Magic Moments: A Second Language Teacher’s Zone of Professional Development

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Declaration

I declare that except where due acknowledgement has been made this research proposal 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 Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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Jingjing Weng
March 2010
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List of Abbreviations

BA: Bachelor of Arts

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

CER: Centre for Educational Research

CET: College English Test

DET: Department of Education and Training

L1: a first language

L2: a second language

NMEB: Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau

NSW: New South Wales

ROSETE: Research-Oriented, School-Engaged, Teacher Education

SERAP: State Education Research Approval Process (NSW)

TEM: Test for English Major

UWS: University of Western Sydney

VTR: Volunteer Teacher-researcher

VOA: Voice of America

WSR: Western Sydney Region

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development
Abstract

This research reports on the experiences of a Volunteer Teacher-researcher (VTR) from Ningbo China, who taught Mandarin in a voluntary capacity in three NSW public schools. The study focuses on her development as a teacher-researcher. The purpose of this investigation is to analyse the process of her constructing, observing and understanding her own multiple Zones of Proximal Development (ZPDs). As a self-study, the research involved recording, analysing and discussing the creation of and journey through multiple ZPDs for a novice L2 teacher. It investigated the use a beginning L2 teacher makes of the guidance and assistance provided by more capable others in constructing ZPDs. In addition, it highlights the value of research for a teacher solving idiosyncratic novel problems.

The theoretical concept of the ZPD was first used by Lev Vygotsky, who saw it as a means of describing the process of learning rather than the product of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky died before he could complete formulation of his theory, and more recent interpretations of his concept diverge in varying degrees from his conception (Daniels, 2001; Kell, 2005; Lantolf, 2000; Wertsch, 1985). Essentially, most research has been on learning in the early years, with the novice assumed to be a student and the expert assumed to be the teacher. There are few, if any, research studies on the notion of the ZPD in the development processes of beginning teachers. Using the ZPD as a conceptual tool to analyse evidence of professional learning, this research examines the value of mediational tools in the context of a beginning L2 teacher and the events that lead to learning. The guiding question was: How are physical and psychological tools internalised and mediated by the VTR (Volunteer Teacher-researcher) in resolving multiple idiosyncratic novel problems in the process of learning while also teaching and researching. Data sources included a reflective journal and observation feedback. This self-study of the ZPD identifies a range of interactions and reflective writing as key mediational tools to professional learning. In doing so it, questions the identities of experts and novices, expanding current understandings of
Vygotsky’s original theoretical concept. This study concludes that it is possible for the adult learner, as a beginning teacher-researcher, to construct her own ZPD, arguing that active participation from a mentor, and reflective writing as mediational tools for internalisation, are necessary for an adult learner to construct his/her own ZPD.
CHAPTER 1

Magic Moments

Introduction

This research, a self-study through the lens of sociocultural theory, aims to investigate how an adult novice constructs her own Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In other words, it focuses on a novice teacher-researcher’s professional learning with sociocultural theory, specifically the ZPD, as a framework for data analysis. This is a small-scale study under the ROSETE (Research-Oriented, School-Engaged, Teacher Education) program, co-sponsored by the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau of China (NMEB), the Western Sydney Region (WSR) of the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education and Training (DET), the School of Education (SoE) and Centre for Educational Research (CER) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). This innovative program enables graduate students from Ningbo, China to learn to teach as Volunteer Teacher-Researchers (VTR) (Zhao & Singh, 2008) in NSW schools. As a VTR, I taught Mandarin (Han yu), in a voluntary capacity, in three NSW state schools. As a researcher, I studied my professional learning as a teacher.

This chapter sets the story of my past education experience as a background to this research. By outlining my past cultural and educational contexts, it provides the rationale for articulating the research question. Following the research question, it explains why the concept of ZPD could provide an avenue for investigating the process of learning to be a teacher. This chapter also details the significance of the research, particularly in terms of adults constructing and operating parallel ZPDs, as this notion is a gap in the literature. It finally ends with an overview of the whole thesis by explaining the content of each chapter.

1.1 My Story as Background to This Study

I once thought my primary school years were the happiest time of my education. As one of the top students in my class, teachers liked me, classmates
respected me, and my family also had high expectations of me. I had no sense of learning pressure or competition. These happy moments ended when I entered high school. The junior high school I attended, Xiang Shan, is a famous one in my city of Ningbo. Many of my peers gathered there from throughout the county. With more capable peers, my academic performance dropped to the middle level of the class. This apparent backward step in my studies tortured me greatly. I felt frustrated and stressed by the pressure of family, friends and teachers. These bad feelings lasted to the end of my senior high school. I had a chance to study in an excellent class of high performing students, unique in my school. However, the furious academic competition exhausted my energy. Sometimes I wished that I did not belong to that class.

I survived those years, achieving good marks in China’s university entrance examination. Even though I gained university entry I felt that my marks were bad when compared with my classmates. When I started university life I began to realise that it was unnecessary to feel frustrated because I was judging myself in a very limited context. Commenting on one’s self is often done using dynamic criteria that can change, because different objects are used as the reference points for making such judgements. Even so, one should reflect on one’s self with a critical view.

It is widely acknowledged in China that high examination scores, in particular those for university entrance, are the only way that leads to a bright future. But after four years of life in university, I found that was not true, because students who gained higher university entrance scores were not offered a chance to study in Australia.

The opportunity arose for me to apply to study and teach in Australia. Despite four years studying English I had no confidence in my ability and saw this as a good chance to improve my English language skills. After stiff competition, I was selected to come to Australia as a VTR, to teach Mandarin in Western Sydney schools and to undertake a Master’s degree at the University of Western Sydney.
I decided to record my professional learning as a teacher-researcher using the idea of the ZPD. As a research higher degree student, I focused my study on the teaching work I was “doing in Australian schools as a volunteer Visiting Teacher of Mandarin” (Zhao & Singh, 2008).

Taking this opportunity resulted in a life changing experience. I now have a brighter future compared to some of my classmates in junior high school who had much better academic performance. However, I am a novice in many things, such as solving computer problems, cooking, singing, looking at road maps, or running my mum’s shop by myself. I have to acknowledge that my cousin is an expert in such things. She ended her formal education many years earlier than I because of bad academic performance.

Maybe my life would not have changed so much if I had not applied for the Ningbo VTR project in my last year of undergraduate studies. My local community was overwhelmed by my successful application: several local newspapers interviewed me (Appendix 7); I dined with the chief leaders of the Ningbo Municipal Education Department—this was the first time I attended such a formal banquet; I was also asked to give a speech to the teachers and students at my University—this was also the first time I had given a speech in front of so many people. All the things I experienced in the first half of 2008 were such a special part of my life. After those special experiences, I felt more confident in myself.

At first I did not understand the connection between my teaching and my research, but over time I began to see how they were connected. For example, after reading about the link between teaching theories and practice, I found the ideas impacted my understandings of being a teacher and of my teaching practice. When I encountered problems in teaching, I turned to these academic sources to find suggestions for dealing with problems. In addition, negotiations with my university and my school mentor (Louise) also helped me to overcome difficulties in my teaching practice.

Magic happened during my days in Australia. I learnt to cook, to ride a bicycle
near pedestrians, to read road maps, to improve my handwriting in English, to teach Mandarin (Han yu) in a classroom and to become a teacher-researcher. Four months before starting this adventure I could not even imagine such changes in myself. All of these changes in myself have come as a great surprise. I now realise that every new experience leads to learning.

Gradually, I gained some insight into the question that tortured me often in my childhood—why did my academic performance get so bad? Now I know it was because the object of reference that I used to judge my performance changed, not me—well, maybe I changed a little. I was always on the way to somewhere, moving forward. I now see that it was not my primary years that were most important to me. Now I see my current moment as the prime time in my education, if not my life. There is a Chinese saying, 读万卷书，行万里路 or in pin yin, du wan juan shu, xing wan li lu (read 10,000 books, and travel 10,000 miles, or travel far, know much). That is why I wanted to travel overseas. I believed that having new learning experiences is really good for achieving one’s potential.

1.2 Rationale for the Research Focus

In the process of refining my research topic related to my experience as a VTR, my mind went back to my high school experiences. How relevant were they to the person I am today? What if I had studied in a common class in school in my hometown, instead of studying in an excellent class in a city high school? I might not have had the pressure of academic competition and might have had a happy time in high school. But what would I be like now? I might have become a saleswoman in a supermarket, a worker in a factory, or a private shop owner like my mother. I am not saying that those careers are of lower social status, but I do prefer what I am doing now, being a teacher-researcher.

The education system in China is not perfect. I had some painful experiences and dark days at high school. But from my perspective as a teacher-researcher I view my experiences under such a system quite differently now. For example, competitive pressure can be a facilitator of learning instead of a
barrier. Therefore, two things attracted my interest in this research project. First, knowing that an important process for professional learning is observing and understanding the experiences of the teacher-as-learner. Second, that exploring critical moments in my development as a teacher-researcher provided significant learning experiences during my time as a VTR.

Here I look at Dewey’s (1938, p. 108) advice, “To set up a problem that does not grow out of an actual situation is to start a course of dead work”. I am a novice teacher-researcher and volunteer teacher. I am trying to learn and improve my teaching strategies based on studying my current knowledge and skills, and their development over 18 months. I am a fluent Mandarin (Han Yu) speaker; I know what it is like to learn a foreign language and I know how difficult high school can be. The research problem I came to focus on was how I would know if I were developing professionally as a teacher. In other words, how do I make use of the physical and psychological sources available to me to better facilitate my professional learning?

Vygotskian theory provided a way of thinking about these issues. Initially, I think choosing a theory was like choosing a religion. You think you have many things in common with the theory. You are in favour of it, you believe in it, and also want to check it, to see if it is applicable in life activities. That is the feeling I had when I first approached Vygotsky’s (1978) theory, particularly the concept of the ZPD. According to Lantolf, the ZPD “is not a physical place situated in time and space; rather it is a metaphor for observing and understanding how mediational means are appropriated and internalized” (2000, p. 17). After some consideration I decided that Vygotsky’s ZPD could provide a framework for me to examine my teaching and research experiences.

1.3 Research Questions

This study aims to investigate my professional learning as a teacher by using the theoretical concept of the ZPD as a key analytical tool. By using four elements of this conceptual tool to analyse evidence of my professional learning, I examine the value of the ZPD in adult professional learning. To
fulfil this aim, the following question was initially posed to guide this study: How does the internalisation and mediation of physical and psychological tools impact on the novice teacher’s learning process?

As a consequence of reading the literature, the following question was developed to provide the key focus for this thesis: Do the mediation, internalisation and appropriation of physical and psychological signs impact on the novice teacher-researcher’s learning process?

Contributory research questions included:

- How does my cultural and historical background impact on my learning in Australia?
- How do various tools mediate my professional learning as a beginning teacher?
- What insights do other voices or perspectives give into my teaching performance?

### 1.4. Significance of this Research

There are two areas of significance arising from this study, which relate to my dual roles as a teacher and a researcher. The first is the field of educational research, and specifically sociocultural theory. The second is the importance of the study to the establishment of Chinese (Mandarin) teaching in western Sydney.

#### 1.4.1 Significance for the Field of Educational Research

This research extends current knowledge by exploring a new and un-researched aspect of the ZPD. Current research on this Vygotskian concept mainly focuses on children, and this narrows its conceptual usefulness (Chaiklin, 2003). Studies of adults learning using the ZPD have focused on process workers (Kell, 2005) and university students (Harland, 2003; Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997; Lantolf, 2000) and have centred on development in a single area. Novice teachers need to develop simultaneously in many areas, thus creating numerous ZPDs. The notion that adults construct and operate parallel ZPDs is however a gap in the literature.
As a powerful notion within sociocultural theory, the ZPD “provides a structure for directing the learning of novices along a predetermined, yet achievable, path” (Kell, 2005, p. 92). Although it is widely recognised as a significant concept, some contemporary researchers fail to comprehend the notion of ZPD, seeing it in a somewhat simplified form (Chaiklin, 2003). Mediation of tools is an important concept for understanding the complexity of ZPD (Kell, 2005) and this study examines a range of physical and psychological tools that aid the development of a novice teacher. In doing so, this study sheds light on the complexity of ZPD.

Chaiklin (2003) argues that the development of higher order mental functions as a result of positive movement through a ZPD does not necessarily correspond to chronological ages. Therefore, applying the ZPD solely to the childhood years narrows its conceptual usefulness. “When Vygotsky writes about ‘age’ it is understood as reflecting a psychological category, not only a temporal characteristic” (p. 48). Taking as its focus the adult learner, this study seeks to reclaim and build on the initial notion developed by Vygotsky.

The privilege given to models that emphasise teachers’ expert knowledge may be dangerous, leading to “misrepresenting or misinterpreting the concept of the ZPD” (Kell, 2005, p. 89). This can result in a reduction of Vygotsky’s notion to a one way learning process. This popular model usually involves the teacher creating a zone to teach students or novices, but this is against Vygotsky’s notion that learning (not teaching) creates the ZPD (Kell, 2005). As a self-study, the research reported here focuses on the tools and understandings of internalisation and mediation used by a novice teacher to achieve her teaching potential. Thus, this thesis is an account of a novice teacher who created ZPDs rather than waiting for or depending on the expert knowledge of her teacher mentors.

In an era when fast tracking teacher education to meet global demands is being promoted, this study describes more flexible learning options and new delivery models—researching a new mode of researcher education. I am a participant-researcher in a research-based, school-engaged, teacher education project,
confirming that the internationalisation of education is a key driver for reform. The particular study reported in this thesis analyses the articulation of school-based teaching practice with university-based learning and research. This small-scale study thereby provides some insights into new directions for teacher education as a response to and an expression of the rapid social, economic and educational changes borne of contemporary globalisation (Zhao & Singh, 2008).

1.4.2 Significance for NSW Schooling

This study relates to the following DET goals: (a) establishing effective partnerships between DET’S Western Sydney region, the University of Western Sydney, public schools in the Western Sydney region, and Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau, China. This study, as small-scale research under the ROSETE program, aims to train teacher-researchers with international cooperation. (b) Strengthening teaching and learning by promoting the uptake of Mandarin in Western Sydney state schools. In responding to globalisation recent Australian government policy has been to increase the opportunities for school children to become familiar with the languages of Australia’s Asian neighbours, including China. This study explores one aspect of introducing native speakers of Mandarin into schools in Western Sydney. (c) Promoting evidence-based best practice, by investigating the Vygotskian concept of the ZPD from the perspective of the novice teacher. This study uses ZPD as a theoretical framework, aims to investigate the novice teacher-researcher’s development both in teaching practice and in research.

By developing both teaching skills and research ability, this study investigates a new mode of teacher training, thus supporting quality teaching and learning. In addition, by researching Mandarin teaching, this study introduces both the language and Chinese culture to the students.

1.5 Methodological Structure

This is a qualitative study. As a self-study, qualitative methods have been used for data collection and triangulation was adopted to ensure validity. Data for
this study consisted of my reflective journal, my recollections of learning in China, and mentor observation feedback. Four factors in sociocultural theory, namely, tools and signs, mediation, internalisation, and appropriation were selected as coding elements to analyse the reflective journal. Data was first presented in the form of 10 narratives, using Ollerenshaw and Creswell’s (2002) Problem-Solution Narrative Structure. By articulating these four sociocultural concepts, the thesis then analyses these short stories individually and across stories or cases. Exploring the four factors in the same order in each story enabled me to demonstrate the learning process of a novice teacher-researcher.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction
This chapter gives the context and the rationale for the study. As the basis of the study, my past learning experience provides the context for me to articulate the research question.

Chapter 2: Literature Review
This chapter explores the literature on beginning teacher learning and development and ZPD. It starts with an inquiry into why teachers choose their professional careers. By investigating the challenges teachers may encounter in the first year, it identifies the major concerns that these teachers hold. Literature around the strategies and support the new teachers may hold and need to receive, respectively, is examined. The links and differences between teacher identity and teacher functional roles are also identified. The review then turns to L2 teaching; the investigation follows with two categories, namely, knowledge about and knowledge how. At this point the review returns to the literature about ZPD. It reviews how the previous research constructs ZPD in various contexts. Finally, it summarises the literature and proposes this research as a new topic in the study of ZPD.

Chapter 3: Theory—A Theoretical Understanding
This chapter outlines the theoretical basis of this thesis by placing the
particular focus on some key concepts in sociocultural theory, such as tools and signs, speech, mediation, internalisation, and appropriation. In concluding, this chapter prepares a conceptual framework for data analysis.

**Chapter 4: Constructing the Study**

This chapter discusses the methodological approach to data collection and analysis. With the research being undertaken as a self-study, adopting multiple ways to represent the same events ensured triangulation of data.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are the first part of data analysis—data display.

**Chapter 5: L2 Learning Experiences**

This chapter represents my past L2 learning experience. By reflecting on past experience, it explains how previous educational experience impacts on the current learning activities and perspectives, and contributes toward answering a subsidiary research question.

**Chapter 6: Voices from others—Observation feedback**

This chapter reports first on the feedback I received from my mentor (Louise) following two observations. Then it compares that with observation feedback I received from the teachers of two other classes that I taught. The data and analysis in this chapter contribute toward another subsidiary research question.

**Chapter 7: Identifying Sociocultural Concepts in Professional Learning**

The data analysis in this chapter returns to the sociocultural factors presented in Chapter 4. It first adopts a narrative approach to present the data in terms of four principles of sociocultural theory associated with the ZPD. In doing so, it reveals how an adult individual constructs her own ZPD and how the process impacts on her professional identity, thus answering a third subsidiary question.

**Chapter 8: Single Case Analysis: four elements of the ZPD**

This chapter is Stage 2 of data analysis—single case analysis. It examines the
four principles of sociocultural theory in each narrative to demonstrate the learning process and identifies aspects of each of the four principles in each narrative. The aim here is to demonstrate a logical process of learning in each narrative.

**Chapter 9: Cross-case analysis: understanding the four elements of the ZPD**

As Stage 4 of the data analysis—across case analysis, this chapter groups each of the principles of sociocultural theory across all cases. It demonstrates the depth and variety of mediators, tools and signs, internalisation and appropriation that resulted in learning and the development of teaching and research skills.

**Chapter 10: Discussion of findings**

Discussion is the final stage of the data analysis. Three findings from the study are discussed in relation to sociocultural theory, showing how this study has extended thinking about who initiates ZPDs, about adult learners and the ZPD, and the roles of novices and experts.

**Chapter 11: Implications and conclusion**

This chapter discusses and concludes the research findings and their implications for future study, particularly in the ZPD debate. Limitations of this study are also outlined.
CHAPTER 2
A Literature Review: Becoming a Second Language Teacher

Introduction

In this chapter, literature relating to L2 teachers is reviewed. The investigations are around four aspects, which are: the rationale for a person to choose teaching as a career, the beginning teacher’s survival year, support gained by teachers in their beginning years, and teacher identity. The second part of literature in this chapter is about L2 teaching.

2.1 Becoming a Teacher

Each individual who chooses to be a teacher does so for a variety reasons; likewise, one’s professional development will be impacted by many factors. In this section, the literature about why one chooses to be a teacher, how beginning teachers manage their first year, support for beginning teachers’ professional development, and teacher identity, are reviewed.

2.1.1 Why Choose the Teaching Profession

There has been considerable research into why people join the teaching profession (Bastick, 2000; DeLong, 1987). In a study of 237 second-year student teachers in Slovenia, Krečič and Grmek (2005) found that the students’ reasons for choosing teaching could be categorised into five groups: (a) self-realisation; (b) altruistic; (c) material; (d) arising from aspirations or stereotypes; and (e) alternative reasons. A similar but larger study (Hobson et al., 2004) surveyed 4,393 student teachers about their reasons for entering teaching and their preconceptions and expectations about education and teaching. The ten factors that made teaching strongly attractive could be fitted into Krečič and Grmek’s five categories, adding specificity to them. Hobson et al.’s (2004) ten reasons are: (a) helping young people to learn; (b) working with children or young people; (c) being inspired by a good teacher; (d) giving something back to the community; (e) the challenging nature of the job; (f) long holidays; (g) staying involved with a subject specialisation; (h) job
security; (i) wanting to teach pupils better than in their own experience; and (j) the professional status of teaching. The majority of student teachers were attracted by the idea of working with children or young people and helping them to learn.

This research suggests that student teachers are motivated more by service consideration than by any other career drivers. They want to see young people grow, based on their efforts:

Because the financial rewards in teaching do not match other professions and have not progressed as quickly as other professions, teachers must look elsewhere for rewards … the intrinsic rewards become more significant and important for career satisfaction in the teaching profession. (DeLong, 1987, p. 118)

These two studies indicate that student teachers attach importance to intrinsic and altruistic reasons for entering the profession. However, teachers are influenced in different ways to choose teaching as a career. Weiner (1993), for example, found that for some student teachers, extrinsic reasons influence career choices. Comparing students enrolled in teacher education programs at Harvard Graduate School of Education and 53 student teachers at Urban College, a small public college in the northeast of the USA she found that even though both groups gave their reasons as wanting the opportunity to be creative, enjoying work with young people, and desiring a socially useful job, there were distinct differences between the two groups. The Urban College students gave higher ratings for the importance of salary and job security, while Harvard students gave higher ratings to independence and autonomy, a desire to change society, the desire to meet people of different social backgrounds, the suitability of the academic calendar, and the length of the school year.

A similar finding relating motivational factors to socioeconomic and geographical status was reported by Bastick (2000). He found that extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic considerations were distinct motivations that Jamaican student teachers had for choosing the teaching profession. The results differed
from those in metropolitan countries. The research pointed out that extrinsic motivation was the most important reason for student teachers in developing countries. Bastick (2000) discusses the reasons that led to these contradictory results between metropolitan and developing countries:

In English speaking metropolitan countries, teachers’ salaries tend not to keep pace with salaries of comparable middle management in the commercial sectors and there tend to be more competing opportunities for employment in the commercial sectors than is the case in developing countries. Hence, salary and security might be less of an attraction to metropolitan teachers. In developing countries there are comparatively fewer competing employment opportunities from the commercial sectors. Governments tend to be the major employers and offer comparatively secure employment … Fundamental motivation theory (Maslow, 1970) predicts that altruistic and self-actualization motives remain weak until these basic needs are met (p. 347).

These studies reveal significant differences regarding the factors that attract people to be teachers. Multiple issues relating to gender, training route, teaching phase, regions, economic conditions, individual life experiences, and cultures influence such decisions.

2.1.2 Beginning Teachers ‘Survival Year’

A number of studies document challenges that beginning teachers face, providing a lens through which one might get a general picture of what it is like in the ‘survival years’. The first year of teaching is special in a teacher’s career time, and has been characterised as “a period of survival, discovery, adaption, and learning” (Clausen, 2007, p. 2). Once out of nurturing teacher education colleges, beginning teachers are on their own, faced with challenging situations they encounter during the early stages of their teaching careers. Once they embark on their professional careers, they need to struggle with establishing classroom management, images of themselves as teachers, ideas about students, and ways of teaching specific subject matter (Grossman &
Thompson, 2004). In a two-year study McCann and Johannessen (2004) studied 11 novice high school English teachers in the early stages of their careers. The purpose of this study was to investigate the concerns new teachers have that drive them from the profession, and the attitudes and support systems that help retain them. The researchers found that the major concerns revealed by the novice teachers fall into five categories: (a) relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and supervisors; (b) workload or time management; (c) knowledge of subject/curriculum focus and framework; (d) evaluation/grading value judgements; (e) autonomy/control independence and integrity. These categories could be characterised as showing competence in the skills of their chosen career.

Onafowora (2005) points out that the beginning teacher is “likely to face a number of challenges in meeting the expectations embedded in showing competence in teaching skills” (p. 34). Teachers need to demonstrate competence in both subject matter and in teaching and “new teachers are better able to develop pedagogical expertise after spending some time in their teaching career” (Onafowora, 2005, p. 34). In other words, the teaching experiences beginning teachers acquire over time help them to balance theory with practice. The study pointed out that mastery of teaching and instructional effectiveness is unlikely to happen in the first year; it requires at least several years’ teaching practice. The first year is critical for beginning teachers.

Interviews conducted by McCann and Johannessen (2004) indicate that those likely to leave teaching feel: (a) the workload is unreasonable and unmanageable; (b) their efforts to correct classroom problems are futile because they are problems inherent in teaching; (c) their needs have a greater priority than the needs of the students; (d) they have to plan an ‘escape’ from teaching; (e) their decision to teach was a career compromise because they had limited career choices. Clausen (2007) argues that “the first year is simply a period where new teachers make trial and error decisions about instruction, classroom management, and curriculum development, then continue to rely on those decisions even though they do not represent best practices” (p. 246). Research literature stresses the importance of providing support to help
beginning teachers survive the first year and stay in the teaching profession.

2.1.3 Support for Professional Development

Feiman-Nemser (2003) argues that the first year of teaching must be treated as “a phase in learning to teach [and new teachers need to be surrounded with] a professional culture that supports teacher learning” (p. 1). Support that beginning teachers receive during their first years in the classroom affects their professional development (Clausen, 2007). Those who support beginning teachers’ professional development help them realise the importance of their work. This support should include quality mentoring and personal connection as two necessities for beginning teachers.

The quality of the mentoring program makes all the difference … research on the concerns of beginning teachers need to guide the activities of mentoring programs … it is crucial that novice teachers have frequent contact with peers, who can seem less threatening and more empathic to their difficulties. (McCann and Johannessen 2004, p. 144)

Additionally, being proactive and not waiting for beginning teachers to ask for help is vital. Listening and assisting beginning teachers without judging them is also important.

Individuals enter the teaching profession for a range of reasons, but the literature is divided on whether these reasons are extrinsic or intrinsic. There is some evidence that in urban areas the motivation to become a teacher is intrinsic, where it is extrinsic in rural areas. The research, however, agrees that simply completing a formal teacher training qualification is insufficient for sustaining beginning teachers in the profession. In their beginning years of teaching, new teachers need ongoing support for their continued learning. Today, teacher registration authorities benchmark professional learning and development to demonstrate the skills good teachers need. The following section reviews literature on the development of teacher identity.
2.1.4 Teacher Identity

Teaching involves much more than a series of specified benchmarks. Atkinson (2004) indicates, “when all the competency statements are taken together [some teachers] still do not capture what it is like to teach” (p. 380). Previous research suggests a link between teachers’ professional identity and their efficacy in the profession (Chong & Low, 2009; McNally & Gray, 2006; Walkington, 2005).

Chong and Low interpret identity as “an organized representation of our theories, attitudes, and beliefs about ourselves” (2008, p. 60). Teacher professional identity is “How teachers define themselves and to others; It is a construct of professional self that evolves over career stages; and can be shaped by school, reform, and political contexts” (Lasky, 2005, p. 901).

Mayer (1999) asserts that teacher professional identity can be distanced from teachers’ functional roles.

A teaching role encapsulates the things the teacher does in performing the functions required of her/him as a teacher, whereas a teaching identity is a more personal thing and indicates how one identifies with being a teacher and how one feels as a teacher. (p. 6, cited in Chong & Low, 2009)

Teacher identity is based on the core beliefs one has about teaching and being a teacher; beliefs that are continuously formed and reformed through teaching experience.

Chong and Low (2008) are interested in the formation of student teachers’ teacher identity from the completion of their pre-service education to the end of their initial year of teaching. They argue that teacher preparation programs should give priority to supporting student teachers to build a professional teacher identity. Their research indicates that people entered initial teacher education programmes with a positive perception of the profession. However, there was a significant dip at their point of exit. This dip in their perception
remained in the first year of teaching. The researchers argue that for the beginning teachers “changes in perception of teaching and the profession could be related to influences from the environment in school, professional development, and socialization factors” (p. 70). As teacher identity cannot be interpreted as stable or fixed, it is “negotiated through a rich and complex set of relations of practice. This richness and complexity must be nurtured and developed in conditions where there is respect, mutuality, and communication for teachers individually and the teaching profession collectively” (p. 70). These researchers found that yearly follow-up interviews with beginning teachers are an effective way to explore concerns about teacher identity formation.

McNally and Gray (2006) found that the transition of the beginning teacher “has to be recognised as an identity shift rather than as a rational progression in the more abstracted concepts or principles of the standard” (p. 7). A wide range of teaching knowledge and skills are acknowledged as being dependent elements for professional development. Evidence from their study revealed that the narrative data gathered during the first four months of teaching did not uncover any strong occurrence of subject knowledge, teaching methods or any standard conceptual apparatus. They argued that:

Teaching cannot just be assimilated as a craft or set of technical skills, or even as parts of professional knowledge; these can be learned. The various standards and collections of competence requirements lay out laudable, vaguely articulated aspirations that may help illuminate but cannot of themselves hold the key to successful teaching or acceptance as a teacher. (p. 7)

Rejecting the notion that teacher identity related to competence at a craft or set of technical skills, Lasky (2005) found that “early professional training along with the larger political and social context” (p. 913) of the school were mediational elements that shape beginning teachers’ development of a professional identity as teachers.
Attention has been given to ways to facilitate the formation of teacher identity (Atkinson, 2004; Walkington, 2005). Focusing on a consultative mentoring model is a much more effective method in helping the growth of teacher identity rather than the traditional supervision model. “Effective mentoring involves a complex relationship that draws upon personal and contextual factors and a range of tasks and tools” (Walkington, 2005, p. 59). His study indicates that the mentor’s professional identity actually has an influence on the student teacher’s growth in teaching identity. The traditional supervision model, focusing on socialisation, limits the future teacher’s growth as a professional. He suggests that:

teacher educators, whether they are university lecturers/tutors or mentoring teachers in the workplace, must seek to continually encourage the formation of a teacher identity by facilitating pre-service teacher activity that empowers them to explicitly build upon and challenge their experiences and beliefs. (p. 63)

Four strategies have been identified as important means to promote a positive and personally meaningful teacher identity; these include dedicating sufficient time, reflecting on practice, empowering decision-making and learning through research in action.

Atkinson (2004) argues for the importance of using reflection to evaluate teaching experiences and rationales. An unavoidable difficulty with reflective practice is that “the real cannot be symbolized” (p. 393). In other words, reflective practice fails to acknowledge the perspectives of others. His study investigated the formation of student identities in initial teacher education. By investigating student narratives of school experiences, it found that although reflective discourse is a helpful tool, it fails to take into account non-symbolisable and non-rational aspects of experience that have powerful ontological effects on identity. He suggests that teachers who have a more complex notion of the reflective practitioner will gain more from their reflections:
The more complex notion of the ‘reflective practitioner’ … involves rational reflection upon classroom practice but also upon the effect of institutional structures on teaching as well as reflection on the self in action in terms of interrogating one’s beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, prejudices and suppositions that inform teaching. (p. 380)

This more complex notion of the reflective practitioner negotiated with beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, prejudices and suppositions, is more effective to facilitate the growth of beginning teachers’ professional identity.

2.2 Second Language Teacher Education

In this section, the knowledge base of Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) is reviewed. Scholars and researchers have expanded the field of SLTE in both breadth and depth. Based on the traditional perspectives, (Richards, 2008) clarified knowledge about SLTE by dividing the concept into two strands, “one focusing on classroom teaching skills and pedagogic issues, and the other focusing on what has been perceived as the academic underpinnings of classroom skills, namely knowledge about language and language learning” (p. 162). That is, there are two kinds of knowledge in this field—knowledge about second language teaching and knowledge how of second language teaching. Knowledge about involves theorising language teaching from an academic perspective, particularly as it informs practical teaching. In the current study, Vygotsky’s theory of ZPD provides the theoretical resources for ‘knowing about’ my professional learning as a second language teacher. Knowledge how involves the practical application of teaching theories to classrooms. This kind of knowledge emphasises an approach to delivering the knowledge to students, and is more practical, compared to the former. In response to these two forms of knowledge (about and how), the academic underpinnings of L2 teaching and L2 teaching strategies are reviewed in the following sections.

2.2.1 Knowledge about

‘Knowledge about’ includes academic underpinnings about language and
language learning and teaching, language teacher beliefs, and theories. The function of language is twofold. Language is first “a means of social coordination of the actions of various people; and second a tool of thinking” (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 57). Based on this notion, the goals of language teaching may be divided into external and internal goals.

2.2.1.1 External goals

External goals relate to the reasons a language learner has for using a language in particular practical situations. According to the traditional perspective, the goal of language teaching is to “get as close to the native speaker as possible, recognizing the native speaker as having the only acceptable form of language” (Cook, 2005, p. 53). This native speaker target notion is seriously limited, as it ignores what students really need from a foreign language. A native speaker is a person speaking the language they learn first in childhood. By this definition it is impossible for any L2 learner ever to become a native speaker without going back in time to their childhood, an impossible quest: “nothing learnt in later life could qualify you as a native speaker” (Cook, 2005, p. 49). Therefore, it would be better for L2 learners to identify themselves as L2 users, as bilingual persons who learn the target language from a variety of needs, rather than aspiring to imitate the native speakers, who by definition they can never be. From a Vygotskian perspective, the external function of a language is for social communication; therefore, an achievable external goal for L2 learners is to be able to switch between L2 and L1 for some appropriate uses. Imitating the native speaker might represent a high level of L2 acquisition, against learning criteria; it does not belong to the basic external function of a language.

2.2.1.2 Internal goals

For many years, “textbooks and syllabuses were concerned with how students should use the language in conversation and how they could convey ideas to other people, not with internal goals” (Cook, 2005, p. 55). Internal goals focus on L2 learners’ cognitive development. The Chinese K-10 Syllabus (NSW Board of Studies, 2008) expects pupils to “maximize their individual talents
and capabilities for lifelong learning; to develop positive self-concepts and their capacity to establish and maintain safe, healthy and rewarding lives; to take account of moral, ethical and spiritual considerations” (p. 5). These expectations reveal a concern that as well as the practical need to communicate L2 learning should provide opportunities for intellectual enrichment, cognitive growth and a deeper understanding of the world. They imply that the internal goals of language teaching are beneficial for L2 language learners.

2.2.1.3 Some ideas about native speaker teachers

A prevailing perspective in this field tends to draw a clear line between native speaker teachers and non-native speaker teachers. The native speaker teacher is defined as a person “who does not know the first language of the students … the only asset of native speaker teachers is precisely that they are native speakers” (Cook, 2005, p. 56). However, with increasing internationalisation, native speaker teachers are currently more qualified and are likely to know some of the students’ L1. I am an example of contemporary native speaking L2 teachers: I am a native speaker of Chinese teaching Chinese language in Australia. Chinese is my first language (L1). Before I came to Australia I was an English major in China. In other words, English is my L2. I have learned English since junior high school; in addition to the language, I also have learned the culture, history, and literature of English speaking countries. Therefore, rather than knowing nothing about English language and culture, I am a fluent L2 user and have some knowledge of this country.

At this stage it is useful to consider two strands of native speaker teachers: western native speaker teachers, those from the UK, the USA, and other English speaking nations, and eastern native teachers, those from non English speaking countries, such as Asian countries. Since World War II English, as a communication tool, has been advocated by the governments of many eastern countries. “Learning English has been accepted by students as a matter-of-fact, as a normal part of school and academic life” (Crozier & Kleinsasser, 2006, p. 34) in non English speaking countries. Therefore, a considerable number of eastern native speaker teachers have L2 learning experience. Just like non-native speaker teachers who know two languages, most eastern native speaker
2.2.2 Knowledge how

Knowledge how involves categories such as teaching skills, pedagogic issues, and teaching methodologies. In this section, some practical L2 teaching strategies are reviewed:

2.2.2.1 Creating a motivating classroom climate

Students come to classrooms from different backgrounds and life experiences. Those individual differences will affect their motivation to learn a target language. Dörnyei (2007) argues the significance of creating a motivating classroom environment:

> As a long-term, sustained learning process, the acquisition of an L2 cannot take place unless the education context provides, in addition to cognitively adequate instructional practices, sufficient inspiration and enjoyment to build up continuing motivation in the learners. Boring but systematic teaching can be effective in producing, for example, good test results, but rarely does it inspire a lifelong commitment to the subject. (p. 719)

Lightbown & Spada (2006) assert that the principal way teachers can influence learners’ motivation is by making the classroom “a supportive environment in which students are stimulated, engaged in activities that are appropriate to their age, interests, and cultural backgrounds, and, most importantly, where students can experience success” (p. 185). Dörnyei proposes that the initial motivational conditions of the class are characterised by a safe climate, cohesiveness, and a good student-teacher relationship (2007, p. 726). The three–step motivational teaching practices are shown in Table 2.1:
Table 2.1 Three-step motivation learning paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: Generating initial motivation</th>
<th>Step 2: Maintaining and protecting motivation</th>
<th>Step 3: Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation</th>
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<tr>
<td>enhancing the learners’ language-related values and attitudes</td>
<td>making learning stimulating and enjoyable presenting tasks in a motivating way setting specific learner goals protecting the learners’ self-esteem and increasing their self-confidence creating learner autonomy promoting self-motivating learner strategies</td>
<td>offer motivational feedback by communicating trust and encouragement, motivational feedback can promote a positive self-concept and self-confidence in the student motivational feedback should be informative, prompting the learner to reflect constructively on areas that need improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increasing the learners’ expectancy of success</td>
<td>increasing the learners’ goal-orientedness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making the teaching materials relevant for the learners</td>
<td>creating realistic learner beliefs</td>
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This appears to be a long list of L2 teaching strategies. However, there is no necessity to use all the techniques at the same time: “what we need is quality rather than quantity; some of the most motivating teachers often rely on a few well-selected, basic techniques” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 731).

2.2.2.2 Balancing L1 and L2 in L2 classroom

Traditional perspectives insists that immersion in a L2 language environment has benefit for the L2 learners which is why native speaker teachers are preferred in classrooms in some areas of the world. This has led to a prevailing but extreme view of language teaching, that language teachers should minimise the use of the first language in the classroom as much as possible. However,

The use of the first language in the classroom should not be taken to an extreme. It is wrong to try to impose a total ban on the L1 in the classroom, partly as this makes teachers feel guilty not observing it, partly because it ignores the very real ways in which the first language can be used, partly because it does not take account of the classroom as an authentic situation of L2 use, rather than pseudo native speaker use. (Cook, 2005, p. 59)

The frequency of using first language varies from classroom to classroom, since it depends on the learning level of L2 learners and the content of a lesson.
For example, beginning learners need more instruction in L1 than the high level learners. Content, such as grammar and culture, needs more explanation in L1. Language teachers should be flexible in balancing L1 and L2 use according to the actual situation, thus to achieve a good effect in classroom teaching. In the classroom the first language may be used: to convey L2 meaning; as a shortcut for explaining tasks or tests; to explain grammar or; for practising L2 uses such as code switching (Cook, 2005).

### 2.2.2.3 Culture in language learning and teaching

The mutual relationship between language and culture is a frequently discussed topic in the language teaching field. Acquiring a new language means a lot more than the manipulation of syntax and lexicon (Gene & Bada, 2005, p. 73). Without the study of culture, L2 teaching is inaccurate and incomplete. For L2 students, language study seems senseless if they know nothing about people who speak the target language or the country in which the target language is spoken.

Since the primary function of language is communication, people learn a foreign language in order to communicate with target language speakers. The goal of those activities is to minimise misunderstandings and to communicate effectively. Thus, the L2 user needs to understand the people and the culture of the target language. Learning syntax and lexis does not include this kind of knowledge so learning about culture is a necessary component of language teaching. Kitao (2000) has discussed four benefits of teaching culture. In summary, these are:

- Studying culture gives students a reason to study the target language as well as rendering the study of L2 meaningful.
- Studying culture helps learners to conceive of the native speakers of the target language as real persons.
- Studying culture helps to achieve high motivation in L2 learning.
- Studying culture gives learners a liking for the native speakers.
of the target language, and also plays a useful role in general education; for example, the learners could also learn about the history and geography of the target culture.

Alptekin (2002) concurs with these benefits, highlighting the intercultural communicative nature in L2 learning. He asserts that since people have various reasons to learn a foreign language, it is unnecessary to learn the conventions of the target language. That is, the learners themselves should clarify their own reasons for embarking on learning a foreign language.

2.3 Conclusion

Nothing about becoming a teacher is simple. People choose to become teachers for a range of reasons, but in their beginning years in the profession they require ongoing support and professional development. The situation is even more complex for teachers of foreign languages. They struggle not only with issues around becoming a teacher but also with their motivation and their students’ motivation for learning another language.

Since I was teaching without formal qualifications in a new culture and in a first language that is my L2, becoming a teacher could be very daunting. This study explores the development of my teaching skills using the framework of Vygotsky’s ZPD. The next chapter reviews literature about Vygotsky, sociocultural theory and the ZPD.
CHAPTER 3

A Review of the Literature: The Zone of Proximal Development and Adult Learning

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate my professional development as a teacher by using the theoretical concept of the ZPD as a framework. This chapter reviews the ZPD and explains four of its key elements.

There should be a mental developmental movement in every ZPD: that is, a movement from the interpersonal or external level to the intrapersonal or internal level. Sociocultural theory named this movement internalisation. According to Johnson and Golombek (2003), internalisation “involves a process in which a person’s activity is initially mediated by other people or cultural artifacts but later comes to be controlled by the person as he or she appropriates resources to regulate his or her own activities” (p. 731). From the above perspective, without mediational tools, the process of internalisation, and learning within the ZPD, will not occur. Or more precisely, the mediational tools and internalisation are two prerequisite elements in the ZPD. An important, but not the primary construct of sociocultural theory is the ZPD, entailing mediation and internalisation. Those three key constructs enable researchers to trace the internal cognitive processes of learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In the following section, interpretations of mediation and internalisation, and the relationship between the three elements are discussed.

3.1 Review of the ZPD

The term ZPD was introduced as a part of, but not as a main or central concept of Vygotsky’s theory of child development (Chaiklin, 2003). Because he proposed this notion in the latter years of life—15 months before his death—Vygotsky had no time to elaborate this concept. Although the term can be found in at least eight of Vygotsky’s published works, “most of these have only
brief comments about this concept” (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 43). The most common definition encountered by English-reading audiences is:

The distance between the actual development levels as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87)

Despite the popularity of the concept in contemporary theoretical and empirical research, this seminal definition of ZPD remains something of a mysterious concept (Nassaji & Cumming, 2000). That being the case, it is useful to consider interpretations of ZPD further.

3.1.1 Vygotsky’s Concept of the ZPD

Vygotsky “developed the notion of the ZPD to deal with two practical problems in educational psychology: the assessment of children’s intellectual ability and the evaluation of instructional processes” (Kell, 2005, p. 88). Since he believed the IQ test developed by Thorndyke and Binet was inappropriate to measure learning potential, Vygotsky introduced the ZPD to “address the issue of predicting future development” (p. 88).

He argued “the notion of a zone of proximal development enables us to propound a new formula, namely that the only ‘good learning’ is that which is in advance of development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89). This is an explanation of the higher mental functions that could be applied in their entirety to children’s learning processes (Kell, 2005, p. 89). This notion demonstrates that the relation between learning and development is a unity but not an identity, and learning leads to development (Kell, 2005).

In a ZPD, instruction is viewed as an important element but not as an end in itself. Chaiklin argues that Vygotsky wanted to develop “a theory about the relationship between specific subject matter instruction and its consequences for psychological development” (2003, p. 39). Such a theory focuses on the
relation between instruction and development in a ZPD, not simply on instruction.

From a Vygotskian perspective, development occurs when cultural knowledge is transmitted through social interaction. Instruction using the media of speech or writing is a process of imparting cultural knowledge. So, when novices and experts work together to solve problems constructively, learning occurs.

Instruction within this zone always involves social interaction and the transmission of cultural symbols through the mediation of psychological tools and signs, particularly speech. When instruction is proceeding in a zone of proximal development, it is essential that the learner must be able to use words and other artifacts in ways that extend beyond their current understanding of them, thereby coordination with possible future forms of action. (Kell, 2005. p. 89)

3.1.2 Common Interpretations of the ZPD

A neo-Vygotskian conception of the ZPD presupposes “an interaction on a task between a more competent person and a less competent person, such that the less competent person becomes independently proficient at what was initially a jointly accomplished task” (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 41). There are three main assumptions emphasised by this notion, namely, a) generality, b) assistance and c) potential.

The generality assumption suggests that the concept of the ZPD can be applied in all kinds of learning contexts. A person is able to perform a certain number of tasks alone but in collaboration can perform a greater number of tasks. However, the ZPD is not concerned with the development of any particular skill, but is concerned with cognitive development (Chaiklin, 2003).

The assistance assumption emphasises the importance of a more competent person in the ZPD. How a more competent person instructs a less competent person is a defining characteristic of the ZPD. Learning is a process of co-
construction. Therefore, it is not the competence of a supposedly more knowledgeable person that is of concern here, but understanding the meaning of that assistance in relation to a novice’s learning and development (Chaiklin, 2003).

The potential assumption suggests that the properties of the learner permit the best and easiest learning. Here, properties, refers to a learner’s potential and/or readiness to learn. If the zone can be identified properly, it may be possible to facilitate a novice’s learning (Chaiklin, 2003).

Given these assumptions, “Vygotsky’s concept of ZPD is more precise and elaborated than its common reception or interpretation” (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 39). However, many practitioners who use the notion of a ZPD do not interpret it as fully as it has been elaborated. Further, the idea of using a ZPD across a group of learners is problematic because each ZPD should be individual and should change, as circumstances require.

### 3.1.3 Applying the ZPD to Adult Learners

Vygotsky’s theory, the ZPD in particular, is predominantly concerned with children. However,

> Despite a perception that sociocultural theory is about childhood cognitive development, it is also applicable to adolescents and adults. While some concepts are quite specifically concerned with childhood, others are more general and can be considered in any discussion of lifelong cognitive growth and development. (Kell, 2005, p. 94)

Nyikos and Hashimoto’s (1997) investigation of a group of student teachers in a teacher education program serves to illustrate the applicability of the ZPD in adult learning. Using a constructivist framework, their study demonstrated the extent to which the ZPD explains the interactions that occurred spontaneously during a group work project where each of three collaborative groups of international students in a graduate teacher education class wrote their term
paper collaboratively. The groups produced three kinds of written statements: dialogue journals, self-reports about the group process, and self-reports about each student’s role in the group. These were analysed as self-regulation tools. The study also generated a list of four interdependent elements that are necessary for the ZPD to function for adult learners:

- Social interaction, a necessary factor for functioning in the ZPD.
- Cognitive development, means of constructing new understanding through problem solving and critical thinking.
- Self-regulation is a response to power relationships and affective factors.
- Language is a tool to mediate these factors. (Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997, p. 511)

Echoing Chaiklin’s concerns, this study highlights the importance of social interaction, arguing that:

Without a strongly supporting social component, the potential for learning (ZPD), for both the individual and the group, was radically undermined. Without social support, knowledge construction was diminished to solitary reflective problem solving. (Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997, p. 516)

Harland (2003) offers another example of research that took the ZPD out of the original context of child development. In a longitudinal study he and his colleagues investigated how zoology students developed critical analysis skills as they worked, with guiding tutors, through a process of problem-based learning. For the tutors:

The concept of the ZPD became embedded in personal theories of teaching, which were realized through practice. It was only at this stage that the ZPD was regarded as having genuine utility. (p. 270)

Harland identified three areas of practice influenced by the ZPD, namely an
emphasis on diagnostic teaching and learning; creating and maintaining instructional environments centred on authentic activities; and supporting students as peer-teachers to help develop student autonomy in the context of collaborative learning. He noted that in teaching using the ZPD, the tutors constructed ZPDs for themselves. Further, they reported feelings of loss as students gained autonomy and ceased requesting help from the tutors.

These two studies emphasise the autonomy of the novice in the ZPD, and the elements of self-regulation, language as a tool, and authentic activities applied to adult learners. Harland’s (2003) emphasis on diagnostic teaching reflects Vygotsky’s definition of a ZPD. Both studies suggest the importance of authentic activities for adult learning in a ZPD.

3.1.4 Scaffolding and the ZPD

Research literature on ZPD and scaffolding and their relationship is substantial. However, there is a misconception that regards the ZPD as scaffolding. The ZPD does not equal scaffolding. Some researchers have also pointed out the limitations in interpreting the ZPD as scaffolding, as this only reflects a part of the richness of the ZPD (Daniels, 2001; Stone, 1998, cited in Verenikina, 2003). In this section, the definitions of scaffolding and its relationship to the ZPD are examined.

The term scaffolding has been applied to educational practice in many ways since Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) introduced it. Their definition is “a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (p. 90). Scaffolding is interpreted as “any type of adult-children (expert-novice) assisted performance” (Lantolf, 2006, p. 214). Scaffolding is also seen as a type of assistance that aims to advance the development and learning of children and novices (Rasmussen, 2001). The concept of scaffolding emphasises the role of adults or more capable peers in guiding children or novices’ learning and development.

There is a consensus that the concept of scaffolding was derived from
Vygotsky’s notion of the ZPD or, more precisely, that the notion of the ZPD is at the heart of the concept of scaffolding (Lantolf, 2006; Verenikina, 2003; Wells, 1999). One view is that scaffolding is “a way of operationalising Vygotsky’s concept of working in the zone of proximal development” (Wells, 1999, p. 127).

However, the goal of scaffolding “is to complete the task rather than help the child develop” (Lantolf, 2006, p. 214). This represents a departure from Vygotsky’s concept of a ZPD. The differences between these two concepts are shown in Table 3.1.

### Table 3.1 Differences between the ZPD and Scaffolding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZPD</th>
<th>Scaffolding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills-related—aimed at developing the</td>
<td>Task-related—aimed at completion of task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ability for novices to solve novel problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation—expert or adult looks for</td>
<td>Regulation by others—child’s action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opportunities to relinquish control</td>
<td>controlled by expert or adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on quality of assistance</td>
<td>Focused on quantity of assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences between ZPD and scaffolding can be illustrated with the following example. A Year 1 primary student was folding a paper dog under the instruction of the teacher, step by step, following the instructions. After roughly 20 minutes, the student completed the task with the teacher’s support. This is a typical example of scaffolding; with the task finished, the scaffolding also finished. What happened in the young student’s mind? Could he fold another dog independently next time? Could he fold a cat or create something else with some modification based on the former task? What changes have happened in the student’s cognition? The concept of scaffolding cannot answer these questions. However, the ZPD is more precise, allows for much longer time and so could provide an answer. Doing this task under ZPD conditions would require the teacher to do more than instruct. She/he might ask the student to predict which fold to make next, see if the students can modify her instructions, or check that the student understands the process of folding flat paper into three-dimensional shapes. In other words, if the task was instructed under a model of ZPD, the result would be that the student internalises the
paper-folding task and will be able to handle a similar task next time by himself. The ZPD “is not concerned with the development of skill of any particular task, but must be related to development” (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 43).

### 3.2 Mediation

Vygotsky argues, “the central fact about our psychology is the fact of mediation” (1982a, p. 166, cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 15). Wertsch (1985) regards Vygotsky’s conceptualisation of mediation as the “most important and unique contribution” (p. 15) Vygotsky made in his life. Wertsch argues that three concepts form the core of Vygotsky’s theoretical framework. These are “(1) a reliance on a genetic or development method; (2) the claim that higher mental processes in the individual have their origin in social processes; and (3) the claim that mental processes can be understood only if we understand the tools and signs that mediate them” (p. 14). He proposes a leading function for the concept of mediation, because the functions of the other two concepts must take the involvement of mediation as a prerequisite:

Vygotsky’s account of social interaction and the development of mental processes is heavily dependent on the forms of mediation (such as language) involved … Vygotsky defined development in terms of the emergence or transformation of forms of mediation, and his notion of social interaction and its relation to higher mental processes necessarily involves mediatonal mechanisms. (Wertsch, 1985, p. 15)

In other words, the third core concept concerning tool and sign mediation comes prior to the other two themes. Similarly, this fundamental role of mediation with tools and signs is also acknowledged:

Vygotsky brilliantly extended this concept of mediation in human-environment interaction to the use of signs as well as tools. Like tool systems, sign systems (language, writing, number systems) are created by societies over the course of human history and change with the form of society and the level of its cultural development.
Vygotsky believed that the internalization of culturally produced sign systems brings about behavioural transformations and forms the bridge between early and later forms of individual development. (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p. 7)

The above claim is that an individual’s cognitive development is rooted in society and culture; perhaps more than one society and one culture. Importantly, this development could only be achieved as a result of the mediation and transformation of tools and signs.

The notion of mediation was not original to Vygotsky. It was rooted in Hegel’s work and considered by Hegel as “a central characteristic feature of human reason” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 54). The notion of mediation is essential in distinguishing human attitudes toward life from that of animals:

The animal does not transcend its own body; it has no distance with respect to itself. But to become human, to have self-consciousness, one must be able to transcend oneself as a given. This transition to self-consciousness becomes possible for the Slave because he satisfies the Desire of himself and becomes mediated. (Kozulin, 1990, p. 119)

Hegel’s notion of work as a source of universal mediation became a central claim in Marxist philosophy, where “the activity of mediation is no other than activity of labour” (Hegel, cited in Kozulin, 1999, p. 120). Vygotsky was also aware that Engels advocated the role of labour and tools in transforming the relation between human beings and their environment (Vygotsky, 1978). In the tradition of Hegel, Marx and Engels, Vygotsky extended the concept of mediation to the use of tools and signs:

Human activity (on both the interpsychological and intrapsychological plane) can be understood only if we take into consideration the ‘technical tools’ and ‘psychological tools’ or ‘signs’ that mediate this activity. (Wertsch, 1990, p. 115)
Mediation by tools and signs is at the heart of the development of mental processes of higher mental functioning. Kozulin (1990) claims that the agent of mediation could either be a material tool, a symbolic tool or a human being. However, a mediated activity must have two distinctive features, namely it: (1) is generative of higher mental processes and; (2) is socially meaningful. In his investigations, Vygotsky tried to demonstrate how tools and signs help people to “direct their attention, organize conscious memorization, and regulate their conduct” (Blanck, 1990, p. 45).

Vygotsky demonstrated the concepts of tools and signs by discussing the difference between the two concepts. He proposed that the basic difference between tools and signs resides in the different ways they orient human behaviour:

The tool’s function is to serve as the conductor of human influence on the object of activity; it is externally oriented; it must lead to changes in objects. It is a means by which human external activity is aimed at mastering, and triumphing over, nature. The sign, on the other hand, changes nothing in the object of a psychological operation. It is a means of internal activity aimed at mastering oneself; the sign is internally oriented. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55)

Technical tools mediate human actions directly, while psychological tools mediate humans’ psychological processes. Psychological tools are those symbolic artifacts such as “signs, symbols, texts, formulae, graphic organizers that when internalised help individuals master their own natural psychological functions of perception, memory, and attention” (Kozulin, 2003, p. 15).

Signs change the whole psychological structure, just as material tools change labour operations:

Both tool and sign form an intermediate link between object and operation, between object and subject. Both labour operations and instrumental acts are mediated acts, that is, they involve a third element that comes between human beings and nature. (Vygotsky,
Vygotsky’s primary emphasis when examining mediation was on the sign systems used in human communication. His elaboration of mediation reflects his lifelong interest in sign mediation, such as semiotics, linguistics and literary analysis (Wertsch, 1990). For Vygotsky the inclusion of signs in the psychological act led to important structural changes:

Their use implied that (1) new psychological functions became involved; (2) several natural processes would eventually decay; and (3) such properties of the whole act as its intensity and length would change. The inclusion of a sign in one or the other behavioural processes … reforms the whole structure of the psychological operation as the inclusion of a tool reforms the whole structure of a labour operation. (Vygotsky, 1930aa/1982, p. 103, cited in Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000)

Vygotsky drew a cautious parallel between material and symbolic tools. He indicated an intertwined relationship between tool mediation and sign or psychological tool mediation. “The mastery of nature and the mastery of behavior are mutually related, [because] in the course of man’s transformation of nature, his own nature changes as well” (Vygotsky, 1983/1987, p. 90, cited in Kozulin, 1990, p. 115).

Kozulin (2003) distinguishes two faces of mediation: firstly, mediation through another person; secondly, mediation of the other, symbolic tools. Studies of human mediation often focus on enhancing the child’s performance by the mediational role of a teacher or other adult. Studies of symbolic mediation usually focus on changes in the child’s performance through the introduction of symbolic tools.

Vygotsky (1978) defined the role of human mediation as a dual process of development. The first developmental plane is interpersonal and then follows the second, intrapersonal plane. In this respect, Gallimore and Tharp’s (1990) study identifying four stages of the ZPD is relevant. The researchers claim that
in the first stage of development, more capable peers, such as parents, teachers, experts, peers, and coaches, assist the child’s performance. This stage involves interpersonal mediation with human mediators. Later, as the child progresses through the ZPD, he/she experiences a further three stages. In Stage 2 the self provides assistance by means of internal speech. In Stage 3 the learner internalises and appropriates the knowledge that was once interpersonal. Stage 4 extends Vygotsky’s concept by introducing a recursive loop representing the times when learners need to return to earlier forms of mediation to recall knowledge or skills not used for a long time. These three final stages indicate that intrapersonal mediations have occurred in the child’s activity. The transition from interpersonal mediation to a successful intrapersonal mediation reveals that the child starting from a proximal developmental level has achieved an actual development level.

Cognitive development is dependent on the novice’s mastery of symbolic mediations, their appropriation and internalisation in the form of inner psychological tools. Symbolic mediation, such as signs, symbols, writing, formulae, and graphic organisers plays an essential role in cognitive development and learning (Kozulin, 2003). Introducing Chinese characters (Han zi) to my students is a kind of symbolic mediation, since many Chinese characters (Han zi) were originally standardised drawings of concrete ideas or objects. Over time, each drawing was simplified until it only vaguely resembled the original drawings. Therefore, when introducing the character for 鱼 (yu: fish), I drew a fish as well as the result of its evolutionary process on the blackboard. The pictograph of the character for fish is a symbolic mediation that helps students to remember the character and its meaning.

Research concludes “one cannot take it for granted that children will detect a symbolic relation, no matter how obvious it appears to adults” (Kozulin, 2003, p. 24). In young children’s learning, the relationships between the symbols and the concepts do not emerge spontaneously but remain a systematic formation for more capable others. In the tradition of that notion, Kozulin (2003) discussed a crucial issue about relationship between symbolic and human
mediation:

Symbols may remain useless unless their meaning as cognitive tools is properly mediated to the child. The mere availability of signs or texts does not imply that they will be used by students as psychological tools. (p. 24)

Kozulin discusses this issue in the context of child/student learning, concluding that the children’s or young students’ appropriation of symbolic mediation is dependent on the teacher or parent for the tools. He does not address the issue of adult learners. An inquiring mind might ask whether an adult learner could rely on other forms of symbolic mediation, since they are no longer dependent on parents or teachers to provide mediation. For example, an adult learner could realize that writing is a psychological tool by reading books.

3.3 Speech

Vygotsky discussed the term rech, which can be translated as speech. But rech can also mean language or discourse in Russian. In other words, there is a problem confronting translators, that is: “the semantic fields of Russian rech and English ‘speech’ overlap, but do not coincide” (Kozulin, 1990, p. 151). In English the words speech and language may be equated. In Russian the word rech means oral speech, writing and thought.

Vygotsky claimed there is a dual function of speech: “(1) a means of social coordination of the actions of various people and (2) a tool of thinking” (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 57). The two functions are evident as Vygotsky describes the role of egocentric speech: it plays as a crossroads from which “one ‘road’ leads to mature communicative speech while the other leads to internalised and abbreviated inner speech” (Kozulin, 1990, p. 174).

Vygotsky emphasises the significant role of speech as:

The most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of
practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge ... as soon as speech and the use of signs are incorporated into any action, the action becomes transformed and organized along entirely new lines. (1978, p. 24)

Here Vygotsky links the use of tools and signs with speech. It is the way he is able to explain the difference between humans and animals. Speech was vital in the human enculturation process.

Acts of speech not only enable humans to become enculturated but also mediate the use of culturally derived tools and signs. That is, while tools and signs in themselves are useful they become more meaningful when their use is governed or modified by inter- or intrapersonal speech. (Kell, 2005, p. 74)

There are abundant examples to understand this idea. For instance, people learn to use machines by using oral or written instructions from others. Another example worth mentioning is that a student reads, summarises, and reflects on a text to be able to better internalise and master its ideas. Finally, telling school students about the cultural evolution of Chinese characters helps them to learn their meaning. These examples show that the material text as a symbolic tool can be more effectively utilised through the intervention of speech.

Vygotsky analysed various modes of speech, such as inner speech, oral speech and written speech. The potential of written speech is often overlooked because:

Psychologically, writing is not a paper-and-pencil application of verbal functions already developed through oral speech, but a creation of new psychological systems, which do not emerge spontaneously but become possible only because of systematic instruction. In a broader sense, the mastery of reading and writing is the road to a higher form of consciousness. Symbolization, which in oral speech occurs spontaneously and unconsciously, is
mastered anew on a conscious and purposeful level in written speech. (1990, p. 184)

Kozulin’s argument, following Vygotsky, is that writing is completely different from speech. People use more elaborate forms in writing than in oral speech, in order to explore an idea fully. While oral speech is learnt through spontaneous imitation of more expert others, writing (reading and critical thinking) is learned through instruction or schooling.

Another mode of speech that Vygotsky investigated is inner speech. Although it was not his original idea, Vygotsky enriched the idea “with the notion of dialectical transformation of speech when it is transformed from the external to the internal form” (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, p. 179). Vygotsky introduced the concept of inner speech to counter Piaget’s research on egocentric speech. He believed that egocentric speech originated from social, interactive speech and had a regulatory function (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Just as writing is not a transcription of oral speech, inner speech is not talking minus sound.

Kozulin (1990) cites Bakhtin’s argument that language is the primary reality of human consciousness since the development of speech plays an important role in the formation of human consciousness. He argues “the analysis of literary discourse may become a methodological tool in the study of not only everyday language, but also of consciousness” (p. 180). Put differently, the study of literary discourse may contribute to the construction of individual consciousness.

3.4 Internalisation

Like other aspects of sociocultural theory, the concept of internalisation was not original to Vygotsky. In his work, Vygotsky combined Karl Bühler’s notion regarding psychological development as a gradual internalisation and Piaget’s theory of the internalisation of sensory-motor schemas, and finally developed a distinctive conceptualisation of internalisation (Kozulin, 1990). From a Vygotskian perspective, internalisation is an essential process in the
formation of a higher mental function. “What first appears as an external signmediator or an interpersonal communication later becomes an internal psychological process” (Kozulin, 1990, p. 116). Put differently, internalisation is a process in which other human beings or symbolic tools mediate one’s thought or behaviour. Initially, external tools mediate behaviour but later, internal or psychological signs control a person’s thoughts and thus behaviour.

In contrast to other theorists, Vygotsky’s creative contribution to conceptualising internalisation was his “elaboration on the theme of the social character of an external function which is preserved when that function becomes internalised” (Kozulin, 1990, p. 116). Vygotsky claimed that any higher mental function is initially a social function:

> It is necessary that everything internal in higher forms was external, that is, for others it was what it now is for oneself. Any higher mental function necessarily goes through an external stage in its development because it is initially a social function. This is the centre of the whole problem of internal and external behaviour ... when we speak of a process, ‘external’ means ‘social’. Any higher mental function was external because it was social at some point before becoming an internal, truly mental function. (Vygotsky, 1981b, p. 162, cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 62)

Vygotsky considered social or external processes as the primary processes in determining internal functions. Wertsch (1985) understands Vygotsky’s notion of internalisation as “a process involved in the transformation of social phenomena into psychological phenomena” (p. 63). Based on a sociocultural perspective, Kell (2005) claims that the learning processes involve three stages:

Initially, learners are assisted by more capable others through social interaction, activity and speech. Next, learners monitor and correct themselves externally through oral speech at first and then internally through inner speech (2005, p. 84).

The third step, mediated by inner speech, is the internalisation stage. Kell
(2005) argues that a new skill or piece of knowledge is not truly learned until it is internalised. Automaticity is a key feature of internalisation functions. In other words, learners mediate activities with inner speech, rather than external tools such as human or symbolic tools. Wertsch claims that Vygotsky’s account of internalisation is grounded in four major points:

1. Internalisation is not a process of copying external reality on a pre-existing internal plane; rather, it is a process wherein an internal plane of consciousness is formed.  
2. The external reality at issue is a social interactional one.  
3. The specific mechanism at issue is the mastery of external sign forms.  
4. The internal plane of consciousness takes on a ‘quasi-social’ nature because of its origins. (1985, p. 66)

It is important to note that internalisation, as claimed in Wertsch’s first point, is not a mere duplicating of external tools or signs. It is a productive process of internal consciousness. Vygotsky points out that “it goes without saying that internalisation transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions” (1981a, p. 163, cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 63). Internalisation is not equal to copying external or interpsychological processes. Following this tradition, Stetsenko (1990) claims that internalisation does not mean that something literally is “within the individual … [or] in the brain, [but instead] refers to the subject’s ability to perform a certain action without the immediately present problem situation … in the Mind” (cited in Lantolf, 2003, p. 351). Kell supports this claim:

It will be a truly internalised function only when the learner is able to reflect on his or her actions and learn from them … internalisation is a two-way process. Interpsychological processes become intrapsychological processes, which impact on external behaviours. (2005, p. 85)

The internalisation process is an active process of creation rather than a mechanical process of copying. Imitation plays an important role in the internalisation process. However, imitation is often erroneously equated with
copying.

The concept of imitation is fundamental to internalisation (Vygotsky, 1987). Reviewing various perspectives on the concept of imitation, Lantolf (2003) notes that because of the impact of the behaviourist legacy, the concept of imitation was considered as a copying process. But before behaviourism, imitation was widely understood as an essential developmental activity because it is “aimed at the future and not at copying the past. It is developmental because something new is created out of saying or doing the same thing” (p. 352). Lantolf distinguishes between ‘imitation’ and ‘repetition’, pointing out that the basic difference is in “understanding of the process through which human mental capacity is formed in transition from external to internal activity” (p. 353).

3.5 Appropriation

Appropriation is a term used in a variety of ways. It is widely used in art, music, sociology, economics, and law. The basic idea of appropriation in a sociocultural context is that “thorough participation, people change and in the process become prepared to engage in subsequent similar activities” (Rogoff, 2008, p. 66). In order to clarify some ambiguities in the use of the term ‘appropriation’, Rogoff summarised three uses of appropriation:

One use is simply the same as internalisation—something external is imported. The second use goes beyond this but … is still a version of the concept of internalisation—something external is imported and transformed to fit the purposes of the new ‘owner’ … The third use of the term ‘appropriation’ refer to the change resulting from a person’s own participation in an activity, not to his or her internalisation of some external event or technique. (2008, p. 67)

Rogoff (2008) acknowledges that Vygotsky’s concept of internalisation is similar to her notion of appropriation in “emphasising the inherent transformation involved in the process” (p. 66). However, Rogoff (2008)
argues the purpose for her use of the term ‘appropriation’ is to express the difference between her views and the version of internalisation “involving importing objects across boundaries from the external to the internal” (p. 66). The distinction between appropriation and internalisation is based on two theoretical perspectives:

The appropriation perspective views development as a dynamic, active, mutual process involved in peoples’ participation in cultural activities; the internalisation perspective views development in terms of a static, bounded ‘acquisition’ or ‘transmission’ of pieces of knowledge. (p. 67)

In summary, Rogoff’s notion of appropriation can be understood as an extension of and complement to Vygotsky’s concept of internalisation. The latter aimed at the transformation of external knowledge or skills, while the former aimed at participation in subsequent similar activities.

In conclusion, the ZPD involves three key factors. These are mediation, internalisation, and appropriation. Speech is an essential mediational tool. By following the three factors in a particular order, the novice transforms the knowledge or skills from an interpersonal or external plane into an intrapersonal or internal plane, then, in the appropriation stage, the novice changes and develops him/herself, as demonstrated in subsequent similar situations. The appropriation process is a creative stage where the novice combines his/her own style into activities that make the novice feel comfortable.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on various aspects of sociocultural theory in particular the ZPD. The previous chapter reviewed literature on a range of aspects pertaining to beginning L2 teachers. With these ideas in mind the next chapter describes how the data collection and analysis was planned, to investigate whether a novice L2 teacher uses psychological tools and signs to construct and learn through multiple ZPDs.
CHAPTER 4
Constructing the Study

Introduction

The principal aim of this study was to answer the overarching question: Do the mediation, internalisation and appropriation of physical and psychological signs impact on the novice teacher-researcher’s learning process? This was achieved by investigating my development as a volunteer teacher-researcher, using the theoretical concept of the ZPD as a framework.

Accomplishing this goal required a qualitative methodology to construct and conduct a credible study based on systematic data collection and analysis. The method selected for this study was self-study. Narrative inquiry was chosen as the research mode, the vehicle for displaying and describing the data.

This chapter is divided into five parts. It begins by discussing the appropriateness of qualitative methods to this study. This is followed by a rationale for selecting self-study as the method, as well as consideration of some issues around self-study. This section concludes with a discussion of narrative inquiry. Part two gives a description of the research design providing detailed descriptions of the sites and participants and the modes of data collected. Part three describes research procedures, including selection of sites and participants, and how data was collected and analysed. Part four discusses issues of validity and reliability. The fifth part turns to ethical considerations.

4.1 Locating a Methodology for this Study

Every researcher needs to decide on the essential nature of their project. Studies that measure behaviour often have a quantitative nature, while studies that report interpretive perceptions often have a qualitative nature (Creswell, 2003). Since this study reports data that are essentially perceptions and reflections it seemed most appropriate to use a qualitative methodology.
4.1.1 Qualitative Research

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe a qualitative approach as a means to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). As a volunteer teacher-researcher who first lived and studied in China and later worked and studied in Australian schools and university, I engaged in multiple contexts and multiple settings. A qualitative approach provided the most suitable way of exploring the research question.

Rossman and Rallis (2003) concur with the notion of qualitative research taking place in the natural setting, adding seven characteristics. Three of these relate to the nature of the research (Table 4.1) and four relate to the role of the researcher in qualitative research (Table 4.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Example in current study</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic</td>
<td>The current research chose a reflective journal and mentor observation as modes of data collection; this study also used narrative inquiry, and within-case and across-case analysis to interrogate the data. These methods could not operate without interacting with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is emergent rather than tightly prefigured</td>
<td>This study is not prefigured since the research question study is ‘how’, so the researcher will follow the process to investigate the potential signs and tools to mediate the learning process for an adult learner. The study is not premised on a hypothesis but on a question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is fundamentally interpretive</td>
<td>Data analysis is this study is largely dependent on the researcher’s knowledge and understanding about research strategy and research theory. The researcher herself has to build a framework since the major task of analysis is to interpret a set of narratives and their triangulating data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 takes the first three of Rossman and Rallis’ (2003) seven characteristics of qualitative research and provides examples of how they apply to the current study.

Carefully designing qualitative research is important in establishing a credible approach. Taking account of the role of the research further strengthens a study (Table 4.2).
A qualitative approach, through focusing on the experiences and perceptions of the researcher as well as others, enabled me, the researcher, to make sense of my development as a teacher-researcher. At the same time, a qualitative approach also provided the possibility of exploring the process of my learning and teaching (Creswell, 2003), particularly in understanding how higher mental functions developed as a result of the mediation of cultural tools and signs.

Table 4.2 Characteristics of qualitative research as they relate to the role of the researcher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Example in current study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Views social phenomena holistically</td>
<td>This study recognises that the fact or situations observed or that exist do not occur in isolation but are part of a connected whole. That is, the events recorded in my reflective journal and displayed as narrative in this thesis occurred in the midst of, and were a part of other events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study</td>
<td>The current study used reflective and biographical writing to collect data. The researcher kept reflective writing over 18 month. It enabled the researcher to inquire into her experiences and make sense of her development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted, iterative, and simultaneous</td>
<td>This study used the mentor’s and the teachers’ observation feedback to triangulate the data collected from reflections. The teacher and mentor observations were conducted at the same time I was writing the reflections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopts and uses one or more strategies of inquiry as a guide for the procedures in the qualitative study (cited in Creswell, 2003, pp. 181-183).</td>
<td>This study employs strategies from self-study and narrative inquiry to guide procedures. Further, it adopts Ollerenshaw and Creswell’s (2002) Problem-Solution Narrative Structure to systematically prepare the 10 narratives, allowing for systematic analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 takes the last four of Rossman and Rallis’ (2003) seven characteristics of qualitative research and provides examples of how they apply to the current study.

4.1.2 Self-study as a Methodology

Self-study is an empowering way for teachers and teacher educators to research their own practice. Research confirms the benefits for teachers in conducting self-study research. Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) claim that self-study is imperative for teachers in “developing new understandings and producing new knowledge about teaching and learning” (p. 143). A self-study approach
helped me to be more introspective about my learning and teaching: by systematically inquiring and reflecting on my life and my circumstances, I became more sensitive about who I was as a teacher-researcher.

Self-study research enables teaching and research to inform each other (Loughran, 2004). As a volunteer teacher-researcher, the positions in which I was situated included being a novice L2 teacher and a beginning research candidate. Self-study offered me an opportunity to investigate my teaching and learning practice, enabling me to apply pedagogical knowledge I learnt in my teaching practice. At the same time, this investigation helped to improve my professional learning.

Loughran (2004) notes that a diversity of ways of doing self-study research has been developed over time and LaBoskey (2004) has identified five characteristics of self-study methodology. He claims that self-study should be: (1) initiated by and focused on self, (2) improvement-aimed, (3) interactive at one or more stages, (4) using multiple, mainly qualitative methods, and (5) advancing the field. These characteristics define the current study.

First, this study focuses on my teaching and research as a volunteer teacher-researcher. By investigating how cultural tools and signs mediate my learning and teaching, I examine the possibility of a novice teacher-researcher constructing her personal ZPD.

Second, since the ZPD is development-aimed, my study was initiated by a desire to be a better L2 teacher and researcher. I wanted to improve my practice by developing teaching strategies and L2 teaching knowledge. I also sought to deepen my understanding of the research process. This study contributes to the field of knowledge for researchers and teachers who are situated in contexts similar to mine.

Third, interaction with a range of stakeholders is a feature of this study. The interactions with classroom teachers, my mentor, a new VTR, students, supervisors, and doctoral students are discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.
Fourth, multiple qualitative methods have been used in this study. Reflective
writing and mentor observations were used to gather the data. Narrative
inquiry was used to represent the data. Focused coding with four elements
based on a theoretical framework was used to analyse the data.

Finally, by documenting my own experiences in teaching and research, this
study will inform (L2) teacher training and adult learning.

4.1.2.1 Issue of Multiple Voices in Self-study Research
As its name suggests, self-study research is the study of self, and
characteristically focuses on the self in a sociocultural context. However,
perspectives from others should not be ignored. Loughran (2004) claims the
term self-study should convey an understanding of a commitment to checking
data and interpretations with others; otherwise, for the unwary it is easy for
self-study to be a misleading descriptor. Therefore, it was necessary for my
self-study to involve both my own voice and others’ voices in order to seek
alternative perspectives. In doing this, my study avoided being a misleading
description of my own thinking.

4.1.3 Narrative Inquiry
I now provide the rationale for my choice of narrative inquiry as an appropriate
method to conduct my research. Specific procedures of narrative inquiry for
this study, as well as the details of data collection, are discussed later in the
chapter.

Narrative has been used to understand and share the lived experiences of
human beings. Conle describes narrative as “a basic mode of thought and as a
way of organising knowledge” (2001, p. 50). Narrative inquiry is different
from narrative in education. The difference is the usefulness in relation to two
areas, namely, research and professional development (Conle, 2001). Narrative
inquiry refers to a practice:

where researchers, teacher educators, in-service or student teachers
study their own experience or that of other people, explore
institutions and places with the understanding that action and beliefs are grounded in personal, cultural histories and should not be inquired into without accounting for these as well. (Conle, 2001, p. 30)

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argue that narrative inquiry “is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other’s stories” (p. 2). Conle claimed a dual function of narrative inquiry: “a method of inquiry as well as a means of personal, professional development” (2001, p. 22), which facilitates its use in educational research, graduate teacher development and teacher preparation. In the current self-study, narrative inquiry was used not just to represent the data but also to influence my professional learning.

Bell (2002) identified three values that narrative inquiry offers to researchers: (a) allows researchers to understand experience; (b) lets researchers get at information that people do not consciously know themselves; and (c) illuminates the temporal notion of experience, recognising that one’s understanding of people and events changes. These three values are addressed in my self-study. First, by expressing desires, conveying emotions and describing mood (Conle, 2001), narrative inquiry provided a way to understand my experience and inner world. Second, narrative inquiry allowed me to become aware of, explore and capture some unconscious thoughts in my mind. Writing the narratives on which the analysis is based enabled me to see personal professional learning that I had not previously consciously recognise. Finally, narrative inquiry allowed me to reread and re-investigate my experiences in written records. By doing this, I was able to study the dynamic changes to my attitudes and perceptions over time.

4.2 Research Design

In designing a study researchers should have clear ideas of where, with whom, when and how the research will be conducted. This requires a general framework that provides guidance about all facets of the study (Creswell, 2003). Studies that are well planned add integrity to the study. The following
section provides details of the research site and participants, the time frame for the study and the data collection and analysis process.

4.2.1 The Research Sites and Participants

Having provided the rationale for selecting self-study as the methodology for this research, the next section provides information about the research sites and the participants in the study.

4.2.1.1 Research sites

The research sites in this project consisted of a primary school in Sydney (Australia) and the university where I was enrolled as a Master of Education research candidate. As a volunteer Mandarin teacher, I worked voluntarily in three state schools from July 2008 to December 2009, including the data collection period for this research project. The schools consisted of a high school (School A) and two primary schools (Schools B and C). I worked with these three schools every Wednesday.

I was in School C for 2.5 hours per week, longer than at either Schools A or B. Besides working, I also had lunch and recess in the staff room of School C. I had off-class time to communicate with teachers and students in School C. My mentor also worked in School C. Therefore, School C provided a natural context for this research project.

School C

School C is a primary school in the Western Sydney Region of the NSW Department of Education and Training. It has a student population of approximately 300 students and offers teaching programs for students from Preschool to Year 6. This includes providing Mandarin lessons to Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 classes. The students are from monolingual or multicultural backgrounds but none of the students I taught had a Chinese background. However, all students spoke English fluently at school, and there were no problems for the students in providing instruction in English. The children elected to study Mandarin as a second or third language. For my part, I am a
Mandarin native speaker. English is my second language. I conducted teaching in English.

**The University**

Another site of this research was the university where I was enrolled as a postgraduate student. A requirement of my course was to construct a study about my teaching and research experiences in Australia. At the university, I attended workshops, seminars and conferences. I discussed the research project with my supervisors and other research candidates. Experiences at this site impacted on my understanding and practice as a teacher-researcher.

**4.2.2 Participants**

All participants in this study were colleagues of mine at either School C or the university. Since their purpose as participants was to triangulate a self-study, it was important that they were familiar with the work that I did and with myself. The participants included myself, the class teacher, who was also my mentor, and two other teachers (Years 4 and 5) who also taught classes that I taught.

**4.2.2.1 The researcher—the object of this study**

I was born and educated in China. I have an undergraduate degree in English Literature from Ningbo University of Technology. I do not have any teaching qualifications. During this study I was a VTR in the ROSETE Program. In this position I was a volunteer Mandarin (Han yu) teacher at School C from July 2008 to December 2009. From February to December 2009 I taught Mandarin to Years 4, 5, and 6 classes. As a researcher, I studied my professional development as a teacher. Below are detailed descriptions of the participants and their relationship to me.

**4.2.2.2 The Mentor**

My mentor (Louise) was the classroom teacher of one of the classes I taught. She is an experienced primary teacher. We developed a close friendship throughout my 18-month stay in Australia. She was very supportive, both in work and life. As a novice non-native teacher with no teaching qualification, I
found the mentor’s help enabled me to adapt to the new context quickly. When I asked if she might agree to participate in my research study, she willingly agreed.

There are two groups of participants in any ZPD, namely, expert(s) and a novice. My equivalent context was that I was the novice in the ZPD, and my mentor was the expert. I choose the mentor for this study because of her rich teaching experience, because of the ease with which we conversed, because of the frequent interaction opportunities with her, and the mutual trust we established. In a study of the mentor-intern relationship, Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney and O’Brien found that mutual trust and respect facilitate a successful relationship between mentor and intern: “The intern’s perceptions of the mentor’s experience and knowledge about students and content contributed to the intern’s respect for the mentor” (1995, p. 180).

Trust in the mentor’s experience and knowledge about teaching and pedagogy was integral to the role of the expert other in Vygotsky’s ZPD. The expert other should be sufficiently knowledgeable to ascertain each novice’s actual development level accurately. As a novice teacher, I needed a participant with a rich knowledge of teaching to point out the problem areas in my teaching and to provide assistance. I believed that the friendship and trust I had developed with my mentor helped to build a comfortable context for my professional development as we shared thoughts about teaching. The mentor was asked to observe my teaching practice and give me feedback. Initial observations focused on what I could do independently and what she believed I needed assistance with, when actualising my ZPDs. Analysis of these initial observations revealed my actual development as a teacher.

### 4.2.2.3 Years 4 and 5 classroom teachers

The teachers in charge of the Years 4 and 5 of classes that I taught agreed to participate in this study. Both of them are professional teachers: one with 23 years teaching experience, while the other has been a teacher for seven years. They were very supportive of my work as a beginning teacher and novice researcher. They were invited to allow me to observe their lessons. They
agreed to this and asked that they observe one of my lessons and provide feedback and comments about my performance. I readily agreed to this condition.

4.2.3 Timeframe of the study

This study draws on my experiences as a teacher-researcher in Australia. At the request of the supervisory panel I kept a reflective journal for most of the 18 months I was in Australia. Entries made between 27 August 2008 and 7 July 2009 are the main data source for this study. Other data was collected in Terms 2 and 3 2009. Prior to data collection I drafted a number of chapters, prepared for Confirmation of Candidacy and ethics approval. After data collection I analysed the data and reviewed and completed chapters. A complete timeframe for the study is in Appendix 8.

4.2.4 Data collection

In this study, data was collected from my recalled experiences of learning English in China and Australia, my reflective journal and observations made by my mentor and two other classroom teachers. My recollections of learning English are in Chapter 5. Data from observations is presented in Chapter 6. Data from my reflective journal will be presented in Chapter 7, through a narrative inquiry approach.

4.2.4.1 Reflective Journal

Reflection has been widely used in education as a strategy to promote teachers’ professional development. Reflection is:

a process of turning experience into learning, that is, a way of exploring experience in order to learn new things from it … it involves taking the unprocessed, raw material of experience and engaging with it as a way to make sense of what has occurred. (Boud, 2001, p. 10)

Reflection is a form of mental processing that “we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is no obvious solution” (Moon, 1999a, p. 23,
cited in King, 2002). Among the various models of reflection, the use of a reflective journal is a familiar approach.

King (2002) claims the most powerful feature of reflective journals is their ability to facilitate “learning and understanding in the more unstructured areas of knowledge domains” (p. 2). Writing is a means of thinking. The writing of reflective journals helps us to understand what happened and why (Johnson, 2001), to “enhance what we do and how we do” (Boud, 2001, p. 9), thus to promote the professional learning of student teachers (Clarke, 2004). In my work, a reflective journal was used not only to “capture an experience, record an event, explore feelings, or make sense of what we know” (Boud, 2001, p. 9), but also to formulate a plan of action and to find out a resolution for some uncertainty (King, 2002). In other words, a reflective journal was both the place for me to record my experience, emotions, and feelings and the place for me to re-form and review my experience. It helped me to focus on the issues or incidents I encountered, to search for solutions to solve problems and to increase the awareness of my own learning and development. A further factor in the decision to use a reflective journal as evidence was that the written words allowed me to rethink and revise ideas over an extended period.

In this work, evidence collected from my reflective journal is a major part of the data. I made notes in my journal from when I first arrived in Australia in July 2008. The contents of my reflections were quite diverse: ranging from my teaching and learning experiences to life’s trivialities. I recorded my experience in Australia, reflected on the incidents I confronted in teaching, and re-formed my learning and understanding about research. In the journal, I described my experiences, revealed emotions and feelings, found solutions to some issues, and made sense of my own weaknesses and strengths. The reflective journal provided a lens to investigate my mental processes through the experiences of the past 18 months.

In my journal, I recorded ‘critical incidents’ I encountered. An incident is salient or critical when “it appears to precipitate a shift in focus, organization, or elaboration in thinking and behavior” (Brass, 2008, p. 466). Many
reflections were on critical incidents that I “observed or participated in which caused me to question something or think critically” (Goodell, 2006, p. 224). The way I recorded critical incidents for my study was informed by Goodell’s model of critical incident reflection, namely, what happened, the outcome, the implications, and what you would change. I have modified this it into a new model (see Table 4.3), in order to suit my study better:

Table 4.3 Goodell’s Critical Incidents Reflection Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happened</th>
<th>The outcome</th>
<th>How might I use this in my teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In describing what happened, I noted the antecedents of these incidents, recorded the incidents and made reflective suggestions of why and how it happened.</td>
<td>In this section, my actual feeling and immediate response to the incident were recorded from my perspective.</td>
<td>In this part, I discussed how I would respond if a similar situation were to arise again.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up, I used a reflective journal to collect the data for this research. It had a dual function in my study: (1) it led to learning and development; (2) it allowed a further investigation of the process of my learning and development.

4.2.4.2 Observation

Self-study involves interactions with our colleagues, without which there would be no self-study (LaBoskey, 2004; Pithouse, Mitchell, & Weber, 2009). Observation as a research process offers the opportunity to “gather ‘live’ data from naturally occurring social situations” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 396), to interact with colleagues and to understand someone else’s perspectives on my actions. In my work, I gathered observational notes by conducting an observation as a participant. My mentor was invited to observe my teaching in one class period in the first week. I developed an observation checklist (copies of the completed checklist are in Chapter 5) and the mentor was asked to provide ratings and comments. Mentor’s observations provided a significant data source in my study and served as an aid to develop my teaching skills.
Initial observations focused on what I could do independently and what she believed I needed assistance with. The mentor was invited to give written comments and suggestions on my teaching areas that most needed development. These areas where assistance was required represented the baseline of my ZPD. Immediately after observing me teach, we had a conversation about the outcome of the observations. As an extension of the observation, the mentor explained why she gave particular comments and detailed how to implement her suggestions. In addition, she shared ideas based on her teaching experience. My field notes recorded her suggestions and teaching strategies. The suggestions and comments from the mentor served as a source of data to improve my teaching strategies.

After five weeks of implementing the new strategies, another round of observation was carried out. This observation focused on the areas where my mentor had given me advice. These observations helped to determine whether I had internalised and appropriated her advice for developing my teaching skills. This activity aimed to generate the evidence I needed to analyse my development. From the Vygotskian perspective, these social interactions were a necessary element for a ZPD to function (Vygotsky, 1978).

I observed the Years 4 and 5 classes that I taught using ideas gained from my mentor’s observations. These observations contributed to my professional development, enabling me to see different models of teaching practice. From a Vygotskian perspective, I used this as an opportunity to identify strategies that I could internalise and appropriate. During these observations, my focus was on the areas where the mentor had given advice. The notes taken from these observations were analysed to help improve my teaching strategies, especially for the areas most in need of development. All observations are presented and analysed in Chapter 6.

4.3 Research Procedures

Having detailed the various aspects of the research study, these sections detail how each of these elements were enabled or enacted. They form the greater
part of an ethics application to the University of Western Sydney (Approval number: H6825; Appendix 1) and a SERAP application to the NSW Department of Education and Training, Western Sydney Region (Application number: 20090015; Appendix 2)

4.3.1 Sites and participants

The site (School C) and the participants were selected purposefully, as has previously been explained. As detailed in the ethics approval process, the principal of the school was informed about the study (Appendix 3). Teachers of Years 4, 5 and 6, whose classes I taught, were asked to participate in the study, using the procedures detailed in the ethics application. All approved, with teachers of Years 4 and 5 asking, in addition, that they be able to observe one of my lessons (Appendices 6, 7, 8, & 9).

4.3.2 Data collection

In this study, data was collected from three sources: my reflective journal; autobiographical writing about my past English learning experience; the observations made by my mentor and two other class teachers. No data were collected directly from children in my classes.

4.3.3 Data analysis

Conle argues that narrative inquiries need “to develop their own terms both for what was being studied and for how it was studied” (2001, p. 52). Although the reflective journal and the teacher feedback provided much more data than is displayed in this report, I have chosen to display the data in relation to 10 events that, in line with Conle’s argument, I believe were integral to the development of my teaching and research skills. In the context of this study an event is an incident that prompted me to reflect on a particular phenomenon.

The process of qualitative data analysis involves:

- preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses,
- moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the
data. (Creswell, 2003, p. 190)

The major task in analysing data for this study was to merge divergent data modes into a coherent, structured and reliable report. This has been achieved by using a four-stage process based on Miles & Huberman (1994). The first stage, data display, is presented over three chapters. Chapter 5 offers memories of my experiences of learning English in China and Australia. These memories provide the sociocultural background that is a constant feature of Vygotsky’s theory. Chapter 6 reports observational feedback from my mentors and two other teachers. My detailed responses to my mentor’s feedback are in Appendix 11. The background from Chapter 5 and the feedback from Chapter 6 are reflected in several of the 10 narratives in Chapter 7. Each was constructed from my reflective journal entries over time, using Ollerenshaw and Creswell’s (2002) Problem-Solution Narrative Structure, illustrating critical incidents or ‘magic moments’ in my development as a teacher. The elements of the plot structure are presented in Table 4.4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual’s archetype, personality, behaviours, style, and patterns</td>
<td>Context, environment, conditions, place, time, locale, year, and era explained</td>
<td>Question to be answered or phenomena to be described or feelings, intentions, actions, and reactions about failed and successful attempts</td>
<td>Movements through the story illustrating character’s thinking</td>
<td>Answers the question and explains what caused the character’s thinking or the character to change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Organising the Plot Elements into the Problem-Solution Narrative Structure

While the characters and setting remain fairly static, the problem, actions and resolutions change with each narrative. In order to analyse the data using the ZPD as a framework, the Problem that I nominated, including the Characters and Setting, was in the narrative, the Actions were expanded to incorporate two of the four elements (mediation, tools/signs) and the Resolution incorporated the final two elements (internalisation and appropriation). Finally, each narrative and its resolution were matched with triangulating data deriving from
teacher and mentor observations.

Stage 2, single case analysis, analyses each narrative across the matrix, that is, in terms of the four elements of the ZPD. In this stage the role of each of the four elements of the ZPD in the problem-solution process is established.

Stage 3, across case analysis, takes the data from the columns of the matrix, that is, the four elements of the ZPD, and demonstrates the types of mediation, tools and signs, internalisation and appropriation that are important in developing teaching and research skills. This stage links all of the narratives using the framework of the ZPD, drawing out common features of the development process.

Stage 4, discussion, explains how the data demonstrates the use of self-created ZPDs in the development of my teaching and research. Further, it suggests reasons why, as an adult, I constructed my own ZPDs, and the factors that were vital in the process. Finally, the discussion refocuses on the concept of the ZPD as devised by Vygotsky, showing how it can be extended when adult learners are the novices.

4.4 Issues of Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are important principles for guiding qualitative research. This section briefly discusses both of these principles in relation to the current study.

4.4.1 Reliability

The notion of reliability infers that another researcher, using the same procedures as this study, could replicate the exact findings even though the evidence-base is mainly personal reminiscences and the researcher’s journal entries and emails. The subjectivity of the evidence should not matter since reliability refers to how the results were obtained. Logically, if another researcher chose to follow rigorously the procedures used in this study (reflective journal completed weekly, use of the same observational feedback
and four-step analysis), the results should be the same or similar. This is because it is not the subjective nature of the data but the way it is analysed that leads to the findings.

4.4.2 Validity

Given the existential nature of self-study research (Feldman, 2003), the importance of validity cannot be ignored. Researchers can claim validity when the relationships between the data and the theory are constantly checked and questioned. Using narratives about self in a self-study means that the data is, by nature, subjective. As a self-study researcher I needed to make sure I was not “blinded or fooled by the ways that I construct[ed] my stories” (Feldman, 2003, p. 3).

As a self-study this research shares a moral obligation to shed light on educationally important issues. Thus, validity is necessary in this thesis. In other words, as a researcher, I have tried to “provide reasons why others should trust [my] findings” (Feldman, 2003, p. 3). With the purpose of increasing the validity, the current study provided details of the research methods, how data was represented and analysed and how the use of multiple sources of data allowed triangulation.

Explicit descriptions of the research approach and how data was collected have been given in this chapter. Adopting multiple data sources and multiple ways to represent that data in this study ensured triangulation of data. Triangulation “is an epistemological claim concerning what more can be known about a phenomenon when the findings from data generated by two or more methods are brought together” (Moran-Ellis, et al., 2006, p. 48). In this study, data from my reflective journal, classroom observations, peer observation, and student work samples have been used as multiple data sources. Issues of the values of changes provide little challenge for this research. The significance and implications of this research are introduced in Chapter 1 and discussed in detail in Chapter 11.
4.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues come up at every stage of academic work: when it is being executed and later when it is written up as a thesis, report, or a manuscript for publication in journals, or when it is presented, as in technical talks. Thus the researcher has to give consideration to ethical issues, since “physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harm” (Creswell, 2003, p. 64) might occur during the study. The researcher had regular weekly meetings with the principal supervisor and with the supervisory panel every fortnight. The researcher was expected to provide evidence of the ethical conduct of the study and/or to raise concerns. The following discussion details how the research design minimised the risk of harm to participants and how participants benefited from the study.

4.5.1 Minimising risk of harm

Risk of harm was minimal. Participation in this study was not compulsory and data was only collected from those who gave informed consent. To protect the anonymity of the people and the schools referred to in this thesis I have given all participants pseudonyms. The benefits listed above outweigh the low level risks inherent in this project.

Teachers played two different roles in this study. The Year 6 class teacher (the mentor) and the other two class teachers observed the researcher teaching. They were aided in this by an observation schedule devised by the researcher. The Year 6 teacher, as the mentor of the researcher, regularly observed the researcher teaching. Using an observation schedule may assist the class teacher in targeting her advice to the researcher. As such, the observations were supportive rather than inconvenient.

The observations were focused on the researcher and the techniques and strategies she used. No observations were made about individual children. Having an observer in the room to observe a teacher’s classroom practices may be considered an inconvenience. However, it is a standard practice in schools. Further, the observers’ presence in the classroom was not disruptive to the
children as the observers were their classroom teachers, whom they already knew and were familiar with.

4.5.2 Benefit to the participants

This research was beneficial for both the participants and the wider education/research communities. For the research community, this study demonstrates a new aspect of the ZPD. As such, it adds new perspectives to a field of current research. This study also informs second language teachers, who are in similar situations/contexts as the researcher, of the influence of competing demands for excellence while developing L2 teacher skills as they teach. Finally, as the global education market for second language teaching grows, the findings of this study have implications for policymakers and course designers who currently make particular assumptions about teacher preparation and skills development.

As to the participants in this study, there were indirect benefits for the students and other second language teachers who are in similar situations/contexts to the researcher. Although the school students were not direct participants in this work, they benefited from a teacher who was increasingly competent and confident as a result of her awareness of the physical and psychological tools she was internalising and appropriating. The teachers benefited from a deeper awareness of the challenges facing VTRs. Over the next five years up to 40 more students from Ningbo, China will come to Western Sydney as VTRs. This research provides evidence of the dilemmas and concerns of “teachers” working in an L2 environment.

4.6 Conclusion

Having outlined and detailed the design and procedures for this study, the next chapter, part of the first stage of analysis, outlines my sociocultural background, particularly in relation to learning and L2. It demonstrates how recognition of cultural differences between Chinese and Australian education helped me to reflect on the process of learning.
CHAPTER 5
My English Learning Experiences

Introduction

I learned English in China for ten years, since junior high school. Before I entered university, I was very confident in my English, because I always gained high marks in English tests. It was this confidence that inspired me to go on learning English at university, studying English as my major. During four years of specialised English studies, I successfully passed a series of exams and tests, including the Test for English Major-band 8 (TEM 8). These results indicated my high level of English proficiency. But I realised that my ‘real’ English learning journey started on the first day I arrived in Sydney, in July 2008. I found that language was the biggest problem I encountered in my first term of teaching Mandarin in Australian schools. My first lesson in school was exhausting and disconcerting. I felt like I was doing a listening test, and the classroom teacher was my translator.

It was an introductory culture lesson. I was asked to discuss China and the culture with the students. Every time a student asked a question, I had to prick up my ears and listen very carefully. Since, to my ears, they spoke very fast, the pronunciation was not clear. Often I could not understand their words. Then the classroom teacher had to repeat questions in a more clear and understandable way to me. I felt embarrassed about that. (2/8/2008)

This chapter reflects on memories of English language skills developed in China, across four aspects—listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

5.1 Learning English in China

As previously indicated, before I came to Australia I thought my English language skills were good. Experiences such as the classroom incident reported above, led me to understand that I needed to improve those skills.
This chapter then describes how I furthered my English proficiency in Australia.

5.1.1 Listening Skills

At university, the listening tests were usually chosen directly from British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) or Voice of America (VOA) news reports, which use British or American ‘broadcast English’, not the real English spoken by people in those countries. I developed test-taking skills to choose a correct answer. For example, if the question were about numbers, I would focus on the numbers only. The result was that I could get all the answers right without understanding the topic. Obviously, these methods would not help me to understand what Australian students were saying. Besides, professional journalists with an artificial American or British television accent, not everyday English, spoke the English I heard at university. In reality, the Australian accent sounded quite unfamiliar to me.

5.1.2 Reading skills

Reading was another problem I encountered in Australia. As an early career researcher, I needed to read a large number of journal articles and books. The skills of reading I developed in China helped me in some ways. For example, I could identify key sentences, thus grasping the main idea of a paper. But now the task had changed. There was no need to choose A, B, C or D as an answer in a multiple-choice test. I actually had to understand the text and deduce the meaning of the article by myself. In my journal, I wrote:

It took more than three hours to read a thirty-page article. I reread many parts many times, since I often felt lost as I kept on reading it. I finally gained some idea of what the author was talking about, but I felt it was hard to relate it to my own research. I have nothing to say with this article. I don’t know why my supervisor recommended this article to me. (17/08/2008)

In China reading comprehension is taught using short passages with some associated multiple-choice questions. From my previous learning experience,
the reading task is completed as long as I have finished the multiple-choice exercises. It was fine even if I did not understand the whole article. Reading comprehension tests followed exactly the same format. Most of the time the questions in a test helped the student to understand a passage.

But now things had changed: As an early career researcher, I needed to understand the key concepts in the articles, and I also needed to give my own ideas and comments about these concepts. At the very beginning, it cost me considerable time in reading.

Another notable thing that made reading a problem for me was that I had no education training or research background, especially in relation to Australian academic culture. The terms used in Australian education research were quite new to me. I needed to check my dictionary frequently. Sometimes I might know every word in a sentence but I still did not understand it. I acted on the suggestion to read the abstract, introduction, and conclusion as the first steps to grasping the main ideas or concepts. However, because of my lack of research knowledge, I was unable to identify the research gaps, arguments, results, and methodological strategies quickly. I learned that research, including real reading and study, takes time. In conclusion, the ways I was trained to read, which were largely dependent on multiple choice tests and my lack of knowledge of Australian research culture were the main causes that made my reading so time-consuming. Listening and reading are two essential parts of an English test in China. The school education I experienced values those test-taking skills very much. In school, much time is spent on developing these skills. However, I have now found, sadly, that the time I spent was on developing test-taking skills, not on language education itself.

5.1.3 Writing skills

Writing and speaking were treated indifferently during my school years. Initially, I encountered big problems in relation to these two skills when I arrived in Australia. My weakness in English writing and speaking made me feel my studies were hard in some respects. Writing a thesis, teaching, and negotiating relationships with students and other native speaking colleagues
were a challenge for me. In the first half year, I had many long nights of thesis writing, not because I am so diligent, but because I was reluctant to do it. I always leave my research writing to the last night, just before the deadline.

I felt worried that I have not written reflections for almost two weeks. Although I had lots of feelings to record, every time as I decided to express them in English, I suddenly lost interest. (11/10/2008).

Since writing occupies the smallest portion in an English test in China, the learning of it was often neglected. During so many years of learning English in China, I was rarely asked to write English as a lesson task or homework. I remembered I once handed in some writing when I was attending an English writing course in university. The teacher did not point out or correct the mistakes in my work, but just gave me a mark out of A, B or C. These kinds of writing tasks were quite rare in my learning years and written feedback was even rarer. How could I improve if I did not know the problems in my writing? As a student in China I was educated as if I could write English to a high standard, but was never taught to do so. The topic of writing courses in my Chinese university was usually in relation to rhetoric, poems, or literary comparisons. How could a learner be able to appreciate the elegant and refined language in a poem if he or she had never had the experience of writing a poem him or herself? How could a baby run if he or she was not able to walk? There was not a great need for creativity in a writing test, because one could always buy a book about how to pass a writing test.

5.1.4 Oral Skills

With regard to my speaking problems, as I wrote in my journal:

I did not prepare too much cultural information to introduce in the classroom, because I am not confident in using oral skills. I worry about making too many mistakes in front of my students, so I avoided speaking too much English in the classroom. Due to this language barrier, I feel I am too far away from a good teacher.
Sometimes I don’t know how to conduct a conversation with the students when I want to express some emotions such as caring, encouragement, or unhappiness. (17/09/2008)

Classroom teaching involves communication between students and the teacher. Most of this communication is conducted orally. How can the students understand the lesson well without the teacher’s vivid explanations? How can the teacher make the lesson more interesting if she is unable to express interesting things in English and unable to bring a sense of humour to the classroom? How can the teacher and the students establish a good relationship if they cannot understand each other? I could feel the students’ affection from their warm greetings and their enthusiasm when attending my lessons. This much was revealed from their facial expressions and eyes. However, I was frustrated at not being able to make further contact with them.

In addition to the students, I also felt I was incapable of developing relationships with other, native English speaking colleagues. For example, I wrote about my colleagues in school:

Today I finished lunch before the recess, so I can avoid sitting numbly among a house of teachers. Recess was not a relaxing period for me, I couldn’t understand what the teachers were talking about, what the teachers were laughing about, and I don’t know what I should say. (1/112008)

A friend who is also a VTR told me she only felt relaxed at school when she was alone in the restroom. Because of my lack of confidence in conducting a conversation with native English speakers, I had problems in my research or teaching. I was reluctant to raise my concerns with the native English-speaking professionals. I did not raise my concerns with the language methodology training lecturer or my research supervisors. I tended to discuss the problems with Chinese people, such as the other VTRs, a supervisor who has a Chinese background, and doctoral students from China.

I feel one of my problems in writing and speaking English is grammar. I do
not know how to organise sentences appropriately because I did not learn grammar well. That does not mean that I am not a diligent student. Like other classmates, I woke up early every morning during high school, and read English texts. It was usually the sense of English accumulated from reading, rather than the knowledge of grammar, that led me to the right answer in tests. This meant that I was unable to explain why the answer was correct.

Speaking was another neglected language skill during my school and university years in China. In high school, we hardly spoke English, because it was not a section in the test. After entering university, I rarely spoke English. Although I enrolled in an oral English course one year, like most of my classmates, I listened quietly but was not brave enough to speak out in the class, let alone after class. If my introverted personality is one reason for poor English proficiency, another reason is my lack of motivation to speak, since I did not have to attend a speaking test in the major English exams, such as CET 4, CET 6, TEM 4, and TEM 8. In my last year of university, I attended one social English test offered outside the university, called the Shanghai Interpretation Test. I passed the written examination, but failed the oral examination. It was that failure that first led me to reflect on my prior learning experiences.

5.1.5 Vocabulary Difficulties

Vocabulary was another of my English language problems. The TEM 8 test demands an English major to master at least 8,000 items of English vocabulary. Reciting English words with a vocabulary book was very popular among university students. But I did not recite honestly. I kept most of the vocabulary roughly in mind, since that was enough for me to choose a correct answer in a test. Later I found that in daily life or for academic purposes, although I knew the meanings of words, I was unable to spell or pronounce some vocabulary properly. Moreover, I did not know how to use the words in sentences. The reason is that I learned a large number of English words roughly and only for passing the tests, not for using them.
5.2 Improving English in Australia

One of my major incentives for studying abroad was to improve my English skills. According to the learning habit I formed in China, I planned my learning tasks carefully. For instance, I resolved to read newspapers and to listen to the radio everyday. However, because of the increasing research and work tasks, I never had time to carry the learning plan out.

I was occupied with the books and articles in my research. My supervisors never set me an exact number of books I should read, but I was told I could stop when it made sense. Therefore, making sense of the books and articles has become the primary goal in my reading. To achieve this purpose, I had to summarise the ideas, sort them into categories, make active comparisons, and give critical reflections on them.

I was busy with writing numerous reflective diary entries and thesis drafts. At the very beginning, I found it hard to extend a journal entry beyond 200 words, because I had difficulties in expressing ideas freely in English. When I was writing, I had to stop and make frequent checks in the dictionary. But I did not stop writing, since my reflective journal was a major data source for my research. I always tried to express complete ideas in my journal, although it was initially difficult. Drafting my thesis was another writing task I needed to do during my research candidature. Besides providing insights about the research, my supervisors gave extensive written feedback on drafts of my thesis. Through reading the feedback from supervisors, I realised the grammar mistakes I had made, and also gained some skills in properly organising sentences.

As to oral communications, I did not expect to speak perfect English nor to understand the local English perfectly well. I just made great efforts to make myself understood. For instance, I tried hard to express my ideas to supervisors; I tried to give clear directions and explanations to my students when I was teaching Mandarin; I tried to give comprehensive presentations and speeches in academic conferences, seminars and workshops; I used English in
life, such as shopping, travelling, making friends with local people. In short, I
did my best to express myself. I improved quickly by conversing with people.
Some English native speakers, particularly my supervisors, usually repeated
my utterances when there were mistakes. Rather than pointing out mistakes I
made directly, they repeated the sentences in correct ways, which led me to
notice the problem points without frustrating me. I regard it as a kind way to
help me to improve oral skills.

Although the failure to carry out my plan for learning English worried me
initially, I realised my English was improving. For instance, after reading piles
of books and articles, my reading speed increased. I once kept an English
novel by my bed, in order to improve reading skills. However, I gave up
reading it very soon because I did not enjoy it very much. Interestingly,
months later, when I turned back to it again, I felt I was able to read the novel
more fluently. Rather than reading the novel purposefully, I now read it as a
bedtime story for relaxing purposes. Maybe I have got used to reading
English.

At first my teaching relied largely on the notes I prepared before lessons.
Besides preparing lesson content, I had to organise or even write down the
sentences I needed to say in advance. Otherwise I had no confidence to speak
very much English while teaching. However, the number of notes I took to the
classrooms reduced over the 18 month period. Towards the end I felt that I did
not have to prepare ‘teaching speeches’, since I was able to express my ideas
promptly and freely.

In the beginning, I was always introducing language points but worried about
giving cultural information because I did not think I could explain well, and
considered it as a burden on my memory. I also worried that introducing
cultural information would lead to questions and class-wide discussions; I did
not think I could carry out effective communication with students. But now
my lessons are more flexible. I do not have to follow the plans exactly. I listen
to students, respond to their concerns, and raise questions to trigger their
critical thinking and discussions, because I am confident in speaking English.
I had to complete a 50,000 words thesis. At first, I was concerned about the words because I found it hard to write so many words. But now I am able to accomplish 5,000 words a day as long as I have ideas to express. The focus of my thesis has shifted from words to ideas. As my supervisor says, “Words are the last thing to consider”.

To sum up, in the past 18 months my English proficiency has developed in many aspects. This indicates that in an English context, it is not necessary to copy the learning mode I developed in China, such as carrying out focused reading, writing, speaking or listening exercises, but that English improvement will come after active study and work. There is a very famous Chinese idiom to describe this phenomenon: 水到渠成 shui dao qu cheng (when water flows, a channel is formed; what happens is without extra effort).

5.3 Conclusion

A litany of my problems in using English confronted me during my first term in Australia. I was particularly challenged in listening, reading, writing, and speaking English. Although it is common or even inevitable for a second language (L2) learner to have difficulties, my concern was about time. I had already spent over ten years studying English, but I could not use the language properly. The reasons that caused those problems provided a basis for my reflections and analyses. Through reflecting on my personal English learning experiences, I argue that two major factors led to my learning deficiency. These are, first, China’s exam-centred educational system, and second my lack, as a learner, of understanding the purpose for learning English. In other words, my problems came from what I perceived as the improper way of inputting English and from not having a way to output language. This led to my language learning deficiency.

This chapter, recalling my English learning experience in China and Australia, is the beginning of the data display process. The next part of data display consists of observational feedback from three teachers (Chapter 6) and 10 narratives deriving from my reflective diary (Chapter 7). These three chapters
constitute the data display component of the data analysis.
CHAPTER 6
Voices from Others: Observation Feedback

Introduction

This chapter presents the observation feedback made by my mentor and the other two classroom teachers. Observation feedback is the third part of the data sources in this study. The first section of this chapter briefly reiterates the feedback in four tables. It captures my teaching performance over a period of 5 weeks. The second section of this chapter provides a critical comparison of the observational results made by different people. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it provides data for triangulating purposes. Second, the information displayed in this chapter allows a greater depth of analysis in chapter 8.

6.1 First Observation Feedback from my Mentor

On 29 April 2009, my mentor observed my lesson. It was the first observation she had made about my teaching. Table 6.1 records the scores and comments my mentor provided about my teaching performance.

I areas

I was able to engage students by doing a miming activity; I showed respect to individual students from different cultural backgrounds and represented relevant concepts by using PowerPoint.

D areas

There were areas where I performed well but still needed improvement, including: identify and articulate learning goals for student needs; give clear directions and introduction; listen to students and engage them in classroom conversations; use appropriate tone, volume and expression. In other words, I need to talk a little louder, vary my tone for added impact and structure effective lesson plans.
Table 6.1: Lesson Observation Schedule—L2 teaching: 6L  29 April 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied teaching strategies that are appropriate to learning stages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged students in relevant and purposeful learning experiences</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Great activity where you engaged students by having many come out and mime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified and articulated clear and appropriate learning goals for student needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated clear directions and clearly explained the focus of the lesson to students</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Directions need to be clear. Perhaps repeat an introduction in a different way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to students and engaged them in classroom conversations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoke clearly using appropriate tone, volume and expression</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Try and talk a little louder. Vary your tone for added impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured lessons effectively (i.e., introduction, body, conclusion)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>Good structure of lesson. Perhaps tell the students exactly what they will be doing at the beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managed pupil behaviour appropriately</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clapping hands was a useful strategy to gain student attention. Try and utilise other techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated approval appropriately</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Need to give lots of praise: well done, great answer, nice try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated disapproval appropriately</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Don’t be worried about letting students know when you are not pleased with behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showed respect to individuals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>You are always most respect for all of the students Jingjing. Well done!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represented relevant concepts that are easily accessible to students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Great use of PowerPoint with relevant photographs for mime activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:

I = independent performance (able to solve situations that arise);
AI = attempted to work independently;
D = developing independence (shows influence of other teaching styles);
NA = needs assistance (cannot resolve situations independently)

**NA areas**

There were areas where I most needed help: manage pupil behaviour appropriately; communicate approval; communicate disapproval.
After the observation, my mentor and I had a deep conversation around the results of this observation. The mentor explained why she made the comments and gave her suggestions on how to deal with the problems. After we reflected on my weaknesses together, she listed what I needed to do to gain attention in the future:

At the beginning of the lesson—remind students about your expectations: 1) listen carefully; 2) follow my instructions; 3) do exactly what I ask; Today we will be …

Talking: Ring the bell and wait; Say, there is too much talking; As soon as any student talks again or misbehaves, say their name—put their name on the board.

Praise: Remember to say “well done”, “great work”, “Great answer”, “You are talking well”

Say to a person next to a person who is doing the wrong thing—I like the way **is sitting or working. (29/4/2009)

A more focused and detailed mentor scaffolding was evident in that conversation. It helped me to see clearly the problems in my teaching and how to solve them. I recorded these suggestions on a piece of paper, and decided to take it into class.

The above reveals my immediate response to the first observation feedback. It indicates that I had a very positive attitude toward this feedback. Importantly, it was the mentor’s encouragement that released me from my frustration. She tried to give objective feedback, but did not forget to encourage me, and helped me to face my problems. She detailed the procedures and set a practical model for me to imitate. I really appreciated it, because Louise understood that as a non-native English speaker, I needed to be informed not only of what I should say but also exactly what I should say. The model gave me a vivid structure, which enabled me to imitate it, to practise on it, and to adapt it.
### 6.2 The Second Observation Feedback from Mentor

On 3 June 2009 my mentor did a second observation for my lesson. Table 6.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applied teaching strategies that are appropriate to learning stages</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Well done.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engaged students in relevant and purposeful learning experiences</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make sure all students are engaged in the lesson, not just the front two rows.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified and articulated clear and appropriate learning goals for student needs</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Remember to make clear to the students the main goal of the lesson.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicated clear directions and clearly explained the focus of the lesson to students</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This was not done very well. Take the time to state what the lesson outline is.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listened to students and engaged them in classroom conversations</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Well done. You involved many students often in a variety of situations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spoke clearly using appropriate tone, volume and expression</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English language is improving. Try to talk a little louder and vary your tone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structured lessons effectively (i.e., introduction, body, conclusion)</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good lesson structure. Good use of revision from term 1.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managed pupil behaviour appropriately</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Try using another strategy to gain student attention.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicated approval appropriately</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Try to remember to praise students who are doing the right thing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicated disapproval appropriately</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Telling the students you are not happy with behaviour was good but get them all to stop first. You are a very respectful person.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Showed respect to individuals</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Represented relevant concepts that are easily accessible to students</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Great use of smart board. Concepts easily understood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**

- I = independent performance (able to solve situations that arise);
- AI = attempted to work independently;
- D = developing independence (shows influence of other teaching styles);
- NA = needs assistance (cannot resolve situations independently)
shows the recorded scores and comments my mentor provided about my teaching performance.

**I areas**

I structured the lesson effectively by revising the knowledge I had previously introduced; I made the concepts easily understood by using the smart board; I showed respect to individual students.

**AI areas**

According to the feedback, there were areas that I did pretty well, while still needing improvement. I applied teaching strategies that are appropriate to learning stages; I involved many students in a variety of situations; my English language was improving, while I still needed to talk a little louder and vary my tone; I was improving my communication of disapproval, but still needed some appropriate tactics.

**D areas**

I engage all students; I did not give the students a clear goal at the beginning of the lesson; I did not use a variety of ways to gain student attention; I did not praise students who were doing the right thing frequently.

### 6.3 A Comparison of the Two Observation Feedback Reports

In comparing the two feedback checklists from my mentor’s observations, after 5 weeks’ practice, one can see that my performance in several areas had improved. There were some areas that did not show much improvement. Interestingly, a setback was also found in one area.

There was an overall trend of improvement from Observation 1 to Observation 2. There were three NA areas in observation one, while there were no NA areas in observation two. Four D areas had developed into AI areas.

In Observation 1, behaviour management, communicating approval and communicating disapproval were three areas identified by my mentor as the
areas that most needed help. I paid great attention to these areas since they were identified as the least developed aspects of my teaching. I used my mentor’s comments as suggestions to improve performance in the following weeks. For instance, in the first observation, my mentor’s comment on ‘communicating disapproval’ was that she encouraged me to express disapproval. In the second observation, my mentor acknowledged my performance in communicating disapproval while pointing out that I needed to get all students to stop talking first. It indicated that I had followed my mentor’s suggestion in showing my unhappiness to students.

The area of ‘communicating approval’ also indicated a similar trend. My mentor suggested shifting from giving praise for right answers to giving praise to right behaviour. The second observation indicated that I had taken up my mentor’s suggestion of giving praise to right behaviour. My mentor’s comment in the second observation indicated that her expectations of me in this area grew. An improvement was also identified in the ‘behaviour management’ area. Although the improvement was not significant (only from NA to D), in both of the two observations my mentor mentioned that I needed to use various strategies to gain student attention.

The performance in ‘lesson structure’ area had leaped dramatically from D to I. I believe the reason is because I the lesson outline I used in the second lesson was based on my mentor’s suggestion.

Slight improvements were also identified in two areas. These were: ‘Listened to students and engaged them in classroom conversations’ and ‘Spoke clearly using appropriate tone, volume and expression’. These two areas are related to my English language proficiency. It is unrealistic to achieve great language improvement in a short period. Therefore, the slight improvements are reasonable.

When commenting two of my lessons my mentor put great emphasis on giving the main goal and the outline of the lesson. But I did not totally accept the necessity of giving students the main goal and outline (because of my past
learning experience, as mentioned in my reflection). Therefore I did not change a lot in my second teaching performance.

Interestingly, there was a setback in the area of ‘engaging students. In the first observation, I engaged students successfully because I used a miming activity, while in the second observation, I did not use an activity. The mentor’s comment was that I did not engage the whole class. That means classroom activity is a good way to engage students. But some other tactics are also needed to engage students. It could be spoken directions or gestures or facial expressions. According to my mentor, I lacked these skills to engage students. However, using spoken directions to engage students put the focus on my English language proficiency.

To sum up, the results from the two observations indicated that mentor intervention is a good strategy for my professional development. I improved in many teaching areas, based on the feedback. The changes were evident between these two observations. Based on the above analysis, I divided the areas into three groups.

The first group was dependent on my English proficiency. I had recognised some problem areas in the first observation feedback and intended to change. However, I did not change a lot because those areas relate to my English language proficiency. It is impossible to improve language proficiency to the extent required, in 5 weeks.

The second group of teaching areas related to some specific strategies in teaching, such as ways of gaining students’ attention and praising students. By appropriating the suggestions given by my mentor, I was able to overcome the problems in those areas and demonstrate improved teaching skills.

The third group of areas is those where I did not improve, or even had a setback. I believe that the primary reason leading to the result is that I did not
have a deep discussion with my mentor about those areas. That is, although she mentioned them I did not choose to discuss them. I did not accept the mentor’s suggestion because I did not have an intention to change.

6.4 The Observation Feedback from Two Other Classroom Teachers

I was happy for the other two classroom teachers to observe my teaching in their classes because I had benefited from my mentor’s observations and wanted to get more feedback from different teachers.

They made their observations on the same day as my mentor’s second observation. Tables 6.3 and 6.4 are the observation feedback from two other classroom teachers. It is important to note that I had had a deep discussion with my mentor before the observation, but not with the other two teachers. I just asked them for their feedback for professional development:

The two tables indicate a developing trend. In Table 6.3 I received 11 I ratings and 1 AI. In Table 6.5 I received 10 I ratings and 2 AI. But compared to the results from my mentor on the same day, there was a distinct difference. The two classroom teachers gave higher ratings than my mentor. The following discussion considers why the teachers of 5/6J and 3/4D gave such similar ratings, which were so different from my mentor’s.

As the result of several long and deep conversations, Louise and I had established a good mentor-mentee relationship. She understood my eagerness to develop teaching skills and had some idea of my research work at the university. She was clear that her role was to offer specific assistance in my teaching. She focused on the areas where I still needed improvement. I did not have time to explain either my research or my expectation of teaching to the other teachers before they observed me. They may have thought that the observation was an evaluation task required by the university. Thus, they tried to give me higher marks. Their comments focused on the areas I did well in.
### Table 6.3: Lesson Observation Schedule—L2 teaching: 5/6J  3 June 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applied teaching strategies that are appropriate to learning stages</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged students in relevant and purposeful learning experiences</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students are highly engaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified and articulated clear and appropriate learning goals for student needs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated clear directions and clearly explained the focus of the lesson to students</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes children are unsure of the task.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to students and engaged them in classroom conversations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conversations are very good.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoke clearly using appropriate tone, volume and expression</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>You keep your voice interesting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured lessons effectively (i.e., introduction, body, conclusion)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson structure is good to begin with version works well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managed pupil behaviour appropriately</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated approval appropriately</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>It is very appropriate to ignore minor behaviour issues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated disapproval appropriately</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes it is helpful to let the children know you are unhappy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showed respect to individuals</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very strong.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represented relevant concepts that are easily accessible to students</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**
- **I** = independent performance (able to solve situations that arise);
- **AI** = attempted to work independently;
- **D** = developing independence (shows influence of other teaching styles);
- **NA** = needs assistance (cannot resolve situations independently)
Table 6.4: Lesson Observation Schedule-L2 teaching: 3/4D Date: 3/6/09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>AI</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied teaching strategies that</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>Students are engaged throughout the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are appropriate to learning stages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged students in relevant and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>The lessons are age-appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purposeful learning experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified and articulated clear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Discussed the content at the beginning of the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and appropriate learning goals for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated clear directions and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>Asked meaningful questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clearly explained the focus of the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesson to students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to students and engaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questioned their understandings by quizzing them—having them repeat what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>them in classroom conversations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>they had learnt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoke clearly using appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spoke clearly, varied tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tone, volume and expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured lessons effectively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uses PPT presentations with sequenced lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i.e., introduction, body,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conclusion)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managed pupil behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Needs to develop management skills e.g. speak only when students are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appropriately</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated approval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Confirmed correct responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appropriately</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated disapproval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Confirmed correct responses while encouraging students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appropriately</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showed respect to individuals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Listened to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represented relevant concepts that</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Revised basic knowledge, introduced simple terminology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are easily accessible to students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:
I = independent performance (able to solve situations that arise);
AI = attempted to work independently;
D = developing independence (shows influence of other teaching styles);
NA = needs assistance (cannot resolve situations independently)

There were still some problem areas mentioned by both my mentor and the two other teachers. These were ‘behaviour management skills’, ‘give clear
directions’ and ‘give disapproval appropriately’. To me, these three areas were affected by my English proficiency. Although my English was developing all the time, these results revealed that language development is time essential.

The two teachers acknowledged that I was successfully discussing the content at the beginning of the lesson, speaking clearly and varying tone. These are areas that my mentor identified in the first observation as problem areas. The positive comments indicated a change in these areas. I had internalised and appropriated my mentor’s suggestions in my teaching practice.

6.5 Conclusion

Chapters 5 and 6 have displayed data from two sources: my memories of learning English and the views of three teachers about my teaching. These data are combined with data from my reflective journal in narrative in the next chapter. Each of the narratives follows Goodell’s (2006) Critical Incidents Reflection Model.
CHAPTER 7

Narratives of Ten ‘Magic Moments’

We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and live by narrative. (Hardy, 1968, p. 5, cited in Cochran, 1990)

Introduction

Narrative provides a way to understand people’s identity and personality. Many narratives illuminate lives and experienced reality (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) as a valuable mode for exploring the inner world of an individual. Such an exploration goes some way for the researchers to explore the development of higher mental function narratives, reported in this chapter, and the data reported in Chapters 5 and 6, using the ZPD as a framework for demonstrating the development of higher mental functions, or learning. As neo-Vygotskian researchers, Egan and Gajdamaschko note:

Narrative provides us with one of the main tools for orienting our emotions to the contents of our narrative and consequently gives us the power to make increasingly complex meaning of our lives and of the world around us (2003, p. 96).

Narrative inquiry inextricably intertwines education, experience and life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

This chapter reports the data from my reflective journal. It is the third part of the first stage of data display and uses Ollerenshaw and Creswell’s (2002) Problem-Solution Narrative Structure to display the data. Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, and in particular his concept of ZPD provides a theoretical framework for analysing these narratives in Chapters 8 and 9.

Each reflection was written in a colloquial style, sometimes phrased as a
translation of my thinking in Mandarin. I have edited the reflections presented here for clarity. Otherwise I have tried to maintain the idiosyncratic quality of and personal reflections.

7.1 Teaching

As a VTR I went into teaching with no prior experience or training. My ideas about teaching derived from my cultural background, how I had been taught at school and university. The schools, the students, the education system and the cultural habits in Australia were challenging for me.

7.1.1 Narrative 1: lesson plans

When I had just arrived in Australia, I had little knowledge about Australian students, school culture and society. I was planning a lesson that would allow students to revise and practise the vocabulary for family members that I had taught the previous week, but I had not taken family circumstances into account. In my reflective journal I noted:

I wanted students to bring family photos to classroom, because I had taught ‘family members’ last week, and I wanted them to report with photos in Chinese. But when I suggested that idea to the teacher, she stopped me. The teacher told me that bringing family photos might hurt the feelings of some children whose parents are divorced. Most of the time, I construct lesson plans relying on the experience and scholastic knowledge I gained in China. Although there is an increasing divorce rate in my country, I did not consider it as a serious issue that might hurt young children’s feeling. I had been in Australia for several months and I did not think it is a common phenomenon, or may be it is because I have no experiences of working with students before that I don’t know how to care about their feelings. It made me realise that no matter where I am, no matter if it is a common issue or not, as a teacher I need to do my best to care for every student’s feeling. The teacher suggested that I ask the students to bring any photo
they like instead. It was beneficial to discuss the lesson plan with teacher and to gain some cultural knowledge from the teacher. (11/09/2008)

After the ‘family photo’ incident, I became more willing to discuss my plans with the teachers. For example, when teaching how to express ‘age’ in Mandarin, I checked with class teachers that it was OK to ask the children to report their family members’ age in Mandarin. I was told, “It is impolite to ask old ladies’ age in Western countries” (13/12/2008).

I got increasingly positive comments from teachers. Words (such as “interesting … yes, we can do that …”, “that’s a good idea”, “oh, this is exciting”) encouraged me. Discussions with teachers about my lesson plans provided confidence in my teaching. Gradually, I found that I was not relying solely on lesson plans. Students’ learning levels vary from class to class. My teaching plans in those classes were not always the same. I usually made some changes according to different classes, especially after discussions with the class teachers.

Time went quickly. As I planned lessons on the topic of food it occurred to me that I would “probably not discuss the lessons with my teachers”. I could not remember when I stopped discussions about lesson plans with teachers. Maybe the teachers saw I was capable of planning the lessons independently, and ceased checking my lesson plans. Or maybe I ceased discussing the plans with them because I felt confident enough. I cannot remember. Time is a magic thing.

7.1.2 Narrative 2: comprehending teacher attitudes to me

After one month’s teaching I felt that things were not going well in my relationship with one of my class-teachers. I pondered the difference between two teachers, in my journal:

I feel my teaching performances are quite different in class A and class B. In class A, I feel free, confident, and happy. The teacher
in class A is so easy going that she always respects my opinions. In her class, I have the freedom to teach. The teacher offers help when I really need it. But in class B the teacher is very much in control: she works out the teaching plans for me, and arranges every detailed step for my teaching. For example, this week I was just asked to show how to write every character with ink and brush, and let the students imitate. I felt embarrassed because it seems just like I was a tool of showing how to write characters, rather than teaching them about the characters (31/8/2008).

As I saw it, the teacher in class A created a safe and comfortable environment for my development; however the teacher in class B put her focus on the students’ learning rather than on my development. Both the teachers knew that I had no teacher training. However, Teacher B did not appear to consider my potential development, and did not seem to intend to offer her support in my professional development.

I reflected that issue in my journal and quickly got a clear idea:

Teacher B made great effort to help her students learn much better. She shows a great responsibility to her students’ learning. Although she does not show much consideration and support in my learning and development, it is not her fault. The teacher has no responsibility to do that and since she is so young compared to Teacher A, it is natural for her not to be concerned about a peer’s professional development. It is the time for me to ask but not wait for help (11/9/2008).

Perhaps Teacher B realised that I needed to develop better skills, but since I did not express any difficulty to her, she was unsure if I needed help or not. Therefore, on reflection, I decided that I needed to take the initiative in searching out support:

I took the opportunity to discuss my lesson plan with Teacher B. I raised my problems and asked for her advice.
With the increase of interaction, I feel my situation in class B has changed. The teacher now always asks me about my lesson plan and if there is anything she can help me with. She gives me some suggestions about the plans. Most of the time, she allows me to conduct the lesson I have prepared (17/10/2008).

Increased interactions with Teacher B led her to realise my expectations about teaching. It shifted her view of me from a colleague or a volunteer teacher to a novice teacher who really needed her support to improve.

This experience taught me a good lesson about the importance of the relationship with teachers in my professional learning. I came to realise that setting a comfortable and safe learning environment is essential for a novice teacher. This was evident in the process of assisting a new VTR from Ningbo. I encouraged her to conduct her own ideas in teaching and tried my best to establish a comfortable relationship between us:

Given that actually I am also a beginning teacher, I told Hui to regard me just as a peer with a little more practical experience than her, rather than an ‘expert’. Before classes, we discussed the teaching plans together. I encouraged her to contribute her own ideas about the plans. After classes, we also evaluated and reflected on the lesson plans together. I quite enjoyed these open discussions, which were based on the comfortable relationship we had established. In doing this, I felt relaxed and comfortable. I did not have to perform as a ‘perfect’ teacher; I am actually a novice. The mutual understanding we achieved released pressure from both of us. I did not have to feel ashamed as I revealed any weaknesses; she did not have to be introverted about her ideas on teaching (19/8/2009).

7.1.3 Narrative 3: I need a mentor

It was in my third teaching term (April, 2009) that I felt weak and exhausted with teaching. I felt that the students were not concentrating as they had previously; I did not feel that I was teaching effectively. I had expected that
teaching would become easier over time but it seemed to become harder. I regarded this as a setback. A conversation with a teacher helped me to realise that it was not what I thought:

Today a classroom teacher told me that I have improved a lot and that’s why she does not intervene in my lessons this term. Recalling this term’s teaching, I finally realised that rather than a setback, I am facing a new issue—classroom management. In the previous terms, considering I was fresh to teaching, the classroom teachers helped me to control the students’ behaviour. The teachers’ intervention had an essential impact on students’ engagement in my lessons. Since this term, an obvious change is that the teachers’ intervention has reduced. Most of the time, they are busy with their own business, such as reading or marking work. Although they intervened occasionally when they felt the students were too noisy, most of the time, I had to control the class independently. Now I know why I felt so tired with teaching.

(18/4/2009)

The classroom teachers’ non-involvement is understandable. With two terms of practice, I had improved in some aspects, especially in relation to the preparation of lesson plans. The teachers might believe that it was the time to give me more free space to teaching while to me, classroom management was a new area that needed improvement. The critical issue led me to consider my own development in the past eight months. Although I had improved, particularly in planning and organising the lessons, my competency in organising student behaviour had not developed much, or even had not started to develop until very recently. The reason was that, before, with the help of classroom teachers, I did not have to control student behaviour independently. So the critical issue was neglected and I did not realise that I needed to improve in this area.

I wondered how I could learn some strategies for controlling student behaviour. In addition, I was not sure how the class teachers regarded my teaching
development. Although the teachers, especially Teacher A, were willing to help me when I raised problems with them, they rarely pointed out my problems in teaching. They answered my questions and guided me, but they did not provide feedback and I was unsure of my state of development or what areas needed further strengthening. I understood and evaluated my teaching performance from my own perspective; I did not draw perspectives from others. I felt I needed a mentor to observe my teaching and provide me with some feedback and suggestions in some specific areas that would be useful.

When I explained my desire with the project organiser from DET, she also commented that she was just thinking about providing mentors for VTRs. I was allowed to choose a mentor from the classroom teachers I worked with. I chose to have Teacher A as my mentor. I naturally thought of Teacher A because we had established a close friendship:

She was the classroom teacher of one of classes I taught. She lives not far away from my place. As I did not have a car, she volunteered to pick me up and send me back from the school. We could always have happy chats in her car. We talked about work, study, life and, mostly we talked about the teaching. Especially in my initial teaching stage, I discussed my lesson plans with the teacher. (15/9/2008)

Importantly, we established a good friendship.

“In July 2009, I went back to China for a month. I was quite moved by an email sent by Teacher A. It said, … I will miss you today not coming to Dan Yang (the school) and having our chat on the way home” (Personal Communication [email], 14/7/2009).

Teacher A was happy to be my mentor. As my research design suggested, the mentor was invited to observe my lessons. I developed a checklist for her to assess my teaching. She was invited to give written comments and suggestions on areas of my teaching, which most needed to be developed. Before the observations, we had a deep conversation about my research. Through
introducing the major idea of my research, my mentor saw what I really wanted from teaching, especially in receiving some feedback. I also understood her expectations of me. A mutual understanding about the aims of my professional development was established between the mentor and myself:

Today I discussed my research with my mentor. I explained the focus of my research, and its articulation with my teaching practice. I expressed my desire to receive more detailed and focused assistance about teaching strategies from her. My mentor described her expectation of me. Since I had no formal professional training as a teacher, she did not set high standards for me as she would for Australian student teachers. This revealed most of the classroom teachers’ opinion of me; I assume that the other teachers might also hold the same view as my mentor. The teachers regarded me as a volunteer or novice colleague, rather than a student teacher. Although they were willing to give me suggestions and help whenever I raised problems with them, they seldom pointed out problems first. Instead, they always encouraged me and gave high comments on my lessons. The teachers created a comfortable environment for my professional learning. Their tolerance of the problems I had and mistakes I made in teaching, and their constant encouragement helped the growth of my confidence in teaching. However, besides positive feedback, I also need some feedback that could help me to see those weaknesses that I might not be able to identify by myself. I think the mentoring assistance could meet this need. (15/09/2008)

My first response to the feedback was positive. As I recorded my reflection on the first observation in the journal:

The feedback is very insightful. Although the results turned out to be terrible, I am not frustrated. Through communicating with my mentor, I fully understand that because I am not a student teacher with full time professional training, it’s not practical to hope I
could get a good result. However, I value the importance of the feedback. It helps me to see my problems in teaching and to gain good suggestions to deal with these problems. It tells me what activities I did well and need to continue; what strategies I use which still need improvement or a change. Before, I could only identify some problems in teaching by myself. From this observation, I heard another voice, which is really helpful. How I wish I could have had this kind of observation earlier. (29/4/2009).

Before her intervention, I had never reflected on my teaching so deeply and critically. My detailed reflections to specific comments are in Appendix 10.

I actively engaged in understanding the mentor’s comments and suggestions. Through reflecting, I saw some problems which were not so clear before, such as not giving an outline of the lesson, the volume and the tone of my voice, how to draw students’ attention properly, how to communicate disapproval and approval appropriately. I had a deeper understanding of the suggestions provided by my mentor. On reflection, I recognised the reasons that led to some problems; most of them were in relation to cultural and educational differences between China and Australia. At a professional level, I had successfully found a mentor; we had established mutual understanding and I had an active response to the mentor’s assistance.

7.1.4 Narrative 4: praising and punishing students

Mentoring provided further focused assistance to me. The following presents some specific examples of how I was learning from the mentor:

I discussed one of my concerns with the mentor. I found the teachers in Australian classrooms rarely scold the students because of a wrong answer or even say “no” directly. This is quite different from my learning experience. I raised this concern with the mentor. She told me that a teacher’s negative comments would lead the students to feel frustrated. This is not good for quality learning. Instead of saying “No” directly, she suggested I say “A
good try, but not the answer I want”, or “You are on the way to the answer”, or “A very close answer”, or “Don’t worry, it takes a life time to do that” and so on. (20/06/2009)

I still remember that my mentor repeated those ‘sayings’ slowly as to give me enough time to write them in the notebook I used to record what I learnt at schools. After that, I practised those sayings several times with my mentor. I imitated the tone she modelled for me. My mentor was a similar age to my mother. Her tenderness and patient guidance made me quite dependent on her.

There is a common Chinese saying su yu, 俗语 shou ba shou de jiao (take somebody by the hand and teach him/her how to do something). I think it is quite suitable to describe the help I received from the mentor. It did lead to a good teaching effect:

I felt more confident and secure to respond to the students. Usually I said “a good try”, “very close”, or “you are on the way”.

I adapted the mentor’s original sayings into brief phrases because they are easier to memorise. Since English is my second language and classroom teaching demands rapid, timely and clear responses in English, it is easier for me to use short phrases than long sentences. If some students failed to give any comment, I released them by saying, “don’t worry, can anybody help him/her?” (11/7/2009)

Behaviour management was another area that I most needed to improve. However, a conflict occurred when I was internalising my mentor’s suggestion. My mentor suggested I put students’ names on the board if they were talking. Again, I recorded the suggestion in my notebook. I decided to try it out in the next lesson. However, as a young teacher who was treated as an older sister by the students, I wanted to avoid punishing the students. Therefore, I made an adaptation. I set a new rule for student talking. I told them that in my lessons, raising a red highlighter means instruction time and they need to stop talking. I found it worked:
Young students are so interested in fresh things. The students showed great cooperation with my new rule. I guess students were not meaning to go out of classroom order, they just did not realise they were disturbing the classroom order when they were talking. Therefore it is the teacher’s task to make a rule or direction clear to everyone. More important, this rule controls the order without punishment. I feel comfortable to use it. (11/5/2009).

7.1.5 Narrative 5: learning from students

The interactions with the students contributed to my professional development at many levels: they helped to identify weaknesses in my teaching and also led to critical thinking about teaching. This narrative draws first on my memories of school in China and then shows how students in my class in Australia helped me to see teaching in a different light.

I expected the students to listen quietly and prepare their answers carefully. I felt my prior learning experiences largely affected the strategies I used in teaching. When I was in primary and high school, I was simply expected to answer rather than raise questions. Teachers prepared their lessons dedicatedly. Students were asked to raise questions after classes in order not to interrupt teachers. I took asking questions to be revealing weakness in learning. I was reluctant to do that. I tried my best to give perfect answers. Problems or difficulties were usually regarded as negative things, rather than issues that led to learning or professional development. The classroom was not a comfortable learning environment for me. Most of the time, I felt nervous and depressed: I was worried to be picked by teachers to answer questions that I was not sure of. I was worried to give wrong answers, since I took it as losing face. Teachers and classmates might have bad impressions about me. I learnt that good classroom order equals a quiet environment.

In contrast, I felt a distinctive feature of Australian students is that they like raising questions frequently and freely during lessons. Sometimes, I was quite involved in my own speech while I saw several hands. Initially I felt uncomfortable with frequent questions from the students during my lessons.
Should I stop to listen or should I ignore them? My previous educational background led me to regard that behaviour as a disturbance. However, an event changed my attitude:

I was teaching the phrase 生日快乐 sheng ri kuai le (literally translated as ‘birthday happy’) when a student said loudly (he did not even raise hand), “Miss, why do you put birthday in front of happy in Chinese?” I was stunned by that unexpected question. Seconds later I said, “Well, actually I have a similar question for you. Why do you put ‘happy’ in front of ‘birthday’ in English?” He replied, “I don’t know. I just say it.” I said, “Well, I guess I don’t know either.” Then I turned to the whole class and said, “That was a good question. Our language is part of our culture, which is handed down from generation to generation. Our ancestors developed different life habits because they lived in geographically different places. And the linguistic system is one of these different habits. That’s why people in different countries speak different languages. And we call this cultural difference.” To be frank, as a second language learner, I had never asked that kind of question during the past 10 years. My impromptu explanation seemed not as professional as a language teacher. However, that question led me to realise that students do think critically when they are learning. I feel that rather than lecturing all along, I should stop to listen to them. (2/4/2009)

The reflection reveals that my original teaching strategy was teacher-centred, rather than student-centred. Although I had been introduced to the concept of student-centred teaching during the language methodology training, I did not have a deep understanding of its real meaning. I simply took it as an idea that I should organise more activities in my teaching. At that time, I took teacher-centred to mean the teachers talking the entire lesson. So I introduced games and other activities to the students in order to avoid a ‘teacher-centred’ approach. It was not until that conversation during my teaching that I came to realise that rather than taking the form of a lesson plan, the notion of ‘student-
centred’ requires the students to think critically during the lesson. Before, I just delivered the lessons step by step, following the lesson plans I had prepared in advance. Because I did not value questions from the students, I had no idea how the students understood my lessons. My previous teaching was just like an individual acting, there was a lack of direct communication with the audience.

The issues mentioned in this reflection really taught me a good lesson. I came to value feedback from the students. By communicating with them in the class, I could get an idea of how far their learning had progressed; what they had mastered; where they still needed further explanation. Without such interactive feedback, I could never improve my teaching. In the following lessons, bearing this notion in mind, I set aside discussion time for students to raise their questions. I asked the students to raise questions in a particular time I set aside, rather than raising them anytime they liked. By doing this, my instruction would not be stopped frequently. Through discussion with students, I also gained valuable feedback from them. It made me feel confident in my lesson plans and teaching.

Because mistakes are more tolerated and questions are welcomed, students in Australia raise questions as a way to search for answers from the teacher, as a way of learning, rather than thinking it reveals weakness. As the ZPD suggests, problems indicate the areas where assistance is needed. Learning is not always comfortable, but as a teacher I should set a comfortable learning environment for my students. A comfortable and effective learning environment should make effective teaching/learning relationships between teacher and students a prerequisite. That is, the learner and the teacher must establish a comfortable relationship by both regarding questions and problems positively.

I cannot say the kind of teacher-centred strategy I once experienced is totally wrong, since its existence is determined by many complex cultural, historical, and economical factors. However, I will return to China and become a teacher very soon. I am not well informed nowadays about classroom teaching in
China but I will try my best to make students feel supported and comfortable in my lessons. I believe learners would not be well supported if they did not feel safe to reveal problems or difficulties to their teachers.

7.1.6 Narrative 6: inspirations from students

The students were a great inspiration for my teaching. Every time I walked into the schools, I received warm greetings—“ni hao” (hello). Every time I entered the classrooms, I read the excitement in the students’ eyes and on their faces. The inspiration from the students was both material and mental. In the past 18 months, I received many presents from the students: a flower that had just been picked this morning from her garden; a candy from a child whose father bought it from China; paper-cuttings I taught the class weeks before. Some gave me lovely words such as, “Miss Weng, thank you for teaching us”. Some gave me pictures, which they drew by themselves. All these really moved me. As I recorded in the journal:

After a whole morning’s exhausting teaching, I was walking along the winding stone path, which leads to a quiet corner of the school. With the recess bells ringing, the whole school was suddenly filled with the kids’ laughing and talking voice. When passing the canteen, a little boy walked up to me, with both hands holding a large candy, he said, “@$%^&*” (he didn’t swear, but because of my poor listening skill, I sometimes could not catch the students’ words clearly). But I knew he wanted to give me the candy. “Is it for me?” I asked him. “Yes, Miss.” “What’s your name?” “***”, the boy answered a little nervously (I cannot remember the English name well). “Which class are you in?” “4W”, the little boy said and ran away.

At that moment, I was not as exhausted as I had been just two minutes before. Bright sunshine, a soft breeze, birds’ singing, what a lovely spring day! A feeling of content about my job filled my mind. A class teacher told me she has been teaching for 30 years, and had never thought to change her career. Now I seem
understood why: the tiny move and warm feeling a teacher has from the students every single day will accumulate to be strong and stable beliefs that always light the flame of a teacher’s road. (15/10/2008)

The above reflection records my experience of the first gift I received from a student. Although I was unable to understand the student’s ‘fast’ Australian English at that initial stage, and although the gift was just a candy, I deeply appreciated the student as his action deeply inspired me. I felt proud and satisfied to be a teacher. Besides material things, the students also provided me great mental inspiration. In my journal, I wrote:

Today was the first day of the new term. I felt nervous before entering a Year 7 class. I was worried about how to survive in high school, since classroom management is a big headache in high schools. To my surprise, the class was at once filled with a great joy as I entered. Students cheered, “Miss Weng! Miss Weng! She taught us well!” As I took a closer look, I found many familiar faces of the students I taught in primary schools just last term! (25/2/2009)

My former students’ existence and their sayings released the huge stress I was feeling. The Australian students’ passion touched me deeply; I felt really proud to be a teacher. In addition, I also learnt how I could lead changes to my students’ learning:

I was encouraged by a chat with a student this morning. I teach Mandarin from Year 4 to Year 6 in this school. This was a Year 3 student. During the chat, she spoke some Chinese to me, which she had learned from her older brother who’s attending my lessons this term. The girl also said that she is looking forward to attending my lessons next year when she enters Year 4. (9/11/2008)

That was the first time I knew that my lessons were actually popular in the school. As a teacher, I felt any tiny thing I did in teaching might lead to some
differences for individual students. I learnt that these differences might also have an influence on the people around him/her, such as family and friends. I am quite proud with this ‘magic power’ of a teacher as I can make a difference to my students’ learning.

It is the students who taught me to be a better teacher. Before, I had no intention of improving my handwriting. I was not really troubled with what I thought was poor handwriting, until I entered the classroom as a teacher:

I am not very happy with my handwriting. I am not used in writing on a white board. My students are in the beginning level. They have to copy the characters (Hanzi) I write into their notebooks. The more exactly they copied, the more ashamed (of the poor model I am giving them). It’s time to improve my handwriting (8/11/2008).

I did not want students to imitate my poor handwriting. Out of a sense of responsibility toward the students’ learning I decided to practise and improve my handwriting skills.

It is hard to explain my expectations of the ROSETE program. Since I am an English major, the desire to improve English droved me to study abroad. I value the voluntary teaching in public schools since I believe it will provide me opportunities to use English. (6/11/2008)

From the beginning, the supervisory panel asked the seven VTRs to write an autobiography about past learning experiences. We also needed to express our expectations of our future study in Australia. I was not really eager to develop teaching strategies but rather wanted to improve my English. My choice of teaching was not out of the desire to help young students. However, as time went by, I found a change in my attitude toward teaching.

I am willing to prepare Power Points slides with flashes and pictures; I am willing to borrow the data projector every time from
the library and organise it in classrooms; I am willing to organise games and various activities. Although they are time consuming, I hope my students will learn more things from my lessons; I want to read happiness and excitement on their faces and in their eyes.

(7/18/2009)

The students made me feel trusted, valued, and respected. It was this kind of feeling that led me to make a great effort to prepare good lessons. The students led me to love teaching and inspired my passion for a teaching career.

7.1.7 Narrative 7: an experience of assisting a new VTR

From August 2009 a new VTR, Hui, from Ningbo, observed my lessons. The schools thought my past year’s VTR experience had prepared me to be a wonderful teacher for the newcomer. Therefore her timetable in the first term remained the same as mine. My mentor said, “Hui will be your shadow”. She was to observe my teaching and I had to help her settle into the schools. At first, I was nervous about this. In the past year, I only taught Mandarin one day per week, which meant that I had no more than 40 days’ teaching experience. At that time, both my mentor and I felt I still needed improvement in some aspects of my teaching. I wondered if I was capable of providing effective assistance to Hui. I wondered what she would think about my teaching?

I remembered a deep conversation with my mentor that I had at the beginning of the mentorship. I believed the mutual understanding and trust we had established in that conversation smoothed both the mentor’s work and my learning. I was impressed by that conversation. Therefore, I also initiated several in-depth talks with Hui. I was aiming to develop a friendship with Hui and make clear each of our roles in this context:

She told me about her concerns in relation to inexperience, which reminded me of my initial teaching experiences a year before. I understood her feelings well, because I had the same feelings at first. Therefore, I encouraged her to be brave and confident in herself. I told her stories about what happened during my initial
teaching stage. (8/10/2009).

Gradually, Hui came to understand that this nervousness was natural as she was just entering the job. In addition, the conversations with Hui also made me realise that nervousness of different degrees, is inevitable for everyone. As a result, I viewed my own learning and development more positively.

I tried my best to give clear directions to students and organised activities well, since I regarded it as modelling for Hui. Most of the time, rather than spending the whole time observing, I invited Hui to join in the teaching. At first, the students were just asked to read after Hui. Then, she was asked to help the students’ work during the lessons. Gradually, I asked her to explain some simple instructions in the classes. The reason I did this was based on my past experience and observations. When I commenced I taught in primary schools and observed Mandarin lessons in the high school. The teacher told me, “In this term, I will not ask you to teach. Watch carefully how I conduct the teaching. Next term, I hope you will be able to handle half of the lesson”. During the term, I just sat quietly in a corner of the room watching the teacher’s teaching and taking notes.

Although the students called me Miss, I could not find an identity as a teacher in high school. Then, during the second term I was asked to teach 25 minutes in each lesson. This shocked me as I had never tried to teach in a high school. (11/1/2008)

Although I learned much from the observations and from experimenting with those ideas in primary schools, I still found it hard to teach lessons in high school. Based on that experience, I valued practice very much. Given that Hui will continue my teaching after I leave, I invited her to join in the teaching, since I did not want her to feel the panic I experienced before.

After observing eight lessons, Hui said that she had some confidence, and wanted to teach a whole lesson. This time, I was asked to observe her teaching. I had mixed feelings. Hui was another ‘me’ in the early days of teaching. I found she made some similar mistakes. Hui spent hours preparing
the lesson. Therefore, I was not surprised that she tried to follow the lesson plan exactly. During her teaching, she mainly focused on the lesson plan and herself, rather than the students. It reminded me of my first lesson. I was so nervous that I could not remember the individual students’ faces. I repeated, “read after me” frequently, while I did not give each individual a chance to speak. I asked the students to practise conversations with their partners, but I rarely stopped at one table to help correct their pronunciation. I felt the time went very slowly in the class. I did not know what to say after I finished my plan. Therefore, I knew Hui’s feeling exactly.

Not surprisingly, Hui felt very frustrated about her first lesson. She told me she lacked confidence to change her routine, even if she felt it was unsuitable for teaching, but that to change would make her feel unsafe. Because I had experienced the same thing, I explained to her that it is a natural feeling for a beginning teacher. I suggested Hui slow down and communicate with students. After the conversation, both Hui and I seemed to realise it takes time to be a professional teacher. For my part, I came to understand that teaching practice leads one to be a confident and flexible teacher. Although I still have a long way to go, I feel more positive in my professional development.

Later, Hui often expressed frustration about her teaching. I thought of ways to release her from the negative feelings she had. Later, I found it had to do with classroom management. During the lesson, Hui was teaching on her own. I realised that:

I should have given her more support in classroom management. It was too demanding for Hui to handle the teaching, student engagement and classroom behaviour simultaneously. No wonder she felt so frustrated (11/1/2009).

As I reflected on my initial teaching, my mentor—the classroom teacher—always helped me to control the students’ behaviour, which enabled me to focus on my own teaching. Later I would learn to do these more complex tasks of teaching. Therefore, in Hui’s following lessons, besides observing, I also
helped her to control students’ behaviour. It allowed Hui to put her focus on teaching the content.

7.2 Research

Doing a Master of Education (Honours) degree by research at the Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney is a different experience from all the education experiences I have had before. The program provides advanced training in education research, integrated with my teaching practice. Fresh out of university in China, I lacked research knowledge and skills, but the academic atmosphere and culture of the centre meant that the assistance from the supervisory panel helped me to fit into this new environment. As a research candidate, I have attended research seminars, made presentations at academic conferences, and participated in research seminars in the Centre. These facilitated my growth of skills and identity as a researcher. This experience offered a rich reward, as it was empowering on many levels, making me a better teacher-researcher.

7.2.1 Narrative 8: reflective writing

At first, I had a vague or even incorrect idea about my Master of Education (Research) degree. The only thing I knew was that I needed to submit a 50,000 word thesis in English at the end of this project. I said to myself, “50,000 quality words, 18 months time, except for four weeks holidays, I need to write at least 4,000 words every month”. Although I am now able to write out 4,000 words in a couple of days now, to a student from China whose longest English piece of writing was her 5,000 word graduation thesis, 50,000 was a huge number. However, just two months later, I realised what a stupid ‘calculation’ I had made about research:

Working with a thesis is absolutely unequal to speedwriting. Much of the writing that I do is a rough draft, which still needs to be polished both in scope and depth later on. I need to reconceptualise the ideas and reorganise the structures of my past writing constantly, based on the knowledge extension I gain. Theory and
literature study, framework construction, methodological skills, all these are more important for a research project. No wonder my supervisor told me once not to keep counting words because the word would be there when the work was done. (15/9/2008)

My academic writing skills have developed during the period of my research studies since “learning comes through writing; quality comes through revision; regular writing develops fluency” (Murray, 2006, p. 101).

Regular writing in a reflective journal became a habit that helped me develop writing skills. The first day we arrived at UWS, Professor Michael Singh gave each of us a gift. It was a small red covered notebook. We were encouraged to keep a reflective journal about our life experiences in Australia. I started the writing task with some reluctance, because I felt it difficult to describe my life in English. We were encouraged to write reflections every day; sometimes I just wrote a short paragraph or even several sentences. But I did not stop writing. I recorded my life in my journal, reflecting on critical incidents both in my learning and teaching. Most of them were written in English, while also mixed with some Chinese reflections. I chose to use Chinese when I had some concepts that I felt hard to express in English. For an example of an entry in both Chinese and English, see Appendix 11. As the time went by, I gradually became dependent on this kind of writing.

I realised, reading the literature, that reflective writing is a strategy widely used by teachers to facilitate their professional development. Therefore, I concluded that writing, no matter whether it is writing a journal, or writing to communicate with others, helps me to understand an issue more rationally and effectively. I feel that when I had to face some issues; my thinking was confused. I gained a deeper knowledge only when I wrote it down; this gave me an objective way of looking at the issues. In effect, I used writing to capture my thinking.

7.2.2 Narrative 9: developing an attitude of exchange and sharing

A: How did you find the conference?
B: That was good.
A: Any research you are interested in?
B: Er … er …

The above conversation occurred between my supervisor and me. It was the first time I had attended an academic conference. Before that conversation, I was satisfied with my participation in the conference, because I thought I did a good job. However, that conversation led me to think differently, as my reflection shows:

As a research candidate, I blush for myself, not just because I had nothing to say about the research, but because of my improper attitude toward the conference. I attached great importance to my own presentation. I made elaborate preparations for it: drafted the speech a week before, made slides, and even spent a whole afternoon rehearsing it. If I have to describe the conference, my immediate response is: my presentation went smoothly; I was indeed very lucky that no one raised a question, otherwise I might have been embarrassed with some challenging questions; I attended the drum-beating which was a great fun; I also enjoyed the food there. Although we were told that the conference serves as a platform for researchers to share knowledge and get feedback, I did not take this seriously. I felt too nervous to speak in front of a full room of people. I was too focused on myself so that once I finished my presentation, I felt a great release and thought my task was done. I blindly followed others into different rooms to listen to other presentations. And soon I gave up and chose to chat outside with several friends, because I hardly understood the research topics presented by others. It seems that I did not benefit much from conference. (11/14/2008)

It is really hard to become a researcher. It was really scary being ‘just’ a student surrounded by so many people who seem to be much more knowledgeable than me. Yet I was supposed to contribute and add new
knowledge. Early on I did not understand that I could do this. In addition, at my first conference the other students spoke such good and, at times, complicated English it was all very daunting. Although my supervisor had informed me earlier of the function of an academic conference, I failed to understand it at a personal level. Therefore, I did not make active use of it. Maybe I was too nervous. I even avoided sharing knowledge with others, for example, by not welcoming questions from the audience. Some issues such as lack of research and educational knowledge, and being unfamiliar with conferences, were obstacles. In the reflection, I did not seem to benefit much from the conference, but I did so in some aspects. The conference gave me a chance to present my own research in front of many other researchers. Further, the conversation with my supervisor led me to think critically about the functions of a conference. It made me realise that, rather than an individual show, the real benefit of attending a conference is to share minds with people, to get questions and information that might be useful to my own research. That attitude functioned actively when I attended some seminar presentations later during my candidature. In a later reflection, I wrote:

Today’s [CER] presentation was difficult to follow. I understood the language, but failed to understand the topic. I think one reason is that I always attend a presentation directly, while giving no time to reading the abstract in advance, since I thought there’s not much direct link between these other research and my own research. Maybe next time I need to gain a little background knowledge of the research in advance, as I think it might be easier to follow the presenters. However, I was impressed by the way the presenter introduced herself today. I also took down some useful expressions one might use in a presentation. (21/11/2008)

As a novice or early career researcher who speaks English as a second language, most of the time I was unable to interact with others actively. I failed to master the topics well and did not dare to raise questions. However, the above reflection indicates that, differently from my first conference experience, I had tried to engage in the presentation: I persuaded myself to
follow it, to reflect on the research problem, and work out strategies. What is more important, I had realised that I must learn something from participating in these research events, no matter if it was about research knowledge, research skills or English expression. Six months later, I attended the Institute for Educational Research (IER) Conference. That was the second time I attended a formal academic conference. In my journal, I recorded:

I read through the abstracts and marked some I was interested in. It was quite lucky that I was the first one to present. I had plenty of time to listen to the papers. Besides our seven Master Students, the rest were PhD students from different universities in NSW. I found some Australian candidates like to make their PowerPoint slides concise, for example, a student only gave one word for each slide. It was quite impressive; however most of the Asian candidates like to have slides with more detail. For me, slides with some key words and structures help to remember my presentation. I was impressed by the figures one student used to show the result of her findings. I asked one PhD student some questions during dinnertime and he explained patiently. I learned some things from those PhD students and wish one day I could present as fluently as them. (23/5/2009)

In the second experience, I engaged in the conference more actively. The booklet containing abstracts was taken and used as a tool to get familiar with the conference, and dinnertime was used as a chance to communicate with other researchers. I made some critical comparisons and learned some knowledge from others.

7.2.3 Narrative 10: don’t be ashamed of asking

Trying to be brave enough to ask questions was one of the most valuable experiences I learnt. Due to the cultural and educational contexts, I felt most of my fellow VTRs did not raise questions as frequently as students in Western countries in tutorials and workshops. Take myself as an example: when giving a speech, I tended to give profound or wise views or understandings (in my
eyes) rather than to reveal problems. This was quite obvious in the initial research workshops. I often talked about what I had completed or achieved. I shared interesting experiences in research and teaching, while mentioning the problems or difficulties I had encountered casually. My initial attitude toward workshops with supervisor panels was negative.

Each Friday, we seven VTRs had a workshop with our supervisory panels:

I don’t have too much idea to say in tomorrow’s workshop. Bloody Friday! (8/27/2008)

The workshops provided a group of students who engaged in similar research an opportunity to discuss their research widely with supervisory panels.

However, I just took them as a regular routine. I did not bring questions to the workshops and I did not really want to gain some insights from my peers or supervisors. Interestingly, I was worried by the idea that I did not have ‘brilliant’ ideas to present in the workshops. Months later I realised that my prior concept was wrong. I paid a cost by following my past practice as a student in China and copying it into Australia as a research candidate:

There is a Chinese idiom: 闭门造车 bi men zao che (make a cart behind closed doors/work behind closed doors). I guess I am that kind of person. The price was that it cost me nearly a month to get a clear focus on the problem for my research. Today, by discussing with my supervisors about the concern I have had one month, I became clear about this confusion. I was impressed by the primary school students’ frequent questions in my lessons. In this respect, I think I have learned from my students. (3/10/2008)

In Chinese culture, there is no lack of moral sayings from ancient times which are meant to encourage students to be active learners, such as 不耻下问 bu chi xia wen (do not feel ashamed to ask and learn from others); 勤学好问 qing xue...
hao wen (diligent and inquisitive); 三人行必有我师 san ren xing bi you wo shi (two heads are always better than one). I learnt these notions very early, but I did not use them to promote my own learning actively. These sayings reassured me that I should not hesitate to discuss concerns or difficulties with others. Later on, I found I came to value the workshops with supervisor panels as expert consultations:

These days, I am a bit worried about an issue. I don’t understand the role of theory in my thesis. Vygotsky’s work, for me is hard to understand. I have spent nearly a month in reading the related books. I am lost. I don’t think the theory plays a positive role in my study. I am confused with various terms. I think I need to discuss this concern with supervisors on Friday. (4/5/2009)

7.3 Conclusion

The 10 narratives in this chapter show different aspects of the learning process that occurred as I developed teaching and researching skills. Each narrative is structured in a similar fashion: indicating a problem, how I tried to solve it and how I acted in similar circumstances at a later time. The next chapter, the second stage of analysis, takes each narrative and reviews it in terms of the four elements of ZPDs discussed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 8

Single Case Analysis: 4-elements in the ZPD

Introduction

Data for this study is displayed in two chapters. Chapter 5, memories of my English learning experiences, provides evidence to answer the first contributory research question: How does my cultural and historical background impact on my learning in Australia? Chapter 6, narratives of 10 ‘magic moments’, illustrates the learning process that I engaged in, and begins to answer contributory questions two and three: How do various tools mediate my professional learning as a beginning teacher? What insights do other voices or perspectives give, into my teaching performance?

This chapter, as the second stage of data analysis, continues to probe the second contributory question by reviewing each narrative. Using Ollerenshaw and Creswell’s (2002) Problem-Solution Narrative Structure, each narrative outlines the problem for which I constructed a ZPD and follows the solution process in terms of the four elements of the ZPD, as previously explained (Chapter 3). Data from my reflective journal is in italics.

8. 1 Narrative 1: lesson plans

As described in the narrative I found some difficulty in planning lessons, particularly with respect to sociocultural issues. The incident described was about asking the children to bring photos of family members to class.

8.1.1 Problem

The issue in Narrative 1 revealed that I had a problem in constructing appropriate lesson plans. To be more specific, the problem was that I did not bring the consideration of social or cultural issues into the lesson plan. Since I had no experience of working with students before, I lacked the sense of protecting students that other, experienced teachers have: Most of the time, I constructed lesson plans rely on the experience and scholastic knowledge I gained in China ... I don't know how to care about their feelings.
8.1.2 Actions

Mediation

There were two different kinds of mediation in this narrative. Both centred on speech. Mediation 1: discussing teaching plan with a class teacher enabled me to see this problem in my teaching. Mediation 2: reflecting that issue in my reflective journal. The process of reflective writing enabled me to record the issue and further explore this issue.

Tools and signs

The tools and signs in Narrative 1 involved the class teacher’s feedback about my lesson plan, lesson plans and reflective journal. The oral speech (class teacher’s feedback) enabled me to share ideas with the class teacher, see the problems and gain suggestions from her. The words and symbols in my lesson plans guided my teaching, especially in the initial stages: I could not teach without them. Reflective writing provided a way to reflect on that issue and to re-organise my thinking. The reflective journal provided a place for me to record that event after our conversation.

8.1.3 Solution

Internalisation

After discussing the issue with the class teacher, I took on a more teacher-like attitude, as I reflected in my journal: as a teacher I need to do my best to care for every student’s feeling. It was during the reflection process that I came to realise the benefits and importance of discussing lesson plans with class teachers: It is beneficial to discuss the lesson plan with teacher and to gain some cultural knowledge from the teacher. I did exactly as the teacher suggested: The teacher suggested me to ask the students to bring any photo they like instead. Discussing lesson plans with class teachers made me feel confident to carry out the plans.

Appropriation

This narrative revealed that what I had learned from the teacher was first, care about students’ feelings and second, be flexible with teaching plans. What I
had learned through the process of reflective writing was that I should discuss lesson plans with teachers. A subsequent lesson, ‘reporting ages of family members in Mandarin’, indicated I had entered into the appropriation stage: I checked with class teachers if it is ok to ask them to report their family members’ age in Mandarin. Instead of following lesson plans exactly, I often modified them to better suit different classes: My teaching plans in those classes were not always the same. I usually made some changes according to different classes, especially after discussing with the class teachers. Gradually over time, I felt confident enough to plan the lessons independently: I do not remember when I stopped discussing lesson plans with the teachers. Data from the teachers’ observational feedback also indicated that I gained confidence in preparing lessons and showed respect to the students.

8. 2 Narrative 2: comprehending teacher attitudes to me

8.2.1 Problem

Narrative 2 revealed I had a problem in my relationship with Teacher B. This affected my teaching: I felt my performance was quite different in class A and class B, whose teacher worked out the teaching plans for me, and arranged every detailed step for my teaching. I felt she was doing the job that I should have been doing. It was hard for me to find an identity as a teacher in Teacher B’s class. It made me feel embarrassed.

8.2.2 Actions

Mediation

Initially, mediation took the form of writing in my reflective journal. This helped me think through the situation so that I was able to talk to Teacher B. In this instance I used three different forms of speech as a mediation.

Tools and signs

The tools and signs were apparent in teachers’ attitudes and in my reflective journal. Teachers’ attitudes were mainly expressed in their speech, their physical gestures, and their facial expressions and eyes, enabling me to compare the attitudes of teachers A and B, which alerted me to the problem,
leading me to critically reflect on this issue in my reflective journal. Here the physical tools of writing and the psychological signs of the words and letters that I wrote, allowed me to further explore the reasons behind the phenomenon.

8.2.3 Solution

Internalisation

Through reflecting in the journal, I came to understand why the two teachers’ attitudes were so different. Reflection also enabled me to find strategies to solve the problem. I decided to increase interaction with Teacher B: it is the time for me to ask but not wait for help. By writing reflections in my journal, I came to realise my initiating role in my learning context.

Appropriation

In this case, the idea I first internalised was that classroom teachers’ support was essential in my teaching. Therefore, I came to realise that I needed to take the initiative in seeking support. By increasing discussion about the lesson plans with Teacher B, the relationship between us improved. It helped me to see that Teacher B had a genuine interest in my development as a teacher: she now always asks me what is my lesson plan and if there is anything she could help me with ... most of the time, she frees me to conduct teaching in her class. Data from observations indicate the teacher’s positive comments twelve months after I recognised this problem, showing that by initiating moves to change the teacher’s attitude toward me I had successfully adopted a teacherly attitude. An appropriation stage was evident in my process of assisting a new Ningbo student; I was able to demonstrate appropriation of my understanding of a positive attitude to novice teachers: I encouraged her to give her own ideas about the plans ... I quite enjoyed these open discussions which were based on a comfortable relationship we had established. In doing this, I felt relaxed and comfortable. This example indicates that, based on my own experience, I was clear on the importance of setting a comfortable learning environment for a novice teacher.
8.3  Narrative 3: I need a mentor

8.3.1 Problem

The problem in this narrative was that I felt weak and exhausted with teaching in my third teaching term. To me, it was an interesting phenomenon. I thought I should have been finding teaching easier as my skills developed, but I felt it was harder to teach in my third term: the students were not concentrating as before. This led me to feel exhausted.

8.3.2 Actions

Mediation

The children’s lack of concentration and my exhaustion were the first mediating factors. Difficulty gaining students’ attention led me to question my teaching strategies: why did teaching become harder than in the initial stage? At first, I considered it as a backward step in my teaching. I could not understand why I felt so tired. The students’ behaviour is an example of physical signs, while the exhaustion is an example of a psychological sign. Both indicated that an action needed to occur.

In seeking to understand this situation I spoke to the class teacher, who helped me to understand that it was because of the teachers’ non-involvement that I had to control the classroom behaviour independently: Today a classroom teacher told me that I have improved a lot and that’s why she does not intervene in my lesson this term.

Finally, I turned to my reflective journal as a means of mediating the students’ behaviour, my feelings of exhaustion and inadequacy and the teacher’s explanation.

Tools and signs

The tools and signs in this narrative involve students’ responses in class, a class teacher’s feedback, a reflective journal, and Teacher A’s attitude. The students’ responses included their speech and behaviours in lessons. It directly impacted on my teaching: I felt students were not as concentrated as before; I hardly
could achieve a good teaching result. The conversation (speech) with the teacher led me answer why I had slipped back in teaching. It was actually not a backward step, but in the teachers’ eyes, I had developed enough to teach independently: \textit{I have improved a lot and that’s why she does not intervene in my lesson this term.} The class teacher’s feedback about my teaching led me to see my progress. This finding really surprised me. It led me to reflect on this issue in the journal. The writing in reflection allowed me to investigate why the issue occurred in my teaching and to actively explore ways for improving my teaching strategies.

**8.3.3 Solution**

**Internalisation**

It was through reflective writing that it became to clear to me that I wanted a mentor to provide some extra help about specific teaching strategies: I need someone to observe my teaching and give me some feedback and suggestions. Adopting a professional attitude, I was willing to have some teachers observe my lessons and give me more specific guidance. I decided to find a mentor.

**Appropriation**

The appropriation stage was evident in two outcomes. First, I selected a mentor who was a close friend. I trusted her and felt safe to reveal concerns to her. My positive response to the mentor’s first observation indicated the success of our relationship: I am indeed value the importance. It helps me to see my problems in teaching and to gain good suggestions to deal with these problems. Second, I was able to use the lessons I had learnt about mentoring when I was asked to guide and assist the new VTR.

**8.4 Narrative 4: praising and punishing students**

**8.4.1 Problems**

The first problem was I did not know how to respond positively to students when their work was not exactly what I was expecting: I found the teachers in Australian classrooms rarely scold the students because of a wrong answer, or even say “no” directly. This is quite different from my learning experience. I
wanted to learn how to praise students so that I could be a better teacher.

The second problem was behaviour management. I had problems with controlling student behaviour; I did not know how to punish naughty students. I was concerned that if I shouted at them that they would not like me. Teacher feedback indicated that this was another area that I needed to improve.

8.4.2 Action

Mediation

A range of speech acts were the major mediators for these related problems. My inner thoughts, my concerns, first alerted me to this problem. I discussed my concerns with my mentor, who gave me some suggestions that I wrote down. She recognised that by teaching me exact phrases to use she was teaching me new cultural knowledge.

Tools and signs

This is the only incident where I took precise notes and rehearsed speech acts with my mentor. Speech, in both physical and psychological forms, was the catalyst for both recognising and solving this problem. Physical tools and signs included my mentor’s written and oral comments and suggestions, which allowed me to have a clear picture about my teaching performance; the notebook where I wrote her dictated suggestions; and my reflective journal, which enabled me to explore this issue, such as linking my past learning experience in China with my current teaching. Psychological tools and signs included my mentor’s attitude in the process of assisting me, the tones of voice that I tried to copy and the confidence with which I approached my mentor as a result of the trust that was important in our friendship.

My mentor provided some simple suggestions for the behaviour problem, such as: put students’ names on board if they are talking. This was an interesting suggestion because it would be a tool for me and, at the same time, a sign for the students. I decided to try it in the next lesson.
8.4.3 Solution

Internalisation

From the mentor, I came to understand why teachers always respond positively: a teacher’s negative comments would lead the students to feel frustrated. This is not good for quality learning. I gained strategies from the mentor in dealing with this issue: Instead of saying “No” directly, she suggested me say “A good try, but not the answer I want”, or “You are on the way to the answer”, or “A very close answer”, or “Don’t worry, it takes a life time to do that” and so on. A further indicator that I had internalised these suggestions was the way I implicitly rehearsed them. The mentor’s suggestion led to a good teaching effect: I felt more confident and secure to response to students.

I tried writing students’ names on the board, as my mentor had suggested and as I had seen other teachers do. However, I felt uncomfortable because I thought it did not seem right for a ‘big sister’ to behave this way.

Appropriation

The appropriation stage could be found in the way I adapted the mentor’s suggestions. I thought I should do exactly what my mentor said. I recited the words recorded in my notebook; however, I found it hard to say them in teaching, because my English was not good enough at that time. It was hard for me to respond to students with long sentences so I shortened the sentences provided by my mentor: Usually I said “a good try”, “very close”, or “you are on the way”. I adapted the original sayings provided by the mentor into brief phrases because they are easier to memorise. By doing that, I felt comfortable and confident in teaching. The evidence from the mentor’s observation comments supports this development. In the first observation, my mentor noted I needed to give more positive comments to students in the learning process. In the second observation, my mentor suggested I provide more positive comment on students’ behaviour. These indicated I had improved in the area of giving more positive comments in students’ answers.
I appropriated the suggestions about behaviour by making a new rule. I used the mentor’s suggestion because my identity as a beginning teacher was quite different from the experienced teachers: as a young teacher who was treated as older sisters by the students, I wanted to avoid punishing the students. I made behaviour requirements specific in a way that did not make me feel bossy or superior: I told them that in my lessons, raising a red highlighter means instruction time and they need to stop talking. Results were very good and I felt comfortable and more confident to manage classroom behaviour: the students were quite interested in the new rule … more important, this rule controlled order without punishment. I feel comfortable to use it.

Data from my mentor’s first observation feedback indicated that I needed to try and utilise other techniques to gain students’ attention. In the second observation, my mentor again suggested I try using another strategy to gain student attention. However, the scores the mentor had given were different. In the first observation, I received NA (need assistance; can not solve situation independently). In the second observation I received D (developing independence). The change indicated I had improved in the area of behaviour management.

8.5 Narrative 5: learning from students

8.5.1 Problem

I found Australian students like to raise questions frequently in class time and the problem was that I did not know how to respond to those frequent questions: should I stop to listen or should I ignore them? … My previous educational experience had led me to regard that behaviour as a disturbance. I expected the students to listen quietly and prepare their answers carefully: I felt that good classroom order equals to a quiet environment.

8.5.2 Action

Mediation

There were two different mediation points in this incident. Both involved speech acts. Mediation 1: A student’s question led me to realise that students
do think critically. It was the first time I heard voices from students. The student’s question was hard to answer. I felt I was being challenged: I was stunned by that unexpected question. Mediation 2 involved both the thinking process that resulted from the student’s question and the written reflections I made in my journal.

**Tools and signs**

The tools and signs in this case were students’ responses, my past learning experiences and my reflective journal. The students’ response led me to think critically on the issue of raising questions in class time. The student’s question allowed me to get feedback about teaching: By communicating with them in the class, I could get an idea of how far away their learning had progressed; what they had mastered; what they still needed further explanation. My past learning experience provided me the reason why I initially felt uncomfortable with students raising questions. By reflecting on that issue and my past learning experiences in China, I came to understand the reason why I initially had a negative attitude toward students raising questions. I saw the value of listening to students’ voices.

### 8.5.2 Solution

**Internalisation**

I changed my view about student questioning and had a more positive view. When I realised the issue, I became more ready to listen to and answer students’ questions when I was teaching: I feel, rather than lecturing, I should stop to listen to them. By reflecting on the issue in my journal, I decided to: try my best to make students feel supported and comfortable in my lessons. I believe learners could not be well supported if they don’t feel safe to reveal problems or difficulties to expert. More important, this event led me to realise the big difference of classroom atmosphere between China and Australia; this phenomenon led me to reflect on this issue critically.

**Appropriation**

Because I did not want the students’ frequent questions to interrupt my lesson
plan, I asked them to raise questions in a particular time I set. By doing this, I felt comfortable, since I could receive feedback from students without interrupting my lecturing. Besides, I also had a desire to apply what I had learned in Australia to China: I return to China and become a teacher very soon ... I will try my best to make students feel supported and comfortable in my lessons. The data from the mentor’s observation comments indicated progress in this area. In the second observation, my mentor noted I listened to students and involved many students often in a variety of situations. The mentor also mentioned in the observation notes that I am a very respectful person; I show respect to individual students. It indicated that I listened to the questions raised by students. I had improved in this area.

8.6 Narrative 6: students are a great inspiration

8.6.1 Problem

The problem in this narrative is that initially I was not really eager to learn to be a teacher. My aim in coming to Australia was to improve my English as a voluntary teacher in public schools. I did not really love teaching: it was not always happy and comfortable for me. Sometimes it was tiring: after an entire afternoon’s teaching, I felt exhausted. Sometimes it was intense and I felt nervous. I worried about how I would survive in the high school.

8.6.2 Action

Mediation

Speech was the form of mediation in this narrative. Positive interactions with students in and out of classrooms were important in understanding how they regarded me. Receiving presents from the students led me to know that I was loved and respected by students. It cheered me and gave me job satisfaction. By chatting with a student, I knew my lessons were popular among students and I came to realise that as a teacher I was actually influencing my students and the people around them.

Reflective writing was another important mediating element. When students chatted to me I noted that I was not as exhausted as I had been just two minutes
before. Over time when I thought about the students I felt really proud to be a teacher: I felt any tiny thing I did in teaching might lead to some differences in individual students ... I am quite proud with this ‘magic power’ of a teacher as I can make a difference to my students’ learning.

**Tools and signs**

The tools and signs in this narrative were students’ responses and my reflective journal. The students’ responses involved their speech, facial expressions, and their behaviour. These led me to know how students thought about my lessons and me: *Miss Weng! She taught us well! ... She is looking forward to attending* my lesson next year when she enters Year 4. The gifts I received from students were direct and very powerful inspiration I gained from teaching: a feeling of contentment about my job fills my mind. The facial expressions such as the excitement on the students’ faces and eyes inspired me and made me more confident in teaching. Reflective writing allowed me to record those touching incidents. It was not just a review process but I comprehended deeper understandings beyond those events: students were a great inspiration for my teaching ... *a class teacher told me she has been teaching* for 30 years, and had never thought to change her career. Now ... *understand why ... it is the* students who taught me to be a teacher. From them, I could always feel that I was trusted, valued, and respected.

8.6.3 Solution

**Internalisation**

I internalised the students’ responses and felt inspired and proud to be a teacher. I came to love teaching and students: I hoped my students could learn more things from my lessons; I wanted to read happiness and excitement on their faces and in their eyes.

**Appropriation**

I was inspired to do my best to teach the students well. For instance, I tried to improve my handwriting. I prepared lessons dedicatedly with rich activities and various technologies. I felt responsible for their learning. Doing this
helped me to become a confident teacher. The evidence from my mentor’s observation feedback showed that I developed great activities to engage students; I prepared good, well-structured lessons; made great use of PowerPoint and the smart board. I tried various techniques and activities to engage students and to help them to learn Mandarin well. It indicated my teacher identity and responsibility were growing as a result of the inspiration of my students.

8.7 Narrative 7: an experience of assisting new VTRs

8.7.1 Problem

The schools asked me to guide and assist a new VTR, Hui, because they believed that I had learnt so much. Given I was a beginning teacher, I felt I lacked confidence to assist a new VTR: I wondered if I was capable of being Hui’s mentor. I wondered if I could assist her effectively and what she would think about my teaching.

8.7.2 Action

Mediation

Assisting the new VTR allowed me to use my past experience: it reminded me of my initial teaching experiences a year before … I encouraged her to be brave and confident in herself. I told her stories about what happened during my initial teaching stage. I used my experiences to guide her. For example, we had a number of deep conversations, like those I had had with my mentor; I invited her to teach part of the lesson after a few weeks of observation. We talked and talked.

Being observed by the new Hui provoked me to be a better teacher: I tried my best to give clear directions to students and organised activities well, since I regarded it as a modelling for Hui. In this respect I acted as a teacher or expert to a novice.

As with all the other narratives, thinking about this experience and writing my thoughts in my reflective journal was important. Over time the journal had
become a way for not only recording thoughts, emotions and plans, but also critically analysing events in relation to current and past experience.

**Tools and signs**

My teaching and learning experiences in Australia were psychological signs for me when I planned how I would assist Hui. Her responses included her speech and her teaching performance. Conversations with Hui enabled me to know Hui’s concern about teaching and allowed me to encourage her and give her helpful suggestions. It helped to develop a mutual understanding and good relationship: I was aiming to develop a friendship with Hui and make each one clear our roles in this context. Her teaching performance led me to think critically about teaching strategies.

My past experiences had been used to work out strategies to help Hui. For instance, the experience of learning with my mentor led me to imitate my mentor when assisting Hui: I believe the mutual understandings and trust we had established in the conversation smoothed both the mentor’s work and my learning. I was impressed by that conversation. Therefore, I also initiated several in-depth talks with Hui ... my mentor always helped me to control the students’ behaviour, which enabled me to focus on my own teaching ... Therefore, in Hui’s following lessons, besides observing I also helped her to control students’ behaviour. It allowed Hui to put her focus on teaching the content. At one stage I had a difficult observation experience with a Mandarin teacher in a high school. This experience led me to believe in the importance of teaching practice, which was revealed in the process of helping Hui: Most of the time, rather than spending the whole time doing observations, I invited Hui to join in the teaching ... given that Hui will continue my teaching after I leave, I invited her to join in the teaching, since I did not want her to feel the panic I experienced before.

Reflective writing allowed me to explore the critical issues in my journal. It allowed me to articulate my past experiences with the issues I encountered in the process of helping the new VTR. It enabled me to find strategies to help Hui. Through reflective writing, I had a deeper understanding of my own
professional development.

8.7.3 Solution

Internalisation

Working with the new VTR drove me to provide good modelling for her: I tried my best to give clear directions to students and organised activities well, since I regarded it as a modelling for Hui. The experience helped me to have a deep understanding of teaching and professional development: the conversations with Hui also made me to realise that nervousness in different degrees, is actually inevitable for everyone. Thus, I viewed my own learning and development more positively ... I came to understand it is teaching practice lead one to be a confident and flexible teacher.

Appropriation

Despite my initial concerns about mentoring Hui, I found that I was able to draw on my background and experience to guide her. I changed from a novice to an expert. The teachers were confident that I could teach Hui and I met their expectations. I was a teacher, not a VTR.

8.8 Narrative 8: reflective writing

8.8.1 Problem

The problem in this narrative was: I was reluctant to do reflective writing. I had a negative attitude toward it: it was difficult to record my life in English ... I just wrote a short paragraph or even several sentences. At first I viewed reflection as homework required by my supervisor. Initially, my attitude was negative.

8.8.2 Action

Mediation

Paradoxically, writing in my reflective journal was a mediating device for this event. I used the journal to express my confusion and anger and the difficulties I had. In addition to the journal I used a software application that allows phone
calls on the Internet to chat to my family and friends in China. Although they could not help with my problems, the act of writing about my concerns seemed to trigger a critical thinking process.

In addition, I turned my academic reading to the problem. Reading about a problem that was important to me helped me learn the discipline of academic reading.

Drawing on the structure and discipline I learnt when I was at school in China I used my reflective journal for another purpose. It became a tool for organising my life and work schedule. That way, the space where I planned my day was the space where I reflected on my day.

**Tools and signs**

The tools and signs in this narrative were my supervisor’s requirement of writing reflections, and were both physical and psychological. Although I was initially reluctant to write reflections, the supervisor’s requirement kept me writing. I was informed by the literature about reflective writing and came to realise it is a strategy for self-improvement. Through reflecting the issue of reflective writing in my journal and writing to my family and friends in China, I gained a deep and critical understanding about it. Finally, the self-discipline instilled in me when I was a student in China helped me to focus on solving this problem.

My reluctance to write reflections was not something I discussed with my supervisor or the other VTRs. So, although speech was the major mediator, it was inner or written speech rather than oral speech. Psychological signs, such as the memories of past learning experiences and thoughts about what I was reading, prompted much of the inner speech.

**8.8.3 Solution**

**Internalisation**

I wanted to be a researcher. Professor Singh gave us a red-covered book to use as a journal, suggesting that that’s what researchers do. The discipline I
imposed on myself was designed to make me feel like a researcher. By reflecting my feelings about reflection and what I learned from the literature, I developed a deeper understanding about the role of reflection in my learning and teaching. I got used to reflecting issues in my journal; I realised its value. My attitude became more positive.

Appropriation

I used reflective writing as a tool in learning and teaching. I found that it did not matter whether I wrote my reflections in English or in Chinese; writing helped me think. I reflected on my mentor’s comments in the first observation. In the second observation, my mentor’s comments indicated I had improved in many areas. It indicated that reflective writing played an active role in my professional learning.

8.9. Narrative 9: develop an attitude of ‘exchange and sharing’

8.9.1 Problem

This narrative was about my lack of engagement at the first academic conference I attended. I had an incorrect attitude toward research: I was indeed very lucky that no one raised a question; otherwise I might have been embarrassed with some challenging questions ... I blindly followed others into different rooms to listen to different presentations.

8.9.2 Action

Mediation

Mediation 1: conversation with supervisor. A conversation with my supervisor led me to think critically about the true purpose of attending conferences. However, I did not raise my embarrassment with my supervisor.

Mediation 2: Conferences are events that are alive with speech mediation. At later conferences and seminars I attended other researchers’ presentations: It is really scary being ‘just’ a student surrounded by so many people who seem to be much more knowledgeable than me ... Today’s presentation was difficult to follow. I learnt to read the abstracts so that I had some idea of what each
presentation would be about.

Mediation 3: reflective writing. The mediation of writing a reflective journal after the events led me to record what I had learnt and reorganise my thinking.

**Tools and signs**

The tools and signs in this narrative were the supervisor’s questions, reflective journal, abstracts and other researchers’ speeches and slides. The supervisor’s questions led me to regard conference participation as a critical issue. The presentations (oral speech) of other researchers allowed me to compare and gain knowledge from them. The interactions with others in conferences allowed me to express concerns about research and to share knowledge with others.

Reflective writing allowed me to record events in my journal. It enabled me to explore some critical issues that happened when I attended conference presentations. It allowed me to have a deeper understanding about what I had learnt from those activities.

**8.9.3 Solution**

**Internalisation**

Through the mediation of conversing with my supervisor, I had internalised that I had an incorrect attitude toward conferences: As a research candidate, I blush for myself, not just because I had nothing to say about the research, but because of my improper attitude toward the conference.

Through the mediation of reflective writing, I internalised the real goal of attending a conference: rather than an individual show, the real benefit of attending a conference is to share minds with people, so as to get questions and information that might be useful to my own research.

**Appropriation**

Initially, I did not engage in academic conferences, because I did not see myself as a knowledgeable researcher. Later, at a seminar I tried hard to make
sense of the presentations: I persuaded myself to follow it, to reflect on the research problem, and ... learn something from participating in these research events, no matter it is about research knowledge or research skills, English expression.

By the time I attended the IER conference, I had learnt to make use of the abstracts to better engage in the conference: I read through abstracts and marked some I was interested in. Rather than blindly following others, this time I chose to listen to presentations purposefully: I had plenty of time to listen to the other researchers I had marked in the booklet. Rather than simply enjoying food, I took the opportunity of dining with others as a way of exchanging and sharing knowledge: I asked one PhD student some questions during dinnertime and he explained patiently. I felt and acted more like a researcher.

8.10 Narrative 10: don’t be ashamed of asking

8.10.1 Problem

I did not have a correct attitude toward workshops with supervisors: I just took them as a regular routine. I did not bring questions to the workshops and I did not really want to gain insights from my peers or supervisors. Interestingly, I was worried by the idea that I did not have ‘brilliant’ ideas to present in the workshops.

8.10.2 Action

Mediation

The mediation of discussing with supervisors helped me to solve a concern I had the month before. The mediation of teaching Mandarin in Australian classroom helped me realise the importance of interaction with others. The mediation of reflective writing allowed me to understand the events.

Tools and signs

The tools and signs in this narrative were the Chinese idioms, my teaching experience in Australia, and my reflective journal. The Chinese idioms I learnt
helped me to think through the process. My teaching experience in primary schools allowed me to see the learning mode in Australian classrooms (student-centred); it helped me to get familiar with this learning mode and use it in my own learning in the university workshops. Reflective writing enabled me to think out strategies to solve problems I encountered in my research project.

8.10.3 Solution

Internalisation

I came to realise my previous attitude to the workshops was incorrect. It was a mode of teaching and learning that I was not familiar with. Months later I realised that my prior concept was wrong. I paid a cost by following my past practice as a student in China and copying it into Australia as a research candidate ... I told myself do not hesitate to discuss concerns or difficulties with others.

Appropriation

I regarded workshops as expert consultations: These days, I am a bit worried about an issue ... I think I need to discuss this concern with supervisors on Friday. It indicated I had understood the real function of workshops and engaged in it actively by asking questions and revealing concerns. It indicated that I understood the role of collaborative learning for real researchers.

8.11 Conclusion

This chapter has taken my recollections of learning English in China and Australia reported in Chapter 5, the feedback presented in Chapter 6 and the 10 narratives from Chapter 7, and mapped the learning process that was revealed, using elements of the ZPD. The next chapter examines each of those elements across all cases. It aims to uncover how each element was used.
CHAPTER 9

Across case Analysis: Understanding the Four Elements in the ZPD

Introduction

This chapter is Stage 3 of a four-part analysis. Stage 1 displayed the data in the form of reflections on my experiences of learning English (Chapter 5), observation feedback (Chapter 6) and 10 narratives from my reflective journal (Chapter 7). These data underwent initial within-case (narrative) analysis in the second stage (Chapter 8). At this stage, evidence of the four nominated elements of the ZPD during the process of learning to be a teacher became apparent. This stage revisits each of those elements and analyses them across all cases (narratives). Analysis commences with mediation, then tools and signs, internalisation, and concludes with appropriation.

9.1 Mediation

Mediation is essential in sociocultural theory. Vygotsky argued “the central fact about our psychology is the fact of mediation” (1982a, p. 166, cited in Wertsch, 1985a, p. 15). In documenting the process of my learning to be a VTR, mediation, typically some form of speech or language use, becomes evident. These include interactions with various people such as classroom teachers, my mentor, students, my supervisors, the new VTR, and other researchers, reflective writing, chatting online to friends and family, and reading literature.

In most cases, mediation resulted from my identification of a concern arising from my sociocultural framework. That is, the cultural knowledge and understanding I brought with me from China challenged Australian cultural mores. Incidents such as not understanding the rate or impact of divorce in Australia, finding ways to manage classroom behaviour, comprehending the role of students’ questions in learning, and perceiving the value of research seminars and conferences, exemplify this factor.

Having identified problems, I sought mediation. Kozulin (2003) distinguishes two types of mediation—human mediation and symbolic mediation. Human
mediation is often reported as parents and teachers assisting the children’s or students’ learning. In this context the forms of mediation include “modelling, contingency management (rewards and punishment), feedback, questioning, instructing and cognitive functioning, strategy modelling, strategy awareness, presentation adjustment and transfer of responsibility, apprenticeship, guide participation and appropriation” (Kell, 2005, p. 80). These modes assume that the human mediator in a learning process should be an expert other. Such mediation is evident in my learning process. For instance, my supervisor’s questioning in Narrative 9 drew my awareness to the purpose of attending conferences; the supervisors’ instructions as mentioned in Narrative 10, helped me to solve difficulties I encountered in research; the classroom teachers’ feedback about my lesson plans in Narrative 1 enabled me to have confidence in conducting lessons; the mentor’s feedback, focused instructions, and modelling in Narrative 4 helped me to gain more appropriate teaching strategies.

One common point featured in those incidents and in the previous research is that the mediators in the learning process are expert or more capable others. The mediation provided by those mediators was purposeful and improvement-oriented. Those people used their knowledge and experience to help me, the learner. They set the learning environment and were able to give effective assistance when I encountered problems. However, on most occasions they did not establish the ZPD. In most instances, I, the novice, decided that I needed to find a way to improve and then sought out the assistance of experts.

The narratives indicate that mediation also occurred when I was placed in the position of expert other. The first occasion was when the students asked questions in class (Narrative 5). Initially I thought their questions were a rude interruption and showed deep lack of respect, because this is what I had learnt at school in China. However, their questions made me consider and reflect on the role of questioning in the learning process. As a result of mediation I realised that I had overlooked that aspect of teaching. The process of assisting the new VTR (Narrative 7) is another valuable mediational experience. I had to answer the new teacher’s questions, identify the problems in her teaching
and think of strategies. These clearly deepened my understanding about teaching and facilitated my own professional learning. In the above two cases, the challenges were from the novice rather than from experts. It seems, as an adult learner, I was able to transform the challenges from novices to facilitate my own learning.

Some non-expert human, or symbolic mediating elements were also identified as vital factors in my learning process. Kozulin (2003) argued that learning is an experience shaped by interactions mediated by symbolic tools. The symbolic mediators he lists include “different signs, symbols, writing, formulae, and graphic organisers” (p. 23). In my study, the symbolic mediators include teachers’ attitude, students’ attitude, and reflective writing. The interaction with classroom teachers in Narrative 2 provided an explicit example. The different attitudes of the class teachers, positive and negative, were mediational signs that had significant impact on my teaching and learning. The students’ attitudes as described in Narrative 6 have been identified as inspirational for me. These mediations occurred in the process of interacting with class teachers and students.

Reflective writing was another vital symbolic mediation in my learning as a VTR. In my study, writing was used to organise the lesson plans, to organise my work and life, to chat online with friends and family, and specially to record critical incidents in my reflective journal. Since thought is hard to capture, in my initial teaching stage, I used to write down the lesson plans and take those written plans into classroom. Otherwise, I did not have a clear structure about my lessons. Several narratives demonstrate how dependent I was on written plans, notes or scripts initially, but how I reduced this dependence over time. As mentioned in Narrative 8, writing allowed me to record ideas and knowledge gained from others. I recorded concerns or problems in the journal. I found when I chose to describe problems in my journal, that my attitude changed to be more positive. I also needed to describe my concerns or encounters with friends and family by typing into an online chat. I found this kind of mediation released me and helped me to regain a clear head. Kozulin argued that:
Psychologically, writing is not a paper-and-pencil application of verbal functions already developed through oral speech, but a creation of new psychological systems, which do not emerge spontaneously but become possible only because of systematic instruction. In a broader sense, the mastery of reading and writing is the road to a higher form of consciousness. Symbolization, which in oral speech occurs spontaneously and unconsciously, is mastered anew on a conscious and purposeful level in written speech. (1990, p. 184)

Although writing is considered as the major class of symbolic mediation, its influence on cognitive functioning is inexplicit. As Scribner and Cole explain, “different forms of literacy have different characteristics and a different impact on cognitive processing” (cited in Kozulin, 2003, p. 24). For instance, Kozulin (2003) reports that non-native language literacy in religion studies only turned out to influence the student’s memory but failed to show any influence on other cognitive functions. English is my second language. In my reflective journal, I used both English and Chinese. The reason for combining the two languages was that I wanted to take writing as a pure tool for thinking. Chinese, my native language, was used to express some feelings and ideas that were hard to express in English. Narrative 8 provides an explicit example of this. In my study, reflective writing as a form of symbolic mediation is dominant in the process of my learning. Reflective writing has been used in all of the ten narrative stories. This mediational process always led me to a profound understanding of the problems that concerned me.

Kozulin (2003) claims that the appropriation of symbolic mediators is dependent on the expert others to set for the learner; psychological tools can be mastered only in the process of special learning activities. This is replicated in my own experiences, in learning to be both a teacher and a researcher. I first engaged in reflective writing because my supervisors required me to do this. In other words, my supervisors first introduced reflective writing. It was only after I felt an intrinsic value for reflective writing that I saw its value as a learning tool.
9.2 Tools and signs

Physical and psychological tools and signs are vital in the learning process, for proponents of sociocultural theory. Vygotsky listed a number of physical and psychological tools and signs. “Psychological tools are those symbolic artifacts—signs, symbols, texts, formulae, graphic organizers—that when internalised help individuals master their own natural psychological functions of perception, memory attention, and so on” (Kozulin, 2003, p. 15). According to Vygotskian theory, psychological tools help to change mental functions. Kell argues that, “an important element of any psychological tool is that it must be used to enhance or improve performance” (2005, p. 70). In documenting the process of my learning to be a VTR, several of these physical and psychological tools and signs are evident. These include my reflective journal, feedback from teachers and students, attitudes, past experience or knowledge, supervisors’ instructions, lesson plans, other researchers’ speeches and slides. The reflective journal featured in each narrative.

Thought and speech are dominant in my study. I used thought to plan, muse, consider, wonder and worry. Inner speech was vital in the process of thinking as I reconciled my cultural background with the one I had been thrust into. Narrative 1, where I did not understand the impact of divorce on children, is an explicit example of this. Oral speech in the form of conversations with many people was a major source of learning for me. Vygotsky said oral speech is “a means of social coordination of the actions of various people” (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, p. 57), and this is replicated in my study. Two important examples are the deep conversations I had with my mentor, and my supervisor’s questioning about my conference participation. Without these kinds of conversations I would have failed to understand the teachers’ attitudes, the mentor’s suggestions, the students’ feedback, the supervisors’ instructions, and the new VTR’s feedback.

Vygotsky considered speech an essential cultural tool (Vygotsky, 1978). Oral communication between the teachers and me, as an external form of speech, enabled me to adopt the teachers’ suggestions. An important aspect of oral
speech is the manner in which it is conducted. Vygotsky seemed to assume that in learning situations with children, oral speech would be in the form of instruction. This was not always the case for me, as an adult learner. Often I sought clarification about an idea or questioned what I had seen or experienced. In terms of the ZPD, I was questioning the expert others rather than waiting for them to instruct me.

Written words in my reflective journal, as revised inner-speech, helped to organise thinking. As Kell noted “while tools and signs themselves are useful they become more meaningful when their use is governed or modified by inter- or intrapersonal speech” (2005, p. 74).

9.3 Internalisation

Internalisation is an essential process in the formation of a higher mental function. “Through internalisation what is originally an external and non-mental form of activity becomes mental; thus the process opens up the possibility of bridging this gap (between the non-mental and the mental)” (Galperin, 1967, pp. 28-29, cited in Lantolf, 2003, p. 351).

Exploring Vygotsky’s theory Cole (1990) found that the learning process involves a number of stages. Before internalisation, there is a stage where the learners mediate their activity by their oral speech at first and then through their inner speech. In my study, since reflective writing was used in this stage, the written words enabled me to have a better understanding of the incidents reflected in the journal. Importantly, writing the words always included a phase of inner thought, where I considered the problems I faced and chose the words I wanted to write. As previously indicated, sometimes, when I could not find the English words, I wrote in Chinese, reverting to a cultural form with which I was more familiar and comfortable. Thus, reflective writing in my study has been identified as a necessary pre-internalisation stage.

Gallimore and Tharp (1990) claim four stages of the ZPD. Stage 3, “where the performance is developed, automatized, and fossilised” is the internalisation stage. In this stage, any form of symbolic or human mediation is no longer
needed. Vygotsky (1978) argued that internalised thought, as a result of developed mental functioning, enabled one to respond automatically to a situation. In documenting the process of my learning to be a VTR, these findings are also replicated.

In my study, my changed attitudes indicated that new higher mental functions had been developed as the result of internalisation. For instance, I came to know, as a teacher, that I needed to plan lessons so that I did not hurt the students’ feelings and decided to discuss lesson plans with my class teachers (Narrative 1); I came to understand why teachers had different attitudes toward my learning and decided to take the initiative to ask for help (Narrative 2); I realised the importance of the assistance from a mentor and decided to find a mentor (Narrative 3); I learnt how to respond to students’ behaviour appropriately (Narrative 4); I had a more positive view about student questioning and decided to increase communication with students during teaching (Narrative 5); I came to love teaching and students (Narrative 6); I came to understand that teaching practice leads one to be a confident and flexible teacher (Narrative 7); I realised the value of writing a reflective journal (Narrative 8); I came to understand the real purpose of attending academic conferences (Narrative 9); I realised the importance of wide interactions with other scholars (Narrative 10).

### 9.4 Appropriation

The term ‘appropriation’ is used in various areas. Rogoff (2008) points out that the basic idea of appropriation in a sociocultural context is that as a result of “participation, people change and in the process become prepared to engage in subsequent similar activities” (p. 66). In documenting the process of my learning to be a teacher/researcher, several appropriation examples are evident. These include: the way I independently modified lesson plans to suit different classes, how I utilised my past VTR experience to assist the new VTR, and modified my mentor’s suggestion to make myself feel comfortable when dealing with student behaviour; how I set a particular time for free communication with students during the class time, used reflective writing as a
tool to organise my thinking, engaged in the research conference positively with the help of the abstracts, discussed concerns and problems with supervisors in the research workshops. There are two common points featured in the above examples. First, all these examples happened in activities that I had attempted before but had needed help or support with. Second, the change I made during the processes made me feel comfortable to use those strategies.

Rogoff (2008) introduced the term appropriation as an extension of Vygotsky’s concept of internalisation. It emphasised the necessity of participation in subsequent similar activities at an independent level. I found the evidence in my research supported this idea. In my case, the practical teaching activity and the experience of assisting a new VTR set a good context for me to appropriate the knowledge I had internalised. It is through the process of teaching practice that I modified what I had gained from others and finally found comfortable ways for me to teach (Narrative 4). Assisting the new VTR allowed me to apply what I had experienced and also gave me a deeper understanding about teaching in many areas (Narrative 7).

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how four elements fundamental to ZPDs impacted on a novice teacher-researcher’s learning process. Mediation most frequently occurred through various forms of speech. While Vygotsky’s conception of the ZPD suggested oral speech was vital to learning, this study found that for an adult novice, written speech was a more significant mediator. There is ample evidence of the use of both physical and psychological tools and signs as I interacted in a range of social situations. Internalisation occurred as a process of copying or imitating the people I sought out, and appropriation occurred as I adjusted the procedures I copied to one that I was more comfortable using. The next chapter reflects on this study: what it achieved, who it benefitted, what its limitation were, and fields of future research.
CHAPTER 10
Discussion of Findings

Introduction

This last step explains how the data illustrate the use of self-created ZPDs in the development of my teaching and research. Further, it suggests reasons why, as an adult, I constructed my own ZPDs, and the factors that were vital in the process. Finally, the discussion refocuses on the concept of the ZPD as devised by Vygotsky, showing how it can be extended when adult learners are the novices. Discussion of the results answers the question: Do the mediation, internalisation and appropriation of physical and psychological signs impact on the novice teacher-researcher’s learning process?

Evidence from the current study raises three issues around mediation that extend the notion of the ZPD. First, human mediation does not always have to be provided by experts or more capable peers. Second, the mediation does not always have to be improvement-oriented. Finally, the people Vygotsky considered to be the novices—that is, students—can mediate teacher learning. Effectively, this means that the roles of novice and expert can be reversed. In the case of my study, the adult learner benefited from the novice’s mediation as well.

10.1 The Novice’s Initiative in Constructing Her Own ZPD

Vygotsky (1978) developed the concept of the ZPD to demonstrate children’s learning and development. He emphasised the leading role of expert others, stating, “we offer leading questions or show how the problem is to be solved and the child then solves it” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). It is often assumed that the assistance of more competent others is necessary in creating a ZPD. In emphasising the leading role of expert others there seems to be an assumption that the novice passively waits for the help offered by others. There is no conception of the novice actively seeking help for a self-identified problem.
The novice’s initiative in constructing the ZPD has not received extensive examination in Vygotskian research. A study of second language learners at a Malaysian university (Hussin, 2008) identified how students extended their learning/acquisition process via an online forum. The size of the ZPD was determined by the learners’ own initiatives and efforts. Nyikos and Hashimoto (1997) found that when constructing a collaborative ZPD, the novice took a positive role through self-regulation.

Self-regulation allows less experienced students to be aware of their equally important roles as questioners when seeking clarification, comprehensible information, and negotiation of meaning. The cases in the current study further support these two studies. In the initial teaching stage, through reflection, I recognised teaching problems by myself rather than having them pointed out by others. As soon as I realised a particular problem, I took an active role in searching for strategies and for assistance to solve that problem. For instance, when I found problems in teaching, I increased discussion of teaching plans with classroom teachers, gaining insights from the teachers. I asked questions and discussed concerns with my mentor and received more focused suggestions. I used reflective writing as a tool to explore problems and critical incidents. Doing this enabled me to re-organise my thinking. As a researcher, I found that by actively questioning and interacting with supervisors and other researchers, I gained insights about how to conduct research and was enlightened by other minds. Those cases indicate that by independently questioning, interacting, and exploring, an adult novice is able to determine what she/he needs to learn and creates a ZPD to achieve this.

However, a quite distinct feature in this study is that learning about sociocultural theory, in particular the ZPD, enlightened the researcher, a novice. Through learning theory I came to realise what I should do to facilitate my own development as a teacher and researcher. My learning was also impacted as I mastered research skills, especially reflective writing. It seems that in contrast to the adult novices in Hussin’s (2008) and Nyikos and Hashimoto’s (1997) studies, I had created my own ZPDs more systematically, with related scientific knowledge.
10.2 Social interaction in the ZPD

Social interaction is a crucial theme in sociocultural theory. Vygotsky emphasises the central role social interaction plays in learning:

Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

Human beings construct consciousness through interaction with the outside world, and mediation in the course of social interaction leads to learning and development (Kell, 2005; Verenikina, 2008). Although Vygotsky envisaged the benefit of the novice interacting with all the people in the learning environment, he seems to have narrowed the interaction to novice and experts when he defined the ZPD. The reason for this narrowness is that the concept of ZPD was initially introduced by Vygotsky to demonstrate children’s learning and development. Kell (2005) argues learning will occur if the learner finds expert others.

Social interactions in the ZPDs I had created are apparent in this study. For instance, the interactions with experienced class teachers and the mentor (Narratives 1, 2, 3 & 4) helped me to improve teaching skills as well as to see some issues related to cultural difference; in the course of conducting my research, interactions with my supervisors and some doctoral students (Narratives 9 & 10) enabled me to gain insights and guidance.

Contemporary research on the role of novices and experts critically examines Vygotsky’s notion.Valsiner (2003) argues that the positive role of more knowledgeable social other has dominated the use of the ZPD concepts in recent decades. However “the ‘social other’ may be not just ‘more knowledgeable’ but also more nasty—and instead of using the knowledge to enhance the development of the inferior partner, might delay or suppress it” (p. 7).
Following Valsiner’s lead, evidence from the current study raises three issues around interactional mediation that extend the notion of the ZPD, particularly the roles of novices and experts.

First, human mediation through social interaction in the ZPD does not always have to be provided by experts or more capable peers. Some interactions in this study show that learning also occurs if the learner is challenged by the questions raised by individuals traditionally considered novices, such as students. Narrative 5 indicated that, as a teacher I learnt from the questions raised by students. The data in Narrative 7 indicated that as a novice I became an expert, and continued to learn through assisting the new VTR. There were two primary benefits from the experience of assisting the new VTR: (1) it provided me opportunities to critically reflect on my teaching. Observing the new VTR’s lessons was just like watching a vivid video of my initial teaching. It enabled me to see some similar problems I had had as a beginning teacher. I understood why my mentor had raised those problems with me. (2) It provided me a chance to appropriate some mentoring strategies. For instance, before the new VTR visited schools, I initiated conversations with her. Through chatting, we shared ideas and each other’s expectations. I chose to do this because I valued the importance of mutual understanding in a mentoring relationship. The deep conversations with my mentor impacted on my experiences. My mentoring strategies were also affected by an unsatisfactory observation experience I had in a high school. At the time, I did not think I gained much by observing a teacher’s Mandarin lessons in high school. I gained some ideas by reflecting on this issue. Assisting the new VTR provided a chance for me to appropriate these ideas.

Second, mediation does not always have to be improvement-oriented. As the current study demonstrates, rather than modelling, instructing or guiding, my students and the new VTR just raised problems and questions that concerned them (Narratives 5 & 7). However, those challenges led me to think critically and enabled me to continue learning. Some casual interactions with students also led to improvement. Students were always a great inspiration for my teaching. Through interacting with students, I came to realise that I can make a
difference to my students’ learning. Their trust, value, and respect for me made me feel like a teacher, supporting Mayer’s (1999) notion of teacher identity as something personal. Narrative 5 reports on my initial reluctance to learn to be a teacher and shows how interaction with the students inspired me to help young people to learn, echoing Hobson et al’s (2004) findings on the reasons individuals choose to be teachers.

In both Narratives 5 and 7, mediation was not improvement-oriented, but on both occasions the learning that occurred resulted in improved self-confidence and in more focused teaching. Chong and Low (2008) argued that for beginning teachers, like me, “changes in perception of teaching and the profession could be related to influences from the environment in school, professional development, and socialization factors” (p. 70). In my study, the interaction with students outside the classrooms and the opportunities I had to chat with my mentor on the journey to and from school were socialisation events that mediated the development of my teacher identity.

Finally, the people Vygotsky considered to be the novices—that is, students and the new VTR—can mediate teacher learning. Valsiner (2003), in arguing that Vygotsky’s notion of the ZPD has fixed roles (the expert knows everything and the novice knows nothing) explains that with this structure, the novice can never know more than the expert and the expert does not need to learn any more. However, Narratives 5 and 7 exemplify a different perspective. In the case of my study, the adult learner benefited from the novices’ mediation as well. Effectively this means that the roles of novice and expert can be reversed.

10.3 The power of writing as a means of interaction and thinking

Vygotsky claimed a central role for language in cognitive development. Language in the form of inner speech acts as “an instrument of thought … as it aids the individual in seeking and planning a solution to a problem” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 30, cited in Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997). The relationship between written speech and inner speech is different from that of oral speech, because written speech is more conscious and more deliberately produced than oral
speech. Written speech is a key to inner speech (Vygotsky, 1986).

Kozulin (2003) further demonstrates that writing is more elaborate than oral dialogue. He argues that psychological development in the ZPD is essentially dependent on instruction. Under systematic instruction, it is possible for writing to create new psychological systems. Writing leads to a higher form of consciousness. Nyikos and Hashimoto (1997) argue that the written language in reflective journals leads to self-regulatory functions in the process of adult learners trying to gain interpersonal knowledge.

The cases provided in the current study substantiate Vygotsky’s conception that written speech is a key to inner speech that aids individuals’ thought. During my research journey, I had formed a habit of keeping a reflective journal. I reflected on critical incidents that happened in teaching, research and life. Reflections were used as a tool to record and revise knowledge I gained, to describe problems or concerns I encountered, and to organise my thinking.

Besides a tool for thought, writing in the current study has been identified as a means of interaction. Oral speech was emphasised by Vygotsky (1978) as a central tool for interpersonal mediation. According to Vygotsky, interaction in the ZPD is largely dependent on oral speech between the learner and the people in the learning environment. However, the cases in the current study demonstrated that it was possible and important to interact through written speech in my ZPDs. As indicated in Narrative 9, I used a computer to make contact with my family and friends. I did it by typing words. As showed in Narrative 3, I used email to contact Teacher C. These two cases indicate that writing is a powerful tool for interaction in my ZPDs.
CHAPTER 11
Implications and Conclusion

Introduction

The research reported in this thesis aimed to answer the overarching question: Do the mediation, internalisation and appropriation of physical and psychological signs impact on the novice teacher-researcher’s learning process? In answering this question the thesis has systematically examined a range of evidence, building a case in support.

This final chapter is divided into five sections. Section 1 provides an overview of the thesis. Section 2 reports on the implications of this study for educational practice in general. Section 3 considers how the research was limited and constrained. Section 4 makes recommendations for future research. Section 5 concludes with the assertion that the mediational factors, such as mentoring, reflective writing, and active interaction, were essential in the VTR’s ZPDs.

11.1 Overview of Thesis

The first chapter began by noting my past learning experience as the background of this study. The chapter then discussed the rationale for the research focus—first, observing and understanding the experiences of the teacher-as-learner in an important process of professional learning and second, exploring critical moments in my professional development as a teacher-researcher. The chapter outlined the theoretical framework—Vygotsky’s notion of the ZPD. The significance of this study was distilled into two aspects: a) extending current knowledge by exploring a new and un-researched aspect of the ZPD and b) investigating a new mode of teacher training.

The second chapter provided a review of the literature in two categories: becoming a teacher, and an outline of second language teacher education. The section on beginning teachers reviewed the rationale for becoming a teacher. The second section reviewed the goals of language teaching.
Chapter 3 described the theoretical framework of this study. The section on ZPD reported on Vygotsky's concept of ZPD and some previous investigations of ZPD. Five essential elements (tools, speech, mediation, internalisation and appropriation) in a ZPD were identified for further investigation. Speech and mediation later merged into one element for analysis purposes.

Chapter 4 outlined the research design and methodology to investigate the VTR’s learning development. It detailed the research methods, including research settings, modes of data collection and analysis. Finally, issues about validity, reliability, and ethics were also considered.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 were the first stage of analysis—data display. Chapter 5 displayed my recalled English learning experiences in China and Australia. It contributed to answering the subsidiary research question: How does my cultural and historical background impact on my learning in Australia?

Chapter 6 reported on the observational feedback from my mentor and two other classroom teachers. It contributed to answering the subsidiary research question: What insights do other voices or perspectives give into my teaching performance?

The first section briefly reiterates the feedback, in four tables. It captures my teaching performance over a period of 5 weeks. The second section of this chapter provides a critical comparison of the observational results made by these three teachers. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it provides data for triangulating purposes. Second, the information displayed in this chapter allows a greater depth of analysis in Chapter 9.

Chapter 7 used the device of 10 narratives to report on critical incidents related to teaching (seven narratives) and research (three narratives) as a VTR. The data was selected from my reflective journal over 18 months. First, the chapter described the incidents and issues that arose in my teaching experiences, such as the relationship with classroom teachers, the assistance I gained from the mentor, the inspiration of the students, and the opportunity to help a new VTR.
The chapter then describes the incidents and issues from my journey as a research candidate; for instance, the habits formed with the reflective journal and active interactions with other researchers.

Chapter 8, the second stage of data analysis—within-case analysis—analysed each narrative in terms of the four elements of the ZPD. In this stage the role of each of the four elements of the ZPD in the problem-solution process was established.

Chapter nine, the third stage of data analysis—across-case analysis—examined the data for each of the four elements across all cases, demonstrating the types of mediation, tools and signs, internalisation and appropriation that are important in developing teaching and research skills. This stage links all of the narratives using the framework of the ZPD, drawing out common features of the development process. Both chapters 8 and 9 contributed to answering the subsidiary research question: How do various tools mediate my professional learning as a beginning teacher?

Chapter 10—findings and discussion—the final stage of the analysis process, demonstrates that mediation, internalisation and appropriation of physical and psychological signs impact on the novice teacher-researcher’s learning process. Further, I argue that much learning occurred because I constructed my own ZPDs. The discussion refocuses on the concept of the ZPD as devised by Vygotsky, showing how it can be extended when adult learners are the novices.

11.2 Constraints and Limitations

Purposefully identifying the sites and individuals “does not necessarily suggest random sampling or selection of a large number of participants and sites, as typically found in quantitative research” (Creswell, 2003, p. 185). Time was a major limiting factor of this study. To study fully, professional strategies that combine the skills and perspectives need a long time scale. However, this was not possible, and therefore it is necessary to specify this limitation of the study.
11.3 Implications

Implications, based on the major findings of this research study, focus on those for (1) the professional development of teachers, (2) employees in other occupational fields, (3) the students’ learning, (4) further research.

11.3.1 Implications for the professional development of teachers and employees

I will go back to China and become an English teacher in a technical college in China. Although, as a volunteer teacher-researcher, I had some language teaching experiences in Australian primary and secondary classrooms, my future job will be a very different world for me because of the distinctly different educational systems in Australia and China. In Australia I taught students my first language, Mandarin; in China, I will teach students my second language, English. In Australia, I taught primary and high school students; in China, I will teach college students. My future job is challenging in some aspects. My ability to transfer what I learned in Australia to my future job deserves discussion.

This study reveals some critical mediations for the professional development of teachers. For example, some effective strategies to facilitate the VTR’s learning and development were addressed by this research: (a) active interaction with others, (b) initiatives the beginning teachers can take, such as using reflective writing as a strategy to mediate personal thought, (c) listening to the students, and (d) gaining mentoring assistance. This study serves as a model for the professional development of teachers, especially for beginning teachers. The teachers could use examples from this study to locate potential experts, to establish mutual understanding and support, to mediate critical issues and internalise new knowledge by reflective writing and practical appropriations.

This study further reveals that, by research-based learning with school-engaged teaching practice, the VTR had remarkable changes both in research capacity and teaching practice. Teacher education communities could take this study as an example to help student teachers make better transitions to their work.
11.3.2 Implications for employees in other occupational areas

As a research candidate, self-study research enabled me to investigate my own learning and development process. By articulating theoretical knowledge and practical experiences, I had a better understanding of learning and development. This study reinforced the essential role of four sociocultural elements in the learning process, namely, tools, mediation (speech), internalisation, and appropriation. Active interaction with others, and social activities, were identified as approaches for obtaining effective mediational tools. This study emphasised the fundamental and essential role of speech/language as a tool in personal learning and development. A key point to mastering knowledge or skills is appropriation. This only occurs during practice. I am confident that those rules apply universally no matter what career I will take in the near future.

No educational background or vocational training could provide perfect preparation before one enters a new occupation. Working is another kind of learning journey. Almost every career area needs flexible learners and critical thinkers. This study demonstrates how novices can become flexible learners and critical thinkers while gaining knowledge about learning and development.

11.3.3 Implications for students’ learning

In this study, critical analysis of my English learning experiences in China and in Australia reveals that appropriation is very important in mastering a language. Programs that focus on focused memorising or study only, cannot help a student master a foreign language; purposeful activities such as critical reading, teaching, and communication with native speakers were identified as keys to learning. Implications from this include: (1) the importance of incorporating students’ life experience into language learning, (2) expanding students’ learning environments.

From the perspective of the schools and students I worked with, my work as an inaugural ROSETE scholar has had an important impact on the school community. A successful Asia Education Foundation application (NALSSP Becoming Asia Literate: Grant to Schools) noted that the ROSETE program
has increased interest in and awareness of China and the Asian region. In an exciting development, the cluster of four schools in the neighbourhood plans to build demand for Asian languages amongst students and staff over the next three years.

11.4 Conclusion

Lev Vygotsky raised the theoretical concept of the ZPD. The Russian psychologist died before he could complete formulation of his theory, and more recent interpretations of his concept diverge in varying degrees. Current research on this Vygotskian concept mainly focuses on children, narrowing its conceptual usefulness. Studies of adults learning using the ZPD focus on process workers and university students and centre on development in a single area. New volunteer teacher-researchers need to develop simultaneously in many areas, thus creating numerous ZPDs. The notion that adults construct and operate parallel ZPDs remains at present a gap in the literature. This research extends current knowledge by exploring a new and un-researched aspect of the ZPD.
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sociohistorical psychology (pp. 175-205). Cambridge, UK.


Appendices
Appendix 1: University of Western Sydney Ethics Approval

Subject: HREC Approval H6825
Date: Monday, 6 April 2009 3:43 PM
From: Kay Buckley <K.BUCKLEY@uws.edu.au>
To: Marilyn Kell <M.Kell@uws.edu.au>
Cc: <16601680@student.uws.edu.au>

Notification of Approval

Email on behalf of the UWS Human Research Ethics Committee

Dear Marilyn and Jingjing

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

TITLE: Magic Moments: The ZPD and L2 Professional Development

Masters of Education (Honours) candidate: Miss Jingjing Weng

The Protocol Number for this project is H6825. 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 2009**. If you require an extension of approval beyond this period, please ensure that you notify the Human Ethics Officer ([humanethics@uws.edu.au](mailto: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/ors/ethics/human_ethics <http://www.uws.edu.au/research/ors/ethics/human_ethics>

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/ors/ethics/human_ethics <http://www.uws.edu.au/research/ors/ethics/human_ethics>

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

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

Kay Buckley
Human Ethics Officer
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797, Penrith Sth DC NSW 1797
Tel: 02 47 360 883
Appendix 2: State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP) Approval

Miss Jingjing Weng
K.2.26 School of Education
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797
PENRITH SOUTH DC NSW 1797

Dear Miss Jingjing Weng

I refer to your application to conduct in NSW government schools (Western Sydney Region) a research project entitled Magic Moments: The L2PO and L2 Professional Development.

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

Your approval will remain valid until 31 December 2009.

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

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

20 May 2009

NSW Department of Education & Training
Western Sydney Region Building TDC, Wulwara Education Precinct, Eastern Road, Quaker Hill NSW 2763 T 9208 7611 F 9208 7615
www.det.nsw.au Received Time 28 Jan, 14:19
Appendix 3: Principal’s Information Sheet

Project Title: Magic moments: the ZPD and L2 Professional development

Who is carrying out the study?
Jingjing Weng

This information sheet is for the school Principal.

The research will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Hons) at the University of Western Sydney, under the supervision of Dr Marilyn Kell.

What is the study about?
I have been teaching voluntarily at your school since July 2008 as part of an innovative collaboration between NSW DET (Western Sydney region), University of Western Sydney and Ningbo Municipal Council. Another aspect of this collaboration is the completion of a Master of Education (Hons). This, in part, involves a research study: I have decided to investigate my professional development as a teacher, using the theoretical concept of the ZPD as a framework. Using a self-study methodology, this research will conceptualise a new and unresearched aspect of the ZPD, and also provide some insights into new directions for teacher education. This statement is to inform you of the research I wish to conduct at your school, particularly the time frame and what I am asking of participants.

What does the study involve?
The study involves
a) The Year 6 Mandarin class. It is important that the students know about the research project and the possibility of their participation in it. The most efficient means for this to occur is for the students to have a statement read to them. If I read this to the students, I will be deemed to have breached ethics. So, I would like the Year 6 teacher to read this statement to them at the end of a lesson. This will be done on a day when I am at the school and able to answer student questions at either morning tea or lunch time. If this is not a satisfactory arrangement, I am happy to work with you to initiate the study in a manner that is least disruptive to the class in particular and the school as a whole.

At the end of 4 lessons over a 17 week period (Term 2 & 3) I will collect the students’ worksheets. Students will not write their names on their worksheets so that their anonymity is maintained. I will analyse the worksheets to test the improved quality of my planning, teaching and instruction.

As these students are minors, they will need parental consent to participate. Information sheets and consent
form with return envelopes will be posted to the parents/caregivers of every student in the class. I will supply the
forms and stamped envelopes but I would like the addressing to be carried out by school administrative staff.
This reduces the risk that I will have access to information that is not necessary for this study. Some parents
might like to meet me and to seek further information about the study. I would like to negotiate with you and the
class teacher a time that may be suitable for this that aligns with current school plans.

b) The Year 6 teacher will be asked to observe up to 6 of my lessons in Terms 2 & 3. She will be given a
checklist for this purpose and will be asked for her feedback after each lesson which I will record in my reflective
diary. The initial observation will help me to establish a baseline for the study. That is, it will determine which
skills, techniques and strategies I can achieve independently and which I still need assistance with. Subsequent
observations will help to determine if those skills with which I required assistance are becoming internalised,
mediated and appropriated to an independent level. The classroom teacher's participation does not require her
to alter her work patterns as she is currently in the classroom when I teach and gives me regular feedback.
Participation in the study requires her to focus on factors that are indicative of me working in one or more ZPDs.

c) In order to gain insight into a range of teaching strategies, I would like to observe, once each during Term 2,
the teachers of the Year 4 & 5 classes where I also teach Mandarin. Once again, this participation should not
interfere with the teachers' normal teaching practice. Disruption to the classes should be reduced because I am
familiar to all the students.

How much time will the study take?
The study will be conducted over 17 weeks. The observations will each take approximately 40 minutes and will
be conducted at my normal teaching time in the Year 6 class or during regular Year 4 & 5 classes.

Will the study benefit me?
This study will inform you of the way a novice L2 teacher internalises, mediates and appropriates the physical
and psychological tools that are part of the established culture of teaching in a NSW public school. It will help
you to understand the influences that aid strategy development for teachers who are in similar situations/
contexts as the researcher. As this school has indicated continuing interest in the volunteer teacher researcher program,
the results of this study will shed light on the ways future volunteers from a Chinese cultural background can learn to teach in
the Australian culture.

Will the study involve any discomfort for me?
The study should not involve any discomfort to you or any of the participants. All observations are focused on the
researcher, either as teacher or learner. All teachers will be asked to provide a pseudonym to maintain their
anonymity and no students will be identifiable.

How is this study being paid for?
The study is an unfunded project, conducted under the auspices of the School of Education, University of Western
Sydney.

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. Results of the study will be in a Master of Education (Hons) thesis which will be
lodged electronically with the University of Western Sydney library. Results of the study, maintaining
confidentiality, may be published in appropriate academic journals or presented at conferences and will be
presented at a DET forum in late 2009.

Can I withdraw from the study?
Participation is entirely voluntary. Prospective participants are not obliged to be involved and, if they do
participate, 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, Jingjing Weng 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 me
Jingjing Weng: 169916989@uws.edu.au
or my supervisor
Dr Marilyn Kell: m.kell@uws.edu.au

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 0083 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 will be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Appendix 4: Information Statement (Mentor)

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Magic moments: the ZPD and L2 Professional development.

Who is carrying out the study?
Jingjing Weng

This information sheet is for a classroom teacher (mentor).

The research will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Hons) at the University of Western Sydney, under the supervision of Dr Marilyn Kell, Lecturer, School of Education, College of Arts.

What is the study about?
This project is designed to investigate the researcher's professional development as a teacher by using the theoretical concept of the ZPD as a framework. By using a self-study methodology, this research will conceptualise a new and unresearched aspect of the ZPD, and also provides some insights into new direction for teacher education.

What does the study involve?
In this study I am seeking to find out your views on my development as a second language teacher. The study involves analysis of students' classroom worksheet, classroom observations of other teachers and your feedback after observing my teaching. Feedback on your observations of my teaching is a primary source data. You will be asked to complete an observation checklist and provide feedback for up to 6 lessons. This is designed to develop my teaching skills as a beginning L2 teacher. Your participation will make a difference in the enrichment of the theory: ZPD.

How much time will the study take?
The study will be conducted over 17 weeks. The observations will each take approximately 40 minutes and will be conducted at my normal teaching time in your Year 6 class.

Will the study benefit me?
This study will inform you of the cultural influences that are important for a novice L2 teacher when learning how to be a teacher in NSW.

Will the study involve any discomfort for me?
No. The lesson observations and the types of questions you will be asked in the observation form are typical of
the professional judgements that you would normally make in the course of your work and will focus on the researcher.

How is this study being paid for?
The study is an unfunded project conducted under the auspices of the Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney.

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. Results of the study will be in a Master of Education (Hons) thesis which will be lodged electronically with the University of Western Sydney library. Results of the study, maintaining confidentiality, may be published in appropriate academic journals or presented at conferences and a DET forum in late 2009.

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, Jingjing Wong 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 me Jingjing Wong: 16001860@uws.edu.au or my supervisor Dr Marilyn Keil: m.keil@uws.edu.au

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 0083 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 will be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Appendix 5: Consent Form (Mentor)

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Magic moments: the ZPD and L2 Professional development

I, ................................, the class teacher of Year 6, consent to participate in the research project titled “Magic moments: the ZPD and L2 Professional development”.

I acknowledge that:

I have read the participant information sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher.

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 reading a statement about the research to the students and observing making notes, using the schedule provided, on up to a total of 6 lessons taught by Jingling Weng in Terms 2 & 3 2009.

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 researchers now or in the future.

Signed: ____________________________

Name: _____________________________

Date: ______________________________

University of Western Sydney

Locked Bag 1787
Penrith South DC NSW 1787 Australia
www.ews.edu.au/research/services

Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Research Services
Building K1, Penrith Campus
Tel +61 2 4736 2805 Fax +61 2 4736 2903
Appendix 6: Information statement (Year 4 & Year 5 Teachers)

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Magic moments: the ZPD and L2 Professional development

Who is carrying out the study?
Jingjing Wang

This information sheet is for Year 4 & 5 classroom teachers.

The research will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Hons) at the University of Western Sydney, under the supervision of Dr Marilyn Kell, Lecturer, School of Education, College of Arts.

What is the study about?
This project is designed to investigate the researcher's professional development as a teacher by using the theoretical concept of the ZPD as a framework. By using a self-study methodology, this research will conceptualise a new and unresearched aspect of the ZPD, and also provides some insights into new direction for teacher education.

What does the study involve?
In this study I am going to observe you teaching once during Term 2 at a time that is least disruptive to your normal school and classroom routine. I will record your teaching strategies using an observation checklist. The observations are designed to develop my teaching skills as a beginning L2 teacher. Your participation will make a difference in the enrichment of the theoretical concept, the ZPD.

How much time will the study take?
The study will be conducted over 17 weeks. Lesson observation will take place once. The observation will take approximately 40 minutes.

Will the study benefit me?
This study will inform you of the influence of ZPD as a tool used by second language teachers who are in similar situations/contexts as the researcher.

Will the study involve any discomfort for me?
No. The lesson observations will take place at a time that is least disruptive to your normal school and classroom routine.
How is this study being paid for?
The study is an unfunded project, conducted under the auspices of the School of Education, University of Western Sydney.

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. Results of the study will be in a Master of Education (Hons) thesis which will be lodged electronically with the University of Western Sydney Library. Results of the study, maintaining confidentiality, may be published in appropriate academic journals or presented at conferences and presented at a DET forum in late 2009.

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, Jingjing Weng 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 me.
Jingjing Weng: 15901680@uws.edu.au
or my supervisor
Dr Marilyn Keil: m.keil@uws.edu.au

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 0083 Fax 02-4736 0013 or email humaneethics@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 will be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Appendix 7: Consent Form (Year 4 & Year 5 Teachers)
## Appendix 8: Measures of Achievement

### Work schedule Year 1 (July 08-Dec 08)

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<td>Finalise appendices and front matter</td>
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Appendix 9: Local Newspaper reports about Jingjing Weng

"We use three-chink pictures to help children understand China"

Summary translation of local newspaper reports with Jingjing Weng

Jingjing Weng and another 6 girls were selected by Ningbo Municipal government to go to Australia as volunteer Mandarin teachers in June, 2008. After six months staying in the strange land, how’s the life going of our volunteers? As the only Ningbonese of the 7 girls, Jingjing Weng accepted a
QQ (a kind of chatting software) interview from our correspondent Chen Min.

She has 180 foreign students
Jingjing and the other 6 girls live in Penrith City, NSW. On each Wednesday, Jingjing goes to three schools to teach Mandarin. She has six classes with totally 180 students to teach in that day. Most of the students in her classes are non-Chinese background students. The reasons for those students to choose Mandarin as a second language are diverse, but a considerable number are out of strong interest. Jingjing chose to teach her students from the basic knowledge, such as greetings, numbers, names of animals and family members, instead of boring and complex characters and grammas. She said the interest of students should be well protected.

Challenges from research work
Our volunteers are also doing their Master’s degree of Education (Honours) in the University of Western Sydney. At very beginning, the challenges were from lacking of background knowledge of education, the language and also the pressure of school teaching work. The volunteers tried hard to overcome those difficulties, and have already fallen into their new life. Jingjing said this experience changed her a lot. Besides the improvement of English skills, she also came to understand what research is, how to do research, and also how to balance the time between work and study.

We still have a long way to go in promoting Mandarin
Jingjing shared her memory of her first class with us. The students asked her a lot of questions such as, “do people use cars in China?” “Do you use computers?” “The Great Wall was built to reject rabbits, right?”… it indicates that we still have a far way to go in promoting Mandarin in Australia. (By Ningbo Daily correspondent Chen Min)
Appendix 10: Responses to my mentor’s feedback (29/04/2009).

The words in bold are feedback comments made by my mentor:

Remember to make it clear to the students the main goal of the lesson.

Take the time to state what the lesson outline is.

This reminds me of my learning experience in China. A science teacher (mathematics, physics, chemistry) would normally give the lesson outline or main goal to students because emphasises logical reasoning, clear structure and ideas. Language teachers like to start a lesson in more fascinating ways, such as telling an interesting story or asking a reflective question at the beginning of the class. Those are what I always do in my teaching. Today, my mentor pointed this out as a weak strategy. I think it is understandable.

First, although my English language is improving, it’s still hard to make every instruction clear to every student. Although they enjoy the stories, pictures, music, actives, sometimes they might feel confused, “Why”, I was asked, “do we need to do this and that?” Therefore, giving an outline as well as the teacher’s expectations of the lesson at very beginning could help them feel clear about the following tasks.

Second, I attributed it to the difference of the habit of mind between the East and the West. Eastern culture appreciates the implicit style. We could find evidence from young pupil’s composition. If the main idea is revealed clearly at the beginning of writing, it would be considered as colourless and lacking in
invention. On the contrary, the West culture favours coming straight to the point.

Try to talk a little louder and vary your tone.

This is a very good point, because I had never realised my volume in teaching. I am a naturally softly spoken person. I will remind myself to speak more loudly, although I usually feel exhausted before I entered the sixth classroom of the day.

Try using another strategy to gain student attention.

I had tried some strategies such as, clapping hands three times, and letting the students to follow; showing a gesture which means stop; stop talking and wait until the class is quite. In my eyes, trying to find one or two strategies which are both effective, and which I feel comfortable using is more important than using various ways. For example, I once observed a teacher’s teaching, and she would count “One, two, three” in an extremely loud and angry voice every time the class became noisy. This is a good way to stop students from talking. But it may be because of my nature, I feel uneasy behaving like that in front of my students. My mentor also suggested ringing a bell and waiting. I think this is a good way and would like try it next week. She also suggested, “Jingjing, I need you to put one or two names on the board next week. As soon as any student talks or misbehaves, say ‘their name’ put their name on the board”.

My mentor and I are very close friends. As a friend, she makes me feel safe to try new ideas. As a mentor, she is very responsible and generous in offering help. But this time, I’m in a fix. I can feel the students treat me differently from other teachers. They greet me cheerfully, they always feel excited when
chatting with me; they give me small gifts (sometimes a paper cutting, a small
drawing with a sweet wish or expression of thanks, a flower, or a small lolly).
I feel more like an older sister than a teacher. It is difficult to vary my identity
since I don’t want to hurt the students’ feeling by punishing them. What should
I do?
Make sure all students are engaged in the lesson. Not just the front two rows.

Telling the students you are not happy with behaviour was good but get them all to stop first.

I feel it is necessary to develop the above two points as my mentor suggested. Part of the reason could be, I am always in a rush (only 40mins for each lesson), and do not want to spend too much time waiting. Another reason is, at this current stage, I still put more focus on myself. I am greatly concerned as to whether I have explained clearly, how to give instructions appropriately, if time is enough to finish the whole lesson I planned. Because of this, I consider little about students’ response, whether they have mastered the knowledge or not. Maybe I need to make some changes in my planning: because time is limited, I might need to reduce the number of learning points for each lesson.

Try to remember to praise students who are doing the right thing.

I have become used to praising students after they give a right answer. In China, teachers do not praise students as frequently as we do here. Traditional Chinese culture advocates the value of pointing out errors. In ancient China, an officer would be regarded as great if he dared to point out the emperor’s mistakes. To give praise is considered insincere flattery. Being influenced by this historical value, most Chinese are not so used to praising others as frequently as people in Australian society do. But in fact, appreciation could inspire a sense of pride and achievement, build good mood, and is a force for motivation; no one hates praise, it is wise to give praise, which helps to improve the interrelationship. That’s one of the most impressive and reflective things I have learned since I arrived in Australia. So next time I need to more generous in giving praise, not just to the students who give the right answer, but also to those with good behaviours (29/04/2009).
Appendix 11: Reflections on writing a reflective diary

我渐渐感受到了写反思日记的作用，因此也更加喜欢上写反思。我喜欢把教学、做研究、以及生活中遇到的问题，领悟到的道理用反思的方式记录下来。每次参加完workshop，或者与导师及其他人交流后，我习惯把我认为重要的领悟到的新东西以反思的方式再回顾总结一遍。因为这样做让我觉得有安全感，不但有利于加深印象，也便于日后回顾。而且后来我惊奇地发现对于那些总结反思过的知识，我总是有很清晰的印象。

对于遇到的困难，无论是教学中遇到的困难，论文过程中的疑惑，还是生活当中遇到的挫折，我都选择尽量把它们一一记录下来。当然，最开始我可能仅仅是为了抱怨内心的郁闷。但是到后来，我渐渐发现，每一次这样做，我的心态都会调整得更加积极。我常常一开始先描述这个困难或者挫折。当我差不多描述完这件事情的时候，往往这件事情的起因，过程，结果，客观环境，主观想法都非常清晰地呈现在了我的面前。这使我更加客观理性地分析这件事情，寻找问题的答案。那时的我仿佛是一个思路清晰的法官，正在宣判一个案子。

我也时常通过skype和在国内的家人朋友聊天。因为是在办公室，我多半
选择打字而不是语言聊天。我发现通常只有我聊到心中的迷茫，经过与对方一番深入的文字交谈，到最后我的心情都会变好，并且找到问题的部分答案。当然你会说，那是当然，因为你得到了对方的安慰和建议，心情自然也变好了。我无可否认这一点。可是令我称奇的是，给出问题答案的人往往是我自己，而不是交谈的另一方。因为朋友和家人对我现在所做的工作并不十分了解，不会有太多经验和建议，更多时候，他们都是我的倾听者。事实是，往往我通过文字诉说着，诉说着，我自己就突然醒悟过来了。

从一开始把写反思当作导师布置的作业，到后来渐渐依赖上它。我发现自己动手写的爱好甚至扩展到了生活习惯上。自从来到澳洲后，学习工作的时间变得相对自由，事情一多往往手忙脚乱。我发现学校有免费的记事簿供应给学生，而且很多导师都有自己的journal book。他们总是把要做到事情记在一个本子上。这也许是西方国家人办事情的一个特点吧。我也渐渐养成了列清单的习惯。我习惯每天早上把这一天要做的事情按照先后顺序一一写下来。这样让我的一天过得更加充实，井然有序。

于是乎，我总结出一个经验，无论是我自己一个人在日记里写，还是与别人一问一答形式写，都有助于我更加客观理性地看待一件事物。我感觉到，很多时候面对一些问题，我的思绪在头脑里往往是漂浮模糊的，只
Gradually, I came to realise the positive role of writing reflections and did so more willingly. I liked to record the problems I encountered in my teaching, research, and life in my reflections. I used to record the new ideas I gained from workshops, seminars, or supervisors and others. I usually reviewed and included them into my journal. In doing this, I felt a sense of security. It is not only good for deepening my impressions, but also useful to be reviewed in future. Later, I found I usually had gained clearer concepts of the knowledge I once reflected before.

As to the problems, no matter whether it was in relation to the difficulties about teaching, or wonders I encountered in my research, or frustrations I experienced in my life, I tried to record them in my reflective journal. Of course, at very beginning, I regarded writing as kind of homework provided by my supervisor. Sometimes I described frustrations in journal just for the purpose of complaining. As the time went by, I found most of the time if I chose to describe problems in journal, my attitude turned to be more positive. I usually started with describing a difficulty. Then I found quite often that the cause, the process, the result, the physical reality and the personal idea of a particular issue would clearly merge. This enabled me to analyse those issues in a rational way and to search strategies objectively. I was like a cool judge who was judging a case.
I usually contact my family and friends in China with Skype (a kind of chatting software). So as not to disturb others in my office by making a noise, most of the time I chose to type instead of voice video. Many times, I found after discussing my worries or confusion with people by typing words, I felt released and regained a clear head. Of course, one might say it was because the people I talked with gave me suggestions and comforts. Undisputed, I acknowledge that point. But one thing surprised me was that, most of the time; it was myself rather than the people I chatted with who offered strategies. Because my family and friends in China actually do not have similar work experiences as I currently have. They are usually good listeners rather than wise advisors. The fact was, I usually had a sudden idea as I communicating with these people by typing my issues to them.

From initially regarding reflections as a task, later I gradually came to dependent on them. I felt I had formed a life habit. Since arriving in Australia, my study time has become more flexible. At first, my life fell into a muddle since I was unable to organise a good work schedule. Later I found the university provided free diaries to students. What’s more, I found most of the supervisors also have a journal book, in which they record things they are going to do. I guess may be this is a common habit of people in Western countries. I gradually shaped that habit. I like listing things I need to do in an order every morning. It helped to make my work more regulated. (16/5/2009)