual and communal interests. By using these interests to inform the content of the learning experiences, teachers are able to capture students’ interests to further their learning.
The pre-intervention questionnaire aimed to find out about students’ everyday interests and their interests in the study of Mandarin and Chinese culture, in order to design an interest-based language teaching curriculum. In the first part of the questionnaire, I asked students about their everyday interests or hobbies and I worked out how to relate these to the Mandarin lessons I prepared. Students were given an open-ended question asking about their everyday interests: What are your interests or your hobbies in your daily life? They were encouraged to list the things they liked to do during their free time, which meant every student could list an unlimited number of their everyday interests. The number of mentions of each interest was counted and categorised (see Table 4.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ everyday interests</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Various Sports</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art/drawing/painting</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing games</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing/dancing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV/movies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The left column of Table 4.3 shows the categories in which students’ everyday interests were grouped and the number in the right column gives the total for each category. Among all the everyday interests, sports were the most frequently mentioned. Students listed many kinds of sports, such as swimming, riding bikes, netball and soccer. They seemed to have a keen interest in playing sports. Following sport, in the category of art, drawing and painting were students’ most popular interests. Students liked spending free time with colours and pictures. Games received the same number of mentions by students as art. Students were fond of playing out-door games with their friends or alone on the computer. After that, singing and dancing were the favoured interests of 7 students, more than one sixth of participating students. Besides, watching movies and television was also mentioned by 3 students, along with students interested in study (2) or shopping (1). To sum up,
the answers provided by the students were not very different from each other. Only seven categories of everyday interests were listed. Among the seven categories of interest, students liked sports, art and games the most. Singing, dancing and watching videos were also enjoyed by a few students.

4.2.3 Analysis of students’ topic interests in Mandarin

In the second part of the pre-intervention questionnaire, thirteen common topics and themes related to learning Mandarin were listed. I selected thirteen topics and themes from those suggested by the Board of Studies NSW (2003) in its Chinese K-10 Syllabus. These topics suited my students’ level as beginning Chinese learners and seemed potentially relevant to their interests. Topic interests represent a “relatively enduring evaluative orientation toward certain topics, a form of individual interest” (Ainley, Hidi & Berndorff, 2002, p. 546). Participating students were asked to select three topics they would like to learn the most, from these thirteen topics. Therefore, the topic interests were the most important evidence for this interest-based Mandarin teaching project, together with students’ everyday interests. The following Table 4.4 presents the thirteen topics and themes of interest to all the students (n = 65) and to those participating (n = 45) in this study.

Table 4.4 Students’ Mandarin topic interests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colours</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>Colours</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food &amp; drink</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>Food &amp; drink</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body parts</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>Body part</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions/Feelings</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>Emotions/Feelings</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is worth mentioning that although students were asked to select three topics from the list of thirteen, some students selected only one or two topics. Therefore, the total number of choices (two hundred and five) was less than three times the total number of students (3 x 65 = 234) and of the participant students (3 x 45 = 135). Comparing the results for both groups of students, the choices made by participating students were consistent with the choice of all the students in the three classes. The topic of sports was favoured by 73.8% (n = 48) of all students and by 57.8% (n = 26) of participating students, followed by animals, which was also chosen by 53.8% (n = 35) of all students and 53.3% (n = 24) of participant students. The topic of colour ranked third among all the topics and themes, and about one third of students liked this topic (41.5% of all students, 42.2% of participating students). Some other topics, like “Food and drink”, “Body parts” and “Transportation” were also liked by a few students, and the percentages were similar among both categories of students, while other topics were favoured by a few students while being excluded from most students’ topic interests. The students’ most favoured topic interests were sports and animals, which were preferred by more than half of all students, and also of the participating students. The topic of colour was also chosen by more than a third of all students and participating students.

4.2.4 Students’ topic interests and everyday interests

For interest-based language teaching, my primary task in designing Mandarin lessons was to identify the key topics that connected with students’ identified interests. Evidence of students’ topic interests and everyday interests provided the basis for deciding the topics to be addressed in my lessons. Table 4.5 compares the students’ topic interests and their everyday interests.
Table 4.5 Students’ topic interests and everyday interests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic interests</th>
<th>Everyday interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Various Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>Art/drawing/painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colour</td>
<td>Playing games</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5 indicates that sports ranked first in both the students’ topic interests and their everyday interests. Although animals were not mentioned as a daily interest, the students indicated they would like to learn about them. The third popular topic interest, “colour”, was favoured in students’ daily life, particularly in art, drawing or painting. One of the students’ everyday interests, “playing games” would be a challenging topic for beginning Mandarin learners because of the vocabulary required and the complicated grammar associated with the rules of the games. As a result, I decided to use the topics “sports” and “animals”, with arts and games to promote students’ interests in learning Mandarin (Figure 4.1).

Figure: 4.1 Student interests considered in Mandarin lesson design
4.2.5 Analysis of students’ interests in cultural activities

In this interest-based Mandarin teaching project, cultural activities preferred by the students were also identified, using the pre-intervention questionnaire. The SA DECS (2009, p. 2) suggests that the “real world experience to the teaching and learning of Asian languages” is an effective way to promote students’ engagement and increase their “requirement to include studies of Asia across the curriculum in any jurisdiction”. It is argued that “introducing culture and religion will greatly help avoid semantic errors when language learners are from very different cultural backgrounds” (Li, 2005, p. 93). Providing cultural activities was expected to provide authentic information and experiences, and also enhance students’ understanding of the background to the language they were learning. Therefore, I selected 10 cultural activities that students were familiar with, for them to choose 5 to experience. However, not every student selected 5 out of 10 cultural activities—some students selected less. Table 4.6 shows the selection of cultural activities from all the students and from the participating students, from the classes involved in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese cultural activities</th>
<th>all students (n = 65)</th>
<th>participating students (n = 45)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing opera</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese traditional painting</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making dumplings</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using chopsticks</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie/ TV programs about China</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthday party</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-autumn festival</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea culture</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing calligraphy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6 indicates that the choices made by the participating students were similar to those of all students. Interestingly, Beijing Opera was chosen by most of the students. Traditional Chinese painting and dumpling making was favoured by more than half of the students. Other cultural activities selected by many students included using chopsticks and watching movies or television programs about China.
Consequently, I decided to integrate Beijing opera, Chinese traditional painting, making dumplings, using chopsticks and watching movies or television programs about China as the focus of my Mandarin lessons.

4.3 Planning of Mandarin lessons

In this study of interest-based language teaching, topics favoured by the students were linked to themes nominated as arousing their interest, to plan lessons for them to study Mandarin. This was the basic principle of the lesson design. Therefore, in each lesson, I tried to teach students the key languages related to the topic through activities students were interested in, so as to promote their understanding and continuing interest. Table 4.7 shows a typical Mandarin lesson designed upon this principle.

Table 4.7 Sample of Mandarin lesson design

Lesson 7 Animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn and say several kinds of animals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. for me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To stimulate students’ interest in Mandarin by using a variety of activities and games.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Students are doing . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduce six kinds of animals in Mandarin</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>Flashcards</td>
<td>Listen and read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sentence “我喜”/wo xi huan/I like . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition game: pick up “the” animal</td>
<td>15 mins</td>
<td>worksheet</td>
<td>Listen, choose, &amp; say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worksheet: 马/ma/--- write, make connection &amp; colour in</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>worksheet</td>
<td>Understand, write &amp; colour in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie: Kongfu Panda (with a question)</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Watch and think about</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation and extension

Students learn Chinese animals and express their attitudes towards these animals in Chinese. By using competition and watching part of a movie, students can learn and master the words better.

During this particular lesson, students learned the Chinese names for six animals, and a sentence for them to express their attitude towards a certain animal. A game was used to enhance their understanding and memory of the language. After completing the game, worksheets (see work sample in Figure 4.2) were distributed for students to practise the Chinese writing of animals. The worksheet provided students an opportunity to draw the animal “马” /ma/—horse and colour in the horse.

Then, part of an interesting movie about Chinese animals was shown to the students in order to stimulate their interest in learning the names of Chinese animals as well as to consolidate their language learning. To sum up, based on the topic of animals, games, art and cultural activities were incorporated in the lesson to facilitate students’ learning and to stimulate their continuing interest in learning Mandarin.
4.4 Games and activities

In the pre-intervention questionnaire about their everyday interests, many students indicated that playing various games was among their interests. Although being aware of the importance of using games in the classroom (Wright, Betteridge and Buckby, 1991; Kumar & Lightner, 2007), I did not think of games as an important tool for promoting students’ language learning. I did not know how to integrate games into my lessons at that stage. The processes of learning and teaching are always tough. After the very first lesson, I wrote the following reflection in my journal:

Students just would not stop talking and moving around for the first fifteen minutes. I asked them to concentrate on the lesson, but this only resulted in failure. Surprisingly, when we turned to do a competition, all of them became quiet and very cooperative. The game went
on smoothly and the lesson was successful” (August 5 2009, p. 1).

During the first two weeks of the action research project, I tried to stimulate the students to learn key Chinese terms by using worksheets featuring Beijing Opera mask matching. I used listening comprehension to have students match terms with the masks. In my first lesson, teaching Chinese sports, I used games and activities to relate language to actual movement, such as in “Chinese chair champion?", which is like “musical chairs”. Although the game was not successful for the purpose of enhancing students’ learning, they all enjoyed doing it. The following excerpt from my journal records my reflection on the students’ inclination towards games.

In the last lesson, the class played “chair champion” terribly. They always directly run into the nearest seat without listening to my instructions carefully. I was very shocked and the class seemed to be in chaos. However, during today’s lesson, they asked me whether they could play the game again. I was so surprised because I thought they would hate that terrible game. Therefore, I told them that we could do games next time (May 5 2010, p. 34).

Despite my bad experience of playing the language game during the previous lesson, students still wanted to play games in the class, which showed they favoured having games and activities as part of the learning process. In my language classes, the games were vital for making lessons enjoyable and at the same time, enhancing students’ knowledge of Mandarin. When teaching Mandarin, I found that students quickly lost focus on learning the language. Fifteen minutes after beginning the

7 Students walked in a circle around the classroom. I gave instructions for different types of movement in Chinese, such as hop, jump, listen, stop or look. The students did the movement accordingly. When I said “stop” in Chinese, all students needed to respond quickly and to sit on a chair. Because the number of chairs is one less than the students, the student who could not find a chair was out, and he/she gave the instructions for the next round.
lesson, they started to make noise, were not participating in learning or were even moving around the classroom. The idea of using games to attract the students’ attention presented a possible way forward. With respect to the effectiveness of using games in language class, Kumar and Lightner (2007) contend that using activities and games in class encourages active learning. The following excerpt shows my reflections on my use of games in language teaching/learning to grasp students’ attention:

I started to call out words. I found when I grasped their interests and made them need to listen to me carefully, they were quite quiet. They did not talk to each other or focus on something else. I did not expect students in this class to behave properly in this way. They were happy with the game although they needed me or other students to tell them the answer all the time. They asked “Can we play more?” when I asked them to stop (May 5 2010, p. 36).

Mandarin differs from English in every aspect, and it seemed mysterious to these Australian students at the beginning stage of their learning. Students felt interested and yearned to know more about it at first. However, after having regular Mandarin lessons, their curiosity about knowing and learning Mandarin gradually decreased. Mandarin learning became an unattractive and burdensome task for them. Therefore, at this stage it was vital to maintain students’ attention and interest in learning Mandarin as a precondition for stimulating them to continue learning it. As a result, the use of games in Mandarin classes provided an effective way to grasp students’ attention and postpone their tiredness in learning. There is a Chinese concept called “寓教于乐” /yu jiao yu le/which is pertinent here. “寓” /yu/means embed, “教” /jiao/ means cultivation or education; “于” /yu/equals in and “乐” /ye/means happiness or enjoyment. This concept means to infuse students’ knowledge acquisition or cultivation with an enjoyable learning environment. It comes from Confucius’ philosophy for education. He argued that the teacher should make the setting for learning interesting so that students can learn better and more joyfully. Games are a good tool for providing students with such an environment for learning Mandarin (Kumar & Lightner, 2007).
The adoption of games and activities in my Mandarin classes was also meant to make students’ language learning more meaningful. In Australia, ways of practising Mandarin are limited, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Almost all the relatives, friends and neighbours of students spoke English. There were few Chinese restaurants or shops in the nearby streets. Only a small proportion of students had been to Chinatown in the centre of the city. Students had few opportunities to practise Mandarin or experience Chinese culture, except for my Mandarin classes. Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1991, p. 1) argue that games provide “repeated use of a language form. By making the language convey information and opinion, games provide the key feature of ‘drill’ with the opportunity to sense the working of language as living communication.” This suggests that games can help language teachers to create an environment that makes the new language meaningful to students. However, some understanding of the language is needed by the students in order for them to join the game that interests them. In one of my Mandarin classes, the students were required to draw the animal picture they liked the most from the animals they had learnt and then introduce their drawing by using the language they had acquired. The other students needed to remember what their classmates said and reintroduce the drawings of others. The following excerpt from my journal indicates that the game made the language more meaningful to the students:

The only new language in this lesson was ‘他/她喜欢’ /ta xi huan/which means he/she likes . . . After finishing drawing, each student was required to introduce their picture and the other students needed to remember what they had said. At first few student knew how to introduce the other students’ pictures using the new sentence structure. However, after several rounds, almost everyone understood the new sentence and they loved the game very much. I was so glad about this (June 30 2010, p. 78).

Integrating games and activities in my lessons made the language meaningful, so the students were able to use the language in their daily life. In this situation, the language was no longer just something to be learnt, but something to say and to use. In the game, students were amused, intrigued or surprised to see that the content was clearly meaningful to them. If I could always find tasks that captured or reflected
students’ interests, and also were beneficial to their study of Mandarin, then my lessons would be significant for students. Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1991, p. 1) state that “games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, and then they must be regarded as central to a teacher’s repertoire”. They also contend that games are capable of assisting students to take part in practising all the skills needed for acquiring a language. By drilling important features of the language, students’ skills and their understanding of the language are increased. Therefore, games provided my students ways to practise the language.

Then, I played the competition game as I did in Class A. But the word was called after “我喜／wo xi huan/8...”. So they could hear the new sentence again and again. (May 19 2010, p. 49)

Then, I took off all the flashcards and they needed to recall from their memory and say the sentence, which made the game harder for them. However, they did well in this game while having fun. Everyone was willing to play it (April 21 2010, p. 20).

When I was teaching Mandarin words and sentences using flashcards, and repeating the new language, all the students were statically engaged with the language. The language learning was less than satisfactory, except for some words they felt extremely interesting, or words that were easy to remember. Nevertheless, the games made a difference. Students’ listening, reading, speaking, and writing of the target language became a more colourful experience as they seemed to find the words easier to remember. In this case, students were not simply being amused, but their learning was being enhanced and their desire to continue doing so was promoted.

I used to involve games in the class to make the lesson interesting and informative. However, not all games were good for the students. Some games or activities turned into a disaster; this was completely out of my expectations. The following excerpt is from my reflections on a terrible situation that happened while playing a language game during a Mandarin class:

8我喜／wo xi huan/ means “I like ..” in Chinese. 我／wo/ means I; 喜／xi/ means like and 欢／huan/ has the same meaning with 喜／xi/, namely, like.
During the celebrity head\textsuperscript{9} part, among the total 4 rounds, only in round 1, the three students standing at the front figured out the right words. In the other three rounds, the participating students had trouble telling the names of the animals. They needed help from the rest of the class. Sometimes, even the rest of the students could not give the answer. I could see students standing in the front were awkward and discouraged. The game did not work well and the class became noisy because the game was too difficult and they became impatient (May 12 2010, p. 43).

When a task was too complicated for the students, no matter how interesting it was, they could not enjoy it and they even complained about it. In my initial lessons, I prepared games without fully comprehending students’ learning level and ability. As a result, they could not accomplish the game, let alone getting the pleasure of learning from the game. Moreover, I was concerned that students’ self-confidence in learning Mandarin might be reduced by such games and that their interest in the study of Mandarin would be decreased. It was vital to choose games which were suitable for my students. In addition, I realised that I needed to make the aims and rules of the games understandable to my students. If the students are unclear about what they have to do, the class may degenerate into chaos (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 1991). I quickly learnt that appropriate games had to build upon the language the students had learnt and suit their learning level and ability. It was vital for the games to have a middling level of difficulty and be clear to students. Some games might seem tricky and complex, but students could do these if it were explained in an understandable and practical way. The following evidence is my reflection on a game that worked well during a Mandarin lesson:

After that, we moved on to the game of cockroach stomp\textsuperscript{10}. This time, I made the rules much clearer. I even drew a diagram and filled in every square which they needed to fill in. I told them to draw cockroaches randomly and I

\textsuperscript{9} Celebrity head: Several students sit out the front, facing the class. Put a picture of a Chinese word behind students so they cannot see the picture. Students take turns to ask ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions to help them work out what the picture is. The rest of the class responds with 是 /shi/ (yes) or 不是 /bus hi/ (no). The winner is the student who uncovers the picture and says the word in Chinese. From <Lai Wan You xi> by Curriculum Corporation 2006.

\textsuperscript{10} Cockroach stomp: each student is given a game board. Students draw a cockroach in any eight of the circles. Taking turns, students create sentences using the vertical and horizontal co-ordinates from the table. If the sentence 我爱苹果 (wo ai ping guo) (I love apples) is made, students find the corresponding circle and cross it out. The aim of the game is to stomp on all eight cockroaches. When all of one student’s cockroaches are dead, he/she calls out “都死了” (dou si le), meaning all dead.
wiped out those I had drawn on the board after a student asked me whether they should draw cockroaches in exactly the same square as I had done. When we were doing the game, I did the game together with them and explained it to them again and again. Since I had really tried my best to explain the game to them and did it with them, they had no reason to say they could “not get it”. Finally, I was very glad that the game went on smoothly and the students actually played the game well. They even said, “This is so fun!” (June 9 2010, p. 70).

Difficult games may need to be modified to facilitate their use so that they can be played by students whose learning can benefit from them. Although this game was a disaster with one class, it worked well in another class because my reflections led me to recognise the need to provide the students with detailed explanations, and to do so several times. Therefore, a complex game may become appropriate and enjoyable if teacher-researchers are able to examine and adjust it to students’ ability before using it with their class. To sum up, an appropriate game entertains, informs and engages students in learning Mandarin. The following Figure 4.3 is a sample from a language game used in a Mandarin lesson to consolidate students’ learning and promote the interestingness of the lesson.

Figure 4.3 Student’s language game work sample
4.5 Artistic activities

Each of my lessons lasted for an hour; this was quite a long time for young language learners. However, this is how the school had decided to program the Mandarin classes. During my teaching, I found that whenever students were given a worksheet that had pictures on it, they would ask me whether they could colour them in. Sometimes students commented in their feedback that they wanted to have more colouring in or drawing. In addition, painting and drawing ranked third in students’ topic interests and second in their everyday interests (see Table 4.5). Gradually I acknowledged that at their age (approximately 10 to 11 years old), colour and pictures are a part of their everyday interests, especially at school. The following excerpt concerns my reflection on how students wanted to have artistic activities in their class:

I gave them a worksheet for practising the writing of Chinese characters. They did it quietly and with a good deal of concentration. Sometimes they asked me whether they drew the characters in the right way. They called writing characters “drawing”. For them, Chinese characters are like pictures to be drawn. When they finishing practising characters, some students pointed to a little picture on the worksheet and asked me whether they could colour it in. Then, I told them they could. They seemed very happy, even excited about colouring in (March 3 2010, p. 6).

My students seemed to have a natural inclination for colours and drawing. They had a strong desire to engage with these artistic activities. In my conversations with a classroom teacher, she said that in order to encourage the students to read and learn, she selected books with many interesting pictures. In addition, I also found that in each classroom, there were a great number of craft displays, which were made by students. These students adored their work and they would proudly introduce their little creations to me. Henley (2010) argues that one of students’ intrinsic needs includes the need for fun, and that the teacher can meet this need by providing successful learning experiences for them. Incorporating students’ needs and suggestions into my Mandarin lessons helped to meet students’ desire for fun. In my
observations of other classes conducted by experienced teachers, I found that students used drawing or colouring to express their ideas and that the teachers encouraged them to do so. Therefore, I started to make use of more art activities in my lessons, since the central point of interest-based language teaching is taking students’ interests into account and explicitly engaging them. Brooks (2009) argues that drawing is a social tool that mediates new knowledge and knowledge that is already understood. Most young children have a strong desire to draw, as it provides them a way to make an enduring record and to transmit evidence of their ideas.

Artistic activities provided my young students opportunities to express their thoughts, feelings and interests in images. They chose “Chinese painting” as one of the top three cultural activities they wanted to experience. Moreover, the “Beijing Opera mask” activity was students’ favourite cultural activity, and is closely related to colour and painting. As a beginning teacher-researcher, I also found that asking students to colour in and draw was a very effective way to calm them down and engage them in learning. Here is a reflection from my fieldwork journal:

I sent them back to their seats and asked them to write Chinese characters (Han zi) and pinyin on the back of each picture and then, to colour in these pictures. They “drew” Chinese characters very carefully and some of them did not want to stop to write feedback until they had finished drawing. I could see they liked these pictures very much. Usually at the end of the lesson, the students would make a noise and talk to each other. However, this time they were very cooperative and everyone was concentrating on their work (June 2 2010, p. 61).

This example showed how it was possible for me to use pictures and drawing to engage students and to have them stay on task for an extended period. The students did not complain about the length of the lesson at all and were willing to do the work. Not only did they “draw” Chinese characters, but they also coloured in the pictures of animals which I had selected for them. For most of these Australian children, they regarded Chinese writing as “drawing”, since the characters looked like pictures to them. Even so, during this process they learned to match the pictures of animals with their Chinese names; how to say the animals’ names in Chinese and how to write the
names of animals in Chinese Hanzi. Hence, drawing and colouring in, did facilitate the students’ learning of the language. Brooks (2009, p. 22) argues that artistic activity “allows the children to recognize each other’s thoughts and ideas, link them to their own and to carry these thoughts and ideas forward to future projects”. As a result, drawing allows children to link their own experienced knowledge with new knowledge and build a joint understanding. The following reflection from my journal indicates the function of promoting learning through artistic activities:

I divided them into two groups. One group stayed in the classroom and, did a worksheet to practise two Chinese characters “狗” /gou/ (dog) and “猫” /mao/ (cat), colouring in their pictures while waiting for their turn to make 饺子 /jiao zi/ (dumpling). Although I was outside the room with the students making jiao zi, the classroom teacher told me that the students liked writing Chinese characters and colour in every much. They hardly made any noise. Later on, I found the students took the initiative to write the Chinese names beside the animals and they “drew” very beautiful Chinese words! (June 23 2010, p. 74)

By using drawing and colouring in my Mandarin classes, the students’ learning was promoted and I also gained more positive feedback from both the classroom teachers and the students. This stimulated my students’ desire to learn and promoted their understanding of the language. It helped the students to have an enhanced understanding of new knowledge by linking it to their interest in art for fun. Such a combination can be an effective tool in Mandarin classes. By engaging students in artistic activities with which they were familiar through previous classroom learning experiences—drawing and colouring in—their learning of new Chinese language was then consolidated. Figure 4.4 shows samples of students’ artistic works.
4.6 Cultural activities

Providing students with opportunities to experience traditional Chinese culture is an essential part of their learning Mandarin. There is a Chinese concept “纸上谈兵” /zhi shang tan bing/which is relevant here. “纸” /zhi/means paper; “上” /shang/means on or above; “谈” /tan/means talk about; “兵” /bing/means military strategy. This concept literally means “strategic planning on paper”, and refers to somebody who only knows knowledge but does not really know how to use the knowledge in practice. Providing cultural activities enables students to be connected with Mandarin and Chinese culture, so that students can have a good idea about what they are learning through gaining relevant background knowledge.

When learning a language, students are necessarily and perhaps inevitably brought into contact with the culture and knowledge of the language. Learning a different language like Mandarin can be novel but tiring or challenging. Adapting cultural knowledge and activities may mitigate this fatigue effect and inspire students to learn more about the language as well as its culture. To introduce Chinese culture(s) into the Mandarin class, I needed to make sure there was not just knowledge without understanding, and to focus on knowledge the students could reasonably experience.
and acquire. My first lesson about Chinese culture was about the use of 筷子 (/kuai zì/, chopsticks) since they are a distinctive cultural icon, and my students were familiar with them although few had used kuai zì previously. The following excerpt shows my reflection on how students appreciated the Chinese cultural knowledge about kuai zì, willingly developed their skill in handling them and used the kuai zì outside Mandarin classes:

During morning tea, the classroom teacher said to me, “You’ve made an impact on them”. She told me that students loved the lesson about using kuai zì very much and even after the lesson, they used two pencils as substitute kuai zì to practise using them. She said, “They may forget the words they learned, but they will never forget how to handle kuai zì by themselves.” The students also told the teacher that they would like to use kuai zì next time they went to a Chinese restaurant. They were having a fun time in my Mandarin lesson. I was very glad on hearing this (March 31 2010, p. 18).

This example suggests that the students knew about this aspect of Chinese culture, and the knowledge of using kuai zì made an impact on their daily life. It could provide a basis for a life-long learning experience for at least some of them. In my Mandarin class, cultural learning played an important part in both helping the students to build their intercultural competence and stimulating their interests in learning Mandarin. Dervin (2010, p. 156) defines intercultural competence as “the expected outcome of the insertion of interculturality in language learning and teaching” and adds that it “is a vital competence in our contemporary world”. It is a way to develop students’ language learning. The following excerpt illustrates my reflections on how the students further developed their skills in using kuai zì and practised saying words about food during the lesson about making “饺子” (/jiao zì/, dumplings):

For each step, I showed them how to do it and then, they were allowed to do the same step by themselves. When providing instructions, I said every important word or phrase in Chinese. I found most of them chose to use kuai zì to pick up fillings though they were allowed to use spoons. This time, they used the kuai zì much better than last time. Some of them could use
kuai zi very well. What was more, I was even more surprised to find that after the lesson, they still remembered how to say “chopstick” in Chinese. They learned more words this lesson such as “饺子” (/jiao zi/, dumpling) “皮” (/pi/, pastry), “好吃” (/hao chi/, delicious) (June 23 2010, p. 75).

During the process of making jiao zi, new language was appropriately integrated. The students could learn the new language in a pleasurable atmosphere with minimum discomfort. These cultural activities triggered their interests in learning Mandarin, since the language was from the culture, and the culture was embedded in the language. Furthermore, students received first-hand experience in making jiao zi, eating them with kuai zi, which could also be applied in their daily life. In this way, their intercultural competence and knowledge of Mandarin were improved and students’ interest in learning Mandarin and its culture were enhanced.

4.7 Conclusion

Chapter 4 has reported on the analysis of students’ responses to pre-intervention questionnaires about their everyday interests and their topic interests in the study of Mandarin and the Chinese cultural activities that they would like to experience. Together, this knowledge was used to design the Mandarin lessons. The Mandarin lessons were then designed to link students’ interests in animals and sports, and these were integrated with games and artistic activities. Also, cultural activities were adapted to promote students’ understanding of the Chinese language and culture(s) and to promote their interest in learning Mandarin. The evidence from the teacher-researcher’s reflective journal was analysed to explain the importance of lesson design. In the next Chapter, students’ Mandarin learning and their interest in the study of interest-based language teaching are analysed.
Chapter 5

Students’ Mandarin learning and Mandarin teaching strategies

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 analyses factors that affect students’ interest in the study of Mandarin. As part of this interest-based language teaching, changes in students’ Mandarin learning, including their interest in learning this language are examined. This chapter details the analysis of the students’ feedback, teacher interviews and the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires.

5.2 Analysis of students’ feedback

Students’ feedback was the vital evidence for analysing students’ Mandarin learning in this project and for examining the effectiveness of the interest-based language teaching. Analysis of student feedback provided a measure for assessing teaching effectiveness, and a stimulus for improving teaching quality (Richardson, 2005, p. 401). One way to improve students’ learning performance was to improve my teaching, which was improved by professional instruction and also by listening to students’ feedback. Moreover, by providing feedback about the Mandarin lesson, students might be motivated by feeling involved in the process of making decisions about their learning (McCuddy, Pinar & Gingerich, 2008).

I prepared a feedback booklet for each student at the beginning of the project, including students not participating in the study, but whose feedback was used for teaching rather than research purposes. After each Mandarin lesson, they were invited to write down their feedback about the lesson on their booklets. They mainly gave answers to four questions:
1. What do you think of today’s Mandarin lesson?
2. Which part of the lesson did you enjoy the most?
3. What did you not like about this lesson? Do you have any suggestions for future Mandarin lessons?

From their responses to these questions, I was able to find out students’ feelings about these lessons. However, there is need for caution in interpreting their feedback since their classroom teacher and I were both present when they were writing these responses, and some students might have provided positive information merely to please the teachers. Although all students had written in their feedback booklet, only the feedback from those participating students who had their parents’ consent and had themselves agreed to participate in this study, was used for this research project. Given the purpose of the feedback questions, I generated three key categories of information according to their: response to lessons, source of enjoyment and advice for future lessons. In their responses to the lessons the students expressed their feelings about each lesson. Their identification of their sources of enjoyment indicated which parts of the lessons, if any, the students liked the most. Their advice for future lessons not only indicated students’ willingness to participate in Mandarin classes, but also illuminated their areas of dissatisfaction with the lessons.

Table 5.1 Categories of student feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback question</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you think of today’s Mandarin lesson?</td>
<td>Responses to lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which part of the lesson did you enjoy the most?</td>
<td>Sources of enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you not like about this lesson? Do you have any suggestions for future Mandarin lessons?</td>
<td>Suggestions for future lessons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1 Class A student feedback

Table 5.2 shows the feedback from the 13 participating students in Class A, with responses from 6 boys and 7 girls. Students in this class were in Year 5 or 6. The
students’ responses to the lesson, their sources of enjoyment and suggestions for future lessons were analysed to identify the key words they used.

Table 5.2 Lesson feedback from participating students in Class A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Responses to lessons</th>
<th>Sources of enjoyment</th>
<th>Suggestions for lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>very enjoyable (1) – fun (2) – good (3) – fun (4,5) – very fun (6) – fun, cool (7) – fun (9) – good (10)</td>
<td>To learn, play a game, to paint, to colour in, to draw</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Very interesting (1) – the best lesson (2,3) – very fun (4,6) – fun (5) – not very fun (6) – favourite lesson (9) – boring, don’t enjoy (10)</td>
<td>Learn a new language, difficult but fun, game, learn more, watch a video, art, make dumplings, --- art &amp; making things</td>
<td>Do more games, have another lesson of painting, make dumplings again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>sort of fun (1) – really fun (2) – the best fun ever (3) – best lesson (4) – ok (5) – love part of it (6) – don’t really like (7) – the worst lesson (9)</td>
<td>Numbers and bingo, game, make dumplings, painting</td>
<td>Do this (game), every day do the painting all the time you are here, to improve a lot more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Really good (1) – very good (2) – really fun (3) – fun (4) – really great (5) – really fun (6) – cool (7) – fun (8) – really fun (9) – alright (10)</td>
<td>To learn, the last game, play bingo, board game, video, little song, watch movie, colouring, --- making dumplings, ink-painting</td>
<td>Make the class a bit quieter by clapping and stuff, have a timer to get students to the floor and on task, say things slower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fun (1) – okay (2) – good (3) – really fun (4) – so much fun (6) – fun (7,8) – good (10)</td>
<td>Number game, movement game, Bingo, celebrity heads, Chinese painting, game, movie, draw</td>
<td>Watch more of the movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Good (1,2) – fun (3) – fun and funny (4) – excellent (5) – favourite so far (6) – like it (7) – enjoy it (9) – good &amp; fun (10)</td>
<td>Starting basics of language, guessing, learn something, game, learn new thing, Chinese, Beijing Opera mask, art, video, drawing</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Enjoy (1) – fun (2,3) – like it (4,5,6) – fun (8) – great fun (9) – fun (10)</td>
<td>Make clovers, game, numbers, words in pictures, painting, quiz, movie, learn the animals</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Great (1) – so fun (3) – really good (4) – Chinese good fun (9)</td>
<td>To learn numbers, game, how to cook,</td>
<td>To know how to make Chinese food, learn how to cook again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Fun (1) – very fun (2) – fun (3) – very fun (4,5,6) – super fun (7,8) – fun (9)</td>
<td>Guess numbers, to learn, bingo, video, colouring mask, game, cockroach stomp, make dumplings</td>
<td>Everyone have a clover, to learn Chinese all my myself, make everything fun, have you all year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Very fun (1) – fun (2,4,5,6) –OK (10)</td>
<td>Game, video, painting mask, make dumplings</td>
<td>Make Chinese food, more outdoor activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Very fun (2,3) – awesome (4) – very fun (5) – the best lesson (6) – alright (7) – very fun (9)</td>
<td>Game, everything</td>
<td>More games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Not bad (1) – fun (2,4) – fun but not as last week (5) – fun (6,8,9)</td>
<td>Guess numbers, game, bingo, art – drawing, sing a song, movie, cooking,</td>
<td>Get picked, do more games, do Chinese sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Very interesting (1) – enjoy</td>
<td>Learn numbers, learn</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Legend: The number in brackets indicates the lesson number.

From the column “Response to lessons”, three key points can be identified. First, it can be seen that most of the feedback is positive. Students tended to avoid using negative words to describe their feelings even if they did not like the lesson very much. Instead, they used “alright”, “okay” or “love part of it” to comment on those lessons they did not really enjoy. Second, different students have different views about the same lesson. Take Lesson 6, about a Chinese painting as an example. Some students regarded it “not very fun” or “love part of it”, which looks like negative feedback. However, some students gave this lesson high recognition, “really fun”, and “favourite so far”. The third point is that all students experienced different levels of enjoyment across these various lessons. Even students who provided very positive feedback every time, used different levels of positive words to describe their different levels of enjoyment. Take student No. 6 for example: all his feedback was positive. Nevertheless, he employed words like “good”, “fun” and “like it” to comment on those lessons he did not regard as very enjoyable. In contrast, he used “excellent” and “favourite so far” to express high appreciation for those lessons he really enjoyed. For other students, we can find similar variations in the levels of joy they express.

From the column, “Sources of enjoyment”, the most frequently used word that appears is “game”, which could suggest the students’ great liking for games. Students mentioned many games and activities like “bingo”, “guess numbers” and “movement game”. These different games were very popular, and were favoured by the students. Next, “to learn” was an important point that could not be ignored as a source of the students’ enjoyment. Almost all students stated that the learning itself was rewarding and pleasurable. Some of them would write down Chinese characters like a Chinese sports name (e.g. 篮球 /lan qiu/, basketball, 游泳 /you yong/ swimming, 打/da/ play) and/or Chinese names of animals (e.g. 猫 /mao/ cat, 狗 /gou /dog, 羊/yang/ sheep) in their feedback to show their appreciation, and to indicate
that they actually learned the language during the lessons. In addition, songs and videos about China and Chinese culture were especially favoured by the students, followed by liking cultural experience activities such as “making Chinese dumplings” and “Chinese painting”. Art could always bring students’ gratification. They liked drawing, painting and colouring in very much.

These responses to the lessons reflected students’ sources of enjoyment. Students greatly enjoyed lessons which had many games and activities. For example, in Lessons 4 and 5, I played several games and activities with students. Surprisingly, all of them gave these two lessons very positive comments. If these lessons had no element which the students enjoyed, they would not have regarded them so highly.

Students did provide much advice for improving these lessons. Their feedback was classified into two categories, namely: strategies of classroom teaching, and teaching content. For strategies of teaching they addressed methods of classroom management and the importance of equality in the classroom. The students were aware of these problems in my class. They tried to tell me about their concerns indirectly, and also provided me with possible solutions to these problems.

The advice on teaching content was closely related to their source of enjoyment. They were asking for more games and to make Chinese food. These two learning experiences brought them fun in the classroom and they wanted more. Furthermore, students’ feedback also related to their concerns about my conduct of the lessons. For example, when the students felt the learning environment was bad or were not happy with noisy lessons, they considered these lessons to be not very good. As a result, their suggestions enhanced my critical reflections about the various teaching strategies I might implement.

5.2.2 Class B student feedback

There were 15 student participants in Class B. It was a mixed class, with students from Years 4 and 5. There were more boys (n = 11) than girls (n = 4) among the participating students in this class. The following Table 5.3 is a summary of their feedback about my Mandarin lessons.
Table 5.3 Lesson feedback from participating students in Class B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Response to lessons</th>
<th>Source of enjoyment</th>
<th>Advice for lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Fun (5) – great (7) – good (8,10) – love dumplings (9)</td>
<td>Game, cockroach stomp, movie, dumplings, learn about sports</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Fun (2) – great (3) – like it (6) – enjoy it (8,9) – lots of fun (9)</td>
<td>Game, I’m good at playing games, art, animals, cockroach stomp, movie, make dumplings.</td>
<td>Play games more often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Fun (2,3,4) – love it (5) – fun (6,7) – like it (8) – really fun (9,10)</td>
<td>Game, learn cool things, to learn, bingo, movie, make dumplings, learn animals</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Good (2) – fun (3) – like it (4,5,6,7,8,9,10)</td>
<td>Game, Bingo, card game, painting, movie, make dumplings, guess who likes what animals</td>
<td>Play more games, learn some more stuff, paint again, watch the movie again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Like the lesson (1-10) – love it (7)</td>
<td>Learn movement, game, bingo, get clovers, learn more, mask &amp; painting, won a game, movie, cockroach stomp, make &amp; eat dumplings,</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Very interesting (2) – like it (3,4,5,7,8) – love it (9) – didn’t like (not get a clover)</td>
<td>Game, bingo, get clovers, move and cockroach stomp, make dumplings,</td>
<td>Play games every week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Fun (2,3,4,5) – great (7,9) – great fun (10)</td>
<td>Game, words, learn animals, learn new words, watch video, make dumplings, movie, drawing</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>good (2) – alright (3,4,5,6,7,8) – good (9) – ok (10)</td>
<td>Learn new words, game, painting, sing a song, movie, make dumplings, draw &amp; guess animals</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Fun (2) – lots of fun (3) – great fun (4) – fun (5) – really fun (6) – fun (7) – okay (8,9) – great (10)</td>
<td>Game, celebrity heads, colouring mask, movie, drawing, make dumplings</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Fun (2) – okay (3) – the best lesson (4) – okay (5) – good (7) – okay (8)</td>
<td>Play games, bingo, a quiz, song, making Chinese Opera masks</td>
<td>Do Chinese animal colouring, more singing, watch more movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Very good (2) – good (3,4,5,6) – good (7) – enjoy it (8) – love it (9)</td>
<td>Game, learn Mandarin, painting, movie, cockroach stomp, song, video, make dumplings, drawing a picture</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Fun (2,3) – hard &amp; tricky (4,5)</td>
<td>Play bingo, animals.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Great (2,3,4) – awesome (5) – great (6) – very good (7) – the best (8,9) – good (10)</td>
<td>Learn movement words, bingo, learn animals, game, cockroach stomp, make dumplings, draw &amp; guess an animal</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Fun (2) – great (3) – fun (4,5,6,7) – great (8) – really fun (9) – great fun (10)</td>
<td>Game, learn new words, celebrity heads, painting &amp; colouring, learn animals, watch videos, cook &amp; make dumplings, watching stuff on board, draw an animal &amp; say it</td>
<td>Learn more words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Fun (2) – good (3) – fun &amp; like it (5) – love it (6) – fun (7) – ok (8) – good (9) – fun (10)</td>
<td>Game, to paint, song, making things,</td>
<td>Learn more about movements, do the actions while learning, everyone (didn’t) get a turn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: The number in brackets indicates the lesson number.

Table 5.3 indicates that the Year 4 and Year 5 participating students used fewer words in their feedback to describe their feelings and ideas, than did the students in Classes A and C. The words used in their feedback were limited. “Fun” was the most frequently appearing word. Their comments about the lessons were short. Second, most of the comments were positive. However, it is possible to see different levels of enjoyment. Take No. 22 student for an example: although “fun”, “lots of fun”, “good” and “really fun”, “okay” and “great” are not negative statements, he did not find “good”, “fun” and “okay” lessons as enjoyable as the lessons that were “lots of fun”, “great” and “really fun”. Generally, most students (n >= 12) had similar
feelings towards the same lesson. Yet, there were a few students who held the opposite view. Consider Lesson 4 for instance: most students highly valued this lesson, with one student even regarding it as “the best lesson”. However, some students thought it was “alright” or “hard and tricky”.

In Class B, students’ sources of enjoyment were games and activities, as was the case in Class A. Every student mentioned various games and activities several times, and showed their high level of interest in doing these. Likewise, almost all students wrote favourably about oral and visual activities in Mandarin classes, such as singing a song, or watching videos. Also, Chinese art, like drawing and painting, appeared frequently in students’ feedback as enjoyable. The other activities students often mentioned enjoying included making dumplings and learning a new language. They wrote down the pronunciation or characters of some Chinese words and sentences. Sometimes, they even expressed “I like” or “I don’t like” in the Chinese sentence they had learnt—“我喜欢”/wo xi huan/or “我不喜欢”/wo bu xi huan/. In this regard, all these students shared a similar interest in learning Mandarin. Games, art, video, cultural activities and learning the language were five elements that were especially favoured by these particular students.

It is valuable to compare these students’ responses to lessons and their sources of enjoyment. Two conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of this evidence. First, when the lesson contained elements that the students found to be a source of enjoyment, students mostly provided positive feedback. Lessons 6, 7 and 9 included almost all students’ favoured sources of enjoyment. Students gave little negative feedback about these three lessons. Although some lessons were full of activities students liked, if the activity was too hard (as in Lesson 8, “cockroach stomp”) or the class was out of control during the activity (as in Lesson 5), some students felt bad about these lessons.

Students in Class B offered less advice for improving my Mandarin lessons than these in Class A. All the advice was about Mandarin teaching, except for one student, who mentioned equality in class and the need to ensure that everyone gets a turn. There were two main types of advice about teaching, namely: to learn more Mandarin and to play more games. One student suggested more colouring in, singing
and movies. Much of the advice related closely to students’ sources of enjoyment. They asked for more of those activities that they enjoyed in the Mandarin lessons.

With regard to the relation between students’ suggestions about these lessons, when the students felt good about a lesson or some parts of it, they made suggestions to spend more time on these learning experiences. Most often, when they made suggestions, they did not feel bad about the lesson. For students who thought about the problems in my teaching, they did not feel bad about the lesson.

5.2.3 Class C student feedback

There were 17 students in Class C who were in Stage 3 (Years 5 and 6), including 7 boys and 10 girls. Table 5.4 provides a summary of their feedback.

### Table 5.4 Lesson feedback from participating students in Class C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Response to lessons</th>
<th>Source of enjoyment</th>
<th>Advice for lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Awesome &amp; cool (1,2) – cool (3,9,10) – like it (5) – awesome (6) – interesting (7) – better than ever (8)</td>
<td>Opera mask, learn sport word, Chinese painting &amp; calligraphy, animals’ names, make dumplings</td>
<td>Learn how to do Mandarin art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Great (1) – fun (2) – great (3) – fun (5,6) – great (7) – a bit boring (8) – great, really enjoyed it (9,10)</td>
<td>Opera mask, do movements, game, art, animals, make dumpling, drawing</td>
<td>Don’t call out the same people, make the lesson more interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Very interesting (1) – cool (2) – really fun (3) – great (5) – the best lesson (6) – lots of fun (7,8) – great (9) – very interesting (10)</td>
<td>Mask, different language, game, video, make dumplings, draw animals</td>
<td>Keep doing what we are doing, learn more about Mandarin, do the lesson again, the game was tricky, do games with animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Good (1,2,3) – interesting (6) – alright (7) – good (9,10)</td>
<td>How to use kuai zi, game, celebrity heads, opera mask, painting, dumplings</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Ok (1) – boring (the beginning, copy you) (2,5) – better (3) – like it (6) – the best (7,9,10)</td>
<td>Count 1-20, make mask, game, video, painting</td>
<td>A bit more fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Really awesome (1) – alright (2) – really fun (3,6,7,9,10)</td>
<td>Number activity, art, game, bingo, remembering, painting, drawing &amp; writing, saying animals in Mandarin, make dumplings</td>
<td>Keep up good activities for us, not to run for a seat, play more games with Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Great (1) – good (2) – out of hand (3) – cool (5,10) – awesome &amp; cool (6,7) – awesome (9)</td>
<td>Beijing Opera mask, game, board game, watch video, learn animals, cockroach stomp, make dumplings,</td>
<td>When people talk you tell them shush, don’t change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Great (1) – okay (2) – great (3,5,6,7,8) – love it (9)</td>
<td>Guessing game, make mask, learn more stuff, game, bingo, sports game, game, learn new things, drawing,</td>
<td>Have more or longer lessons, the worksheet was hard, learn more animals, learn more thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Fun (1) – ok (2) – really fun (3) – well set out (5) – like it (6) – very good (7) – good (8) – fun (10)</td>
<td>Mask, game, painting, mask, win a prize, writing words</td>
<td>Go to higher numbers, to learn real sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Fun (1) – a lot better (2) – awesome (3) – the funniest lesson (5) – fantastic (6) – fun</td>
<td>To learn something new, guessing game, game, get clovers, celebrity heads, having fun and learn at the same time,</td>
<td>Do some Mandarin painting &amp; colouring, play more games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Interesting (1) – fun (2,3,5) – interesting (6) – fun (7,9,10)</td>
<td>Opera mask, game, celebrity heads, cockroach stomp, writing &amp; colouring, drawing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Great (1) – lots of fun (2) – fantastic (3) – great (5) – great fun (6) – lots of fun (7) – awesome (8) – very enjoyable &amp; interesting (9) – good (10)</td>
<td>Opera mask, play game (Chinese chairs), game, celebrity head, video, painting, colouring, video, sheet, make dumplings, to win</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Good (1,2) – great (3,5,6,7,8,9) – fun (10)</td>
<td>Opera mask, game, video, painting, worksheet, acting to be animals, make food, count clovers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Exciting &amp; enjoyable (1) – great (2,3) – very nice (5) – very interesting (6) – very much enjoy it (7) – fun &amp; enjoyable (8,10) – very exciting (9)</td>
<td>Fruit game, to learn sports games, bingo, celebrity heads, video, painting, colouring, to learn animals, make dumplings, game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Wonderful, the best ever (1) – great (2,5) – fun exciting &amp; enjoyable (6) – fun &amp; great (7) – great, love it (8,9,10)</td>
<td>Opera mask, game of movements, bingo, to learn sports, celebrity heads, movie, to say animals, game, cockroach stomp, make dumping, picture game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Good (1) – cool (2) – great (3) – cool (5) – lots of fun (6) – fun (7,8,10) – awesome (9)</td>
<td>Guessing, game, bingo, calligraphy, make dumplings, drawing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Fun (2,3) – great (5,6) – good (7,8,9,10)</td>
<td>Game, painting, make the food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: The number in brackets indicates the lesson number.

In the column, “response to lessons”, students in Class C made fewer negative comments about the Mandarin lessons than the other two classes, although it should be noted that there were more participating students in Class C than in Class A or B. The students also used different words to show their appreciation about these Mandarin lessons. From their feedback, it seems that they were very satisfied with my teaching and were interested in Mandarin lessons. Most of their comments on the same lesson were consistent. The lesson that had the most complaints was Lesson 2, although particular sources of enjoyment were identified by the students. What is more, the listening comprehension they did during this lesson was a challenge for them. My reflections on that lesson indicate that I drew the same conclusion:

这张作业是我念数字和动作，然后他们把数字和做动作的图片连线在一起。数字是中文和英文都有 的。他们就很多人不懂。像 1，一，即使我解释了一下，可是他们还是记不清楚，因为上面只有汉字没有拼音。然后让他们把中文数字和图片连起来，他们就转不过来了，所以上课的情况很糟糕。

The worksheet was designed to evaluate students’ listening comprehension of the Chinese sports they had learnt. They needed to listen to the words I called out
and match the number of the words to their pictures. Besides, I gave the instructions in Chinese, such as 第一题/di yi ti/—the first question. The numbers of the questions were written in Chinese and they hardly remembered any Chinese numbers, they could not complete the task well. They kept asking me questions and were very unsettled (April 28 2010, p. 27).

This reflection was based on my classroom observations. Students in Class C were very confused during this lesson and complained about it in their feedback.

Over time, it can be seen that students’ interest in Mandarin changed from medium to high, back to medium. From Lessons 3 to 7, they were very happy with my teaching whereas, at the beginning and during the last few lessons, they did not feel as positive as during the middle period.

The top 2 activities students in Class C enjoyed were artistic activities and games. All students mentioned artistic activities like Beijing Opera mask, drawing and painting. They adored all tasks related to colours. Also, many kinds of games were mentioned in their feedback. These ranged from the Bingo Beijing (the most popular) and from celebrity heads to some tricky games like “cockroach stomp”; these all attracted their high regard. In addition, learning to make jiao zi and watching a variety of videos depicting Chinese culture were all favoured by these students. The classroom teachers mentioned in their feedback the need for such activities, rather just pure language learning (see 5.3).

In their advice the students made three kinds of suggestions. First, some students offered ideas about classroom management like “don’t let students run for a seat”, or “when people talk you tell them shush”. These students perceived some mistakes or problems in my teaching and they suggested ways to solve them. Second, they asked for more games and activities. Sometimes, when they thought some games were good, but I did not let them play them, they would ask for those games. The last point is that some students kept asking me to make the lessons more interesting. They admitted they “lost focus quickly” and could concentrate only if the lesson was very appealing to them.
The students’ responses to the Mandarin lessons, their sources of enjoyment and the advice they gave about improving my lessons all told the same story. A good lesson always engages students’ source of enjoyment, and students asked for more lessons like that. In contrast, a lesson that was not good either did not engage students’ sources of enjoyment, in part because it was too hard to realise, or the class was out of my control. In this situation, students either asked for more interesting lessons, or offered suggestions to improve my teaching. In practice, these three points cannot be separated from each other.

5.2.4 Lesson content and student feedback

Across Table 5.5 a pattern emerges. Among the sources of enjoyment, “game” was the most important. “Bingo”, “Cockroach stomps” and “celebrity head” were all highly valued games. The second important source of enjoyment was art: “drawing”, “painting” and “opera mask”. Entertainment came next: “video”, “movie” and “making dumplings” easily attracted students’ interests. Some students also regarded “to learn” as a source of enjoyment. From their feedback, the study of Mandarin and learning about Chinese sports and animals brought them enjoyment.

With regard to the students’ advice, many were asking for “more games”. As a prime source of enjoyment, the students liked learning Mandarin through playing games. Besides games, students also mentioned “colouring in” and “painting”; this is consistent with their second key source of enjoyment—namely, artistic activities. What is more, students also offered suggestions for improving classroom management and the learning environment, such as “make the class a bit quieter by clapping” and “make the lessons a bit more interesting since we lose focus quickly”.

129
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lessons</th>
<th>Main learning content</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 1 (21/04/10)</td>
<td>Review of numbers, guessing the price, opera masks &amp; numbers</td>
<td>very enjoyable 1, very interesting 2, sort of fun 1, really good 1, fun 4, good 4, great 4, very fun 2, not bad 1, awesome &amp; cool 1, very interesting 1, ok 1, really awesome 1, interesting 1, exciting &amp; enjoyable 1, wonderful, the best ever 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 2 (28/04/10)</td>
<td>Movement, listening comprehension worksheet, Chinese chair</td>
<td>fun 15, the best lesson 1, really fun 3, very good 2, ok 3, good 6, enjoy it 1, like it 1, very interesting 1, great 3, awesome &amp; cool 1, cool 2, boring 1, alright 1, a lot better 1, lots of fun 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 3 (05/05/10)</td>
<td>Listen &amp; move, bingo, board game &amp; movement</td>
<td>Good 4, the best lesson 1, the best fun ever 1, fun 9, so fun 1, very fun 1, great 8, like it 3, alright 1, lots of fun 1, okay 1, cool 1, really fun 4, better 1, out of hand 1, awesome 1, fantastic 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 4 (12/05/10)</td>
<td>Guess &amp; learn sports, listening comprehension worksheet, celebrity heads</td>
<td>fun 7, very fun 2, the best lesson 2, fun and funny 1, like it 4, really good 1, alright 2, awesome 1, great 2, good 1, hard &amp; tricky 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 5 (19/05/10)</td>
<td>Expo video, sports, sentence “I like”, competition game: listen &amp; get the card</td>
<td>fun 10, ok 2, really great 1, excellent 1, very fun 2, fun but not as last week 1, enjoy it 1, love it 1, like it 5, very nice 1, alright 1, hard &amp; tricky 1, boring 1, awesome 1, great 6, good 3, cool 1, well set out 1, the funniest lesson 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 6 (26/05/10)</td>
<td>Review sports words &amp; sentences, PPT about Chinese painting &amp; calligraphy, ink-painting</td>
<td>very fun 3, really fun 3, so much fun 1, favourite so far 1, like it 6, the best lesson 2, fun 4, cool &amp; awesome 2, alright 1, good 1, love it 1, awesome 1, interesting 1, fantastic 1, great fun 1, great 4, very interesting 1, fun exciting &amp; enjoyable 1, lots of fun 1,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 7 (02/06/10)</td>
<td>Guess &amp; learn animals, competition game: pick up “the” animal, trace &amp; colour in worksheet</td>
<td>fun, cool 1, don’t really like 1, cool 1, fun 7, like it 3, super fun 1, alright 3, awesome 1, great 4, love it 1, good 3, interesting 1, fun &amp; great 1, lots of fun 2, the best 1, really fun 1, awesome &amp; cool 1, very good 2, very much enjoy it 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 8 (09/06/10)</td>
<td>New animal words, cockroach stomp, watch a movie</td>
<td>Fun 4, super fun 1, good 3, enjoy it 2, like it 5, alright 1, the best 2, great 3, ok 2, a bit boring 1, lots of fun 1, exciting 1, awesome 1, fun &amp; enjoyable 1, great, love it 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 9 (23/06/10)</td>
<td>PPT: Chinese jiao zi, video: how to make jiao zi, make &amp; eat your own jiao zi</td>
<td>fun 5, favourite lesson 1, the worst lesson 1, really fun 4, enjoy it 1, great fun 1, Chinese food fan 1, very fun 1, so fun 1, love 1, lots of fun 1, like it 2, love it 3, okay 1, the best 1, good 4, great, really enjoyed it 2, great 3, the best 1, awesome 2, interesting 1, very exciting 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 10 (30/06/10)</td>
<td>Review animals, draw a animal you like, practising language about your picture</td>
<td>Good 6, Boring 1, alright 1, good &amp; fun 1, fun 7, cool 1, really fun 2, like it 2, great fun 2, ok 2, great 2, great, really enjoyed it 2, very interesting 1, the best 1, fun &amp; enjoyable 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.5 presents students’ comments about each Mandarin lesson. Most of their comments were positive. However, during these 10 weeks, students experienced several stages of emotional engagement with the Mandarin lessons. During the first two lessons of Stage 1, they thought the lessons were “enjoyable”, “great”, “fun”, “alright, not bad”, “very interesting” and “very fun but not too good”. Lessons 3, 4 and 6 were regarded as “the best lessons”, “the best fun ever”, “really fun”, “excellent”, “really good” or “awesome”. During this stage, most students showed great interest in the Mandarin lessons. They recognised the value of these lessons. The comment “the best lesson” appeared in their feedback journals for each of these successive lessons. Then, in Lessons 5, 7 and 8, most students provided positive feedback such as “good”, “great” and “fun”. However, there were more complaints such as “not very fun”, “ok”, “alright” or “boring”. During this stage, students felt Mandarin was not as interesting to them as previously. During the last two lessons, their feelings towards it were a little better than in the previous several lessons, although not as good as during Stage 2. This can be seen from their feedback: “cool”, “favourite lesson”, “good”, “good and fun” and “so fun”. In Class A, many students seemed not to like the last lesson; some thought it was “ok”, “boring” or “the worst lesson”. In the most popular lessons, Lessons 3, 4, 6 and 9, the language content was integrated with games and cultural activities.

To conclude, three points are worth highlighting. First, despite the diverse views of students, most felt the same way about the Mandarin lessons. Most of the lessons were regarded in a positive way as “fun” and “good” by the students. For a few lessons like Lesson 2, they commented it was “ok” or “alright”. Second, games were an effective tool for grasping students’ interest, but only if the game suited the students’ learning level and was played under good classroom management. The last point is that, although students acknowledged that learning itself was rewarding, learning the language was not of great interest to these students. The language lessons needed to be integrated with artistic activities, cultural activities and games so as to stimulate students’ interest in learning Mandarin. This was also reflected in students’ responses in the pre-intervention questionnaire about their everyday interests and interests in the study of Mandarin (see Tables 4.3, 4.4 & 4.6 in Chapter 4).
5.3 Use of audio-visual tools to stimulate interest in learning Mandarin

In students’ feedback and their pre-intervention questionnaire, audio-visual tools like songs, movies, and other videos were popular and inspired students to be enthusiastic in participating in the study of Mandarin. With regard to engaging students’ needs for fun, Henley (2010, p. 120) identified several approaches doing so, such as incorporating music and art in the lesson, or adapting television game show formats for classroom use. In the primary school, most of the classrooms had interactive whiteboards. One classroom teacher told me that, for years, children’s learning strategies had not changed greatly, but that now their access to the Internet and high-technology is changing them. In her lessons, she would go directly to the Internet and show the students pictures or videos about the topics they were studying. As a result, these kinds of activities always worked, and had a positive effect on students’ interest in learning. The following excerpt from my reflections also indicates the effectiveness of audio-visual tools in stimulating students’ interest in the study of Mandarin and stimulating their language learning:

I used the picture of Kongfu Panda to review the lesson. I told them if they could say names of the animals in the picture in Mandarin, they could watch the movie next time. They were very excited and quickly achieved this goal. Then, we watched the animation “Kongfu Panda” for about 10 minutes. In the movie, many words were spoken in Chinese. For example, the name “turtle” was pronounced /wu gui/, which is the Chinese name for turtle. After watching the movie, almost all students could remember how to say “turtle” in Mandarin (June 2 2010, p. 62).

Audio-visual tools and the Internet not only stimulated students to participate in the learning process, but also accelerated their language learning. Because the students were highly interested in funny and interesting videos, they showed high concentration when watching them. As a result, they were likely to remember the content of the videos. Furthermore, with the videos from the Internet, students were able to see modern China, which contrasted with the vague image they had in their mind. Students knew something about Chinese traditional culture and about Mandarin, but they knew little about what modern China looks like:
I showed them a video about the Shanghai EXPO. While watching the video, I asked them to say the sports that appeared, in Mandarin. Some of them responded very well. The students and the teachers were also amazed by the video. The teacher told me she had never thought of China as a modern country. In her mind, China was a tradition-bound country where people wear their old costumes. Some students told me that they liked China better and wanted to see China themselves someday (May 19 2010, p. 46).

The Internet technology was able to provide many far-reaching insights into modern China and develop students’ interest in learning its language (Tsai, 2008). The video from the Internet broadened students’ views of modern China and expanded their knowledge about China. Students appreciated the language and culture after watching accounts of modern China. Moreover, their language learning was consolidated during this process. Their language learning was embedded in the use of audio-visual tools.

Values coding (Saldana, 2009) was used to analyse the interviews with three experienced classroom teachers, to deepen the analysis. Units of teachers’ interviews were coded according to V (value), A (attitude), and B (belief) (Saldana, 2009, p. 90): the key concepts from the Values coding of teachers’ interviews.

V (values) audio-visual and Internet, various strategies, share interests and knowledge, ask questions, prior knowledge, try to find out
A (attitudes) very difficult, worry, arouse interest, share, very convenient
B (beliefs) teacher’s personality, more difficult, something new, teaching content, visual thing

According to the key concepts that expressed these teachers’ values, these teachers used a variety of strategies to stimulate students’ interests in the lessons and they believed that these teaching strategies were important but should be used under certain circumstances. Among these strategies, they suggested that the use of Internet and videos needed to be given greater attention in class lessons. These teachers had high regard for audio-visual tools and the Internet as part of their teaching:
For visual things, I especially mean the new technology. I used to use visual books or something like that a lot but now with new technology I can just Google it online and everything comes up quickly (Lisa, 2010, p. 1).

They were very interested when the YouTube videos were shown, including that was a very good idea because their world was very electronic. They love looking. They respond more to looking than to thinking themselves from their background knowledge (Mary, 2010, p. 3).

With new technology, teachers build new and attractive lessons which are able to bring students into a fascinating, informative world. It fulfilts students’ interest in exploring new knowledge and makes an abundance of intellectual life available in the classroom. Teachers and students could easily access the Internet as needed during the lessons and this was a very convenient way to enrich teaching resources and to expand students’ knowledge. The students liked these activities since they were eager to learn more via appealing pictures, animations and videos. These audio-visual tools attracted students who concentrated on their lessons and presumably learnt more. It was the teachers’ view that audio-visual media could capture students’ interest in learning.

However, although the teachers believed that audio-visual activities helped students to learn more about the outside world and were a valuable resource for their teaching, some teachers worried about their negative effect on student’ interests:

I think television and access to the Internet so they see things outside their own house and their own school distracts them from having an interest in learning a lot. I do worry a lot about it (Mary, 2010, p. 10).

There is a Chinese concept “双刃剑” /shuang ren jian/ that is useful for interpreting this claim. “双 /shuan/” means double, “刃 /ren/” means blade and “剑 /jian/” means sword. This concept means a sharp sword can help you to defeat your enemy, but if you use it incorrectly, you may hurt yourself with it. Thus, even though new technology is beneficial for students’ learning and teachers’ teaching, television and the Internet may distract students from what teachers expect them to learn. Students may just watch television or the Internet for fun and not learn anything. When audio-
visual tools are used appropriately, they can help students to learn while having fun, and this can help stimulate their interest in the study of Mandarin. However, if these tools are used by students who are not informed about how to use them appropriately, they may distract students from their learning. Therefore, the key point is to be aware of the positive aspects of these audio-visual tools as well as their negative potential, and to find a balanced way to make the best result. I needed to learn to make better use of these tools in the classroom, to ensure they outperformed other teaching resources and sustained students’ interest in learning.

5.4 Analysis of students’ pre- and post-intervention questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learning Mandarin is very important to me.</td>
<td>Attitudes/values towards Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mandarin is an interesting language.</td>
<td>Interest in Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chinese culture is interesting.</td>
<td>Interest in Chinese culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I often have out-of-school experiences in Mandarin and Chinese culture.</td>
<td>Out-of-school experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mandarin lessons are interesting.</td>
<td>Opinion about Mandarin classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I can learn Mandarin very well.</td>
<td>Self-evaluated competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I would like to learn Mandarin this year.</td>
<td>Short-term interest in learning Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I would like to continue learning Mandarin next year.</td>
<td>Long-term interest in learning Mandarin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ interest in the study of Mandarin was examined across six dimensions: their valuation of Mandarin, interest in Mandarin and Chinese culture, out-of-school experiences in Mandarin and Chinese culture, feelings and opinion about Mandarin classes, self-evaluated competence in learning Mandarin, and long-term interest in the study of Mandarin. Table 5.6 summarises the results from the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires of the participating students in Class A.
Table 5.6 Results of intervention questionnaires in Class A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1 Pre</th>
<th>Q2 Post</th>
<th>Q3 Pre</th>
<th>Q4 Post</th>
<th>Q5 Pre</th>
<th>Q6 Post</th>
<th>Q7 Pre</th>
<th>Q8 Post</th>
<th>Total Pre</th>
<th>Total Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By comparing each question from the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, the following conclusions were drawn. Table 5.6 shows that students’ interest in the study of Mandarin did not change dramatically after the 10-week interest-based teaching project; this is to be expected, as teaching and learning are long-term projects. Students’ opinion of Mandarin lessons and their self-evaluated competence in learning Mandarin slightly improved, as can be seen from Questions 5 and 6. Students’ interest in Chinese culture decreased slightly, according to Question 3. According to Questions 7 and 8, students’ willingness to continue learning Mandarin increased a little. Students’ disinterest in learning Mandarin declined to some extent. Therefore, students’ overall interest in the study of Mandarin slightly increased as a result of the interest-based language teaching project in Class A.

Table 5.7 Results of intervention questionnaires in Class B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1 Pre</th>
<th>Q2 Post</th>
<th>Q3 Pre</th>
<th>Q4 Post</th>
<th>Q5 Pre</th>
<th>Q6 Post</th>
<th>Q7 Pre</th>
<th>Q8 Post</th>
<th>Total Pre</th>
<th>Total Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In class B, among all the 15 participating students, only 12 completed both the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. Therefore, this sample was composed of 12...
students. As seen in Table 5.7, it appears that students’ interest in Mandarin improved—there were more students who said they “strongly agree” that Mandarin was an interesting language. In responding to Question 5 however, students’ interest in Mandarin apparently decreased. From Question 4 it can be seen that students’ out-of-school experiences with Mandarin and Chinese culture decreased. As in Class A, students’ self-evaluated competence in learning Mandarin has been promoted, at least according to their responses to Question 6. There was little difference, even a slight decrease, in their willingness to continue learning Mandarin. However, the students’ approval of the Mandarin program seemed to be enhanced, as seen from the increase in the choice “Strongly agree” (from 13 to 18). Overall, students’ interest in the study of Mandarin in Class B has been slightly increased.

Table 5.8 Results of intervention questionnaires in Class C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1 Pre</th>
<th>Q1 Post</th>
<th>Q2 Pre</th>
<th>Q2 Post</th>
<th>Q3 Pre</th>
<th>Q3 Post</th>
<th>Q4 Pre</th>
<th>Q4 Post</th>
<th>Q5 Pre</th>
<th>Q5 Post</th>
<th>Q6 Pre</th>
<th>Q6 Post</th>
<th>Q7 Pre</th>
<th>Q7 Post</th>
<th>Q8 Pre</th>
<th>Q8 Post</th>
<th>Total Pre</th>
<th>Total Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Class C, 16 participating students completed both the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. From Table 5.8, it can be seen that students’ interest in learning Mandarin was noticeably enhanced, especially as seen in Question 2. From Question 4, it can be seen that students’ out-of-school experiences in Mandarin and Chinese culture apparently decreased. Students’ self-evaluated competence in the study of Mandarin declined very slightly, according to their responses to Question 6. Students’ choice of continuing to learn Mandarin gained positive feedback according to their answers to Question 8. The results from the other questions indicate little change after the 10-week teaching-research project. Overall, students’ interest in learning Mandarin improved slightly, especially as seen in their choosing to learn Mandarin in the next year (Q8).
To conclude, I would like to draw attention to five key points. First, students’ valuation of Mandarin, interest in Chinese culture and feeling about Chinese lessons, did not change much. Most of the students already held very positive attitudes towards these aspects. Second, students’ opinion of Mandarin as an interesting language was enhanced during the course of this project. There were more students who came to regard Mandarin as interesting. Third, students’ out-of-school experiences in Mandarin and Chinese culture decreased. Few students had contact or interactions with Mandarin or Chinese culture in their everyday life. Their out-of-school experience with this language was limited. Fourth, students’ self-evaluated competence in the study of Mandarin was improved. Although there were not many students who strongly agreed that they could learn Mandarin well, there were more students who expressed more confidence with the language. More of them had positive opinions rather than negative ones. The last important point is that, even though the students’ overall interest in the study of Mandarin did not change dramatically, there were more students (n = 26) who would be willing to learn Mandarin the next year among all the 41 participating students who competed the two questionnaires.

5.5 Students’ Learning

5.5.1 Diverse attitudes towards learning

I taught similar content to the different classes of the same Stage. However, different classes responded to my lessons differently. From a comparison between pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, especially in Questions 7 and 8, students’ willingness to continue learning Mandarin increased in Class A and Class C. However, this did not happen in Class B (see 5.4). Furthermore, even within these classes, students had diverse responses to my teaching. Some showed great interest in the content and in answering my questions. Some avoided eye contact with me and showed little responsiveness, especially when I was teaching or revising the language. The following excerpt from my reflections points to some students’ lack of interest in learning Mandarin:
I felt that the class was lacking something. When I asked the students to read the new Chinese words, their voice was very low and some of them were not making a sound at all. Sometimes, when I raised some questions about the language we had learnt, not many of them would respond. Maybe it was because some of them were not so active and not willing to participate in the lesson. Nevertheless, there was always a group of students in the class who were always very cooperative and eager to learn (June 30 2010, p. 81).

The boredom of the lesson, as much as their worries about losing face in front of their friends, may have contributed to these students’ lack of response. Besides trying to improve the interestingness of my Mandarin lessons, the students’ social and family backgrounds had to be taken into consideration. Manning and Bucher (2007, p. 7) argue that students’ lack of enthusiasm and misbehaviour in school can be traced to their family and social environment.

5.5.2 Parental influence

During the interviews, I asked the classroom teachers why some students were just not interested in learning Mandarin. Teachers mentioned students’ characteristics in this particular community as being one possible explanation. Given the influence of their parents as well as the local community, some students were not interested in learning anything, and were uninterested in learning a foreign language:

There are some students that are not interested in learning. So I think it’s their behaviour and attitude to school. You will find whether it’s Mandarin lesson, or whether it’s math lesson, whether it’s English lesson, whether it’s writing lesson, you always get students, a group of students that are disinterested or unmotivated . . . It’s the whole attitude to learning. So they don’t show self-discipline. It’s the personality themselves so that they just need a little bit of encouragement and extra attention to be motivated to start. So I don’t think it’s Mandarin because I know by myself assessing the students when you were not there, they all do enjoy Mandarin (Jane, 2010, p. 3).

Those students who showed poor discipline during my lessons were those who did not want to learn anything, but they also distracted the rest of the class. Sometimes, I needed to “bribe” them to win their concentration (see 6.3)—providing a reward was
effective, since they were very materialistic and they wanted something to stimulate their learning:

That wasn’t interesting for them as ones where they could identify what they were interested in, especially for a new language not just English. But I find teaching English to them too, they are not that interested in knowing the correct way because they are so used to saying their words how they always said them at home, that when you say no, let’s fix it, let’s correct it. I’ll teach you the correct way, and they are not interested because they are so used to doing it in this way, they are in a pattern that they don’t want to change now. In their age group, younger children might be easier to correct, but this age group at the moment, I think, are set in their ways, and they are not interested in learning in the right way. You keep trying (Mary, 2010, p. 2).

Teachers told me that most of the students at this school came from lower working class families. They told me that they do not learn how to behave properly, except at school. Apparently many of their parents do not regard education as important for their children, let alone learning a new foreign language. The teachers said it was their parents’ ideas that influenced these children’s lack of interest in learning a language:

A few of the others are lazy in a lot of things they do. But they are keen in a lot of things. So I think their family background is teaching them to learn as much as you can and to be interested while other families don’t have a high value on education, which is really sad. It’s a really big worry for their future. But there are some who do respond and who do try. Some, just because they are not interested in doing a lot of things, that’s their character (Jane, 2010, p. 3).

As a result, some of the students gave less effort to learn it. They did not want to make the effort to learn something that they found difficult and uninteresting. They did not just misbehave and fail to learn in my lessons, they did so in all other subjects and with other teachers as well. In other words, these socio-economic influences may have undermined some of these students’ individual interest in learning Mandarin. It was found that “family members greatly influenced their quitting Chinese Second Language Learning” (Ren, 2009, p. 21), which means that
when some parents of my students are disapproving of learning Mandarin, students are less likely to make efforts to learn it, and may even quit learning the language.

Nevertheless, in order to achieve my educational goal and that of NALSSP (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010)—that is, having more students continue to learn Mandarin, making arduous efforts to make them feel interested in the language was necessary. I designed my lessons to make them interesting and attractive, and provided rewards to stimulate students’ learning. However, this did not ensure that the lessons went along the right track. The Chinese concept “事与愿违/shi yu yuan wei/” is pertinent here. “事”/shi/ means the fact or the result, “与”/yu/ means and, “愿”/yuan/ means wish, hope or expectation and “违”/wei/ means different from or against. Therefore, this concept means getting the opposite to what one had intended, in learning Mandarin. My interest-based lessons did make most students interested, but some students did not take learning the language seriously. They searched for nothing but fun during the lesson. Therefore, although their feelings toward the Mandarin lesson were very positive, their interest in the study of Mandarin did not grow much.

5.5.3 Surprisingly good learning results

Sometimes in my lessons, students quickly lost their focus, as they did not seem to understand the content. Sometimes I did not have enough time to teach them what they needed to know to acquire the language. However, when I used activities or games to assess their learning, this not only cheered them up, but I found they had learnt more than they appeared to.

Although I felt Class B did not learn as well as Class C last time when we were playing the game, this lesson I found they still remembered the language very well.
They were noisy and disorganised in the last lesson and did not respond very well when playing the game. However, during the revision at the beginning of this lesson, I found they did learn the language. Most of the students could say the words and sentences. They were active in answering my questions. Therefore, although the students appeared not to be learning effectively, they actually learnt a good deal of Mandarin (May 5 2010, p. 35).

Compared with students in China, Australian students like to talk to each other in class. I used to wonder whether they talked because they found my lessons uninteresting. However, after a while, I found they sometimes talked when they found the lesson was interesting, as they discussed what they were thinking about the content. They did learn even when they were talking during these activities. The following excerpt also points to the students’ talkative way of learning Mandarin:

I found they were talking about the competition, they were still learning. After each round, they would say to each other whether they were wrong or right, whether they did it well or not. They would also discuss why they did it wrong or the right way to pronounce the Chinese word (May 19 2010, p. 48).

It seems that the level of interestingness of the lesson had a major effect on students’ learning. An uninteresting lesson causes students to be reluctant to concentrate. In contrast, a lesson that makes students interested can make a dramatic difference on their interest in learning. An interesting lesson keeps students on task longer and makes them learn more. Further, the students’ encouragement of me as their teacher came when they recognised my lessons as interesting. The students’ recognition enhanced my enthusiasm for improving my teaching, which benefited the students’ learning.

5.5.4 Students’ interest in learning Mandarin

To conclude my action research project, I interviewed the teachers to find out how my teaching had gone, over the term, and where I could further improve my teaching. The central focus of my action research project was to determine whether students’ interest in the study of Mandarin could be improved over a year, and these interviews helped me to find out what the classroom teachers thought I had achieved. As shown
from students’ pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, their overall interest in the study of Mandarin had been slightly improved (see 5.4). In order to verify this result further, I undertook further analysis of students’ interests using Values Coding (Saldana, 2009). These codes revealed the following themes: growing awareness, increasing interest, language comfort and increasingly positive attitude. Together, these illustrate students’ change in disposition towards the study of Mandarin. However, when I used this coding strategy to further analyse these interviews, I found it was quite unhelpful and inappropriate. Almost all of the evidence concerned teachers’ beliefs about students’ interest in learning Mandarin. The most frequent code generated through this analysis was “increasing interest”.

Growing awareness
Jing: Do you think students’ interest in the study of Mandarin has been increased?
Lisa: I don’t know. I’m not sure. I would need to do a survey. But I do think there’s awareness now. They are certainly aware of the language, the culture and the country. We were watching the video of learning Asian languages. And students were very familiar with what was being discussed since that is what they are experiencing now.
I think the motivation of interest they’ve developed over time in learning the Mandarin has come from you. And the exposure and promotion we have incorporated in the school. So I think what the weekly lesson has done was having initiated thought and some students want to pursue it further. So I know there are a couple of students, Teegan and I think it’s Felicity, both take what you’ve taught them and then, go either research or do further research themselves.
Increasing interest
Lisa: I think some students have increased their interests in the study of Mandarin.
Jane: And I think that (audio-visual)’s another thing that you motivate them and maintain their interests out of the lesson. To answer your question, yes, the children look forward to the Mandarin lesson and it has increased interest.
Increasingly positive attitude
Jane: I think it (interest-based language teaching)’s very beneficial. I received lots of positive comments
When I had interviews with the parents. They feel that their children are being placed at an advantage by learning another language, especially an Asian language, Mandarin.

Jane: So do you think their attitude towards Mandarin has been slightly changed?
Mary: I think so. I mean I am thinking of everybody over all. I think they interested in learning it more. They enjoy your company. I think that they enjoyed the lessons because you were taking their interests into account, sport and animals; you are a different teacher to their everyday teacher as well.

B: advantage
position

When asked, “do you think students’ interests in the study of Mandarin have been increased?”, the three teachers all provided positive answers. Therefore, from the classroom teachers’ perspective, the students’ interests in learning Mandarin had improved over the year, especially during the implementation of my action research project. The following excerpt from an interview with a classroom teacher points to the effectiveness of this interest-based language teaching project:

I think so. I mean I am thinking of everybody over all. I think they are interested in learning it more. They enjoy your company. I think that they enjoyed the lessons because you were taking their interests into account, sport and animals; it’s a different person to their everyday teacher as well. They were looking forward to Mandarin lessons. So they do enjoy it (Mary, 2010, p. 4).

And I think that’s another thing, that you motivate them and maintain their interests out of the lesson. To answer your question, yes, the children look forward to the Mandarin lesson and it has increased interest (Jane, 2010, p. 3).

Nevertheless, the level of students’ interest in learning Mandarin differed. The students’ interests in Mandarin ranged from “increasingly positive attitude”, “growing awareness” to “increasing interests”, “language comfort”. That suggests it slightly improved for some students and may have dramatically changed for others. Most students had gained a better awareness of modern China and a positive disposition towards Mandarin:
But I do think there’s awareness now. They are certainly aware of the language, the culture and the country. We were watching the video about learning Asian languages. And students were very familiar with what was being discussed since that is what they are experiencing now (Lisa, 2010, p. 2).

Although some of these students may not continue to learn Mandarin, they were aware that they were learning an important Asian language, and at least they knew something either about the language or its culture. During the early stage of my teaching Mandarin, some students resisted learning it, for a variety of reasons. However, by the end of my action research project, there was an increased desire among the students to learn Mandarin. I now entered classrooms with welcoming atmospheres. Besides this growing awareness, some students developed their individual interest in studying Mandarin, regarding it as a field of knowledge that they really liked, and were willing to spend time learning the language: “So I know there are a couple of students, Teegan and Felicity, both take what you’ve taught them and then, go and do further research themselves” (Jane, 2010, p. 4). These children became quite comfortable with the language and they wanted to learn more about it.

5.5.5 Keep trying and encouraging

Given the characteristics of students in this particular school, the teachers believed that encouraging them is essential, and through constantly encouraging the students, to build their confidence and interest in learning, as they find much of it to be difficult or uninteresting:

But you can see after a while, they are just not interested at all. But you keep trying, you keep coming back every day and you keep trying and trying. But sometimes you just have to go back to them and say to them, this is what had happened, and this is what would happen as a consequence (Mary, 2010, p. 2).

Initially it was difficult to get the students to learn Mandarin because they felt uninterested and thought it was difficult to master. Confronted with this situation, I had to design lessons that addressed students’ levels of learning, but also to keep patiently encouraging them:
It was imperative to ensure that regardless of their past experiences, all students were supported and had the skills needed to participate in the teaching and learning activities as this was crucial to encourage their engagement. With this in mind, the students were put into learning sets so that each member could support the others (Leese, p. 71, 2009).

In my Mandarin classes I found that there were two ways to support students to be better stimulated to learn Mandarin. One way was to make sure the students were well-instructed about each learning activity or game, so that they knew how to participate without confusion. The other way was to encourage them to be involved and conquer difficulties in the learning process. Teacher’s encouragement can give students more courage and confidence to learn.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter analysed students’ feelings and opinions about interest-based Mandarin lessons. It indicated the relative effectiveness of the topic interests as well as various strategies such as games, cultural activities and painting, in improving the interestingness of the Mandarin lessons. Students’ change of interest in the study of Mandarin was also examined by comparing their pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, which pointed to students’ growing interest in learning Mandarin. In addition, by analysing the interviews with the classroom teachers, it was found that they detected an increasing interest in the study of Mandarin among the students. In Chapter 6, the importance of my role as a teacher-researcher in promoting students’ learning of Mandarin and their interest in the study of this language is explored.
Chapter 6

Professional learning in stimulating students’ interest in Mandarin

6.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the role of my professional learning in stimulating students’ Mandarin learning and their interest in the study of this language. The main data sources are my fieldwork journal, interviews with classroom teachers and written feedback from the classroom teachers. Various factors that informed and influenced my professional learning are analysed.

6.2 Classroom management

I started this research project with the purpose of fostering Australian students’ learning and interest in Mandarin. However, when I tried to put my initial lesson plan into action, I found that designing and teaching Mandarin lessons were only small parts of my work as a teacher in Australia. Sometimes, I needed to spend much time dealing with students’ misbehaviour during the lessons. As a beginning teacher-researcher, I was very tolerant of noise in the classroom because I thought I should be nice to the students and did not want to stop my lesson from time to time. However, an experienced teacher thought I needed to “watch the noise level of the students. Stop the lesson completely in order to keep the noise level down” (Mary, May 5 2010). The Chinese concept “害群之马” /hai qun zhi ma/ is especially relevant here. “害” /hai/ means harmful, “群” /qun/means team or group, “之” /zhi/ equals “s” in English and “马” /ma/ means horse. The concept comes from a boy herdsman’s words: “To rule the land, as I see it, is no different from herding horses. You also have to get rid of anyone who does harm to the horses.” This concept refers to anybody who is harmful to the whole group. In the classroom, the harmful horses
are some of the noisy students, who have a negative influence on the other students’ learning. Although the noise might be very low and may seem harmless, if I did not stop it in the first place, it could increase and finally ruin the learning of the whole class. Therefore, it was better if I could keep watching their cooperation and self-control, and insist on this during the lesson.

Teaching and learning cannot progress when the students are not paying attention. How a teacher engages students in the classroom, and the relationship between teacher and students, are vital elements in determining whether students’ learning experiences at school are successful (Henley, 2010). Enjoyable learning experiences in Mandarin lessons were an elementary condition for building students’ interest in the study of this language. As a beginning teacher-researcher, I had no prior experience in teaching or managing a classroom. I planned my lessons in detail and hoped to deliver lessons that were delightful and enlightening for the students. However, it appeared that my lesson plans were far from enough to provide successful lessons and create interestingness of the learning environment. My teaching was interrupted by students’ increasing misbehaviour from time to time: “Behaviour problems disturb teachers and students, negatively affect the teaching/learning process, and ultimately hinder academic achievement” (Manning & Bucher, 2007, p. 5). A chaotic class is certainly a bad learning experience for the students who do want to learn. It wastes students’ time and decreases their valuing of Mandarin lessons and learning Mandarin. Therefore, students’ interests in the study of Mandarin were undermined. As a result, it was necessary for me to create a classroom management plan as part of my lesson plans, and organise and implement it.

Students would concentrate when they found the lesson was interesting, and were willing to experience it. A tiresome lesson may “force” students to look for interestingness from things besides learning. Nevertheless, successful classroom management may help to reduce disruptions in the classroom to a minimum. As part of the lesson plan, my classroom management was intended to build on the needs and interests of students. I learnt that good preparation for the classroom management comes from my getting to know students well and skilfully using relevant strategies.
With regard to classroom management, it is not just about supervising or correcting students’ misbehaviour in the classroom in order to make them listen and learn. It involves skills and strategies covering many aspects of teaching and learning. A good classroom management plan facilitates students’ learning in a smooth and productive environment. In order to achieve this goal, I needed to manage and conduct each lesson in a logical sequence, while also managing the students’ behaviour and discipline, and managing to keep my Mandarin lessons well-organised.

The everyday tasks of classroom management comprise the core activities of structure, instruction and discipline (Henley, 2010, p. 19). These interact and influence each other. A failure in any of them can result in poor learning and teaching outcomes.

In their feedback about my first lesson, the classroom teachers provided suggestions that covered all three key elements of classroom management: structure, discipline and instruction. For structure, the teachers suggested that I “need to mix lessons up more” since “children become unsettled sitting too long” (Mary, April 21 2010). Sometimes, I kept the students seated on the floor for a long time, in order to finish the teaching I had planned. However, this longer session not only made students uncomfortable, but also affected their subsequent learning. For discipline, the teachers provided positive feedback about my disciplinary strategies like “great strategy—counting down from 10 when asking children to come back to floor” (Jane, April 21 2010). The part the teachers mentioned most was my poor instructions to students about what I wanted them to do. The teachers believed and pointed out that I need to “be firm, to have their attention before starting” (Mary, April 21 2010). Without clear instructions, the students would not learn anything nor get any useful information from my teaching. These points show that as a teacher I should take all these aspects of classroom management into consideration.

6.2.1 Structure as classroom management

First, structure is mainly the framework of a lesson, and is evident in how a lesson progresses, including the arrangement of the classroom; reviewing the faculty or staff handbook; going over the school procedures; preparing all the teaching
materials and supplies; making a seating chart for the classroom; preparing a checklist of supplies that students should have and making it available to parents and local businesses (Manning & Bucher, 2007, p. 15). Classroom management can be either very general or very specific, to arrange the whole teaching process. The structure needs to be flexible to meet the needs of students’ learning (Henley, 2010, p. 19). As the bones of the lesson, a suitable structure is the basis of a successful lesson. A suitable structure makes the best use of the limited teaching time, meets students’ learning needs and level, and promotes the delivery of the content in a harmonious learning environment. At the beginning of my teaching, I made several mistakes in structuring classroom management. The following excerpt from my reflective journal shows the dreadful outcome caused by my inadequate preparation, which was an important part of the lesson structure:

I still was not fully prepared before the lesson. I should have put newspapers on the desks in preparation for the students’ Chinese painting. I wasted some time in looking for and arranging my materials for the activity. Jane also told me I should have done that preparation before. When I was busying doing the things which should be done before the lesson, the students did not know what to do, so that they talked to each other. When finishing the preparation and asking them to re-concentrate on the lesson, it took a few minutes to achieve this. I feel this little “accident” badly disturbed the teaching process and the continuity of students’ learning (May 26 2010, p. 52).

Good classroom management has to be considered as part of the preparation for a lesson. It begins before the students arrive. Before each lesson, I needed to think about every teaching step I would make and the materials I needed to prepare. An interruption caused by my poor preparation confused the students and broke off their learning. In this case, time was wasted, the class was out of order and the teaching and learning could not progress: “Teachers who are unprepared and disorganized contribute to students’ misbehaviours” (Manning & Bucher, 2007, p. 4). A teacher who keeps his/her students on task is less likely to have students misbehaving in the classroom.

Changes in a lesson structure during a lesson in response to students’ reactions, can sometimes help improve the quality of the teaching and learning. I was teaching
three Stage 3 classes, and always taught these classes the same language content, using the same structure. However, as I put my lesson plans into action, I observed students’ responses and tried to improve my lesson structure. The following evidentiary excerpts point to my efforts to make such responsive changes during my lessons:

This lesson aimed to inform students’ knowledge of the historical changes to Chinese characters (Han zi). It seemed too complicated for the previous three classes to identify the pictures, the early writing, the seal form, and the modern form of these Chinese characters respectively. However, most of the students could figure out the ancient pictures of Chinese pictures. So I first asked them to find out the pictures of these characters, then, I asked them to find out the modern form of the Chinese characters with me providing step by step help. Fortunately, this strategy worked well and students were happy with the task. From Class C, Class D, to Class A, Class B, I gave them different tasks using the same worksheet according to their level of the understanding of Chinese and the time limitation (March 17 2010, p. 13).

The structure of my lesson was changed and improved in response to students’ reactions. Students did not feel pushed when the learning burden was cut down. By slowing down my teaching pace, the students were able to learn step by step. Otherwise, because the students felt stressed, they lost their focus and this led to a failure in my classroom management.

6.2.2 Instruction as classroom management

Instruction is a vital element in managing the classroom. Making good use of every instructional opportunity enables teachers to strike a balance between variety and challenge in the classroom, and to enhance students’ engagement in the learning process. Henley (2010, p. 19) argues that instruction has to be grounded in teachers’ in-depth knowledge of the curriculum and students’ cognitive development. Therefore, instruction is best structured on a good understanding of teaching procedures and students’ characteristics and learning development. I realised I needed to know my students well, including their learning capabilities, and to provide appropriate instruction to facilitate students’ learning. I made mistakes in
instructing my students. Below is an example about playing the game “Chinese Chair Champion” (see 4.4) from my reflective diary. It indicates a poor learning outcome as a consequence of my poor instructions, which did not suit the students’ learning level:

Although it seemed not to go very well, I still continued this game. Students kept making mistakes in distinguishing /tǐng/ (stop) and /tīng/ (listen). They did not know when exactly they should run, stop, or listen. They were unclear about what I was saying or what they should do. I heard some students saying, “Oh, it’s boring.” Some students even ran to the nearest chair whenever I said any Chinese words. They just ignored my instructions since they did not really understand them, “Whatever, just sit down.” Someone said to them, “No, you should listen to Miss.” I was deeply struck by this terrible situation in the class and I believe the students felt terrible as well (April 28 2010, p. 30).

Because of my insufficient preparation of appropriate instructions for students, the game, which was designed to arouse their interest and to consolidate their learning, received a very negative outcome. Therefore, I needed to have an all-round plan that might deal with incidents that would occur in the learning process and try to reduce or minimise these by taking students’ learning capability into consideration, and better instructing them, to foster their learning. Besides getting to know students’ ability to acquire knowledge, I found there existed different learning levels between classes. Even in the same class, students achieved differently from each other. Some could remember all the language they learnt, while others did not remember anything at all. Here is an example that illustrates this situation in the classroom:

Many of the students were doing well in this competition, though the winners were always some students who learned better. Some other students always picked up the wrong picture while others were right every time. When asking
them some questions, they could respond quickly and correctly. But the other students did not quite understand the questions (June 2 2010, p. 58).

When dealing with the whole class, the students who fell behind needed to be paid more attention. Designing activities and games that suited most of the students was my key principle. During each language activity, I managed this process and students’ progress. I tried not to move on too fast, because this could have led to confusion on the part of some students, but if the lesson were too slow this could cause boredom among higher-level students. Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1991, p. 5) state that control is the most important task that the teacher focuses on during classroom activities. I needed always to take the whole class as the learners, instead of just some “smart” students.

Later, when I thought about my Mandarin lessons, I decided to make sure that the students better understood what to do and how to do classroom activities. I slowed my teaching pace, prepared and explained instructions according to their level, and checked whether they had any questions before moving on to the next part of the lesson. The following evidentiary excerpt from my fieldwork journal shows that improvements in my instructions made a difference in my lessons:

Then, we started to play the bingo game. After my explanation, some students were still not very clear about how to play it. Then, I explained it again with more details and I also asked the other students to explain it in their own words to make sure all students understood. Because these students were Year 4 and Year 5, their ability to understand my instructions was not as good as Stage 3 (Year 5 and Year 6) students. Therefore, I paid more attention to instructing them in what to do. Finally, the students were all well-instructed (May 5 2010, p. 36).

A lesson without well-organised instructions leads students into confusion and decreased interest in learning the language. By taking students’ learning needs and abilities into consideration, I improved my teaching instructions in ways that meant
the students were able to understand better. During the lessons, after providing the students with instructions about a task, I checked to see whether they understood my words. By doing this every time, I found the lessons went much smoother than before and the students were able to enjoy the task, since they knew what was involved and how to do it. They no longer wasted time asking me questions about how to do the tasks. As a result of adequate instructions during the Mandarin lessons, students had a clearer idea about their learning and felt less discomfort. Under these circumstances, they were better able to enjoy the lessons and learn the language.

6.2.3 Discipline as classroom management

With regard to discipline, Henley (2010, p. 19) defines classroom discipline as the means and strategies used to direct and develop students’ good behaviour in the classroom. In classroom management, discipline is the most immediate way to put students’ classroom behaviour right. It helps to pull a turbulent class onto the right track quickly. Some students’ misbehaviour may affect the whole class, and cause the lesson to degenerate into chaos. In such circumstances, even the most diligent students, who are enjoying the learning process, are disturbed and not able to continue their studies. Consequently, an informative and interesting learning atmosphere in the classroom can be ruined. The following excerpt from my fieldwork journal shows how poor classroom discipline can lead the class to a bad situation:

The lesson started well. The students were active and responded lively. However, when the classroom teacher went out of the room to deal with something outside the class, I found the class was beginning to become noisy. Some students began to talk. When I angrily asked them to be quiet, they would listen to me and stop talking, but just for a while. Then, they would start to talk again. My lesson was terribly disturbed by their talking, so was their learning (May 12 2010, p. 41).

This was a typical scene in some of my Mandarin lessons. At the beginning of my teaching, I thought classroom management equalled discipline. I thought I needed to be very strict and so I corrected the students’ misbehaviour in the classroom with a heavy hand, so as to set up rules of classroom behaviour, in the expectation that every
student would act according to these. However, after having some experience of
teaching, I found classroom management was not all about discipline, and that
discipline was not just asking students to do the right thing in the classroom.
Classroom discipline acts like a quick behaviour modifier. It facilitates students’
learning and restores students’ interest in the lesson. However, the goal of classroom
discipline is not just to correct students’ misbehaviours, but also to teach students the
social skills required for success, both in and out of school, and to assist in building a
credible working relationship between the students and teacher. It enables students to
be cooperative, to manage their emotions, and to be responsible for their own
behaviour (Henley, 2010).

Besides correcting students’ misbehaviour, classroom discipline also includes
anticipating potential problems, resolving minor inattention and disruptions before
they cause bigger problems, and being aware of the classroom space and safety
(Henley, 2010, p. 19). As a Chinese volunteer teacher, I did not need to account for
managing the class on my own. However, sometimes I still needed to take up
classroom discipline, since the classroom teacher did not always notice a problem, or
she did not want to interrupt my teaching all the time. The following example from
my journal illustrates how I gradually developed strategies for effecting classroom
discipline:

In Class C, I used the way I learned from a classroom
teacher at high school to manage students’ misbehaviour.
When the students were not listening and chatting to each
other, I asked them to look at me, put their hands up with
their palms facing to me as I did. I did the first move and
they were required to imitate my action. By using this
method, students quickly stopped talking and calmed
down. It was very useful and I could use it in the other classroom
when dealing with a similar situation (April 28 2010, p. 28).

Although the classroom teachers did not correct my classroom discipline practices
during the lesson, they did give me suggestions after the lesson that greatly helped
me. When trying to discipline students to behave well in the classroom, instead of
saying pessimistic words like “are you doing the movement?”, the teacher suggested
I offer positive reinforcement, such as to “offer praise to those students who are
doing what they were supposed to do” (Jane, April 28 2010). Punishing words might
hurt the students’ feelings and harm their attitude towards learning Mandarin. However, identifying a good model for the rest of the students serves to promote ideas about learning. By taking suggestions and learning from the classroom teachers, I developed my own ways of disciplining the class:

I am now more confident to use a variety of strategies to make students focus on learning. When sending students back to their seats to work on a worksheet, I asked them to go row by row. I would look at them and see which group behaved the best and send them back to the seat while praising their good behaviour and efforts so that the other students knew the right way to act. Then, I would send the next group who were doing well. In this way, they were more organised and under control. I remember in the past, I used to send them back to seat together, and it took a while for them settle down and be on task (June 2 2010, p. 60).

The teachers’ rules, practices and beliefs have direct impact on the classroom management (Manning & Bucher, 2007). Having been teaching Mandarin for over a year, I learned how to discipline students appropriately, based on my own experiential knowledge gained through teaching, as well as from the knowledge of other, experienced teachers. I established my rules of discipline for my Mandarin lessons and implemented these as part of my professional learning.

To sum up, structure, instruction and discipline are three indispensable elements of classroom management. Missing out or neglecting any one of them can lead to unsuccessful classroom management, and undermine potentially productive and interesting lessons. Therefore, by learning to manage the classroom successfully, I could produce lessons which made students feel pleasure and thus, increased their interests in learning Mandarin.

6.3 Inspirational reward

During the first action research cycle, I made “clovers” to reward students who were learning well. It was beyond all my expectations, but they really adored these little artefacts that I had made using Chinese scissor cutting (剪纸 jian zhi). Then, I started to use the “clovers” regularly in the classroom as a reward system. These
clovers were easy to make and were very “Chinese”, which means they are a “unique” Chinese cultural craft. My Australian students had not seen them before, and had rarely, if ever, held them in their own hands (see Figure 6.1).

I made use of these “clovers” to extrinsically motivate the students’ learning of Mandarin. As a result, the “clovers” became a part of every Mandarin lesson; they were a unique reward system in my class:

When someone gets the number right, I give him/her a little reward—a clover which I made last night. They seemed very much like a lucky flower and the students were then highly inspired by receiving them (April 21 2010, p. 20).

However, although I thought that this guessing and repeating activity might be boring, it seemed not too boring to the students. They were willing to guess and say the Chinese words and sentences. Maybe it was because of the reward—clover. When they gave the answer right, they were given a clover as reward (May 19 2010, p. 48).

Reward systems promote an increase in students’ learning motivation and learning outcomes (Raymond, 2008). This particular reward system was popular among my students. The classroom teachers gave each student a small plastic bag for them to
store the clovers they received as rewards; something I should have thought about doing. During the interview with a classroom teacher, she said, “They (the students) really like those little clovers that you made as the rewards. They’ve been saving them in little plastic bags. They really love them. But they are very competitive as well. ‘How many have you got?’ They are looking forward to seeing you.” (Mary, 2010, p. 5) Students highly valued their clovers and put their names on them. During each lesson, when students answered my questions well or won in a game or competition, they were rewarded with clovers. This reward system provided a source of extrinsic motivation to develop students’ enthusiasm for learning Mandarin.

Although the reward system in my Mandarin lessons was extrinsic, students were stimulated to learn Mandarin by using this classroom reward system. They became more eager to answer questions, to behave in a good manner, and to learn, in order to be well-thought-of by myself, their teacher. In order to gain the reward, the students had to be made aware of how the reward system worked and by doing this, my expectations of the students were reinforced (Raymond, 2008). In my classroom the rules of my reward system were simple. The students had to be able to provide the right answer in Mandarin and/or do well in a language game or competition. Further, they had to be well behaved and not behave badly. Being clear about these rules, the students actively participated in each language learning activity and studied hard, as they wanted to get a reward. The positive outcomes from using this reward system were improvements in students’ learning and motivation, even though it seemed an unexceptional extrinsic motivational strategy. Nevertheless, I was worried that the students might just be learning for rewards; they might neglect the possibility that learning itself could be rewarding. Beside, the ultimate goal of my research project was to stimulate students’ intrinsic interest in the study of Mandarin. Ash (2008) also worries about using external rewards in the classroom, suggesting that these can decrease students’ internal desire for learning. However, Manning and Bucher (2007) argue that the rewards may turn students’ intrinsic motivation into extrinsic. In the classroom teachers’ interviews, they expressed their concerns about the use of extrinsic rewards in the classroom:

Children today are much more materialistic, they want the thing of their own intrinsic value . . . They should be learning to want to
do it themselves, for the right reason. But I’ve seen in this school than my last school, when children want something, they will put more effort into something if they are getting something for it. I guess their families have different values on things. But if they are getting something for it, they don’t mind doing your work. But if they are not getting anything, they can hold their hand, they won’t try, even with the book we prepare for tomorrow” (Mary, 2010, p. 2).

In Chinese philosophy, 易 (Yin-Yang) represents the concept of the complex relationship between opposing phenomena. Thus, “yin” can be dark, passive, cold or weak; “yang” can be bright, active, hot or strong. Yin-Yang represents the interaction of these two seemingly opposed energies: yin to yang and yang to yin, causes everything to happen. The concept of Yin-Yang can help explain the use of rewards in Mandarin teaching. The negative effects of external reward systems need to be avoided, or at least mediated or mitigated. Some students earned rewards not for the purpose of gaining knowledge, but only through competition with classmates. This was contrary to my wishes and I tried to deal with these problems during the last stage of my project. Sometimes, I needed to “bribe” students to win their concentration—providing a reward was effective, since they were very materialistic and they wanted something to stimulate their learning. It would have been significant if students acknowledged that they were learning not for the reward, but to know Chinese language, culture and knowledge. In my classes, most students were not intrinsically interested in learning Mandarin. Rewards were a tool to stimulate their extrinsic motivation in learning and ultimately to inspire some of them to take an intrinsic interest in learning Mandarin.

6.4 Teacher’s professional learning

A teacher’s professional learning was a frequent theme in my reflections. It started with a concern about improving my teaching skills and then shifted to a consideration of how to improve students’ learning. As a beginning teacher-researcher, I began with the experience of “surviving the classroom”. When I first stood in front of the class, facing a group of noisy students, I had no idea about how to deal with the situation. In my reflections I wrote:
When L took me home, I told her that “Today’s lesson was a disaster.” She told me do not look at the issue in this negative way. She said it was just the design of the lesson did not suit her active students and there might be other ways to introduce the language. She comforted me that it was no big deal and she used to have lessons as bad as this, or even worse. This is just a process of professional learning. In hearing this, I was not so depressed (April 28 2010, p. 31).

My professional learning as a beginning teacher-researcher led me to reflect upon my experiences in the classroom. It was easy to realise that my teaching directly affected students’ learning. I planned lessons that I believed to be very interesting, only to see them result in students’ misunderstanding. Therefore, I could see that professional learning would have a far-reaching influence on students’ learning and their interest in the study of Mandarin. Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg and Pittman (2008) also argue that teacher professional learning is related to students’ achievement. When analysing my reflections, I also found my teaching was closely related to students’ behaviour and learning outcomes. An unsuitable lesson plan, or unprofessional classroom management, mostly had bad learning outcomes. The following reflection indicates how professional learning helped me to achieve more fruitful teaching and learning outcomes:

Because of the failure in Class A, in Class B, I emphasized the complex part of the language learning for a few times and made sure the students noticed the difference between these two sentence structures. I could see the students in this class basically could distinguish one from the other (June 9 2010, p. 70).

When the classroom teachers were asked in their interviews about my professional learning and development, they all provided very positive feedback:

Oh, yes! I can see it. Because I am used to having a lot of University students coming as practice teachers, and now I can see you are much more confident. You are
still a very quiet person, but you are not as nervous now as you were on that very first day when you came in, you were very nervous. But, now, you come in and you are more comfortable. You are comfortable with setting this up, you do know some of their names. I think you are much more confident. As a teacher, you are using your voice a lot more to get to the children. You are trying different strategies to bring the class back together again and to have them quiet where you won’t aware of those things at the beginning. I’ve seen you improve a lot this year (Mary, 2010, p. 4).

The development of my ability to manage the classroom and my growing confidence in teaching through the use of a variety of strategies, pointed to my professional learning as a Mandarin teacher. Also, students’ increasing interest in the study of Mandarin and their improvement in understanding the language, contributed to and reinforced my professional learning:

I think you’ve improved over time. I think once the students got used to how you teach and once you’ve developed the structures and routines, the lessons towards the end of this term flowed very smoothly. When you started to introduce the things like using the interactive white board or video to consolidate or show the children, I know that the children were a lot more responsive to what you were teaching. Varying your lessons and always being well-prepared for your lesson was evident throughout your whole term. It’s very important to be well-prepared and well-organised and know what you are teaching at students. Because that does have an effect on the behaviour and overall, I think the students’ behaviour, other than a couple of students within the class, I think overall the students’ behaviour was quite tentative. And they listened and participated in what you had planned for them (Jane, 2010, p. 4).

Further,

They look forward to their weekly Mandarin lesson. They’ve enjoyed the variety of lessons. Your lessons were always well-organized, using different media. Studying with some consolidation of the previous lesson they enjoyed and the introduction of new lessons (Lisa, 2010, p. 3).
As can be seen from the teachers’ interviews, as my professional learning developed over time, the students’ engagement in learning improved accordingly. My teaching practices were closely related to students’ learning. By constantly reflecting upon and absorbing feedback from classroom teachers and students, my teaching practices greatly improved, and this led to more effective teaching and fostered students’ increased learning. As soon as the interestingness of the Mandarin lesson was established the students’ interest in the study of Mandarin was enhanced.

6.5 Becoming a teacher-researcher

In the first and second terms of my teaching, I felt lonely and strange. I regarded myself more as a student rather than a teacher-researcher. I did not know how to communicate with the other teachers, and could not join in their conversations. As a result, during that period I just sat in the corner of the staffroom listening to the other teachers talking, or I prepared my lessons. I did not feel like a member of the teaching team at that time. However, after half a year, I felt much more comfortable at the school and my identity gradually changed from a student to a teacher-researcher:

Today I feel a sense of belongingness at this school. I am now much more familiar with all the teachers and getting to know more students’ names. I am accustomed to the rule and routine of the school. Because I have done much teaching and communicate with teachers and students a great deal, I feel more comfortable here. I am also used to hearing students calling me “Miss Jing” or saying “你好” /ni hao/ (Hello!) every time I pass by them (March 31 2010, p. 17).

Piot, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2010) confirm the influence of teaching colleagues’ acknowledgement on the developing professional identity of beginning teachers.

Today I was asked by the principal to send rewards to the students. They asked me to come to the front at the assembly and give the awards to the students. I shook the winners’ hands and said “Congratulations” to them. I now feel that I’m now an official member of the
teaching staff. I am very proud and happy to do so (May 5 2010, p. 31).

My recognition as a professional colleague by the school teachers, also stimulated me to identify myself as a teacher-researcher, and gave me more confidence to deal with my teaching and research. As I came to identify myself as a teacher-researcher, I increasingly talked about my teaching and my daily life with the other teachers with greater ease. Given this interest-based language teaching research project, students’ interest was the central focus of our discussions. However, my own interest also affects students’ learning. Since I was welcomed and recognised by the other teachers at the school, it was much easier for me to seize my identity as a teacher-researcher, which was my professional self-interest. As my self-interest was as satisfied, I was more willing to find more ways of shaping my teaching to meet students’ interests and improve their learning. Furthermore, encouragement from the students also met my need for recognition as a teacher:

Class A seemed more enthusiastic and welcoming than Class C. They came to say hello when I passed their classroom and asked me whether I would go to their class. When having lessons in their class, they were very cooperative and active to learn. I was very satisfied with their responses. When the lesson was finished, one boy said “That was nice” to me. I was very happy to hear that. The teacher Mary told me that the lesson was fantastic (April 28 2010, p. 28).

The students’ encouragement confirmed my teaching and drove me to improve it continuously. In contrast, students’ misbehaviours or lack of interest discouraged my efforts to improve myself; this was something I needed to overcome as a professional. Therefore, the interest of a teacher is related to students’ interests—learning in an interesting and comfortable atmosphere. Students’ interests cannot be fully taken into account unless the teacher can find ways to meet her/his own needs as a professional. As a result, this mutual relationship should be seriously taken into consideration.

6.6 Teacher’s authority “威信” /wei xin/
Although I had already acquired some classroom management skills and strategies, I still sometimes found difficulties in controlling the class. When I used the same classroom management strategies as some other classroom teachers, these did not always work as well for me as they did in their lessons. This made me feel quite despondent and less confident about managing the class:

When the class started to be chatty, I asked the students to be quiet. Sometimes, they became quiet themselves, but not for a long time. Sometimes they needed to be reminded by their classroom teacher. When the classroom teacher told them to behave the right way, they followed her words. I felt a bit sad about my poor “威信”/wei xin/ (authority) (Feb 25 2010, p. 5).

In the classroom teacher’s observational feedback she mentioned that the students were “active chatty and needed to be quietened many times” (Mary, June 9 2010). In my process of building my professional identity as a teacher, I was sometimes struck by students disobeying my instructions. In China, the word “威信”/wei xin/ is always used to describe the authority of school teachers. “威”/wei/ means high, “信”/xin/ literally means trust. Therefore, the word means high trust or high respect. Being different from authority, wei xin emphasises disciplining students and managing the class. When the teacher has wei xin, he/she is trusted and respected by the students who are very submissive. As a Chinese student, I had grown up in an environment where teachers are highly respected and have unconditional wei xin in their classrooms. This has been criticised by some people, who argue that the teacher and the students should have a mutual relationship (Amit & Fried, 2005). In Western countries, teachers are regarded as “leaders” or “captains”. However, teachers in China are regarded as “gardeners” (园丁 yuan ding) who control and cultivate their students. Gao (2008) contends that teachers in China are provided with security by confirming their wei xin. While Chinese students’ compliance with their teacher may cause problems, such as losing creativity and initiative, even so, students should respect their teacher as a matter of course. I was extremely shocked by students’ ignoring my words and body language. Then, I realised that in Australia, I had to earn my wei xin from the students, rather than assuming I enjoyed their respect and that they would readily submit. Only by achieving this was I able to control the classroom better and foster students’ learning.
Conceptualising the development of teacher wei xin in the classroom, Elliott and Stemler (2005) argue that non-verbal behaviour in varying forms can be more effective and more powerful for managing students. Further, classroom teachers believe that a teacher should use strategies with which they feel comfortable:

It depends on the teacher’s personality and what you are teaching. In my class, I arouse their curiosity and sustain their interest through the way of delivering the lesson, my voice, by amusing them, by saying things in a humorous way, and by linking the content to children’s experiences as well as my own experiences (Lisa, 2010, p. 1).

Some teachers correct students’ misbehaviour by stopping talking, and waiting for the students to do the right thing. However, this did not necessarily suit my situation. I had not yet fully built up my wei xin in the classroom. When I stopped talking, to wait for students to be quiet, the result was failure. Therefore, I had to use other more effective strategies that suited my personality—for example, clapping my hands three times to calm the students:

In the last lesson, Mrs Mary told me I needed to wait until they were absolutely quiet when I try to speak to them every time. I could have a bell or use the way I did—clapping. She said I had a soft voice. I feel I am progressing since I was able to use the changes of my voice or gestures to inform students to do the right thing and as I began to have more well-planned and interesting lessons, the students were more willing to listen to me (May 5 2010, p. 36).

Rather than calling out, I employed non-verbal classroom management skills to develop my wei xin and give the students a feeling of more pressure to correct their misbehaviour. In addition, by knowing the students and providing good lessons, my wei xin as a teacher was developed among students. As a result, they were more willing to respond to my instructions and paid more attention to my lessons. Building up a trustful and respectful relationship with my students helped me to put my lesson plans into effect and improved my teaching, ultimately helping me to achieve my goals of improving students’ interests in, and learning of, Mandarin.

6.7 Conclusion
This chapter analysed the role of my professional learning in promoting students’ Mandarin learning. By providing evidence from mixed sources, the importance of classroom management, teacher identity, teacher’s professional learning and teacher’s wei xin were highlighted as being relevant to facilitating students’ learning and their interest in the study of Mandarin. In Chapter 7, a summary of the Chapters, the research findings, the limitations and delimitations of this research, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and my reflections on becoming a teacher-researcher, are addressed.
Chapter 7

Findings and implications

7.1 Introduction

This thesis provides an account of my efforts to investigate how to use interest-based language teaching to stimulate Australian students’ interest in the study of Mandarin and to find out various strategies to enhance their interest in learning this globally important language. It was found that students’ interest in the study of Mandarin was influenced by and increased as a result of, this action research project. Although the extent of the increase was not substantial, the students’ language and cultural awareness was developed. Even though Mandarin was still a complicated and difficult language for them to learn, their interest in continuing to learn it did not decrease. Reasons to explain this study’s findings have been explored. It was shown that an interest-based Mandarin curriculum, the use of various stimulating teaching strategies and my professional learning contributed to students’ increasing interest in the study of Mandarin. In order to improve students’ interest in learning Mandarin, it was vital to create ‘interestingness’ (Michelsen & Sriraman, 2009) in Mandarin classes. By using an interest-based Mandarin curriculum designed on the basis of students’ topic interests and everyday interests, adapting various stimulating strategies, and continuously improving my own teaching practices, the interestingness of the Mandarin classes could be enhanced. By doing this, an increase in students’ interest in the study of Mandarin was obtained.

This chapter begins by summarising what has been covered in each chapter of this thesis, locating the theory, research literature and methodology within the field of the interest-based language teaching. This chapter then brings forward the key findings expressed as major propositions, formulated in light of the evidence, that form the basis for a new contribution to knowledge. After reflecting on the research process,
including the data analysis as well as the findings, I examine the limitations of this study, suggest implications for practice and policy, and raise recommendations for further research. In addition, I reflect on my professional development as a teacher-researcher to provide more personal reflections in this area.

7.2 Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1 highlighted this project’s aim, which was to find out how to increase students’ interest in the study of Mandarin by using interest-based language teaching. The background to this study was described in terms of how I came to this study as a beginning teacher-researcher from China responsible for teaching Mandarin to Australian primary school students. In recognising the significance of promoting students’ interest in the study of Mandarin, the Australian Government’s NALSSP (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010) was explained. An overview of literature used in this study was provided, including the national policy context, interest-based language teaching, and the role of professional learning through teacher-research in promoting students’ interest in learning Mandarin. Furthermore, the method of action research used in this study was briefly explained. Finally, the thesis statement driving this study was provided. To reiterate, it argues that for beginning teachers from China, stimulating Australian students’ interest in Mandarin learning requires an ongoing process of considering students’ learning, reflecting upon their own teaching practices and designing quality lessons.

In Chapter 2, the research literature was critically reviewed, to determine its relevance to the research questions and to identify gaps in current knowledge. The literature covered the national priority for Asian languages; theories of individual interest, situational interest, interestingness and topic interest; factors that influence students’ interest in the study of Mandarin and the student-centred curriculum; various language teaching strategies aimed at creating interestingness in Mandarin lessons and promoting students’ interest in learning Mandarin, including cultural activities, games, artistic activities, audio-visual tools and rewards; and teachers’ capability for classroom management, including their identity and authority. Also, literature on the interrelationships between curriculum, teaching strategies and teachers’ professional learning was considered. By exploring research on the
importance of interestingness, it was possible to consider its role in stimulating students’ interest in learning Mandarin. In order to achieve the goal of creating interestingness in Mandarin lessons, the literature suggested that the idea of surveying topic interests would provide a useful principle for creating a student-centred curriculum. Furthermore, research into various strategies which had been investigated in practice and found to enhance students’ interest in learning Mandarin, was reviewed. It was also found that research had stimulated the role of teachers’ professional learning in influencing students’ learning and their interest in the study of Mandarin. Working with and against this research, this thesis makes a substantive contribution to knowledge in the field of interest-based teaching.

Chapter 3 introduced the key methodology that underpinned the research questions in this study. Stenhouse’s (1975) theory of the teacher as researcher informed the main research strategy used in this study, namely action research (Griffiths & Tan, 1992; Stringer, 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2008; Pine, 2009; Burns, 2009). The characteristics of action research and its effectiveness in solving particular issues in particular settings in a continuous, cyclical way, was explored as a way of explaining the choice of this method for this research project. This included establishing the rigour of this action research project to enhance its credibility, reliability, validity and the generalisability of its findings. Furthermore, the design of this action research project was explained in detail, including site selection, the recruitment of participants, research ethics, and data collection and analysis procedures. This research used mixed-data sources to enhance its credibility and reliability. The central data source was my fieldwork journal. The procedures for data analysis including open coding, making a list of the key categories, building a conceptual map and selecting key excerpts for detailed analysis.

Chapter 4 was the first evidentiary chapter and was focused on the design of Mandarin lessons, based on analysing students’ interests in the study of Mandarin. This chapter answered one of the contributory research questions: How to find a more practical way to design lessons which make connections between students’ interests and their study of Mandarin? The evidence in this chapter came from student questionnaires and my reflective journal as a teacher-researcher. Evidence of students’ everyday interests, topic interests and interests in Chinese culture, was
analysed, as the basis for designing my Mandarin lessons. In this process, creating interestingness in the Mandarin lessons and stimulating students’ learning were central concerns. Therefore, the use of games, artistic activities and cultural activities was adapted to achieve my teaching goals, and evidence of this was analysed and triangulated, to increase the rigour of the findings.

Chapter 5 set out to answer the contributory research question: What are the factors that constrain and/or stimulate Australian students’ interest in the study of Mandarin? This chapter analysed students’ feedback, together with the teacher-researcher’s reflective journal and interviews with the classroom teachers, to examine the students’ interest in the Mandarin lessons designed for this project. From the students’ feedback, the various stimulating strategies identified in Chapters 3 and 4 were analysed to ascertain the importance of using audio-visual tools. From analysing students’ pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, the students’ interest in the study of Mandarin was examined. According to the results, there was a slight improvement in students’ interest in learning Mandarin over the 10-week period. To extend these findings, students’ interest in learning Mandarin was investigated with reference to the influence of their social and family environment.

Chapter 6 answers the contributory research question: How can beginning teacher-researchers from China adapt to the Australian teaching environment and develop their professional learning, especially of classroom management, in order to stimulate students’ learning of Mandarin? This chapter focused on my teaching practices and professional learning as a teacher-researcher and how these impacted on the outcome of my Mandarin lessons. It focused on my improvement as a teacher-researcher, especially in the area of classroom management, including the three key elements of instruction, structure and discipline (Henley, 2010). Evidence from my reflective journal and classroom teacher’s interviews was analysed. Also, the role of inspirational rewards in promoting the interestingness of Mandarin lesson among students was examined. Furthermore, the Chinese concept “威信”/wei xin/, which means the authority of the school teachers, was used to explain that teachers’ professional learning is closely related to students’ Mandarin learning. Now I turn to a presentation of the key contributions to knowledge made as a result of this study.
7.3 Key findings

The key findings to emerge from the evidentiary Chapters (4 to 6) are as follows:

7.3.1 The beneficial effects of interest-based language teaching

This study started with the recognition that promoting students’ interest in studying Mandarin by using interest-based language teaching could be effective. It recognised that when students’ everyday interests and topic interest (Ainley, Hidi & Berndorff, 2002) in Mandarin were incorporated in Mandarin lessons, students’ motivation for learning the language might be stimulated. Although the importance of using students’ interest in the curriculum has been known for decades (e.g. Renninger, 1992; Ainley, Hidi & Berndorff, 2002; Trumper, 2006; Katz, Assor, Maymon & Meyer, 2006; Henley, 2010), there is little research concerning the use of students’ interests to stimulate their learning of Mandarin. Empirical research indicates that there is a strong correlation between students’ interests and their language study: “enrolling for a subject at a stage when it becomes optional is an obvious way of expressing one’s interest” (Gardner & Tamir, cited in Trumper, 2006, p. 51). With the purpose of achieving the Australian national goal of having more students continue to learn Mandarin to Year 12 (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010), this interest-based language teaching project focused specifically on a student-centred Mandarin curriculum based on students’ topic interests, integrated with their everyday interests.

The evidence collected from the participating students indicated positive feedback on learning Mandarin through the topics they had chosen, namely sports and animals (see 5.2). Their interest in Mandarin was sustained throughout this program, even if they were not always highly motivated. The analysis of the evidence from the classroom teachers showed that they thought the students were getting more interested in learning the language. As a result, students’ awareness of Mandarin, as well as modern Chinese culture, was developed. Mandarin was no longer remote from their daily life. Interest-based language teaching provided a way of closely relating it to students’ life experiences (see 5.5.4). From this aspect, the students
gained increased interest through the study of Mandarin and Chinese culture. Also, from my reflective journal, there was no evidence to suggest that students decreased their interest in the study of Mandarin. As indicated by the questionnaires administered before and after the intervention, there was a slight improvement in their interest in learning Mandarin (see 5.4). Regardless of a language that is seemingly “hard to learn” (Ren, 2009, p. 25), students’ overall interest in learning Mandarin increased. Therefore, interest-based language teaching would seem to be effective and valuable for teaching Mandarin in Australia, especially for young students in this particular learning context, who have had little experience with this foreign language.

7.3.2 Factors constraining students’ Mandarin learning

The pre- and post-intervention questionnaires showed students’ growing interest in the study of Mandarin (see 5.4). Since this is a language that is not easy to learn, it is important that Mandarin gained students’ interest, even though this was only to a modest extent. For some students their interest in the study of Mandarin improved; however, for other students their interest did not improve or even diminished.

Some students were not really interested in learning Mandarin or studying any particular topics. As shown in my reflective journal and the interviews with classroom teachers, some of my Australian students were not really interested in learning Mandarin through the topics they had chosen. They had a low interest in studying generally, including learning a foreign language, which seemed remote from their daily life and was perceived as useless. Even before some of my students starting learning Mandarin, they were already resisting study. This is explained by the Chinese concept “先入为主” /xian ru wei zhu/, which means it is difficult to change people’s prior ideas. 先 /xian/ means “prior”, “入” /ru/ is a verb, meaning “entered”, “为” /wei/ equals “is” and “主” /zhu/ literally means “the master”. This concept means that the ideas the people already hold, master their mind and thoughts. For some of my Australian students, they had relatively low recognition of the value of learning Mandarin, or had evaluated their competence for learning Mandarin as low (see 5.4). This meant they did not highly value the language, nor feel confident
about learning it. According to Trumper (2006), a student’s attitude towards a subject is one of the important variables related to their interest in studying it. Also, Patrick, Mantzicopulos and Samarapungavan’s (2009) study showed a strong relationship between students’ confidence in a subject and their persistence in learning it. Some of my Australian students’ interest in the study of Mandarin was low, prior to this action research program, and this was difficult to change.

Furthermore, although these students had selected the Mandarin topics they would like to learn and nominated the activities in which they were interested, they did not really like to learn the language by studying these topics or through these activities. Here it is useful to consider the Chinese concept “叶公好龙” /ye gong hao long/. “叶” /ye/ is the family name of the dramatis personae in the story from which this concept originated. “公” /gong/ means lord, which is the title of the person. “好” /hao/ means love or like and “龙” /long/ means dragon. This concept literally means, Lord Ye professed his love of dragons. It comes from an ancient story about Lord Ye, who claimed that he was fond of dragons. As a result, the Dragon in the Heaven descended from on high, to pay him a visit. However, at sight of the dragon, Lord Ye immediately turned and took to his heels. He was scared out of his wits. It was not that Lord Ye really loved dragons; what he did love was in the shape of a dragon—everything but a real one (Yang, 2007, p. 255). Therefore, Chinese people use this concept to describe someone who claims something as his/her interest when they are not really very fond of it at all; they just want to show off their knowledge or good taste.

The result of my pre-intervention questionnaire showed that the students claimed to like learning Mandarin through the topics of sports and animals. However, what they really liked was to skip the language learning and to have “fun”. Although most students acknowledged that the learning itself was rewarding, learning the language was not very attractive for some of these students. Due to the characteristics of my Australian students, they were not very interested in learning; this included a lack of interest in studying Mandarin (see 5.5.2). They were educated by their teachers that learning itself was rewarding and they were aware of this idea. However, they could not actually involve them in pursuing knowledge. At first, Mandarin was attractive to
the students because it was very different from the knowledge they usually access. Nevertheless, after a period, when students had become used to having regular Mandarin lessons, their curiosity in learning the language dramatically decreased. What was more, they became a little resistant to the study of Mandarin when they found it was difficult to master. For these reasons, some of the students’ interest in the study of Mandarin decreased over time.

Considering the external factors that constrained some of my students’ interest in studying Mandarin, the influence of the social and family environment was a cause for concern. Manning and Bucher (2007) argue that students’ lack of enthusiasm and misbehaviour in school may be traced to their family and social environment. Ren’s (2009, p. 21) study also found that “family members greatly influenced their quitting Chinese Second Language Learning”. Due to the particular environment in which my students were living, a social-economically disadvantaged area, the study of Mandarin was not regarded as a privilege for students by their family (see 5.5.2). Therefore, some students’ enthusiasm for learning Mandarin was somewhat deflated. “孟母三迁” /meng mu san qian/ is a Chinese concept which emphasises the importance of the social environment. “孟母” /meng mu/ is the mother of the Chinese philosopher Mencius; “三” /san/ means three times; “迁” /qian/ means “move house”. The mother of young Mencius moved house three times in order to provide him with a better social environment for learning. In the context of my study, parents’ neglect of the importance of learning Mandarin or even their disapproval of learning it undermined the students’ interest in the study of Mandarin. This suggests that the NSW DET might better focus its resources, such as the Chinese volunteers, on teaching those students who want to learn Mandarin, rather than trying to teach all students.

7.3.3 Teaching strategies to engage and stimulate students’ learning

Some teaching strategies that I used were successful. First, according to the evidence of my teaching experience, including feedback from the participants, audio-visual tools and the Internet had a positive impact on students’ interests in learning Mandarin. Henley (2010) identified several approaches to meet students’ need for
fun, such as incorporating music and art in the lessons, or adapting television game show formats for classroom use. In my initial language lessons, it was difficult to have the students concentrate for a long time, especially when they felt the language was difficult to learn. Audio-visual tools and the Internet were an effective way to postpone students’ distraction. Internet technology is likely to have far-reaching possibilities for the development of students’ learning environments (Tsai, 2008). Furthermore, audio-visual tools and the Internet provide students with opportunities to experience Chinese traditional culture as well as to see what modern China looks like for themselves. The concept “纸上谈兵” /zhi shang tan bing/ is relevant here. “纸” /zhi/ means paper; “上” /shang/ means on or above; “谈” /tan/ means talk about and “兵” /bing/ means military strategy. The concept means “strategic planning on paper”, which refers to somebody who only knows the knowledge but does not really know how to use the knowledge. Stenhouse’s (1975) idea of the teacher-as-researcher emphasises the combining of action and knowledge, theory and practice. Likewise, showing students videos and websites enabled them to be connected with Mandarin and Chinese culture for real, otherwise they would have no idea what they were learning about.

Second, games is an effective tool for grasping students’ attention, but only if the game suits the learning level of students and is played under good classroom management. Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1991, p. 1) state that:

Language learning is hard work. One must make an effort to understand, to repeat accurately, to manipulate newly understood language and to use the whole range of known language in conversation or written composition. Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work.

Games also helped me to evaluate students’ understandings of the knowledge they had learnt and helped the students to consolidate their learning while having fun. In the concept “寓教于乐” /yu jiao yu le/. “寓” /yu/ means embed, “教” /jiao/ means cultivation or education; “于” /yu/ means in and “乐” /le/ means happiness or enjoyment. This concept means to infuse students’ knowledge in an enjoyable
learning environment, and comes from Confucius’ philosophy of education. This concept advocates that the teacher should make the learning setting interesting so that students can learn better and more joyfully. In this research, games were an appropriate tool to provide students with such an environment for learning Mandarin.

Third, when integrated with artistic and cultural activities, the language class could better promote students’ learning. In this study, the effect of adding artistic activities to Mandarin was very successful. Artistic activities, especially painting and drawing, built a channel for the students to play with pictures and colours while learning the language. Brooks (2009) regards drawing as a social tool that mediates new knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, cultural activities fulfilled students’ curiosity for looking into the Chinese culture, about which they were very curious. By doing cultural activities, students experienced real Chinese culture instead of learning some remote ideas. In addition, the students gained a better understanding of the language and cultural knowledge that they had acquired. As a result, when these activities were integrated into the language classes, students’ interest in the study of Mandarin was triggered.

7.3.4 The role of the teacher-researcher’s professional learning

A teacher’s professional development affects students’ interests in learning and the quality of their learning. Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg and Pittman (2008, p. 417) relate teachers’ professional learning to students’ achievement: “Teacher professional development programs, by and large, seek to increase teachers’ professional knowledge, improve classroom practices, and ultimately foster student learning and achievement gains.” As a beginning teacher-researcher, I made many mistakes during my teaching and research practice, due to my lack of experience. My occasional mistakes degraded the effect of my teaching to a certain extent and in all likelihood undermined students’ interest in learning Mandarin. Classroom management is a key to conducting successful lessons, and includes structure, instruction and discipline (Henley, 2010). Therefore, one way to increase students’ interest in learning was to promote my professional learning and thus, improve my teaching practice through my research, which was undertaken in collaboration with school teachers and teacher educators. The Chinese concept “严师出高徒” /yan shi
chu gao tu/ emphasises the importance of teachers for the learning development of students. “严”/yan/ means good, “师”/shi/ means the teacher, “出”/chu/ is the verb “produce”, “高”/gao/ equals excellent and “徒”/tu/ means students. The concept means a good teacher is able to help the students to become excellent. Therefore, if I want my students to be good learners, I should become a better teacher, and teacher-driven research is especially helpful in this regard.

Moreover, by researching the adaptation of various teaching and classroom management strategies, I was able to fulfil my professional learning while promoting students’ interests in learning Mandarin and facilitating their learning. For example, I learnt to use a reward system in the classroom to provide the extrinsic motivation needed to develop students’ enthusiasm for learning Mandarin (see 6.3). Further, the progressive construction of my identity as a teacher-researcher and my “威信”/wei xin/in the classroom also affected my professional learning and that of my students. Piot, Kelchtermans, and Ballet (2010) confirm the importance of the acknowledgement and recognition of colleagues, such as school teachers and teacher educators, in developing one’s professional identity. Gao (2008) also thinks teachers in China are provided with professional security by confirming their /wei xin/. However, it was different for me in the Australian context. As a beginning volunteer teacher-researcher, I needed to search for my professional identity and “威信” through my colleagues, as well as through developing my teaching practices. As a result, the students were more willing to respond to my instructions, and paid more attention during the lessons. This helped me to give my lesson plans better effect and improve my teaching, so as to achieve my goal of improving students’ interests in learning Mandarin.

7.4 Limitations and delimitations of this study

The main limitation and delimiting factor for this study was the time frame in which the action research could be conducted. The ten-week program was a pragmatic consequence of having to conduct research in the everyday, working world. This interest-based language teaching project was part of the school’s normal Mandarin language program. A short research project such as this could not have captured all
the details of life that occur in the average school class over the years. Consequently, the study design, research process and findings would have to be different if the project were conducted over a longer period. Furthermore, due to the particular socio-economic background of this particular school community, the findings from this study may not be generalised to a wider population, such as those schools in the Northern Sydney Region observed as part of the NSW DET language methodology course (see Appendix 15). Therefore, although the data generated by this study are valid and the results from this research are valid, they only apply to the particular research setting in which the study was conducted.

A source of potential bias in this study, that became apparent as the research process unfolded, was the appropriateness of the questions in the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, which provided the basis for lesson design. I found difficulty in identifying a standard instrument for measuring students’ interest in the study of Mandarin. The five-point Likert scale was designed by myself to measure students’ interest in Mandarin. It was based on Trumper’s (2006) questionnaire, which was designed to examine students’ interest in science. I included ideas from Patrick, Mantzicopoulos and Samarapungavan’s (2009) study of factors that influence students’ interests, as this seemed appropriate at the time. Furthermore, the age of the participating students (9-11 years old), meant they were not capable of completing questionnaires with a hundred questions; nor would they understand questions developed by an international advisory group of researchers, as Trumper (2006) did in his research. However, as the study unfolded, the key issues that surfaced were, the appropriateness of the questions for my students and the most effective way to analyse the results. The development of such an instrument still needs further study. While the questionnaires might seem to be too simple to enable drawing solid conclusions, the repetition of the instrument proved a reliable measure of attitudes. Furthermore, in the intervention questionnaires, the gender differences between boys’ and girls’ interests in the study of Mandarin and their everyday life were not taken as a focus, due to time constraints. The analysis presented here treats the students as a single group; future studies could explore the issue of gender differences in students’ interests and their responses about the interestingness of lessons.
7.5 Implications for practice

This study has implications for how to stimulate non-Mandarin background students’ interest in learning Mandarin in Australia, especially those from socio-economically advantaged communities.

In order to promote Australian students’ learning of a foreign language, it is essential to know their interests and needs, so as to be able to relate their prior experiences to their present language studies. When relating what they know to what they do not know, students’ access to the new knowledge may become easier. Interest-based language teaching is based on the principle of using students’ prior knowledge and interests to stimulate new learning. When students’ interests from their daily life and their interests in the language are used to plan and conduct language lessons, their distance from the language is shortened. The language was no longer a totally different, remote, complex knowledge for them to learn, but interesting information they would like to know, that built on their experience.

Second, the appropriate use of different activities engages students and enhances their learning. The “fun” part of a lesson is always the diamond in students’ eyes. In this research, I used a variety of inspirational tools, such as games, cultural activities and videos. When the selected tools were suitable for students, this helped to delay students’ tiredness, and also consolidated their learning by engaging them in these activities. Furthermore, students’ understanding of the language can be further developed when they are immersed in an appropriate language environment.

Third, a group of high-level soldiers needs an excellent commander to make a strategic plan, or the soldiers will not be successful. Consider for a moment the following Chinese concept: “一盘散沙” /yi pan san sha/. “一” /yi/ is the number one, “盘” /pan/ equals to tray, “散” /san/ means scattered and “沙” /sha/ literally means sand. Therefore, the concept means a tray of loose sand. In China, when people say of a group of people “yi pan san sha”, they are suggesting that the group is unorganised and easy to break because it is without a good leader. In a language class, the teacher is like the commander of an army and his/her lesson plans are the
soldiers. Although the general might have a very good soldier, he/she could not win without the right strategic organisation. Therefore, a good lesson plan is not enough to stimulate students’ interest and promote their language learning, especially for beginning teacher-researchers. It also requires the professional learning of the teacher-researcher about classroom organisation and management. As a result, in-depth classroom observations of experienced teachers, keeping a fieldwork journal, reading articles about teachers’ professional learning and asking for professional advice, are important for beginning language teachers.

7.6 Recommendations for further research

This study attempted to find out how to use interest-based language teaching to stimulate students’ interest in learning Mandarin. Lessons were designed to teach the required language by incorporating students’ everyday interests and topic interests. The teaching content and strategies developed could provide a possible path to engage Australian students in learning Mandarin. The development and the analysis of this interest-based Mandarin teaching project is an initiative that has rarely been studied with Australian students and thus would benefit from further research.

Second, the background and setting for the research reported in this thesis was special. I came to Australia as a volunteer beginning teacher of Mandarin. I was not familiar with the NSW educational system or with daily teaching routines. I had little second language teaching experience and needed to learn much about being a teacher-researcher from the beginning. Evidence of how this impacted on my own professional learning, as well as the Mandarin learning of my Australian students, was only gives us part of the picture in this study. Further, the identity of Chinese teachers as teachers of Mandarin working with Australian students could be researched, to establish the possible different effects of these two different identities.

Finally, while this study used pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, it could be useful to find other ways of measuring students’ interest in learning Mandarin. More research is needed to design questionnaires to gauge students’ interest in this area. It would be useful to investigate students’ attitude towards Mandarin, interest in the Mandarin language, interest in modern Chinese culture, engagement in out-of-school
experiences with Mandarin and Chinese culture, opinions about Mandarin lessons and self-evaluation of competence in learning Mandarin (see 3.6.1). A major concern is to investigate students’ interaction with the Mandarin language and China’s culture. Since it was difficult for me to identify the outside factors that influenced their learning, the social and parental influences on students’ learning were analysed based only on the statements made by their classroom teachers (see 5.5.2). Consequently, the other factors that impacted on students’ learning of Mandarin could benefit from further study.

7.7 Reflections on becoming a teacher-researcher

Eighteen months ago, I came to Australia with little experience of either teaching or research. I was a blank paper when it came to being a teacher-researcher. I was not aware of what effect being a teacher-researcher would have on my life, study or career. At that time, I did not think one person could be both a teacher and a researcher, or might be entitled to do so. However, when this really happened, I realised the “magic” of being a teacher-researcher. I identified three “magic” elements that took place as I became a teacher-researcher.

First of all, being a teacher-researcher, I was able to relate scholarly theories to daily practice, issues and problems of teaching. In my mind, the image of a researcher was of a person who sits in a library or laboratory surrounded by books and materials. I imagined that they had little contact with real world situations such as classroom teaching. I thought that all researchers did was look for solutions from various theories in books, to solve certain problems that other practitioners come across. On the other hand, I thought the job of teachers was only a matter of transferring knowledge to students. I also assumed that they had nothing to do with educational research or researchers. However, by becoming a teacher-researcher, I was able to analyse the issues I confronted step by step, based on appropriate theories and research principles. I did not need to rely on someone else to give me the solution, but I could solve my own particular problems in my particular teaching setting through the research I designed, working collaboratively through this process.
Second, I learned it is necessary to reflect frequently on records of my teaching practice and research procedures as a teacher-researcher. By writing my reflective journal, I generated evidence which provided material to analyse my work in a scientific way, and this provided more convincing grounds for my next move, in both teaching and research. The advantages and disadvantages of my teaching and research were revealed through this analysis of my reflective journal, and some seemingly inessential things were identified as vital once recorded and examined. As a result, being a teacher-researcher was effective for my current study and for my 18-month period of being a volunteer Mandarin teacher in Australia.

The last magic element is that, as a Mandarin teacher and a Chinese student, I was able to bring Chinese conceptual knowledge to what I taught, and in my research study. Singh’s (2010, 2011) concept of “transnational knowledge exchange” was a key intellectual resource that contributed to my becoming a transnational teacher-researcher. I came to Australia with the purpose of learning Western knowledge and experiencing Western educational culture. Although I value my own language and culture very much and I taught Mandarin, I might not have been able to make use of my Chinese conceptual knowledge in this study if I had not become a teacher-researcher through the ROSETE Program. My principal research educator inspired me to make use of Chinese concepts in my teaching and research, and this cultivated my thoughts, especially my educational knowledge. Therefore, I learnt Western teaching methods and strategies to teach Mandarin to my students and analysed students’ learning and my teaching through my research. In addition, the Chinese conceptual knowledge I used in my research helped to shape my teaching methods and strategies. This is how my identity as a transnational teacher-researcher enabled me to have a better understanding and appreciation of my own Chinese knowledge and Western knowledge.
REFERENCES


Tsai, C. (2008.) The preferences toward constructivist Internet-based learning environments among university students in Taiwan. Computers in Human Behavior, 24, pp. 16-31


APPENDICES

Appendix 1. University of Western Sydney Human Ethics Approval

From: "Kay Buckley" <K.BUCKLEY@uws.edu.au>
To: "Michael Singh" <mj.singh@uws.edu.au>, <16836075@student.uws.edu.au>
Subject: HREC Approval H7704

Notification of Approval

23 February 2010

Email on behalf of the UWS Human Research Ethics Committee

Dear Michael and Jing Yuan

I'm writing to advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has agreed to approve the project.

TITLE: Interest-based Language Teaching: Stimulating students’ long-term interest in learning Mandarin in Australia

H7704Student: Jing Yuan (Supervisor: Michael Singh)

The Protocol Number for this project is H7704. Please ensure that this number is quoted in all relevant correspondence and on all information sheets, consent forms and other project documentation. Please note the following:

1. The approval will expire on 31 December 2010. If you require an extension of approval beyond this period, please ensure that you notify the Human Ethics Officer, humanethics@uws.edu.au, prior to this date.

2. Please ensure that you notify the Human Ethics Officer of any future change to the research methodology, recruitment procedure, set of participants or research team.

3. If anything unexpected should occur while carrying out the research, please submit an Adverse Event Form to the Human Ethics Officer. This can be found at http://www.uws.edu.au/research/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/human_ethics_adverse_eventand_of_project

4. Once the project has been completed, a report on its ethical aspects must be submitted to the Human Ethics Officer. This can also be found at http://www.uws.edu.au/research/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/human_ethics_adverse_eventand_of_project

Finally, please contact the Human Ethics Officer, Kay Buckley on (02) 4736 0883 or at k.buckley@uws.edu.au if you require any further information.

The Committee wishes you well with your research.
Yours sincerely,
Associate Professor Janette Perz,
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

Kay Buckley
Human Ethics Officer
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797, Penrith NSW 1797
Tel: 02 47 360 883
http://www.uws.edu.au/research/ethics/human_ethics
Appendix 2. State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP) Approval

Miss Jing Yuan
Room J.G.13
Building J
Kingswood Campus
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797
KINGSWOOD NSW 1797

SERAP number: 20100016

Dear Miss Yuan

I refer to your application to conduct in NSW government schools (Western Sydney Region) a research project entitled Interest-based Language Teaching: Stimulating students’ long-term interest in learning Mandarin in Australia.

I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved and that you may now contact the Principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation.

Your approval will remain valid until 31 December 2010.

You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to the schools.

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

- School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time.
- The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering data must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school’s convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the research Approvals Officer before publication proceeds.

Yours sincerely

Kerrie Ikin
School Education Director, The Hills
Western Sydney Region Education Research Manager
16 March 2010

NSW Department of Education & Training
Western Sydney Region, Building E2C, Minerva Education Precinct, Eastern Road, Quakers Hill NSW 2763 T 9208 7611 F 9208 7635
www.det.nsw.edu.au
Appendix 3. Dialogue Sheet (Students)

Dialogue Sheet

A dialogue sheet provides information about the project. It is similar to the information sheet but is written at the child/young person’s level of comprehension. It is verbally read to participating students immediately before commencement of the project.

Note: If not all of the text in the row is visible please ‘click your cursor’ anywhere on the page to expand the row. To view guidance on what is required in each section ‘hover your cursor’ over the bold text.

Project Title: Interest-based Language Teaching: Stimulating students' long-term interest in learning Mandarin in Australia

Who is carrying out the study? Ms. Jing YUAN

What is the study about? This study is to find out why and how I can to use your everyday interests to help you to learn Mandarin better and become more interested in learning it. My aim is to help you to have a better understanding of Mandarin and Chinese culture so you might be interested in learning it for a long time. I want to find out how to keep more children like you learning Mandarin for a long time.

What does the study involve? In order to do this project, I would like to collect some information from you. I will ask you to answer some written questions at the beginning of the year, and then again at the end of the year. I hope to do all of this as part of our Mandarin lessons. All of this information you give me will give me ideas to design better Mandarin lessons. I would also like some copies of your school work, and I will ask you about how you feel about my Mandarin lessons.

How much time will the study take? It should take you about 15 minutes to answer the written questions each time. Your written feedback will take 5 minutes each time, up to 20 times. We can collect samples of your school work in about 2 minutes.

Will the study benefit me? This research will help me, as a teacher-researcher, to find out a way to promote your Mandarin study and make you become more interested in learning Mandarin as second language.

Will the study have any discomforts? This study will not cause you any discomfort. The research is part of the our Mandarin class routine.

How is this study being paid for? This study is not being paid by any agency.

Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated? No one else will know what you as an individual say. All the data will have your names removed and replaced with imaginary names when the results are publicly disseminated via a thesis and others.

What if I have a concern? You can talk with me, your classroom teacher or the school Principal.

Can I withdraw from the study? Yes. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your Mandarin learning will not be affected at all.

Do you have any questions you would like to ask now before we begin?
Appendix 4. Information Sheet (Parents/Caregivers)

Participant Information Sheet (Parent/Caregiver)
An information sheet, which is tailored in format and language appropriate for the category of participant - adult, child, young adult, should be developed.

Note: If not all of the text in the row is visible please 'click your cursor' anywhere on the page to expand the row. To view guidance on what is required in each section 'hover your cursor' over the bold text. Further instructions are on the last page of this form.

Project Title:
Interest-based Language Teaching: Stimulating students' long-term interest in learning Mandarin in Australia

Who is carrying out the study?
Researcher: Student: Jing YUAN

Your child is invited to participate in a study conducted by Jing YUAN, research candidate, Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney, and will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Hons) under the supervision of Professor Michael Singh & Dr. Kevin Watson.

What is the study about?
The purpose of this study is to investigate the 'everyday interests' of non-Chinese speaking background students in primary and secondary schools and then explore how these interests might be used to stimulate students' interests in learning Mandarin. This research project aims to help students to have a better understanding of Mandarin and Chinese culture that might sustain their interest in learning it so as to encourage more Australian students to continue learning Mandarin in the following years.

What does the study involve?
If you give your written consent for your child to be involved in this project, he/she will participate in it as part of the normal classroom routine. Mandarin lesson every week. At the beginning of the project, your child will be asked to complete a questionnaire which will be used to find out about their everyday interests and their inclination to learn Mandarin. By analysing these results, I will be able to design better Mandarin lessons. The content of the Mandarin lessons will be based on K-12 Mandarin syllabus of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training. The topics and teaching methods will be adopted to engage students' everyday interests. At the end of the term, your child will be asked to complete a questionnaire again to determine the impact of my use interest-based Mandarin teaching.

I would also like to collect some of your child's work samples to use as evidence. Also, I would like to collect written feedback from your child, up to 20 times. Each time will take about 5 minutes.
How much time will the study take?
Recordings will be:
Collected on Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 9am and 3pm during Mandarin lessons.
Stored in a locked filing cabinet or password accessed computer in the researcher's office for 5 years, after which they will be destroyed.
They can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors who have the right to deal with this information in accordance with ethical guidelines.
The data will be used in the following ways: it will be analysed and incorporated into my thesis and related publications.
If you have concerns about what has been recorded, you may access recordings of your child within the period of storage. These recordings can be accessed in the following ways, namely by contacting me personally or the class teacher.

Children not participating in the study will be present during the time the research is being carried out.

Will the study benefit me?
This research project will analyse the appropriateness of my teaching efforts to stimulate Australian students to study Mandarin and help students to develop a better understanding of the possibilities for sustaining students' interests in learning the Chinese language and Chinese culture. It is the intention of this study to contribute to these efforts by addressing gaps in knowledge about the "interests" of students' in learning Mandarin in Australia.

Will the study have any discomforts?
There will be absolutely no discomforts in this study. The research is part of the students' regular classroom routine.

How is this study being paid for?
The study is being sponsored by Centre for Educational Research, UWS. The student has an office computer and desk supplied by CER as well as two supervisors.

Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?
All aspects of the study, including results, will be confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. All data will be de-identified in dissemination.

Can I withdraw my child from the study?
Your child's participation in the study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to consent. Your child may withdraw from the study at any time - or you may withdraw your child from the study at which point all written and audio records of your child's participation will be destroyed. Their academic learning will not be affected.

Can I tell other people about the study?
Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the chief investigator's contact details. They can contact the chief investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain an information sheet.

What if I require further information?
When you have read this information, Jing YUAN will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Professor Michael Singh, 0404012409.
What if I have a complaint?
This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is [enter approval number]

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel 02-4736 0883 Fax 02-4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Appendix 5. Participant Consent Form (Students’ Parents/Caregivers)

Participant Consent Form for Parents/Caregivers

This is a project-specific consent form. It restricts the use of the data collected to the named project by the named investigators. Where projects involve young people capable of consenting, a separate consent form should be developed. A parental consent form is still required.

Note: If not all of the text in the row is visible, please click your cursor anywhere on the page to expand the row. To view guidance on what is required in each section, hover your cursor over the bold text.

Project Title:
Interest-based Language Teaching: Stimulating students’ long-term interest in learning Mandarin in Australia

I, [print name]…………………………, give consent for my child [print name]…………………………to participate in the research project titled [insert title].

I acknowledge that:

I have read the participant information sheet [or where appropriate, “have had read to me”] and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my child’s involvement in the project with the researcher(s).

The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I have discussed participation in the project with my child and my child agrees to their participation in the project.

I understand that my child’s involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about my child will be used in any way that reveals my child’s identity.

I understand that my child’s participation in this project is voluntary. I can withdraw my child from the study at any time, without affecting their academic standing or relationship with the school and they are free to withdraw their participation at any time.

I consent to the [insert specific activities] [if applicable] [list all components of involvement, e.g. audio/video taping to ensure participant can indicate their willingness to participate in all or some of the research]. Please cross out any activity that you do not wish your child to participate in.

Signed (Parent/caregiver): ____________________________ Signed (child): ____________________________

Name: __________________________________________ Name: ______________________________________

Date: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Where projects involve young people capable of consenting, a separate consent form should be developed. A parental consent form is still required.
Appendix 6. Participant Information (Classroom teachers)

Participant Information Sheet (General)

An information sheet, which is tailored in format and language appropriate for the category of participant - adult, child, young adult, should be developed.

Note: If not all of the text in the row is visible please 'click your cursor' anywhere on the page to expand the row. To view guidance on what is required in each section 'hover your cursor' over the bold text. Further instructions are on the last page of this form.

Project Title: Interest-based Language Teaching: Stimulating students’ long-term interest in learning Mandarin in Australia (for teacher participants)

Who is carrying out the study?
Ms. Jing YUAN

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Jing YUAN, RHD candidate, Centre for Educational Research, UWS and will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Hons) at the University of Western Sydney.

What is the study about?
The purpose of this study is to investigate the “everyday interests” of non-background students in primary and secondary schools and then, explore how these interests might be used to stimulate students’ interests in learning Mandarin. This research project aims to help students to have a better understanding of Mandarin and Chinese culture that might sustain their interest in learning it so as to encourage more Australian students to continue learning Mandarin in the following years.

What does the study involve?
As a teacher who oversees my Mandarin lessons, I would like to invite you to help me to observe my lessons, make some notes about them and provide a regular feedback after each of my Mandarin lessons. During the process, I will discuss this project regularly with you. Towards the end of the research process, I would like to have an in-depth interview with you about my teaching for about 30-40 minutes. Data will be elicited from open-ended questions and probes exploring "interest-based language teaching". As you have substantial experience and observed my lessons I believe I can benefit from your considerable insights.

How much time will the study take?
I would like you to make classroom observation during my Mandarin lessons.
I would like some written feedback from you, this might take 5 minutes each time, up to 20 times. The interview will last for 30 to 40 minutes; this will be conducted at the end of Term 3.

Will the study benefit me?
This study will not be a direct and immediate benefit to you. However, this research project will analyse the appropriateness of my teaching efforts to stimulate Australian students to study Mandarin and so to develop a better understanding of the possibilities for sustaining students’ interests in learning the Chinese language and Chinese culture. With your help, this study will contribute to these efforts by addressing gaps in knowledge about practical ways to stimulate students’ study by analysing their everyday interests.
Will the study involve any discomfort for me?
There is not expected to be any discomfort to you arising from this study. Participants have complete freedom in deciding whether to participate and you are free to quit the project at any time during the research process. However, this project will take some of your time for interviewing (with a tape recorder) and writing observation notes which will help me gather data related to my research question.

How is this study being paid for?
The study is not being funded by any agency. It is being supervised by Centre for Educational Research, UWS, and conducted in association with the Western Sydney Region NSW DET.

Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?
All aspects of the study, including results, will be confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. All data will be de-identified in dissemination.

Can I withdraw from the study?
Participation is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to be involved and - if you do participate - you can withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any consequences.

Can I tell other people about the study?
Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the chief investigator’s contact details. They can contact the chief investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain an information sheet.

What if I require further information?
When you have read this information, Jing YUAN will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Professor Michael Singh, 0404012409.

What if I have a complaint?
This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is [enter approval number]

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel 02-4736 0883 Fax 02-4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Appendix 7. Participant Consent Form (Classroom teachers)

Participant Consent Form

This is a project specific consent form. It restricts the use of the data collected to the named project by the named investigators.

Note: if not all of the text in the row is visible please 'click your cursor' anywhere on the page to expand the row. To view guidance on what is required in each section 'hover your cursor' over the bold text.

Project Title:
Interest-based Language Teaching: Stimulating students' long-term interest in learning Mandarin in Australia

I, ................................... consent to participate in the research project titled [insert title].

I acknowledge that:

I have read the participant information sheet [or where appropriate, 'have had read to me'] and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to the [insert specific activities] [if applicable] [list all components of involvement, e.g. audio/video taping to ensure participants can indicate their willingness to participate in all or some of the research]

I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher/s now or in the future.

Signed: ........................................

Name: ........................................

Date: ........................................

Return Address: Ms. Jing YUAN, Room J.G.13, Building J, Kingswood Campus University of Western Sydney Locked Bag 1797 or via e-mail: 166836075@student.uws.edu.au
Appendix 8. Semi-structured interview schedule (Classroom teachers)

1) What strategies do you use to arouse students’ curiosity and sustain their interest in learning?
2) How do you encourage students to try their best in learning, especially when they lack interest?
3) What does interest-based language teaching mean to you? Do you use this teaching strategy in your teaching?
4) To what extent do you think students’ everyday interests have been used in my lessons? Do you think it is beneficial for the students’ learning of Mandarin?
5) What do you think of the benefits of using games and activities in Mandarin lessons? Are there any disadvantage in using games and activities?
6) What are your suggestions about using interest-based language teaching?
7) Has students’ interest in the study of Mandarin has been increased this term?
8) Some students seem to be much more interested in learning Mandarin than the other students. What you think influences their interest? Do you think students’ interest in learning a foreign language like Mandarin has been influenced by family or social environment? In what way?
9) Have students changed their attitude towards Mandarin? In what way?
10) Do you think my teaching has improved over the term?
11) What suggestions do you have for the long-term improvement of my teaching?
Appendix 9. Pre-intervention questionnaire for students

Name (1st name only): Age:
Year level:
Language/s spoken at home:
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander: Yes No

1. Attitudes/value towards Mandarin:
Learning Mandarin is very important to me.
Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

2. Interest in Mandarin and Chinese cultural:
Mandarin is an interesting language.
Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

3. Chinese culture is interesting.
Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

4. I always have out of school experiences in Mandarin and Chinese culture?
Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

What are they?

5. Opinion about Mandarin class:
The Mandarin lessons you had before are interesting.
Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

6. I can learn Mandarin very well.
Strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

7. Would you like to learn Mandarin this year?
Yes no do not know

Why?
Answer question 8 if you are not a year 6 student

8. Would you like to continue learning Mandarin the next year?
   Yes  no  do not know

Why?

Answer question 9 if you are a year 6 student

9. Will you select the subject of Mandarin when you go to high school?
   Yes  no  do not know

Why?

10. The following are sample Mandarin lesson topics. Choose three topics you would like to learn the most.
    Colour  number  family  transportation  animals
    weather & season  clothing  sport  time
    body part  Emotion/feeling  fruits  food & drink

11. Choose 5 cultural activities you would like to experience in our Mandarin lessons.
    a. make a Beijing Opera mask
    b. produce Chinese calligraphy
    c. produce a Chinese traditional painting
    d. use chopsticks
    e. Chinese middle-autumn festival
    f. Chinese music
    g. movie/TV program about China
    h. Chinese birthday party
    i. Make dumplings
    j. Chinese tea culture

YOUR INTERESTS

1. What do you usually do during your free time?
2. What are your hobbies and other interests?

3. What did you find interesting in Mandarin lessons you had before?

4. What other topics would you like to learn about in Mandarin class?
Appendix 10. Post-intervention questionnaire for students

Name (1st name only)

1. Learning Mandarin is very important to me.
   Strongly agree    agree    neutral    disagree    strongly disagree

2. Mandarin is an interesting language.
   Strongly agree    agree    neutral    disagree    strongly disagree

3. Chinese culture is interesting.
   Strongly agree    agree    neutral    disagree    strongly disagree

4. I always have out of school experiences in Mandarin and Chinese culture?
   Strongly agree    agree    neutral    disagree    strongly disagree

   What are they?

5. Mandarin lessons are interesting.
   Strongly agree    agree    neutral    disagree    strongly disagree

6. I can learn Mandarin very well.
   Strongly agree    agree    neutral    disagree    strongly disagree

7. Would you like to learn Mandarin this year? Why?
   Yes              no          do not know

   Answer question 8 if you are not a year 6 student

8. Would you like to continue learning Mandarin the next year? Why?
   Yes              no          do not know

   Answer question 9 if you are a year 6 student

9. Will you select the subject of Mandarin when you go to high school? Why?
   Yes              no          do not know
11. When you recall our Mandarin lessons this term,

1) Which part did you like the most?

2) Which part did you like the least?
Appendix 11. Unstructured observational feedback (classroom teachers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of observation</th>
<th>Behaviour of volunteer teacher</th>
<th>Behaviour of students</th>
<th>Other events</th>
<th>Views about lesson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Appendix 12. Summary of key themes and categories in fieldwork diary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching skill/strategy</th>
<th>Games &amp; activities</th>
<th>Students’ learning</th>
<th>Teacher identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting prepared</td>
<td>Popular games</td>
<td>The more the better</td>
<td>Belongingness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident occurrence</td>
<td>Worksheet calms students</td>
<td>Bad learning result</td>
<td>Getting to know kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in teaching</td>
<td>Learning through game</td>
<td>Different levels of learners</td>
<td>My poor English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>Game lack of language understanding</td>
<td>Not bad beginning</td>
<td>Get familiar with classroom teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive teaching</td>
<td>Grasp students’ attention through game (CM)</td>
<td>New language learning</td>
<td>Used to be evaluated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language reinforcement</td>
<td>Video for stimulation</td>
<td>Students’ encouragement</td>
<td>Recruiting research participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward &amp; inspiration</td>
<td>Knowing more about China &amp; Chinese</td>
<td>Inadequate feedback</td>
<td>Feedback from students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay attention to students</td>
<td>Colour &amp; art</td>
<td>Good learning result</td>
<td>Learn from the previous lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic listening comprehension</td>
<td>Popular &amp; useful song</td>
<td>Bad participation</td>
<td>Bad experience for all beginner teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the winner</td>
<td>Special requirement</td>
<td>Feedback from classroom teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fieldwork journal was kept from 2 February 2010 until 1 July 2010.
## Appendix 13. Timeline for the research: key milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation of Candidature</td>
<td>December 5th, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics approval UWS</td>
<td>End of term 1, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics approval SERAP</td>
<td>End of term 1, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and consent obtained for students and teacher participants</td>
<td>Middle of term 1, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students background pre-intervention questionnaires completed and analysed, e. g. everyday interest</td>
<td>Term 1, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan and take lesson plan into action, collect and analyse data as lessons proceed</td>
<td>From term 1, 2010 to end of term 3, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students post-intervention questionnaire-collect and analyse immediately</td>
<td>End of term 3, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students &amp; teacher written feedback</td>
<td>End of term 3, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interview</td>
<td>After term 3, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalisation of thesis</td>
<td>End of term 4, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of thesis</td>
<td>January, 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 14. Schedule for Language Teacher Training (NSW DET)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27 July</td>
<td>Child Protection; Teaching in NSW schools; Chinese syllabus K-10 and technology resources</td>
<td>Lynda Campbell, Evelyn Mark, Evelyn Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 July, 30 July</td>
<td>School observation in primary and secondary schools</td>
<td>Chatswood Primary, Burwood Girls High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 August</td>
<td>Discussion about observations; background/Communicative Approach; Learning styles</td>
<td>Evelyn Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 August</td>
<td>Practical classroom teaching strategies</td>
<td>Ayumi Dalpadado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 August</td>
<td>School visit and discussion with practising classroom teacher</td>
<td>Willoughby Girls High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 August</td>
<td>Classroom organization; intro to QT-teaching and learning cycle</td>
<td>Evelyn Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 August</td>
<td>Visit to The Hills Sports High; QT reflective assignment</td>
<td>Kate Wang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 September, 8 September</td>
<td>Quality Teaching-Intellectual Quality; school visits</td>
<td>David Jaffray, Evelyn Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 September, 15 September</td>
<td>Quality Learning-Environment &amp; Significance; School visits</td>
<td>Elisabeth Robinson, Evelyn Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 September</td>
<td>School visit discussion with practising classroom teacher using QT framework for observation</td>
<td>Evelyn Mark, Ashfield Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 September</td>
<td>Hanzi, Pinyin and Tones</td>
<td>Cynthia Haskell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 October</td>
<td>Planning and programming</td>
<td>Enri Paronlin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 October</td>
<td>TBA-dependent on needs</td>
<td>Evelyn Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 November</td>
<td>Evaluation of program</td>
<td>Evelyn Mark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 15. Sample Lesson Plans

Lesson 4 Sports (3)

Objectives

a. students

To learn, understand and say several kinds of sports

b. for me

Teach Mandarin stimulate students’ interest in Mandarin by using a variety of activities & games.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Students are doing . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Review movements “打”</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Flashcards</td>
<td>Think and read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Show part of flashcards and guess the picture</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>Flashcards</td>
<td>Guess, say &amp; demonstrate actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Sports worksheet--- Listen comprehension</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td>Listen &amp; choose the correct answer and say the word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Activity- celebrity/sports head Or Silent ball!</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>Flashcards</td>
<td>Participate in the activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Close Review and ask for feedback about the lesson</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation and extension

Students will know several kinds of sports in Chinese. By using games they are familiar with, they can quickly involve in the activity and learn Chinese in fun.
2010.6.2 Lesson 7 Animals (1)

Objectives

a. students
To learn and say several kinds of animals

b. for me
Teach Mandarin stimulate students’ interest in Mandarin by using a variety of activities & games.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Students are doing . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. 1. Introduce the six kinds of animals in Mandarin 2. Sentence “我 喜欢”/ wo xi huan/(I like . . .)</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>Flashcards</td>
<td>Listen and read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Competition game: pick up “the” animal</td>
<td>15 mins</td>
<td>worksheet</td>
<td>Listen, choose, &amp; say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Worksheet: 马 --- write, make connection &amp; colour in</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>worksheet</td>
<td>Understand, write &amp; colour in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Movie: Kongfu Panda (with a question)</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Watch and think about questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Review</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Flashcards</td>
<td>Answer questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Close Review and ask for feedback about the lesson</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation and extension

Students learn Chinese animals and express their inclination of animals in Chinese. By using competition and watching part of the movie, students can learn and master the words better.
### Appendix 16. Open-coding of journal entries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching skill/strategy</th>
<th>Games &amp; activities</th>
<th>Students’ learning</th>
<th>Teacher development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting prepared</td>
<td>Popular games</td>
<td>The more the better</td>
<td>Belongingness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident occurrence</td>
<td>Worksheet calms students</td>
<td>Bad learning result</td>
<td>Getting to know kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in teaching</td>
<td>Learning through game</td>
<td>Different levels of learners</td>
<td>My poor English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>Game lack of language understanding</td>
<td>Not bad beginning</td>
<td>Get familiar with classroom teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive teaching</td>
<td>Grasp students’ attention through game (CM)</td>
<td>New language learning</td>
<td>Used to be evaluated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language reinforcement</td>
<td>Video for stimulation</td>
<td>Students’ encouragement</td>
<td>Recruiting research participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward &amp; inspiration</td>
<td>Knowing more about China &amp; Chinese</td>
<td>Inadequate feedback</td>
<td>Feedback from students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay attention to students</td>
<td>Colour &amp; art</td>
<td>Good learning result</td>
<td>Learn from the previous lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic listening</td>
<td>Popular &amp; useful song</td>
<td>Bad participation</td>
<td>Bad experience for all beginner teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the winner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Special requirement</td>
<td>Feedback from classroom teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 17: Open-coding of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher professional learning</th>
<th>Students’ interests</th>
<th>Teaching methods /strategies</th>
<th>Students’ learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s personality</td>
<td>Link to students’ experience/life</td>
<td>New technology</td>
<td>Growing awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A variety of stimulating strategies</td>
<td>Incorporate students’ interests</td>
<td>Link to students’ experience/life</td>
<td>Increasing positive attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-prepared teaching</td>
<td>Interesting topics</td>
<td>Changeable lesson</td>
<td>Parental influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-students relationship</td>
<td>Games motivate students</td>
<td>Teaching routine</td>
<td>Increasing interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe experienced teachers</td>
<td>Learn through game</td>
<td>Incorporate students’ interests</td>
<td>Easy to be distracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language barrier is nothing</td>
<td>Learning choice</td>
<td>Isolated teaching</td>
<td>Learning scaffolding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic rewards</td>
<td>Interests inspire</td>
<td>Audio-visual tools</td>
<td>Materialistic children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual teacher</td>
<td>Pictures made difference</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learn for the right reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to get students’ interest</td>
<td>Uninteresting sentence learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of self-discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep trying and encouraging</td>
<td>Boring repeating</td>
<td></td>
<td>Different learning attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More confident</td>
<td>Enjoyable Mandarin lesson</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unwilling to change/learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Language comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear explanation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>