Popular culture and engagement in teaching Mandarin:
An action research project

YU Xinyu

Bachelor of Arts with Honours
in International Communications Studies
(University of Nottingham, Ningbo, 2010)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education (Honours)

Research-Oriented, School-Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE)
Centre for Educational Research
College of Arts
University of Western Sydney

Supervisory Panel
Professor Wayne Sawyer (Principal Supervisor)
Dr Dacheng Zhao (Associate Supervisor)

March, 2012
Declaration

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 Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

............

YU Xinyu

March 2012
Acknowledgements

This thesis was the joint effort of many people. First and foremost, I am deeply indebted to Professor Wayne Sawyer, my principal supervisor, who gave me invaluable advice and encouraged me all the way through. It is this support that helped me finish this thesis when I encountered problems with data collection and thesis writing. I sincerely thank him for his devotion of time, for his great support for and patience with my research.

Secondly, great appreciation also goes to my associate supervisor, Dr Dacheng Zhao, who always cares about the daily life of us ROSETE students just like our parents. Without his help, this thesis would not have been finished. In addition, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Michael Singh. He is talented, has abundant professional knowledge in education, and was kind in providing resources, ideas and solutions to me for the research procedure.

Also, I owe my sincere gratitude to all the academics in the ROSETE team, from whom I learned much about how to conduct rigorous research as a Masters candidate. They are my colleagues and also my friends. Without their help and care, my life and study here could not have been so happy. It is my life time memory to have had them in my life for these eighteen-months of living and studying together.

As the position of Volunteer Teacher-Researcher was the basis of my research, I sincerely appreciate the continuous support from the very beginning, and and cooperation involved in this international collaborative project, of the three parties involved: the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau; the Department of Education and Communities (Western Sydney Region, New South Wales, as the then Department of Education and Training), and the Centre for Educational Research, the University of Western Sydney. I also would like to say thank you to the schools where I taught; they
provided very good opportunities for me to experience colourful school life and to develop myself professionally as a second language teacher.

For a recent undergraduate with no teaching experience, the language teaching methodology training course was extremely helpful, enabling me to adapt quickly to the new teaching context. Evelyn Mark, the manager, organiser and lecturer of this training course, gave me much in this field. I am grateful for her guidance.

In addition, I want to express my thanks to the participant schools and students in this research. Thanks to the support of the principals and staff in the two schools, I could collect my data smoothly and finish my thesis. It was my luck to teach the lovely students who attended my lessons.

Moreover, I need to thank my dear parents and my younger brother, for their support for me, which afforded me had this opportunity to develop myself as a volunteer, a teacher and a researcher.

Notwithstanding all of the above support for this study, all errors and omissions are solely my own.
# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** ........................................................................................................ i  
**List of Tables** ................................................................................................................ viii  
**List of Figures** ................................................................................................................... ix  
**List of Abbreviations** ....................................................................................................... x  
**Abstract** ............................................................................................................................ xi  
**Chapter 1 Introduction** .................................................................................................... 1  
  1.1 Research Background .................................................................................................. 1  
  1.2 Research Questions .................................................................................................. 2  
  1.3 Discussion of the Ningbo/Western Sydney Project .................................................... 3  
  1.4 Rationale for this Research ....................................................................................... 5  
    1.4.1 Popular culture and teaching ............................................................................ 5  
    1.4.2 Engagement ...................................................................................................... 6  
    1.4.3 Action research ............................................................................................... 8  
  1.5 Significance of the Study ........................................................................................... 8  
    1.5.1 Significance for the program ........................................................................... 9  
    1.5.2 Significance for the WSR and for Australia ....................................................... 10  
    1.5.3 Significance for schools and students ............................................................... 11  
    1.5.4 Significance for the education field .................................................................. 14  
  1.6 Brief Overview of the Methodology ......................................................................... 15  
  1.7 Organisation of the Thesis ....................................................................................... 17  

**Chapter 2 Intellectual Context: A Conceptually Driven Review of the Literature** ............................................................................................................................................................... 19  
  2.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................ 19  
  2.2 Definition of Popular Culture .................................................................................. 19  
    2.2.1 The features of popular culture ...................................................................... 20  
    2.2.2 The position of popular culture: Eastern and Western ...................................... 22  
    2.2.3 Asian and Chinese popular culture .................................................................. 23  
    2.2.4 Culture and language: Intercultural competence .............................................. 25  
  2.3 Popular Culture and Pedagogy ............................................................................... 27  
    2.3.1 Providing authenticity and relevance to students ............................................. 27  
    2.3.2 Emphasis on children’s knowledge ................................................................. 28  
    2.3.3 The importance of playfulness in the use of popular culture............................ 28  
    2.3.4 Low value and low intellectual quality? ......................................................... 30  
    2.3.5 Popular music in the classroom ...................................................................... 32  
    2.3.6 Video used in the classroom .......................................................................... 33  
  2.4 Popular Culture and L2 Teaching ............................................................................ 33  
    2.4.1 Music and language teaching .......................................................................... 34  
    2.4.2 Video and language teaching ......................................................................... 36  
  2.5 Engagement ............................................................................................................. 37  
    2.5.1 Definition of student classroom engagement .................................................. 37  
    2.5.2 Different levels of engagement ...................................................................... 42  
    2.5.3 Motivation and engagement .......................................................................... 44
2.5.4 Evaluation of engagement: REAL Framework ........................................48

Chapter 3 An Action Research Study ............................................................... 50

3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 50
3.2 Theoretical Basis of the Methodology ........................................................... 51
  3.2.1 Validity of action research ...................................................................... 51
  3.2.2. Teacher-as-researcher ......................................................................... 55
  3.2.3 Why choose action research? ................................................................. 56
  3.2.4 Self-reflection in the Confucian tradition .............................................. 56
3.3 Research Design ............................................................................................ 58
  3.3.1 Site Selection and sampling .................................................................. 58
  3.3.2 Cycle implementation ............................................................................ 59
3.4 Data Collection .............................................................................................. 61
  3.4.1 Self-Reflection by the researcher............................................................ 63
  3.4.2 Self-Assessment by students: the REAL Framework ............................. 64
  3.4.3 Test and worksheet samples ................................................................... 68
  3.4.4 Other teachers’ observations /interviews .............................................. 69
3.5 Data Analysis ................................................................................................ 70
  3.5.1 Coding .................................................................................................... 71
  3.5.2 Excerpt commentary ............................................................................ 76
3.6 Ethical Issues ................................................................................................. 77

Chapter 4 Data Analysis: Cycle 1 ..................................................................... 80

4.1 Introduction ................................................................................................... 80
4.2 Research Setting and Lesson Contents .......................................................... 80
4.3 What Data Were Collected ........................................................................... 82
  4.3.1 Self-Reflection ........................................................................................ 82
  4.3.2 Interview & observation notes ............................................................... 82
  4.3.3 Self-Assessment ..................................................................................... 83
  4.3.4 Test results ............................................................................................. 84
4.4 Analysis of Self-Reflection ............................................................................ 84
  4.4.1 Coding .................................................................................................... 84
  4.4.2 Limits to reflection ................................................................................ 86
  4.4.3 Key theme 1: Students and affective engagement ................................. 87
  4.4.4 Key theme 2: Students and operative engagement ................................ 91
  4.4.5 Key theme 3: Teaching Skills ............................................................... 96
4.5 Analysis of the interview .............................................................................. 102
  4.5.1 Helpfulness by using popular culture .................................................... 103
  4.5.2 Some factors impacting on students’ engagement................................. 105
4.6 Cognitive Engagement .................................................................................. 108
  4.6.1 Student self-assessment ....................................................................... 108
  4.6.2 Discussion .............................................................................................. 112
  4.6.3 Test Results .......................................................................................... 113
4.7 Other Aspects of Students Self-Assessment: Operative and Affective .......... 118
  4.7.1 Affective Engagement ......................................................................... 118
  4.7.2 Operative engagement ........................................................................ 119
List of Tables

Table 3.1 Data sources used to problematise research questions ............... 62
Table 3.2 Self-assessment in the unidiemsional level of the REAL framework... 66
Table 3.3 Self-assessment for students used in my research .................. 67
Table 3.4 Interview questions ........................................ 69
Table 3.5 An example of evaluation coding .................................. 73
Table 4.1 Lesson contents in Cycle 1 .................................... 81
Table 4.2 Colleague interview questions used in Cycle 1 .................... 82
Table 4.3 Self-assessment in Cycle 1 .................................... 84
Table 4.4 Coding results: Self-reflection diaries ............................. 85
Table 4.5 Categories in theme Teaching skills ............................... 97
Table 4.6 Dimensions of self-assessment questions used in Cycle 1 ........ 109
Table 5.1 Teaching contents in Cycle 2 ................................... 127
Table 5.2 Interview questions for classroom teacher ....................... 128
Table 5.3 Self-assessment questions in Cycle 2 ............................... 129
Table 5.4 Coding results: Self-reflection diaries ............................. 130
Table 5.5 Dimensions of self-assessment questions used in Cycle 2 ........ 146
Table 5.6 Distribution of test results: 6A and 6B in Cycle 2 ............... 151
Table 6.1 Teaching contents in Cycle 3 .................................... 160
Table 6.2 Self-assessment questions in Cycle 3 ............................... 162
Table 6.3 Coding results: Self-reflection in Cycle 3 ............................ 163
Table 6.4 Dimension of self-assessment questions used in Cycle 3 .......... 178
Table 6.5 Problems revealed in worksheets .................................. 194
Table 7.1 The impacts of popular culture on student affective engagement ... 218
Table 7.2 The impacts of popular culture on student operative engagemen .... 219
Table 7.3 Application of Bloom’s Taxonomy in language .................... 226
Table 7.4 Foci, teaching methods and knowledge in three cycles ............ 232
List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Two levels of engagement .......................................................... 43
Figure 2.2 Student motivation and engagement wheel .................................. 47
Figure 3.1 Four dynamic moments in action research ................................. 53
Figure 3.2 Dynamic cycles in action research ............................................. 54
Figure 3.3 Cycle implementation in this research ....................................... 59
Figure 3.4 Teaching contents and focuses in three cycles ......................... 61
Figure 3.5 Data sources .......................................................................... 62
Figure 3.6 Evaluation coding diagram ....................................................... 73
Figure 4.1 The distribution of scores: 6A and 6B in Cycle 1 ....................... 115
Figure 4.2 Work sample from a student ..................................................... 117
Figure 5.1 The distribution of scores: 6A and 6B in Cycle 2 ....................... 151
Figure 6.1 Bloom’s Taxonomy (adapted for the primary classroom) ........ 187
Figure 7.1 The cycle of popular culture impacting student affective engagement .......................................................... 207
Figure 7.2 Quality Teaching Model ............................................................ 221
Figure 7.3 Bloom’s Taxonomy ................................................................. 225
Figure 7.4 Revised taxonomy of the cognitive domain ............................. 225
List of Abbreviations

DEC: Department of Education and Communities (then the Department of Education and Training)
NMEB: Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau
NSW: New South Wales
ROSETE: Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education program
UWS: University of Western Sydney
VTR: Volunteer Teacher Researcher
WSR: Western Sydney Region
This study focuses on how to use popular culture as teaching material to engage students in learning Mandarin in Australian schools. The aim of this research was to explore whether popular culture can engage students in learning with high intellectual quality, and provide a more contemporary picture of Chinese society by presenting popular culture to students.

This study used action research as the main methodology to investigate the influence of popular culture on engagement. The action research comprised three cycles and employed three aspects of popular culture respectively: popular songs, movies and teen magazine. Each cycle lasted for four to seven lessons and formed a sequence from single-dimensional to multidimensional focuses. For the evaluation of student engagement, data were collected from the researcher’s self-reflections and field notes, including classroom observations, student self-assessment and other feedback, and interviews. The REAL Framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006) was used to design questions for student self-assessment, which provided student feedback to the teacher on student classroom engagement.

The study shows that popular culture has the advantage of stimulating student engagement in an affective, operative and cognitive way. Young students enjoy the learning content and this increases their interest and motivation. Some forms of popular culture can facilitate specific language ability: for example, music is useful for developing students’ pronunciation and speaking. Cognitive engagement improves in a varied way, from simple recall to a deeper and more complex understanding of their learning and knowledge. Nevertheless, students will not be automatically engaged by this material without the application of good teaching strategies. The results demonstrate that student engagement largely depends on how well the teacher incorporate popular culture context in teaching and how well the
teacher incorporates the popular culture context into the teaching and how well the teacher uses pedagogical knowledge to teach and manage the students. The researcher, as a early beginning teacher, developed her understanding of how to engage students and came to realise what a teacher can do to develop student engagement effectively.

This study may contribute to our knowledge of how to use popular culture to effectively teach and learn second languages in general, and Chinese as a second language in particular. It also provides suggestions for the application of the MeE Framework (Munns & Martin, 2005) and the REAL Framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006) in different contexts of practice.
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

As a little girl, I was enthusiastic about singing and dancing like the people on television. My mother sent me to learn music theory and play the piano. Unfortunately, I did not achieve well at that age. As I grew up, I was a big fan of popular culture, attracted by the rebellion of rock’n roll, exciting Hollywood movies, sensitive Korean dramas, and Japanese animation. To become ‘cool’, I spent plenty of time learning guitar; to get closer to my favourite singers, who are a Korean boy band, I studied Korean by myself and in two years reached Intermediate level.\(^1\) Quite different from reciting the grammar of English in the classroom, I found it was easy and interesting to memorise vocabulary through reciting song lyrics and practising listening, by watching variety shows. At the University of Nottingham, where I completed my undergraduate degree, I chose media studies as my major.

I came to be engaged in a program organised by the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau, the University of Western Sydney (UWS), and the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (DEC), as a Volunteer teacher researcher (VTR) of Mandarin in two Western Sydney schools. When I began this experience, I was a completely new teacher and did not have any teaching experience in Australian schools. As a result, from my very first class, many problems, such as classroom management, emerged. Students seemed uninterested in the textbooks, and soon lost interest in traditional Chinese cultural activities like paper cutting or calligraphy, which were far removed from their daily lives. I was frustrated that it was difficult to make students find Mandarin classes not tedious. However, one day the students saw a Kungfu movie, and then they asked me to teach them Chinese Kungfu. I immediately

\(^1\) (Standard Test of Proficiency in Korean managed by the Korean Institute of Curriculum & Evaluation: includes beginner, intermediate and advanced levels).
went to learn a ‘serial’ of Taijiquan (shadowboxing), and then taught the students. The children were enthusiastic about engaging in learning about Kungfu and were well disciplined in the classroom. The vocabulary taught in that lesson also gained a positive response. It reminded me of my experience of learning Korean: if learners have a long-term interest, they will actively engage in language learning, even spending after-school time on it. As Mayberry (2004, p. 19) states, “if you can find something that interests your students and relate it in some manner to your subject matter, it is likely that you will keep their interest and attention longer”. Popular culture—for example, Kungfu movies and the use of popular songs—could be one of the solutions to my classroom management issues and a way to motivate students to engage in learning Mandarin. In addition, we know that in contemporary society teenagers are surrounded by ‘new media’ and unprecedented information input. Could their immersion in popular culture be harnessed for classroom engagement?

This raised three crucial points for the teacher:

- There is an almost automatic assumption that the use of popular culture will be inherently engaging because it is, by definition, ‘popular’. This research will partly problematise this issue.
- The question where there is an inherent contradiction between popular culture in the curriculum and intellectual quality. This research will again partly problematise this issue.
- An advantage of using contemporary popular culture in the Languages classroom is to provide students with a more contemporary picture of the society of the target language.

1.2 Research Questions

In the light of the three issues discussed above, the main research question is therefore:
How can popular culture be used to successfully engage young students in learning Mandarin?

Student motivation and engagement were identified as the main problems encountered in my teaching. To resolve this issue, it was planned to use popular cultural references in the classroom. ‘Successfully’ in this question led to need to evaluate student engagement. This also required providing criteria for the assessment of engagement. In order to highlight the quality of engagement, the issue of intellectual quality in language learning was centrally addressed in this study. Chinese popular culture, as an essential part of Chinese contemporary culture, is a path to know modern China, and it is necessary to strengthen this understanding. Therefore, there were three subsidiary research questions:

- Are students engaged by this material?
- Is the engagement of high intellectual quality?
- Do they have a good knowledge of the target culture because of this?

1.3 Discussion of the Ningbo/Western Sydney Project

The program in which I was engaged was a crucial influence on this research. The program is known as the Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) Program, which is defined as “an innovative, flexible and intellectually challenging program that has Chinese graduates researching the teaching of Chinese to non-background speakers” (Centre for Educational Research, UWS, 2011). This is a community engagement initiative being conducted by the Centre for Educational Research of the University of Western Sydney, in collaboration with the Western Sydney Region of the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC), and entails a key international partnership with the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau (Ningbo, China). All the partners involved recognise the importance of intercultural knowledge in language learning and the necessity of postgraduate study for future
teachers (Singh & Zhao, 2008). The ROSETE program is called the “Bridge to Understanding” between NSW DEC, UWS and the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau, as it has played a key part in this Australia-China educational partnership.

The three partners have developed this program since 2008. According to the Memorandum of Understanding that formalised the arrangements, the aims are to “stimulate the teaching and learning of Chinese and Chinese culture in Western Sydney Region schools and to develop the teaching, research and leadership capabilities of research students from China through their education as teacher-researchers”. In respect of this foundational aim, the intercultural knowledge of teachers, and teachers’ research skills are emphasised. For students of NSW DEC, the aim is to achieve higher understanding and use of Mandarin.

As a volunteer teacher researcher (VTR) of Mandarin, I taught in two local schools in the Western Sydney Region, for two days a week. There were three classes in one high school, which I taught every Tuesday; the duration of each lesson in that school was almost 75 minutes. My teaching component lasted 30 minutes to 45 minutes because there were co-teaching classes taught with another Mandarin teacher. In the primary school, there were five classes involved in this program ranging from Kindergarten to Year 6. I taught every class for 45 minutes, with help from the classroom teacher. It can be seen that the students in my Mandarin class had very limited time to gain access to the language. I found this meant that it was insufficient to establish the students’ good motivation and interest in the subject by relying only on the textbooks. To stimulate their better performance in learning Mandarin was not only my teaching goal as a Mandarin teacher but also the aim of this program in general. As a result, the project reported in this thesis served both the program’s and my own research interests.
1.4 Rationale for this Research

The research has several emphases namely: popular culture and its relationship with L2 language teaching; engagement and its evaluation; and the methodology of action research. This section describes these key elements of the study.

1.4.1 Popular culture and teaching

A language is not just a linguistic system, but is deeply embedded within culture, and teaching a language and communicating in a language takes place in a cultural context. To help students achieve good language performance, it is useful to establish it in the culture of that language. Popular culture generally refers to culture that is favoured or well liked by many people (Storey, 2009, p. 5); simultaneously, it is closely related to the development of mass media and the growth of youth culture. In this research ‘popular culture’ is contemporary Chinese popular culture aimed at teenagers, which will be discussed specifically in Chapter 2. Compared with ‘traditional’ culture, popular culture can be more accessible and, by definition, it is more likely to appeal to young people. Using popular culture in teaching is not a novel idea. Much literature argues that popular culture contributes to effective teaching and learning. As Domoney and Harris (1993, p. 234) assert, popular culture is “one way of involving young learners and their teachers in meaningful, enjoyable, and collaborative classroom tasks”. Partly this is attributable to building a relaxed classroom atmosphere and enjoyable engaging activities for students (Biggs & Watkins, 1993). Some strategies, like singing, and watching target language-animation and movies, have the potential to reinforce language development (Hannah, 2009; Ma & Wang, 2009). Still, some voices question the use of popular culture in the classroom, in particular, in regard to its alleged low value and low intellectual quality. Nevertheless, Misson (2009) states it is important to include popular culture in the curriculum because it is important to involve the “everyday textual experience” of the large majority of people.
A good way to treat popular culture, he suggests, is to be flexible in valuing it—to be aware of both its positive and negative aspects.

### 1.4.2 Engagement

A key focus of the research is engagement. Successful engagement is defined as students being strongly involved in tasks of high intellectual quality and having passionate positive feelings about these tasks, rather than students simply being on task and complying with a teacher’s directions. Munns and Martin (2005) define two ‘levels’ of engagement: ‘e’ngagement and ‘E’ngagement. The former is at the classroom level, while ‘E’ngagement reveals a wider relationship with school and education, a sense among students that school is a place that “works for them” and education is a resource that they can successfully deploy in the present and the future. The MeE framework (Munns & Martin, 2005) demonstrates the relationship between motivation and engagement. Motivating thoughts contribute to engaging adaptations. Accordingly, a highly motivated atmosphere is a key to generating effective engagement. To assess engagement, Munns and Woodward (2006) provide a very comprehensive framework: the Reflective Engagement Authentic Learning (REAL) dimension of the student self-assessment framework, which was used as part of the data collection for student feedback. This framework encourages students to assess their engagement in classroom activities and to assess the level of engagement required for students to become engaged classroom learners.

Engagement then is another crucial term in this research. This term has been defined from different perspectives. Early definitions focused on a single aspect, such as psychological processes (Marks, in Klem & Connell, 2004) or behavioural dimensions, and later discussion developed the multi-faceted nature of engagement, with recognition of student emotion, cognition and other aspects. For example, Appleton et al.’s (2006) view of engagement is a multi-dimensional construct comprising four dimensions – academic, behavioural, cognitive and psychological. A widely agreed
definition is proposed in Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004), which categorises engagement into three dimensions: emotional, behavioural and cognitive. Munns and Martin (2005) modified this and established the MeE framework which provides a basis for conceptualising engagement that not only focuses on classroom engagement but also views it at the school level. The framework highlights three key dimensions of engagement. Accordingly, ‘good’ engagement is simultaneously:

- high affective: genuine valuing and having passionate positive feeling
- high operative: active participation
- high cognitive: reflective involvement in deep understanding and expertise

(Munns & Martin, 2005)

Reflecting subsidiary question 2, cognitive engagement is highlighted in this study. It is a response to the issue of potentially low intellectual quality associated with popular culture. As a result, the evaluation of cognitive engagement will be discussed in separate sections of the data analysis chapters of this thesis.

The next issue is how to measure engagement—whether students engage in learning “successfully” or not. Two major methods were used here to evaluate engagement. Firstly, students’ self-assessment and test results were two main tools used to directly address student engagement levels. The implementation of self-assessment was based on the REAL Framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006), a tool derived from the MeE Framework that enables students to provide feedback about the lesson. There were two purposes to collecting feedback from students about the lesson. One was to indicate the level of student engagement, while the other was for the teacher to learn how to gauge the level of student engagement for future teaching. The REAL Framework consists of 60 questions categorised into affective, cognitive and operative dimensions. Questions were selected and modified to be used in this study, to serve the content of each lesson and each cycle. Their selection and use is explained fully in Chapter 3.
1.4.3 Action research

This research explored whether popular culture improves students’ engagement in learning a second language effectively. Action research is a suitable methodology for this research because action research is a tool for change and improvement at the local level, that also provides an individual researcher with more space to make a difference and find solutions. The gap between research and practice could well be narrowed through action research, thereby adding to efforts whereby research has an impact on practice (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 227). It provides a way of thinking systematically about what happens in the school or classroom, implementing critically informed action where improvements are thought to be possible, and monitoring and evaluating the effects of the action with a view to continuing the improvement (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 5). Action research should be an effective way to implement popular culture in Mandarin and evaluate the engagement of students in this research; this could include suggestions for the development of teaching methods and for encouraging students’ motivation in learning Mandarin in Australia.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The research reported in this thesis aims to improve Australian student engagement in the Mandarin classroom by the use of Chinese contemporary culture. This project is considered significant from several perspectives. The first beneficial aim is to improve the ROSETE program itself to produce better Mandarin teaching and help students generate better performance in learning this language and culture, so that the ROSETE program and its approaches to Mandarin teaching could have greater impact in Australia. In addition, the schools and students involved in Languages programs could gain some ideas about and experiences with ‘effective’ teaching and learning of second languages in general. From a broader perspective, the study of Chinese language and Chinese culture is of benefit to students in the Western Sydney Region as a way to promote the relationship between Australia and China. In the academic field,
it aims to develop ways of facilitating engagement in terms of the implementation of popular culture in the Mandarin classroom. It could also give suggestions about the application of the MeE Framework (Munns & Martin, 2005) and the REAL Framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006) in different contexts of practice.

1.5.1 Significance for the program

This research is contextualised by the ROSETE program as one of the potential tangible outcomes of international and cross-sector cooperation between the Ningbo Education Bureau, UWS and DET schools and students (Singh & Zhao, 2008). The ability to deliver maximum benefit for all partners would significantly determine the success of the program. Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau was responsible for selecting qualified VTRs each year and the VTRs’ responsibility is to help improving the learning of Mandarin in Western Sydney Region schools. The schools and students potentially benefit from authentic and culturally grounded Chinese teachers. Therefore, the success of the program builds on VTRs being able to apply what they learn from UWS and DET studies to classroom teaching practice, and how they develop qualified research studies.

This study was aimed at retaining students’ interests in Mandarin and helping them achieve higher language levels and cultural understanding. According to the Memorandum of Understanding, the aims of the program are to “stimulate the teaching and learning of Chinese and Chinese culture in Western Sydney Region schools and to develop the teaching, research and leadership capabilities of research students from China through their development as teacher-researchers”. The goal of this study is consistent with the aims of this program and beneficial for all partners.
1.5.2 Significance for the WSR and for Australia

In the new era of globalisation, it is important for Australia to globalise outward. Implementing L2 learning or Language other than English (LOTE) has been seen as significant for this attempt. It not only aims to tap into and build multinational companies, but also to create new understandings for multicultural living at the local level (Exley, 2006). Because of China’s emerging role in the global economy and politics, Chinese language and culture are becoming widespread in the world. As the fastest growing of the major economies of the world, China has developed strong ties with Australia in many aspects, such as in the coal trade, in academic exchange and tourism. As Orton (2008) outlines, for Australia, China is one country that is:

- a regional neighbour;
- its largest trading partner;
- a rising world economic power;
- a major source of immigrant workforce;
- a major source of international students;
- a major source of tourists to Australia;
- a major destination for Australian tourists;
- the source of its biggest immigrant settlers;
- a country with a long and prestigious culture; and
- home to 1 in 5 human beings on the Earth

(Orton, 2008, p. 8)

This suggests the close relationship between Australia and China and the importance of knowing Mandarin in stimulating this relationship in cultural, social and economic fields. Since the 1990s, the importance of Mandarin has been widely recognised by Australian governments and people, as schools increasingly set Mandarin as a subject, more students are likely to be engaging in learning Mandarin (Rudd, 1994). The draft of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals (2008) for Young Australians
discusses the intention to implement Chinese as a key learning area for the whole
country. Accordingly, for the VTR, stimulating Mandarin in WSR schools is
consistent with Australian national strategic priorities. I hope it may also add to the
corpus of effective teaching strategies for Mandarin teaching in Australia.

1.5.3 Significance for schools and students

First of all, the researcher may make some contributions to second language teaching
in Australia. There is no doubt that learning vocabulary, grammar structures and
practising oral/aural structures plays a crucial role in language acquisition. However,
for younger language learners, it is necessary to provide a much more appropriate and
accessible interpretation of these requirements. The harsh reality of second language
teaching is, “the second language classroom is limited in its ability to develop learners’
communicative competence in the target language. This is due to the restricted number
of contact hours with the language; minimal opportunities for interacting with native
speakers; and limited exposure to the variety of functions, genres, speech events, and
discourse types that occur outside the classroom” (Demo, 2001, in Ashman & Lê,
2007). Through utilisation of textbooks, pop cultural references and interactive
technology, teachers may possibly assist in the students’ learning in a more effective
way.

In the context of learning Mandarin, it is necessary and urgent to look for more
effective teaching strategies. With Mandarin becoming a ‘must learn’ language, there
is increasing demand for effective teaching strategies, sufficient teaching materials
and experienced Mandarin teachers. Compared to Chinese background learners,
non-background students are less enthusiastic about engaging with learning Chinese
because the Chinese tones, characters and culture bear no resemblance to European
script which makes them alien to native Australian students (Jen & Xu, 2000; Ma &
Wang, 2009). Orton (2008, p. 35) also states that there are four challenges for the
English speaking learners in learning Mandarin, which are “tones, homophones,
characters, and the system of particles and verb complements”. As Mandarin is a complex language system, Mandarin learners need to learn three independent systems: the strokes that comprise the written character, the pronunciation and its meaning. To have basic reading comprehension, one is required to master 4,000 characters, but Australian Year 12 learners might only learn 500; this is insufficient to reach the expected level. This is a major obstacle for developing Mandarin in the Australian context. Moreover, most Mandarin teaching in Australia is mainly ‘traditional’: working with traditional Chinese cultural forms, such as traditional paper cutting and festival customs. However, these are distant from students’ daily lives, and it is difficult for them to find connections and relevance in the ‘traditional’. Such things might feel novel first, but they lose their interest after a short while when there is no application to their current lives. Difficulties from the language itself and ineffective teaching strategies have limited the widespread learning of Mandarin. Therefore, it is urgent to find the appropriate teaching materials and methods which fit the Australian context and appeal to students’ interests.

Popular culture by definition the most accessible and acceptable cultural form, is an important component in young students’ everyday lives. A hit song, comedy or cartoon may more immediately engage students’ attention. Using popular culture in Mandarin teaching is possibly a good way to attract students’ attention and keep their long term interest. If learning Mandarin becomes something ‘cool’, students are probably willing to ‘attach’ themselves to Mandarin. Through using a wide range of China teaching materials, students could learn authentic Mandarin language and Chinese values as well.

Although there have been rich studies relating popular culture to teaching and learning, the focus is still largely sociological (Cheung, 2003). Even within language teaching, English acquisition gains more attention in L2 literature. There is insufficient study relating popular culture to Mandarin teaching, and the researcher wants to contribute to closing this gap. Nevertheless, I realise that popular culture can be nation-centric,
and the songs or animations that appeal to Chinese teenagers may not appeal to Australian teenagers of the same age. However, there is another reason to use Chinese popular culture. I am attempting to introduce Australian students to a broader sense of what Chinese culture looks like, beyond the vision of the ‘traditional’.

A Chinese-background teacher who teaches a second language in an Australian context often encounters one or several of five key challenges that are due to differences of values, beliefs, cultural and educational systems:

1. Unfamiliarity with Australian “cultures of learning”
2. Perceived low levels of learner motivation
3. The consequent additional responsibilities required in planning, in order to engage students
4. The need to see language learning from the learners’ perspective rather than from the teacher’s first-language perspective
5. The difficulties in teaching the first language in the second language, English.

(Scrimgeour, 2008, p. 130)

These five obstacles are closely related to Chinese teachers’ previous experiences of learning in China and their own cultures of learning. I come from an educational culture which is completely different from Australian’s. The traditional Chinese culture of learning addresses teacher authority, respect and discipline. This education is conceived more as “a process of knowledge accumulation than as a process of using knowledge for immediate purposes, and the preferred model of teaching is as mimetic or epistemic that emphasise knowledge transmission” (Hu, 2005b, p. 653). It can be seen that Chinese learning is teacher-centred and requires learners to be disciplined to ‘absorb’ what teachers teach them. This learning culture is possibly completely opposite to what happens in Australian classrooms, which highly emphasises being student-centred. Unfamiliarity with this has resulted in difficulties such as issues of engagement and motivation. The focus on students’ interests in Australian teaching is
different from what Chinese teachers usually perceive, and this increases the difficulty of teaching plans and practice as well.

Nevertheless, after experiencing Australian schooling life for more than one year, I have become gradually familiar with its learning cultures. I realise that, unlike Chinese students, Australian students are not automatically motivated to listen to teachers and do what teachers tell them; rather, they need to be attracted to doing something they like. The use of popular culture is partly intended to solve this dilemma. An adaptation to this culture does not come at the cost of entirely giving up the Chinese culture of learning, but combines the two. I also aimed to improve my students’ language level through some traditional methods, such as reciting and doing tests, while not remaining ignorant of their interests and of possibilities for stimulating engagement.

In addition, this study aims to develop students’ intercultural competence, and also addresses their deep cultural understanding. Intercultural competence means being able to use appropriate language in the correct cultural context (Liddicoat, 2002, p. 10). Language changes along with the dynamics of culture; thus, teaching Chinese popular culture to young learners helps them to build contemporary intercultural competence. The popular contemporary culture of China could become a vital part of motivating students. One aim was, obviously, to make my own students actively engage in learning. Secondly, the research may suggest some ideas for Mandarin teaching for those facing similar problems, and thus make a contribution to promoting Mandarin teaching and learning in Australia.

1.5.4 Significance for the education field

This research focuses on increasing students’ engagement in learning Mandarin through the use of popular culture. It is not simply aimed at increasing students’ memorisation of vocabulary or their capability to understand sentences. Instead, it wants to help students “think hard”, “behave appropriately” and “feel good” (Munns
& Martin, 2005) in the process of learning Mandarin. These three aspects are the essence of engagement, emphasising students’ simultaneous well-being in thinking, doing, and satisfaction. Through action research, three aspects of popular culture including popular songs, movies and teen magazines will be implemented in classrooms in a sequence, to investigate effective ways to stimulate students’ engagement and facilitate their ability in the language.

The term “engagement”, as positioned by the MeE Framework (Martin & Munns, 2005) is applied in this research, and the REAL framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006) is used as an assessment of student engagement in a systematic way. The implementation of these two frameworks could provoke innovations in combining engagement and popular culture and open up possibilities for further studies.

In addition, this study is contextualised by the model of Research-Oriented School-Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) developed by Singh and Zhao (2008). This model combines theoretical studies and practical teaching closely and could actively reduce the inherent disadvantage of “perpetuating problematic practices” existing in traditional models of teacher education. This research may provide evidence to support the development of this model of teacher education.

1.6 Brief Overview of the Methodology

This study applied action research to investigate the aspects of popular culture that enable the successful engagement of students in learning Mandarin, and hence, to embed lesson cycles within an overall research timeframe. I used popular culture as teaching materials in Mandarin teaching to investigate effective ways to improve students’ engagement. The action research included three cycles: that is, three aspects of popular culture each formed a cycle. As popular culture is the sum total of various cultural forms which could not all be presented at once, three categories were chosen:
• popular songs
• movies & animations
• teen magazines

Each category formed an individual teaching cycle. Though each cycle emphasised a particular aspect of popular culture, each developed in a process from unidimensional to multidimensional focuses in developing language skills. The reason for choosing these three aspects of popular culture is that they may centrally emphasise different language abilities. Popular song is definitely one of most significant components in popular culture, which lends itself to a central focus on listening practice. Secondly, movies and animation were chosen because the students in my class showed great interest in visual materials, especially some elements such as Chinese Kungfu and ‘cute’ characters. Movies present visual images about Chinese lives and culture that help students observe and understand China in a direct way. Animation is another kind of visual art, which may capture my students’ (from 9 to 13 years old) attention. I also wanted to focus on reading comprehension for students, so magazines were chosen. One advantage of the teen magazines used in the classroom is that they have rich pictures to aid against the difficulty of reading Mandarin. All the teaching materials could be accessed via the Internet, and I expected that my teaching could inspire students to have access to contemporary Chinese culture through the Internet even after school time.

Two schools located in Western Sydney Region were selected for this study; the target students were Years 6 and 7 students. To conduct valid research, multiple sources of data are required. During each cycle, data were collected as field notes from classroom teachers in two schools, and from my colleague VTRs. In addition, my students answered questions selected from the REAL Framework. These included observation notes and students’ self-assessment and test results or worksheet samples. In addition to these data, my self-reflective journal drew on all the above data sources in an attempt to gain insights into student engagement and the ways in which the teacher
was engaging them. All together there were five data sources with the reflective journal and students’ self-assessment as the two main data sources. The process of data collection was validated by triangulating the different sources of data.

Data from all sources were compared from a number of perspectives to generate the study findings. This study was limited to two schools and therefore the findings are not able to be over-generalised, nor to be readily transferred to other language classes or to other teaching contexts. However, the findings are useful as an evidence-based, conceptually informed reference that builds the collective knowledge available about student engagement and teacher’s teaching in the given context. This study therefore functions as a case study that can inform future research.

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

The research detailed in this thesis is a study about improving students’ engagement in a second language classroom. The emphasis is on “how to engage students” and “the evaluation of the engagement”. It is developed through seven chapters.

Chapter 1 gives the background of this Volunteer Teacher Researcher (VTR) and explores the impact of her life experiences and of the program on the research reported by the study. It then outlines the reasons for and significance of the study with a brief methodology.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on popular culture and teaching, especially within language teaching. Firstly it defines the key concepts in this research. Then it reviews the general situation of the use of popular culture in different areas of education. It addresses some specific aspects of popular culture and teaching through songs, movies, animation and the Internet. It then discusses the concept and significance of engagement and especially explores it through introducing the MeE Framework. It
outlines the REAL Framework as an important method of assessing student engagement.

Chapter 3 describes the theoretical basis of the methodology. This study had an action research component, which enabled the researcher to collect data from three cycles. It introduces the research design firstly and then outlines the different data sources, explaining how these sources were collected and analysed. It also reports on the procedures for establishing validity and reliability through the data collection and analysis.

Chapters 4-6 present the data analysis of the three cycles. Each chapter analyses data from one cycle through the structure of self-reflective journals, students’ self-assessment, tests and teachers’ VTR colleagues’ interviews. It focuses on engagement, including affective, cognitive and operative aspects and teacher pedagogy. Most emphasis is on the cognitive aspect, because it relates to whether students access high intellectual quality through the use of popular cultural references. The three chapters have similar structures.

Chapter 7 explores the research findings and discusses all the data analysis. It is structured on the basis of the subsidiary research questions and addresses explicit answers to these questions. It also discusses what a teacher can do to successfully engage popular culture through reflecting on the success and constraints of my teaching process. It concludes with the discussion of key findings and the limitations of the study.
Chapter 2 Intellectual Context: A Conceptually Driven Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the key intellectual context for the study reported in this thesis is provided, in terms of the relevant key concepts addressed in the research literature. The first section focuses on using popular culture in education from a broad perspective in order to discuss relevant pedagogy and its historical development. Then the emphasis narrows down specifically to popular culture in language teaching, including several specific ways of using popular culture through multi-media such as movies. Then, to focus the research further, the review turns to how popular culture can be used in Mandarin education in the literature. The next body of literature to be reviewed concerns key aspects of students’ classroom engagement and its importance in education. The historical development of engagement studies is presented to examine how engagement has been defined and studied. The relationship between engagement and motivation is also discussed. I then address the complex construction of engagement in the behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions: three aspects dynamically interrelated with student engagement. This literature review positions classroom engagement within a theoretical framework that connects to the MeE Framework of Munns & Martin (2005) and to the REAL framework of Munns & Woodward (2006).

2.2 Definition of Popular Culture

‘Culture’, as the root term in Cultural Studies, is one of ‘the most complicated words in the English language’ (Williams, 1976, p. 76). As the dominant source of Cultural Studies, the Birmingham School is very important to an historical analysis of culture. Raymond Williams’ work is often considered to be one of the foundations of cultural
and media studies. As Richards (2011, p. 4) argues, Williams takes the assertion of the complexity of culture, and points to the histories of the words that now routinely shape the way we think and talk about the social worlds in which we live. Hence, his definition of culture has been recognised widely:

Culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture. (Williams, 1963, p. 57)

Accordingly, in this non classic definition, the meaning of culture includes opinions, values, attitudes and identity, which reflect and influence people’s life-style, social status and ways of thinking about the world. Culture, built by a group of human beings, is the sum total of ways of living and producing meaning to make sense of the world. It includes behaviours, texts, artifacts and information as manifestations of culture, as a dynamic set of practices (Liddicoat, 2003, p. 204).

“Popular” could be regarded as “work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people” (Williams, 1983, p. 237). Starting with this point, simply put popular culture is “culture that is widely favoured or well liked by many people” (Storey, 2009, p. 5). In this way, ‘popularity’ is one essential feature of one kind of culture. The popularity of popular culture, according to Storey, can usually be measured by a quantitative index, such as best-seller lists, Billboard charts, high box office Hollywood movies, etc.

2.2.1 The features of popular culture

One way to understand popular culture is to focus on its relationship with the development of mass media. Storey (2009, p. 13) indicates that popular culture originated in the urbanisation of the industrial revolution; this identifies the term with
the usual definitions of mass culture. It is based on the development of commerce and media, the latter of whom create the audiences who are the demand. Through an informal consensus within the mainstream of a given culture, some ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images and other phenomena are deemed to be preferred. The development of popular culture started with Western culture of the early to mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century and the emerging global mainstream of the late 20\textsuperscript{th} and early 21\textsuperscript{st} century (Storey, 2009).

Popular culture is also closely related to post-war youth culture and consumption. Since the 1950s and 60s, a degree of generational commonality appeared (Richards, 2011, p. 10). The development of a youth-oriented popular media, music, films and television had profound consequences. Youth-orientated leisure institutions such as clubs and discos, proliferated significantly. These resulted in the formation of a market in which young people could spend their money and time, and this was different from the experience of their parents’ generation. Youth has been a focus of widespread concern, but often “in combination with fascination” (Richards, 2011, p. 10).

From another perspective, popular culture could be seen as a metonymy for everyday life (Papanikolaou & Duncan, 2008, p. 6; Bennett, 2005, p. 4). Contemporary everyday life for young people is related to media and new media, fashion, music and a counter-culture. The mobile, disparate and technologically mediated characters of everyday life are particularly popular among young people. It is significant to recognise that popular culture has an important influence on structuring young audiences’ identity and attitudes (Cheung, 2003). Popular culture fits deeply into young people’s lives and deeply influences their views of worlds, attitudes and ideas. Although popular culture is often criticised due to its commercial and superficial values, the close relationship between popular culture and youth culture is inevitable.

It can be seen, then, that popular culture connects with ‘everyday life’ and ongoing experience, and its popularity ‘composes’ the mainstream culture via dissemination through mass media.
2.2.2 The position of popular culture: Eastern and Western

Popular cultural texts have been historically positioned as ‘low’, compared with high culture. This remains true, whether the society is Eastern or Western.

In China, popular culture was regarded as a very low and vulgar culture for a long time. There was a 成语Chengyu to show the opposition of high culture and popular culture:

阳春白雪[yang (sun or sunshine) chun (spring) bai (white) xue (snow)]

vs

下里巴人.[xia (under or low) li (inside) bar en (the people living in rural or barbarous area)].

(from: 《楚辞》中的《宋玉答楚王问》)

阳春(yangchun), 白雪(baixue), 下里巴人(xiali baren) are words which originally referred to the names of songs. The Chengyu originates from an ancient article which recorded a conversation between 楚王（chuwang, the king of Chu, located in the middle of China）and an officer during 战国 (zhanguo, a period of two thousand years ago). The king asked his officer, “How many people in my country can sing yangchun and baixue?” “Only a very few people.” Then the king asked again, “How many people can sing xiali baren?” “Hundreds and even thousands.” Since then, 阳春白雪 became the symbol of high classical art, while 下里巴人 refers to rustic and folk art—nowadays, usually used in China to describe popular culture. Here, popular culture is equated with something that the mass of people are able to perform, and is much less valued than high culture.

Nevertheless, the opposition of high and low culture is not so dichotomous in current Chinese society (Zhang, 2005). With the spread of mass media and the embracing of Western culture, the attitude to pop culture has changed extensively. Nowadays, as an important component of Chinese culture, it reflects modern facets of society in terms of music, movies and fashion. In order to ‘understand’ China, it is necessary to develop
insight into the pop culture of China. This view of the ‘low value’ of popular culture in the west has been gradually changing. More recent opinions largely put emphasis on the function of popular culture, designated as a field of shared interests and pleasure among large numbers of people (Richards, 2011, p. 18).

Apart from this focus on the pleasures of popular culture, the value of popular culture has taken on a more significant cultural function in the Chinese context. The terms “China” and “Chinese” are contested by the complex geographical and cultural identities among mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwanese Chinese resulting from their different economic and socio-cultural systems. Ryan (1995, p. 64) argued that there is an ‘impermeable monolith’ of Chineseness shared by all the ‘Chinese’ people, no matter whether they are living in Beijing, Taipei or Macau. Popular culture, as an important component of this, demonstrates common Chinese values, such as brotherhood and fraternity in Hong Kong gangster movies, or errantry in Kungfu movies and novels.

Popular culture then, is a tool for building a complete cultural sense of being ‘Chinese’ somehow because the mass dissemination of popular culture products has massive and persuasive influence on people’s attitude and identity (Lent, 1995).

2.2.3 Asian and Chinese popular culture

It is possibly unwise to clarify a clear boundary of Chinese popular culture because it has been profoundly influenced by the West in an environment of globalisation for its own complex historical and geographical reasons. Globalised media, television and the Internet have been significant carriers of Western popular culture to Asia. As Lent (1995, p. 2) describes, Asians are ‘enamoured of Western popular culture’. Asians like to use English words, whether their meanings are clear or not. English words are interspersed through Asian pop songs in Chinese, Japanese and Korean. This consistent
use of random English lyrics, to some extent, indicates “Asia’s anemic situation” and a lack of confidence in its own pop culture (Lent, 1995, p. 4).

This limitation aside, Asian and Chinese popular cultures have gradually developed their own features. Even under Western influence, Asians produce their own popular products through transforming and hybridising foreign and indigenous characteristics (Lent, 1995, p. 5). Take film as an example: the Kungfu movies of Hong Kong as a genre have gained popularity in some Western countries; Japanese manga, originating from the Western comic book, enlarged the latter by hundreds of pages and enriched its formats and stories, to develop a significant cultural industry.

What does Chinese popular culture, particularly, look like? In Ryan’s opinion, it is better to regard Chinese culture as all the cultural forms that Chinese people living in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and also abroad, create and produce (Ryan, 1995, p. 64).

Also, Sinicism, or ‘Chinese style’ (中国风 zhongguo feng), is a unique form of expression based on traditional Chinese elements, adjusted to a modern environment and to economic and cultural globalisation. Recently, this has been pervasive in different aspects of cultural industries, such as advertisements, movies, music, fashion and architecture. It is conceptually traditional, but functions in a modern way. The watershed of Sinicism was the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (Zhang, 2005, p. 15-30).

The use of Chinese elements in Western pop artifacts dates back to the 1980s to ‘Chinese rock’ (摇滚 yaogun), a hybrid of Western rock’n’roll and traditional Chinese instruments. “Loud punk was tempered by traditional Chinese instruments, synthesizer dance music would spin into jazz improvisation—all sometimes during the same song” (Mihalca, 1992, in Lent, 1995, p. 10). Chinese characteristics lent to Western rock the use of traditional instruments such as the suona, and Chinese lyrics reflected the special problems and feelings of Chinese urbanites, and folk forms. For example, ‘northwest
wind’ was a new hybrid from the combination of Shaanxi folk music and rock; a rock group Bronze melded them with “nostalgia for the recent Communist past-producing revolutionary songs” and set them to a modern beat (Lent, 1995, p. 5). After the new century, increasing hybrid songs appeared. This kind of music uses a Western style, such as R&B, hip-hop and rap, but focuses on local poetry and the melodies of traditional instruments. One of the most successful pieces was produced by Jay Chou in 2004 东风破(dongfeng po), and applied 宋词 (songci, a poem style in Song Dynasty) with the rhythm of R&B, played on traditional Chinese instruments, the erhu and the zithern. The popularity of this song started a wave of using Sinicism in music (Zhang, 2005, p. 29).

2.2.4 Culture and language: Intercultural competence

Culture and language share a complex historical relationship. As Liddicoat (2002, p. 5) argues, culture shapes what we say, when we say it, and how we say it from the simplest language to the most complex. In the newest version of The Guide to Teaching and Learning Language, Scarino and Liddicoat (2009) explain the complex context of using language as follows,

The nature, contexts and purposes of using language and languages for communication are increasingly complex and ever-changing in our multilingual and multicultural world where people use different languages and dialects for different purposes in a range of different context. The need to communicate (that is, create and exchange meanings with diverse people both within and across cultures, and uses a variety of communication technologies) requires a sophisticated understanding and use of language and languages.

(Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009, p. 6)

In an age of global interdependence and an increasingly multicultural and multiethnic society, the nature, contexts and purposes of using language are increasingly complex and changing. The language teachers, as these authors contend, should take this
complexity of language into consideration and work to develop student ability in intercultural communication. Second language learning is also intercultural learning (Liddicoat, 2003, p. 203), and knowing about culture is the basis of using language appropriately. In this sense, the teacher is required to be actively involved in maintaining and developing their knowledge of the language and culture they teach and to seek out opportunities to use their knowledge and to keep up to date with culture in target language communities, as part of their professional stance as Languages teachers. Addressing the significance of contemporary culture and language gives more relevance to the practical communicative function of language.

Therefore, intercultural competence is one of the most significant competences language learners can develop and should focus on (Liddicoat, 2002; Liddicoat, 2003; Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009). Intercultural competence is defined as being awareness that cultures are relative, and that “there is no one ‘normal’ way of doing things”, and requires language learners being able to use the target language properly in cultural context (Liddicoat, 2002, p. 10). Learners develop for themselves an intercultural position that moves beyond their own culture. The acquisition of cultural conventions is only part of a developing intercultural competence. The more important part relies on having strategies for learning more about culture through interaction. As Liddicoat (2002) contends, developing intercultural competence is an ongoing process and the “primary tool for this development is reflection on one’s own linguistic behaviour and that of one’s interlocutors”. Contemporary culture, or popular culture, which reflects the current context of the target society, brings more significance to these competences and communication abilities.

In addition, early foreign language study gives children unique insight into other cultures and builds their cultural competency skills in a way that no other discipline is able to do. Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) argue that at age ten, children are in a crucial time in the development of their attitudes towards nations and groups perceived as ‘other’, according to the research of Piaget, Lambert and other. At this age, children
are moving from “egocentricity to reciprocity and information received before age 10 is eagerly received” (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). The exposure to a foreign language helps children build intercultural competence because children have the opportunity to experience involvement with another culture through a foreign language. This can enhance their awareness of a global community. Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) also suggest that information through foreign language has a positive impact when accompanied by experiencing culturally authentic situations.

2.3 Popular Culture and Pedagogy

Bringing popular culture into teaching is not a new idea. There is a large literature about popular culture practice in teaching Geography (Paterson, 1991), English (Cheung, 2001, Williamson and Hardman, 1994), Sociology (Elterman, 1983), Ethics (Martinez, 1998) and other subjects, that demonstrates that popular culture has been seen as capable of contributing to effective teaching and learning. In particular, for English teachers, popular culture has been one important strategy to engage students and make texts relevant and interesting. It was found in a UK study in the ‘90s that the majority of English teachers had used popular culture in the classroom more extensively than traditional forms (Williamson and Hardman, 1994). As Domoney and Harris (1993, p. 234) assert, popular culture is “one way of involving young learners and their teachers in meaningful, enjoyable, and collaborative classroom tasks”.

2.3.1 Providing authenticity and relevance to students

It is important to involve the “everyday textual experience” of the large majority of people and the experience and knowledge of students in the classroom. Child-centred pedagogy emphasises the validity and authenticity of students’ out-of-school cultures and experiences (Buckingham, 1989, p. 4). It is important to teach authentic culture from the target language as a way of validating the language and culture. Popular culture can also be regarded as an authentic part of students’ experience, a way to
democratise the curriculum, by making it responsive and relevant to students’ out-of-school experiences (Buckingham, 1989, p. 4-5).

Studies have shown that the use of popular culture, be it film, music, or current events, has had a positive effect on assisting students in connecting with texts that might otherwise seem outdated and unimportant in their modern world. It would seem only reasonable that taking advantage of pop references is helping students connect with the curriculum content they need to master, and helping them achieve academic success (Cates & Milner, 2007).

2.3.2 Emphasis on children’s knowledge

Students’ knowledge about music, movies and teen culture is often underused in the classroom because school privileges high culture, usually as manifested in the written word. The use of popular culture texts can help bring children’s knowledge into the classroom, and provide another avenue for children to enter ‘school literacy’ (Grace & Tobin, 1998, p. 46).

This is also a potential change to the dominant power relations of the classroom (Buckingham, 1998, p. 8; Grace & Tobin, 1998, p. 46). Students could be the ‘experts’, who usually have more knowledge about their own popular culture than the teacher. The shift of class focus to students can encourage their exploration of their own cultural investments and concerns.

2.3.3 The importance of playfulness in the use of popular culture

It seems obvious to assume that a popular culture context can bring fun and excitement to students in the classroom, which is itself an important reason for its being in education. However, it is necessary to explore why ‘fun’ and ‘playfulness’ might be significant in the classroom. If the significance of playfulness and fun is recognised by
the teacher, it can be utilised to motivate and inspire students. And this need not ever be
done at the expense of high culture texts. As play at school is typically defined, planned
and monitored by the teacher, teachers and children usually have different perspectives
on play in school (Nancy, 1979). Teachers regard play as being creative, fun, pleasing
and usually ‘easy’, while children think activities directed by the teacher are relegated
to the category of ‘work’ (Romero, 1989, in Grace & Tobin, 1998).

Secondly, fun and playfulness factors that can contribute to the development of
students. Child-centred theories repeatedly emphasise making learning ‘fun’. It is
believed that playfulness and pleasure can improve the development of students. Play is
now considered to be an activity contributing to the cognitive, psychological and social
development of children, especially young children. Humour and playfulness is a way
for youth to navigate their daily discourse (Vasudevan, DeJaynes & Schmier, 2010, p.
19). Taking advantage of this well can blur the lines between work and play, so that
children are able to learn knowledge with pleasure, whilst developing their thinking and
doing abilities (Grace & Tobin, 1998, p. 47). A second advantage is that fun can
contribute to an extension of learning and have impact on the comprehension and
performance of students (Cates & Milner, 2007). Students often love to talk about pop
culture because they are passionate about their music, television, and movies.

Another benefit also acknowledged by Grace and Tobin (1998, p. 59) is that bringing
the unofficial interests, pleasures and humour of children into the classroom can create
a more equal footing in the classroom. Through knowing about children’s interests,
teachers can learn more about children themselves and this can influence their teaching.
Therefore, teachers and students can work together to produce a classroom that is
democratic. Clearly, teachers should always focus on the academic purpose in ‘fun’, to
recognise play’s motivational and disciplinary purpose and, indeed, its place as ‘work’.
2.3.4 Low value and low intellectual quality?

Although advantages in using popular culture in classrooms are found in many studies, some voices question the value of popular culture and doubt the use of popular culture due to a perceived failure to generate high intellectual quality and high-order thinking in classrooms (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Misson, 2009). One early problem in this field concerned with the negative effects of media on children. Popular culture, from the perspective of a critical view of media (Buckingham, 1998, p. 8), has traditionally been criticised for its role in sustaining relations of oppression and domination. Children in this view are regarded as passive victims of the influence of media, which act as the purveyors of the ‘dominant ideology’. Consequently, this view argues that teaching through this kind of material fails in providing a comprehensive cultural perspective for young children.

Intellectual quality is defined in Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools (2003) as “pedagogy focused on producing deep understanding of important, substantive concepts, skills and ideas, and such pedagogy treats knowledge as something that requires active construction and requires students to engage in higher order thinking and to communicate substantively about what they are learning.” As a key component in the NSW Quality Teaching framework, high intellectual quality and deep understanding are required of NSW teachers. The problem, then, is whether popular culture can correlate with high intellectual quality in teaching or not.

A further different problem is that popular culture texts and media may only provide direct and accessible pleasure for students, but cannot engage students in deep understanding and higher order thinking, other than giving them superficial fun. In this view, Mission (2009) reported that popular culture texts and media, accordingly, represent low intellectual quality.
Nevertheless, many other scholars and educators do not regard popular culture texts in education as being of low value (Misson, 2009; Grace & Tobin, 1998). It is believed that popular culture texts are attractive and can provide a different way of looking at the idea of ‘text’ which is not necessarily ‘lower’ in value (Misson, 2009, p. 332). In Cates & Milner’s (2007) research, they proposed that popular culture is effective in encouraging student deep understanding. They found that the development of deep students’ understanding relied on the extent to which a teacher used popular culture to connect with student experience. Therefore, rather than focusing on the value of popular culture text itself, the ways to use and incorporate them with the teaching are more relevant to intellectual quality.

More interestingly, in teaching Languages, the implementation of popular culture texts and media does not have to conflict with encouraging student intellectual quality because the aim of teaching language is to teach capability in using the language. Languages are different from other subjects, with Moffett (1968) famously defining the difference as:

Language and mathematics are symbol systems, into which the phenomenal data of empirical subjects are cast and by means of which we think about them. Symbol systems are not primarily about themselves; they are about other subjects. When a student ‘learns’ one of these systems, he learns how to operate it. The main point is to think and talk about other things by means of this system.

(Moffett, 1968, p. 6)

Therefore, popular culture in language teaching potentially has only advantages because it is not the content that is intrinsically important but the use of the language around it.

Moffett (1968) criticised the particle approach used by most textbooks on language, which “analytically decomposed language into elements”, categories, and then units (p.
4). He argued that high ability in using language, accordingly, relies on the extended use of language.

We must create more realistic communication ‘dramas’ in which the student can practice being a first and second person with better motivation and in a way more resembling how he will have to read, write, speak, and listen in the ‘afterlife’.

(Moffett, 1968, p. 12)

‘Little bits of exercises’ are not as useful as the extended use of the language, and the sophistication of language depends on the sophistication of the situation, not on decontextualised exercises. Popular culture is a highly appropriate set of contexts in which students can extend their use of language, and it can help them improve.

2.3.5 Popular music in the classroom

Popular songs, as an important component of popular culture, have been widely utilised in education. Popular music has been strongly associated with adolescence and with being a teenager at least since the 1950s when, arguably, ‘teenagers’ emerged as a distinct, if transitional, identity (Savage, 2007, in Richards, 2010). Though it is probably unwise to assume that popular music is always privileged among the various media that engage teenagers’ attention, it does continue to figure vividly in the way people live their youth (Richards, 2010, p. 132). Therefore, it can be meaningful to involve popular music in young students’ classrooms.

Martinez (1998) found that popular music in teaching could result in more active responses from students and could create a relaxed environment in which students felt more in control. She showed that popular music as a teaching tool had a contribution to make in helping students engage in discussion and in encouraging them to question and criticise. Nevertheless, the emphasis of these studies was on the students at the upper
end of school age (Richards, 2010, p. 133). There remains space for studying the use of
music in the everyday lives of the classroom for the younger students.

2.3.6 Video used in the classroom

Popular songs, movies and other pop artifacts in video format may also be useful
teaching materials in classroom. Grace and Tobin (1998, p. 42) encouraged students to
produce videos by themselves, through using their knowledge of popular songs,
animation and movies. In the process of video production, the researchers found that
students had an opportunity to incorporate their own interests, experiences and desires
into school work (p. 43). Students produce their own pleasure in their own terms by
curricular slippage and excess, pushing the boundaries and transgressing the norms of
everyday life in school.

2.4 Popular Culture and L2 Teaching

In teaching L2, popular culture from the society of the target language can make a
contribution to increasing students’ language performance. Cheung (2001) used
Western popular culture in teaching English to Hong Kong students and found several
advantages. Firstly, the use of popular culture in class was able to motivate students to
learn English, for example, students were very willing to recite the dialogue in the film
Titanic. Through providing materials that students could relate to easily, students could
see “direct personal benefits and life relevance in what they are taught in school”,
which works on their intrinsic motivation (Biggs & Watkins, 1993, p. 6). Secondly, the
“variety, excitement and novelty” of popular culture can help build a relaxed classroom
atmosphere and enjoyable engaging activities for students when learning the distant
language (Cheung, 2001). Thirdly, using popular culture in teaching also contributes to
the developing of an awareness of the social-economic identities of the target society
(Cheung, 2001). As Harmer (1991) says, language teaching can usefully bring students’
daily life and interests inside, so that students will have the feeling that they are able to use the target language in realistic situations.

2.4.1 Music and language teaching

Singing as part of learning L2 has been discussed as an effective pedagogical strategy. Learning a second language is about gaining a set of linguistic, cultural and social habits. As Zhao asserts:

Language is a set of habits and learning a foreign language was just like to establish a special set of habits, the acquiring of a new language consists essentially of acquiring a new set of habits, and for one who has already acquired a set of habits for his native language, it will be necessary to change many of these.

(In Hannah, 2009)

To form habits it is necessary to increase language learners’ familiarity with, and understanding of, the culture and language. Hannah suggests (2009) that music, especially popular songs, could be used to make repetition more interesting and help increase student motivation. Music is also effective because children are learning linguistic and cultural knowledge at the same time. She suggests the use of some Chinese popular songs according to whether the lyrics and rhythm of the songs help students’ to pronounce and memorise words. A song, like 对面的女孩看过来（Dui Mian de Nv Hai Kan Guo Lai）with many directional words in the lyrics, such as up, down, left and right, is likely to be effective for students learning direction words (Hannah, 2009).

Ma and Wang (2009) have a similar opinion, and believe that beginning with learning tones through singing could be less difficult for young students. Kirkham (2004) also points out another advantage of the use of songs in teaching language which is that the music tempo can be changed to suit the level of learning of the students without
distorting the sounds or words. He puts students in a team to sing because the anonymity of a group can build confidence for students without their worrying too much about pronunciation and tones. Jenson’s (2000) study on the brain also supported this view and he found that the role of music in eliminating ‘threat’ and enriching the classroom environment was effective in creating successful language learning.

By employing music as a tool for foreign language learning, teachers can take advantage of the undeniable appeal of music, using it to help promote student interest and motivation in learning the target language (Barnhardt & Redmond, 2007; Claerr & Gargan, 1984; Heusinkveld, 2006;). In addition to music’s potential ability to increase student interest, the commonalities between music and language can be used to help students develop a sense of rhythm and the intonation patterns of the language (Purcell, 1992).

Foreign language educators are discovering more and more how music can contribute to contextually-based foreign language learning and the development of language proficiency in terms of both communication skills—listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing—and cultural knowledge. Trapp (1991, in Barnhardt & Redmond, 2007) observes that songs allow students to hear how the target language ‘flows’. Abrate (1993) notes the ability of songs, particularly culturally authentic songs, to contribute to “training the ear to discriminate rhythms and sounds in the target language” (p. 170).

Songs can additionally provide the basis for class discussion, oral presentation, and a variety of writing activities, thus presenting students with valuable, meaningful opportunities for practising oral and written expression (Abrate, 1993; Claerr & Gargan, 1984). Many researchers note the role that singing can play in improving students’ accuracy of pronunciation in the target language (Heusinkveld, 2006; Mora, 2000; Claerr & Gargan, 1984). Others argue that music can be used to support the development of reading and writing skills, since song lyrics are in and of themselves a
form of literary text (Failoni, 1993; Murphey, 1992; Claerr & Gargan, 1984). Music can support the development of students’ cultural knowledge also. By incorporating culturally authentic songs into their classrooms, foreign language teachers can give students direct insight into some of the products of the target culture and the practices and perspectives that surround them, thus fostering cross-cultural sensitivity (Heusinkveld, 2006).

Some brain studies also show that rhythm develops learners’ memory (Gadzikowski, 2007). Both the left and right sides of the brain are activated when singing. In the process of experiencing the rhythm of music, language learning and memory can both be enhanced. Songs are useful for facilitating the memorisation of vocabulary and grammatical concepts (Failoni, 1993; Claerr & Gargan, 1984).

One limitation found by Murphey (1992) and Eddy (2007) is that, using songs for memorisation alone will do little to produce communicative proficiency in a foreign language. The simple memorization of lyrics without their dynamic use in a context cannot give the expected results. Language should be put into communicative contexts in which is meaningful (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). Culturally authentic songs, defined as those written by and for a culture, are identified as being particularly useful in creating meaningful communicative contexts. A good illustration is the use of Sinicist songs 中国风 (zhongguo fēng) discussed in the first section of this chapter.

2.4.2 Video and language teaching

Another aspect of popular culture is movies, television programs and cartoons. Although watching foreign television programs often confronts students with a language barrier, fortunately, subtitling may have some ‘translation’ advantages. d’Ydewalle and Van de Poel (1999) indicate that subtitling in one’s native language help increase audiences’ comprehension of a second language. It is believed that children are more sensitive to foreign-language acquisition in a natural context of
implicit learning. Children under twelve are at a stage where they have greater possibility for acquiring a second language successfully, and they may gain more linguistic competence when being exposed to the language in an informal context. In d'Ydewalle and Van de Poel’s test, participants (children between the ages of eight and twelve) showed substantial improvement on vocabulary through watching subtitled cartoons. However, they had relatively poor performance on syntax and grammar tests.

2.5 Engagement

2.5.1 Definition of student classroom engagement

Engagement is a growth-producing activity through which an individual allocates attention in active response to the environment (Christensen et al., in Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, D. & Johnson, R., 2005, p. 2). Student engagement has increasing influence on educational outcomes such as academic achievement, behaviour, attendance (Finn, 1989). There have been rich studies working on the indicators and facilitators of classroom engagement. It is necessary to examine the definition of engagement from multiple perspectives.

Early studies of engagement tend to define engagement from a single dimension. One definition of engagement was given by Marks (in Klem & Connel, 2004, p. 3) as “a psychological process, specifically, the attention, interest, investment, and effort students expend in the work of learning”. Another definition is “student psychological investment and effort directed toward learning, understanding or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote” (Newmann in Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 3).

In addition, engagement can also refer to students’ involvement with school which means “a sense of belonging and an acceptance of the goals of schooling” (Finn, in Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 3). Similarly, Archambault, Janosz, Fallu and Pagani. (2008)
think that engagement has been viewed as school involvement or commitment, bounding and connectedness, attachment or belongingness. “Flow” theory focuses on involvement (Csikzentmihalyi, 1988 in Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 63). “Flow” is a subjective state of complete involvement, which means that individuals are so involved in an activity that they lose awareness of time and space. This requires that students simultaneously experience intense concentration, interest and enjoyment in an activity (Shernoff et al., 2003). In this sense, concentration, interest and enjoyment are the foundation for the experience of “flow”. Students need intense concentration and absolute absorption in classroom activity, and maintain interest to continue motivation and subsequent learning; also they need to feel enjoyment and satisfaction in “flow” activities, even intellectually demanding tasks (Shernoff et al., 2003). However, this term seems to be ‘idealistic’ in assuming the intense involvement of students, focusing and affectively engaged all the way through. Another old-fashioned view of engagement is Smith et al.’s (2005) “keeping it flowing around” model. In this model, the transmission of knowledge in the classroom is mutually between teacher and students, and also among students. The teacher provides knowledge and makes student engage in learning, while students can provide knowledge to the teacher in some ways. These studies of student engagement provide various ways of conceptualising the term, but they remain fragmented and untested (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

More contemporary studies focus on the multiple dimensionality of student engagement. Human development is complex and includes several aspects, and a multidimensional concept of engagement can address these multiple facets of human development such as behaviour, values and cognition (Archambault et al., 2008). This approach could also provide prevention and intervention strategies that are beneficial to practical teaching.

An early multidimensional view of engagement was derived from Finn’s (1989) model, which comprised behavioural and affective components. Here behavioural
components refer to participation in class and school, while affective component include school identification, belonging and valuing learning.

Jimerson, Campos and Greif (2003) proposed a more integrated definition of student engagement using multiple dimensions. Engagement was characterised as “a multifaceted construct that includes affective, behavioural and cognitive dimensions” (Jimerson et al., 2003, p. 11). The affective dimension is the student’s feelings about school, teachers and peers. The behavioural dimension includes students’ observable actions or performance, including participation in extracurricular activities, completion of homework, and academic achievement. The cognitive dimension includes a student’s perceptions and beliefs associated with school and learning (for example: I will do well in this class if I try). Finn and Rock (1997) include measurements of delinquency, truancy or misbehaviour in their investigation of engagement.

Fredricks et al. (2004) also argue that student engagement is a multidimensional construct that unites behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions in a meaningful way. The three aspects are described as follows:

Behavioural engagement draws on the idea of participation; it includes involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities and is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out. Emotional engagement encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work. Finally, cognitive engagement draws on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.

(Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60)

use a variety of indicators of conduct, work involvement and participation. Conduct includes positive behaviours and negative behaviours. Positive behaviours refer to completing homework and complying with school rules. Negative behaviours incorporate frequency of absences and tardiness, fighting or ‘getting into trouble’, and interfering with the work of others (Finn & Rock, 1997). Participating in the learning processes involves effort, persistence, concentration, attention, asking questions and contributing to class discussions. School-related extracurricular activities include participation in sport, drama, debating and school governance (Finn & Rock, 1997).

Emotional engagement refers to inner processes such as: “students’ affective reactions in the classroom, including interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety” (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 63). Emotional engagement duplicates an earlier body of work on attitudes, which examines feelings towards school such as liking or disliking school, the teacher or school work; feeling happy or sad in school; or being bored or interested in school work. Emotion also includes interest in and valuing schooling, which also overlaps with motivational research (discussed in Section 2.3) (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 63).

Indicators of emotional engagement include student-teacher relationships (whether students get along well with teachers or not) and the value placed on school and schooling (such as maths will be useful in the future; satisfaction with school because learning is taking place) as well as an orientation towards work transferable skills and attitudes (sticking to tasks and maintaining an interest in things that take a long time).

Cognitive engagement is defined as being strategic or self-regulating. Strategic students use meta-cognitive strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate their cognition. They use learning strategies such as rehearsing, summarising and elaborating to aid memory, organise and understand material (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60). Cognitive engagement depends on the use of intelligence and thinking:
Cognitive engagement draws on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60).

Indicators of cognitive engagement are self-monitoring, exchanging ideas, giving directions, justifying an answer, using learning strategies and control strategies, evidence of persistence; relating the task to prior knowledge, requesting clarification and using analogies as measures of cognitive engagement.

Overall, the literature cites behavioural, emotional or affective and cognitive elements as the three key dimensions of engagement.

- Behavioural engagement encompasses doing the work and following the rules
- Emotional engagement includes interests, values and emotions
- Cognitive engagement incorporates motivation, effort, and strategy uses (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 65).

Influenced by Finn’s (1998) model, Fredericks et al. (2004) and Jimerson et al. (2003), Sinclair et al. (2005), Appleton et al. (2006) conceptualise a multiple dimensional construct of engagement comprising four aspects: academic, behavioural, cognitive and psychological. Behavioural engagement comprises student attendance, suspensions, voluntary classroom participation and extra-curricular participation. Cognitive engagement includes self-regulation, relevance of schoolwork for the future, the value of learning and personal goals and autonomy. The psychological aspect entails feelings of belonging and relationships with teachers and peers. Academic engagement, as a fourth indicator of student engagement, consists of variables such as time spent on tasks, academic results and homework completion. However, some scholars contend that academic engagement can be better explained as an aspect of one of the three more commonly identified indicators: for example, time-on-task accurately
described as a behavioural indicator or as an outcome of student engagement (Hart, Stewart & Jimerson, 2011). Moreover, the categorisation refers to four components as ‘subtypes’ rather than ‘dimensions’. Jimerson et al. (2003) argue that there are a number of overlapping dimensions of student engagement. This implies that engagement has a multifaceted nature, rather than being manifested as a number of subtypes.

The view of a non-behavioural dimension of student engagement was not focused on in early studies of engagement, and even contemporary researchers are not unified in the way they view non-behavioural dimensions of student engagement. For example, Appleton et al., (2006) differentiate between a cognitive dimension of student engagement and an academic dimension, whereas Jimerson et al., (2003) do not make this distinction and choose to combine them in the cognitive dimension. This suggests that the dimensions of student engagement are still being debated and refined but that a behavioural focus combined with an affective dimension is largely uncontested. The cognitive dimension seems to centre on student beliefs related to self, school, teachers, and other students. How this includes academic performance is still being debated.

2.5.2 Different levels of engagement

Munns and Martin (2005) define two ‘levels’ of engagement: ‘e’ngagement and ‘E’ngagement (Figure 2.1). The former is at a classroom level and has a multidimensional nature, while ‘E’ngagement reveals a wider relationship with school and education, a sense among students that school is a place that “works for them” and that education is a resource they can successfully employ in the present and the future. The small ‘e’ngagement is recognized as a “multi-dimensional construct” with cognitive, emotional and behavioural components. The complexity is reflected in teaching and learning settings. Small ‘e’ngagement consists of substantive engagement and procedural engagement. Substantive engagement is when students are ‘in task’ or when students are strongly engaged in the tasks they have been set.
Engagement: “School is for me”
- School is a place that “works” for me
- Education is a resource that I can successfully employ now and in the future

Engagement

Students are involved in classroom pedagogical relationships, learning experiences and discourses that emphasise:
- Active participation (high behavior)
- Genuine valuing (high emotion)
- Reflective involvement in deep understanding and expertise (high cognition)

Figure 2.1 Two levels of engagement (Munns & Martin, 2005)

Procedural engagement is when students are ‘on task’ or when students are simply obeying the wishes and instructions of teachers:

When students are strongly engaged they are successfully involved in tasks of high intellectual quality and they have passionate positive feelings about these tasks.

(Munns, 2004b, p. 3; also see Munns et al., 2002, p. 3).

Substantive engagement and procedural engagement are different:

Substantive engagement is a sustained commitment to the content of schooling, which is similar to cognitive engagement. Procedural engagement is trying to complete task requirements, which lasts only as long as the task itself.

(Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 67).

“Small ‘e’ engagement was the substantive engagement in current classroom experiences” (Munns, 2007, p. 304). This study focuses on small ‘e’ engagement which
means substantive engagement only. Procedural engagement was not explored in this study.

Engagement is profoundly influenced by Berstein’s three message systems which are curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices (Berstein, 1996). Through these ‘systems’, ability, level of control and ‘voice’, teachers send messages to students about their knowledge. Simultaneously, a teacher needs to have some strategies to support, direct and connect students, to help them personalise and adapt the classroom message.

Munns and Martin (2005) modify the definition of engagement slightly, changing ‘emotional’ and ‘behavioural’ to ‘affective’ and ‘operative’ because the latter are regarded as providing a clearer and stronger pedagogical and outcome focus for both teachers and students. The emphasis of their student engagement is simultaneously on student well-being in thinking, doing and satisfaction. Accordingly, successful engagement is defined as students being strongly involved in tasks of high intellectual quality and having passionate positive feelings about these tasks, rather than students simply being ‘on task’ and complying with a teacher’s directions.

2.5.3 Motivation and engagement

“To be motivated is to be moved to do something” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 54). People are able to be motivated and more actively engaged when they have impetus or inspiration. Hence, the issue of motivation is important for teachers’ teaching strategies and students’ learning behaviours. It is important to consider the term ‘motivation’ and the relationship between motivation and engagement.

There are four key motivational themes that appear in the contemporary literature. They are self-efficacy theory (the personal assessment of ability to perform a task—‘I can do this’), attribution theory (the personal explanation of why an outcome occurred—‘I am too short to be a basketball player’), the self-worth theory (personal attempts to
maintain self-worth—‘I am OK because people like me’) and achievement goal theory (the desire to achieve a particular goal—‘if I study hard enough I will do well’) (Seifert, 2004). However, Seifert (2004) posits that although these theories appear to be separate, they are, theoretically interconnected. Seifert (2004) argues that motivation, specifically student motivation, is derived from beliefs and emotions.

Although there are many theoretical perspectives on motivation, some have a long history and have influenced contemporary understandings about motivation. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2008) is an example of a theoretical perspective on motivation; it has led to the view that there are two basic types of motivation— intrinsic and extrinsic. The distinction between the two is based on the different reasons that lead to action.

Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because of internal joy or interest, whereas extrinsic motivation refers to satisfaction achieved not by the task but by some external reward (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 55). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are important to developmental and educational practices. Intrinsic motivation, it is often argued, results in high-quality learning and creativity. Compared with intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is often seen characterised as less powerful.

However, in teaching practice, educators cannot always rely on intrinsic motivation to promote learning. Some learning tasks are not inherently interesting or enjoyable for all students. Martin (2003, p. 44) conceptualised “motivation as students’ energy and drive to learn, work effectively and achieve to their potential at school, and the behaviours that follow from this energy and drive”. He claims that student motivation can be seen as a cognitive orientation towards themselves, school, and schoolwork (Martin, 2002). Psychologists think that student motivation is an individual process (Munns & Martin, 2005, p. 1). This is because thinking is thought to occur within an individual. Hence, motivation occurs cognitively. Psychologists also believe that thinking occurs before action. They hold that motivation precedes engagement.
Engagement has a close relationship to motivation; both terms are significant in determining student interest and enjoyment of school and therefore they underpin student achievement (Martin et al., 2003; Martin, 2006). Martin (2006) developed a student Motivation and Engagement Scale to assess the thoughts, feelings and behaviours underpinning the relationship between these concepts. These thoughts, feelings and behaviours are focused by what Martin (2006) calls factors that reflect motivation and engagement. He divides these factors into three basic categories—factors that enhance; factors that impede and factors that constrain motivation and engagement. They are formally called adaptive, impeding and maladaptive dimensions. The motivation and engagement (MeE) framework developed by Munns and Martin (2005) demonstrates the relationship between motivation and engagement. Adaptive dimensions comprise cognitions (self-efficacy, mastery orientation and valuing school) and behaviours (persistence, study management and planning). Motivating thoughts like self-efficacy, mastery-orientation and the valuing of schooling contribute to engaging adaptations, such as persistence, planning, and study management. Accordingly, a highly motivated atmosphere is a key to generating effective engagement.

Martin (2005) also sees motivation and engagement as related and interactive, defining “engagement as the thoughts, emotions and behaviours that follow from energy and drive”. Martin’s Student Motivation and Engagement Wheel (Martin in Munns & Martin, 2005) describes this complex and interactive relationship between motivation and engagement (see Figure 2.2 below).
Figure 2.2 Student motivation and engagement Wheel (Munns & Martin, 2005)

The wheel is divided into four parts, namely the adaptive and impeding cognitive dimensions, and adaptive and maladaptive behavioural dimensions. Motivation is a determinant of engagement. Positive motivation leads to positive behaviour, while negative motivation results in negative behaviour (Munns & Martin, 2005).

However, looking at classroom environments should not be confined to psychological perspectives alone. Motivation and engagement can incorporate a relational component—a sociological dimension. This model suggests that educators should help students increase the positive dimensions while decreasing the negative ones (Munns & Martin, 2005, p. 3).
The function of the wheel is to help students understand the connection between their thoughts and behaviours. It also helps teachers to discuss thoughts and behaviour with students and to plan useful pedagogy and interventions. These interventions can not only improve individual students’ approaches and attitudes towards learning, but also develop their skills to plan and manage their schoolwork. In this way, positive aspects of motivation and behaviour can be maximised while negative aspects can be minimised (Munns & Martin, 2005, p. 3).

2.5.4 Evaluation of engagement: REAL Framework

As discussed earlier, two levels of engagement were identified by Munns and Martin (2005): ‘E’ngagement and ‘e’ngagement. The latter is at a classroom level and has a multidimensional nature, while ‘E’ngagement reveals a wider relationship with schools and education resources, a sense that school is a place that “works” for them and that education is a resource that they can successfully employ in the present and the future.

This study focuses on ‘e’ engagement. To assess student classroom engagement, using a self-assessment framework, Munns and Woodward (2005) provide a tool: the Reflective Engagement: Authentic Learning (REAL) dimension of student self-assessment. This focuses on engagement as affective, cognitive and operative. Munns (2004b) argues that to develop a deeper student relationship with classroom work, engagement should be defined as composed of cognitive, affective and operative dimensions. Students are:

- reflectively involved in deep understanding and expertise (high cognition);
- genuinely valuing what they are doing (high emotion); and
- actively participating in school and classroom activities (high behaviour)

(Munns & Woodward, 2006).
Affective engagement indicates that “the teacher and students are involved in pedagogical conversations that highly negotiate learning situations that can bring about mutually stimulating and enjoyable emotions associated with classroom work” (Munns, 2004b, p. 6). Therefore, the affective dimension offers a pedagogical focus for teachers to build a positive and enjoyable classroom learning environment.

According to Munns (2004b) operative engagement means that students are guided to become competent and empowered learners in the classroom. In this sense, operative engagement does not focus on classroom compliance. Importantly, operative engagement provides for a stronger pedagogical focus for both teachers and students compared with behavioural engagement.

With the REAL framework, these three dimensions of student engagement are to be evaluated in this research. The REAL framework can be used to investigate the cognitive, affective and operative dimensions of engagement through student self-assessment. All self-assessment in the REAL framework can be found in Appendix 7.
Chapter 3 An Action Research Study

3.1 Introduction

This research is aimed at studying how popular culture can be used to improve Australian student engagement in Mandarin classrooms. It is about a volunteer teacher-researcher (VTR) from China learning how to engage Australian students in learning Mandarin. The research uses popular culture as teaching materials in Mandarin teaching and investigates effective ways to improve students’ engagement. The research applies the methodology of action research to investigate the influence of popular cultural teaching materials on student engagement in the L2 classroom, as a way to improve pedagogy. Action research is a problem-solving methodology for helping the teacher-researcher overcome practical issues in their own classroom (Mills, 2007, p. 10). The action research in this study included three cycles; each cycle implemented one particular aspect of popular culture and addressed particular language abilities.

This chapter firstly introduces the theoretical basis of action research and explains the reasons for choosing this methodology. Secondly, it explains how this study clarified the question of intellectual quality in relation to popular culture. After that, it addresses the research design explicitly, including site selection, cycle setting and especially the sources of data collection, and how these could answer the research questions. It then discusses the methods of data analysis used in the research. The last section discusses some ethical issues that had potential to emerge in the research process and how I dealt with them. Student engagement is the focus of the study, and self reflective journals, student self-assessment and test results, and classroom teacher interviews provide the evidence to assess engagement. ‘Evaluation coding’, as one of the most important methods used in data analysis, is explained and illustrated in this section. The REAL Framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006) is an important basis for providing student
self-assessment of cognitive, affective and operational engagement, and is also described and explained in this chapter.

3.2 Theoretical Basis of the Methodology

Action research is a popular methodology applied in education for teachers and researchers interested in improvement and change in schools. A relatively comprehensive definition of action research is given by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) as follows:

A form of collaborative self reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 5)

It can be seen that action research focuses on the ‘reflective’ practices of the researcher and participants and aims to create ‘improvement’ in practices. This is consistent with the features and aims of this research.

Hence this methodology provides a way of thinking systematically about what happens in the school or classroom, implementing critically informed action where improvements are thought to be possible, and monitoring and evaluating the effects of the action with a view to continuing the improvement (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 5). This section explains these two features, focuses on the validity of action research and on the reason I chose this methodology.

3.2.1 Validity of action research

Action research is considered as valid because it focuses on reflectiveness, helps the researcher to ‘continuously’ learn, and narrows the gap between theory and practice.
Being ‘self-reflective’ is one of the most important features in action research, which means in the case of teachers that they need to bring their daily teaching routine into a reflective position (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 102). Through systematically observing, evaluating and reflecting on their classroom practices, teachers can gain new understandings of and self-awareness about both their own and students’ behaviours, which helps them to make changes in their teaching if necessary. Reflection thus aims at improving and enhancing one’s teaching (McDonough, 2006). Another significance of action research is that this methodology enables teachers to be ‘continuous learners’ using reflection on, and correction of, their teaching, so as to improve their ‘professional position’ (Mills, 2007, p. 10). In addition, action research can attempt to address the contradiction between research and practice. The teacher-as-researcher, who is authorised in action research, conducts the research in his/her own school environment and develops solutions to his/her own problems. According to its definition and features, this methodology should be “flexible and situationally responsive and enable rigour, authenticity and voice” (Mills, 2007, p. 11-13).

Importantly, action research contains several cycles, and every cycle can provide data to improve the next cycle. There are four fundamental aspects of action research, and a dynamic complementarity links the four into a cycle:

- **Plan**: to develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening
- **Action**: to act to implement the plan
- **Observation**: to observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs
- **Reflection**: to reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on through a succession of cycles

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 10)
The four moments create one cycle in research. The research starts with a problem and a plan to investigate it, and then the researcher implements the plan and observes the teaching process. During this process, a number of questions are raised and answered, and formulating these questions influences what and how data are collected. After analysis of the collected data and reflection on the findings, the researcher can decide what to do and revise the plan for the next cycle. Nevertheless, though action research seems to have clear and linear steps (as Figure 3.2 below shows), in practice it is “a dynamic process of moving back and forth across these steps as the data acquired continually reshape practice decisions, additional questions and the gathering of additional data” (Parsons & Brown, 2002, p. 16)
In this research project, each aspect of popular culture had its own action research cycle. The researcher can plan, act, observe and reflect in a careful, systematic and rigorous way. The reflection journals and observation notes provide ideas and plans for subsequent cycles. These will become a resource for improvement and knowledge, and help the researcher investigate the answers to the research questions. In terms of generalisability, action research is not aimed to be generalisable although it may provide some suggestions for those teachers who face similar situations. These readers will need to read the research in the light of their own contexts.
3.2.2. Teacher-as-researcher

The position of volunteer teacher-researcher (VTR) was emphasised in this study. Being a teacher-researcher is regarded as ‘valid’ because it improves teaching proficiency and professionalism. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) stated that teacher-researchers could draw on their expertise and professional knowledge to create and produce new ideas which go beyond the conventional ideas of teaching. The two goals are to enhance the sense of self-identity and professionalism of teachers, and to improve teaching practice in the classroom. As Barry and King (1999, p. 660) contend, “the combination of a teacher with a researcher is probably the best arrangement, blending the classroom expertise and research expertise toward the betterment of classroom practice”. This methodology is appropriate when teachers encounter problems with their teaching, in the way of helping teachers develop and implement interventions in the classroom with guidance from research. In this culture, teachers regard themselves as ‘learners” rather than “functionaries who follow prescriptions without question” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 6). It is thus helpful for teachers to build their awareness of how they could contribute not only to their own teaching practices but also to the field of educational research, which is stated as “research of their own professional practice” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 6).

In this research process, the role of the teacher-researcher is emphasised and it focuses on interpretation and meaning-making (Barry, 1988). Nevertheless, though teacher-as-researcher has a vital and direct influence on the research design, analysis and interpretation of data, the validity of data should be guaranteed by multiple perspectives and triangulation of data sources. Thus, interpretation based on the self-reflection journals conducted by the research needs to be triangulated from different versions of “reality”: student self-assessment, test results and worksheet samples, and through interviewing classroom teachers or observer colleagues.
3.2.3 Why choose action research?

This research aims to explore whether popular culture improves students’ engagement in learning a second language effectively. Action research is a suitable methodology for this research because action research is a tool for change and improvement at the local level, and provides an individual researcher the space to make a difference and find local solutions. Teachers can use action research to help them make decisions about what teachers and students can do to improve teaching and learning in classrooms. Action research should be an effective way to implement popular culture in Mandarin and to evaluate the engagement of students in this research, which could include suggestions for the development of teaching methods and encouraging students’ motivation to learn Mandarin in Australia.

As a new researcher and teacher, it is important to gain knowledge from teaching practice and classrooms, in order to develop teaching skills. Action research methodology and a teacher-as-researcher culture could contribute to the professionalism and effectiveness of teaching practices by helping the teacher-as-researcher use teaching strategies and resources that develop teaching practice and enhance theoretical knowledge. Action research can provide this opportunity, so that teachers can critically examine the dynamics of their classrooms, ponder the actions and interactions of students, validate and challenge existing practice, and take risks in the process, in order to become more professional and skilled teachers (McDonough, 2006).

3.2.4 Self-reflection in the Confucian tradition

As discussed above, reflection is important to enhance context-specific and personal theories, in this case, of second language (L2) teachers. Understanding of the importance of being ‘self-reflective’ has grown in socio-cultural studies, as a significant way to understand human activities in terms of personal experience
(Bengtsson, 1995). Interestingly, being reflective is not only a strong feature of Western qualitative methodology, but it also an important idea in the Confucian world of human beings improving themselves in their daily routine. In the masterpiece Lunyu (the Analects of Confucius), a disciple of Confucius, who is also a great ideologist and scholar, explained how he reflected on himself:

**子曰：吾日三省吾身 —— 为人谋而不忠乎？与朋友交而不信乎？传不习乎？**

(Master Zeng said, “every day I reflect on myself in these three aspects: Have I always been beneficial to others’ interests? Have I always been trustworthy to my friends? Have I reviewed what I have learnt?)

Master Tseng argued for the importance of self-reflection and also pointed to those aspects which one should reflect on: work, friendship and study. These were not only necessary for one’s personal development in morality, but also useful for study and research. The self-reflection conducted in this research was based on three aspects:

- past experience (literature)
- ongoing teaching practice (immediate context)
- future plans (recommendations)

Ongoing teaching practice and student behaviours were the core of the observing and recording process, and involving past experience, through literature, helped drive the theoretical dimension. Considering the dynamic cycle of action research, recommendations were needed in this case to inform the next cycle. These would serve to construct more comprehensive perspectives for the VTR to think about, to understand and interpret in terms of classroom practices and student engagement.
3.3 Research Design

The main research question was how popular culture can be used to successfully engage young students in learning Mandarin. It focused on the ways that popular culture is used and the evaluation of student engagement. Thus the research design should emphasise how to gather information on teaching strategies related to pop culture and the assessment of student engagement.

3.3.1 Site Selection and sampling

Shan Gen High School (Shangen HS) and Dong Xi Public School (Dongxi PS) in the Western Sydney Region were selected as the research sites. I taught Mandarin in the each school once a week. The two schools participate in the learning neighbourhood’s ‘Asia literacy program’, which embeds the teaching of Mandarin to support a deeper understanding of Asian culture through the use of new technologies (Asia Education Foundation, 2010). This shows that the schools strongly supported the Mandarin program, and this enthusiasm for Mandarin teaching could contribute to the implementation of the action research.

There were two classes from each school involved in the action research: 7A, 7B in Shangen HS, and 6A, 6B in Dongxi PS. In Shangen HS, each lesson lasted 75 minutes, but I was only teaching for 30 to 40 minutes each period because there was a permanent Mandarin teacher there, while I taught the whole period in Dongxi PS and this lasted 45 minutes. Since I was a volunteer student teacher, the classroom teacher or the Mandarin teacher needed to stay in the class when I was teaching. Each cycle lasted one term, though in practice only half of the lessons involved popular cultural references. The school schedule occasionally changed unexpectedly and sometimes the Mandarin lessons were cancelled. The beginning of the term was used as a ‘warm up’, for example. I played some songs they already knew and also played some Chinese songs I would use in later lessons. Then students started to learn ‘key’ lexical and cultural
knowledge from the pop cultural references. During the process, students had self-assessments in each lesson. At the end of the term, it was the final test for students. I interviewed the classroom teacher and summarized this cycle; this prepared for the next step.

3.3.2 Cycle implementation

Three aspects of popular culture were applied in the three cycles in this study, as shown below. Most pop culture references used in the Mandarin classroom shared the common features of Sinicism or Chinese style (中国风 zhongguo feng), which is a unique form of expression based on Chinese traditional elements, adjusted to the modern environment and economic and cultural globalisation. It is something conceptually traditional, but functions in a modern way. For example, an R&B song might use Songci (a poetic style from the Song Dynasty) poetic lyrics and melodies played by traditional Chinese instruments.

Figure 3.3 Cycle implementation in this research
The first cycle mainly used Chinese popular songs, including some hip-hop songs and ballads. A variety of musical styles and rhythms were involved. Cycle 1 mainly focused on listening and speaking. Through the repetition of singing, students could master lyrics and learn some lexical vocabulary. Knowing about the background story and cultural meaning of songs was also important in this study.

The next cycle moved to movies and animation. With the assumption that most of my students are visual learners who are sensitive to pictures and video, it is possibly effective to learn words and conversation through watching movies. Listening and speaking were still the emphases in this cycle. After learning some lines from movies, students were required to create conversations within a group and perform these in front of the class. The contemporary culture presented in movies and animation was explained and discussed with students.

The last cycle used teen magazines, but with the help of music and video clips. While not ignoring listening and speaking practices, reading and writing were centrally addressed in Cycle 3. The colourful pictures helped students to focus on the texts and understand them. After learning some paragraphs about fashion, clothes and music, and movies, students were to write short paragraphs themselves to express their opinions on fashion and entertainment. In terms of cultural aspects, students could also learn more about current Chinese teen culture.
3.4 Data Collection

The sources of data were closely related to the research questions and how to answer them. The focus of this study was on popular culture used in Mandarin classes and student engagement. Three contributory questions were:

- Q1. Are students engaged by these materials?
- Q2. Is the engagement of high intellectual quality?
- Q3. Do they have a good knowledge of the target culture because of this?

To answer these three questions, four kinds of data were collected:

- D1. My self-reflection diaries
- D2. Students’ self-assessment
- D3. Students’ test results/worksheet samples
- D4. Classroom teachers’ observation/interviews.
Triangulation is a form of confirmation and validation, and differentiation as well. Multiple points of view can provide the researcher with more confidence about data validity (Stake, 2010, p. 124). The following table shows these multiple sources:

Table 3.1 Data sources used to problematise research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>D 1</th>
<th>D 2</th>
<th>D 3</th>
<th>D 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q 1</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 3</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.1 Self-Reflection by the researcher

As ‘reflection’ is an important feature of action research, the self-reflection journals of the researcher were one of the most important data sources in this research. The teacher reflections are part of an “ongoing attempt by teachers to systematically reflect on their practice by constructing a narrative that honours the unique and powerful voice of a teacher’s language” (Mills, 2007, p. 70). The self-reflection journal is a significant way to recognise oneself and gain insight, and also to guide future planning in the next cycle. It functions as a data source to provide “valuable information about the workings of a classroom” (Mills, 2007) and also provides teacher-researchers with “the opportunity to maintain narrative accounts of their professional reflections on practices” (Mertler, 2009, p. 112). As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993, in Mills, 2007, p. 70) suggest, reflective journals can:

- be records of classroom life in which teachers write observations, and reflect on their teaching over time.
- be collections of descriptions, analyses, and interpretations.
- capture the essence of what is happening with students in classroom and what this means for future teaching episodes.
- provide teachers with a way to revisit analyse and evaluate their experiences over time.
- provide windows on what goes on in school through teachers’ eyes.

The self-reflective journals in this study contained the categories listed above. My reflection took place on a daily and class basis. There were journals written for each lesson in each class involved in this study. The journals had two main categories. One was reflection, including observation of the whole class engagement and of students’ performance in the class. Those observations recorded classroom life and student behaviours. As I was experiencing the teaching process with students at the same time as data were collected, this was participant observation, i.e. “the researcher joins in the
activity as a participant, not just to get close to the others but to try to get something of
the experience they have down on paper” (Stake, 2010, p. 94); this is regarded as an
active form of collecting data. In participant observation, the researcher should become
a participant and gain access to the field and to persons (students), and the observation
should also move through a process of becoming increasingly “concrete and
concentrated” on the aspects that are essential for the research questions (Flick, 2009, p.
226-227).

However, there are some problems with this method. One problem is that the researcher
cannot observe and record all phenomena in all situations. In this case, it was even
harder when I needed to be teaching students, and the observations needed to be
recorded after class. Another problem with this method is that it is very “difficult to
presume that one’s participant experience approximates others” (Geertz, cited in Stake,
2010, p. 2010). The VTR’s experience may not be equal to the students’ experience,
and the accuracy of the recording written by a new researcher is not so guaranteed.
Therefore, multiple sources of evidence are needed, such as students’ assessments and
classroom teachers’ interviews. These are described in the next section.

The second part of the journals is my thinking, understanding and interpretation of
these issues raised in the observation notes. This category engaged past experience,
literature and analysis and recommendations for future planning.

3.4.2 Self-Assessment by students: the REAL Framework

According to Munns and Woodward (2005), engagement is a disposition, and it is
impossible to judge from external signs alone. Hence, it is not valid to rely only on the
reflections of teachers and observers. Students’ dispositions are very important in the
recognition and encouragement of student engagement. As Munns, McFadden and
Koletti (2002) argue:
It is students themselves who will be able to tell us that they are engaged and who will say whether education is working for them in a culturally sensitive and relevant way. . . It is at the messy point of teachers and students responding to each other culturally in relation to classroom discourse and assessment practices where we are truly going to see whether or not students feel that school is for them.

Therefore, it is significant to provide an opportunity to highlight students’ feelings and opinions about whether they are really engaged. At the end of each class, feedback from students was sought by the teacher. The questions on which this feedback was based were from the Reflective Engagement: Authentic Learning (REAL) instrument for student self-assessment (Munns & Woodward, 2006, p. 197). This emphasises the multi-faceted nature of engagement in affective, cognitive and operative ways. The aim of self-assessment is to help teachers to understand students’ internal processes and to encourage students to think about learning (Munn & Woodward, 2006, p. 195). Self-assessment through the REAL framework includes three dimensions: affective (‘feeling good’), cognitive (‘thinking hard’) and operative (‘acting well’). The framework affords similar systematic entry to the higher level of the SOLO Taxonomy of Biggs, by increasing the structural complexity of learning and assessment tasks through unidimensional, multidimensional, relational and conceptual sequences (Munns et al., 2002). The application of this taxonomy to self-assessment is to “promote deeper reflections about learning and works against the compliant and routine nature of self-assessments that have been observed among many students” (Munn et al., 2002, p. 6). In practice, the self-assessment of students will go through four sequences from lower to higher levels after using popular culture learning materials each week. Successful engagement, from the teacher’s perspective, needs to meet the requirements of all three dimensions; however, practically, one or two aspects were to be focused on after each lesson.

In the original design, there were four levels ranging from unidimensional to multidimensional. As Table 3.2 shows, each level covers five subjects: thinking about
achievement, looking for evidence, working with other people, overcoming barriers, reframing the task; these are combined with the three dimensions of engagement.

Table 3.2 Self-assessment in the unidimensional level of the REAL Framework
(Munns & Woodward, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thinking about achievement</strong></td>
<td>What were the fun bits in your learning?</td>
<td>Write a memo to someone about the most important thing you learned today/yesterday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Looking for evidence</strong></td>
<td>What surprised you about your learning?</td>
<td>What is your best hard work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working with other people</strong></td>
<td>How does working with others make you feel?</td>
<td>What cooperation helped your learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overcoming barriers</strong></td>
<td>How do you feel now when it gets tricky?</td>
<td>What was the tricky part?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reframing the task</strong></td>
<td>What would make you feel better about today’s work?</td>
<td>Name two things to make you think harder?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are fifteen questions in each level. To better fit the content of that lesson and to reduce time-consumption, it was more practical to select and revise questions from the framework. As a result, I chose three questions from each of the three dimensions of engagement for student self-assessment in each lesson, so that students could finish it in five to eight minutes as planned. These three questions varied: some focused on
achievement, some emphasised solving difficulties or teamwork. It all depended on the content taught in that lesson. An example is as follows: this is the self-assessment for Cycle 1, and twelve questions are shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Self-assessment for students used in my research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 1</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Operative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 1</td>
<td>Q1. What were the fun bits in your learning Mandarin today?</td>
<td>Q2. What is the most important thing you learned today in Mandarin class?</td>
<td>Q3. What new thing can you do now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 2</td>
<td>Q1. What surprised you about learning today?</td>
<td>Q2. What is your best hard work today?</td>
<td>Q3. List your strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 3</td>
<td>Q1. What was the difficult part?</td>
<td>Q2. How do you feel now when it gets difficult?</td>
<td>Q3. What is your biggest improvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 4</td>
<td>Q1. What would make you feel better about today’s work?</td>
<td>Q2. Name two things to make you think harder</td>
<td>Q3. What would you change about today’s work to help you improve</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As students were new to Chinese pop culture, Cycle 1 focused more on fun and playfulness. The self-assessment questions were thus chosen from the low level—unidimensional level. The sequence of these questions from Lesson 1 to Lesson 4 is mainly based on the sequence of the five aspects (thinking about achievement, looking for evidence, working with other people, overcoming barriers, reframing the task) and the context of each lesson. Lesson 1 was the introduction of two Chinese singers and
songs, and addressed lexical knowledge relatively less, so the questions in Lesson 1 generally asked about their feelings and thinking. As students could learn deeper knowledge in Lesson 2, they were required to look for evidence about their achievement and understanding. Where the content knowledge becomes more difficult in later lessons, such as Lesson 3 and Lesson 4, the questions are selected from working with other people and overcoming barriers.

3.4.3 Test and worksheet samples

Testing is another way to evaluate students’ engagement and their understanding of modern Chinese culture. At the end of each cycle, written forms or oral testing were used to test students’ knowledge of vocabulary and pronunciation and their ability to construct sentences, as well as their knowledge of Chinese culture. To complete a test is one way of assessing student understanding and ability in language. Tests can help evaluate how students master vocabulary and retention of knowledge. However, there are some problems with tests. One is that tests may not really reflect a student’s language performance. It only reflects how well a student is able to finish tasks at that time. Another is that some students may have a negative attitude to this assessment method. It so happened that some students were not willing to write the task even though they were able to answer it. I needed to be cautious that some students with low scores should not automatically be regarded as ‘low engagement’. Therefore, test results were not the only evidence available for evaluation. Engagement had to be assessed through a combination of teacher’s observation, self-assessment and scores in tests. Worksheet samples were collected in Cycle 3 because this cycle focused more on developing writing ability and reading comprehension. Worksheet samples are more flexible than test results, and how students finished these tasks could more readily reflect their strengths and weaknesses in learning the content of the lesson, and provide the teacher with ideas about how to generate the next lesson and the next cycle.
3.4.4 Other teachers’ observations / interviews

To gain valid and comprehensive data, I also used the regular classroom teachers’ observation notes as additional evidence. The regular classroom teachers observed each class, so they were familiar with my teaching and the students’ behaviour. Their observation notes were useful in evaluating the action research. Each classroom teacher was requested to provide one observation note relevant to at least one lesson in each cycle. There was no fixed observation sheet for the observers because, as Stake (2010, p. 91) argues, a fixed instrument is sometimes constraining. Nevertheless, I gave the classroom teachers advice about the focus, such as, ‘How many students are willing to answer questions?’, or ‘Are they happy in singing?’. These helped them maintain focus and facilitate aggregation.

Interviews took place at the end of the last cycle. These were semi-structured. The reason for a semi-structured interview was to enable the researcher to maintain control over the line of questioning, while leaving space for the interviewee to give open answers (Creswell, 2009). In the first cycle, there was an interview in the last week of Term 2. I interviewed a VTR colleague who came to observe my lesson. In the last week of Cycle 2 I interviewed a classroom teacher from Dongxi PS. In the last cycle, the Mandarin teacher in Shangen HS was interviewed, in the 8th week of Term 4. The interview tried to gain an experienced teachers’ perspective on using popular culture in language teaching in terms of student engagement. Nine questions were given to the participants in advance, as shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long have you been involved in the Mandarin program? Do you have any suggestions about improving it?</td>
<td>Opinion of the Mandarin program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Have you ever used popular culture in your classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What was the result?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How do you feel about the atmosphere in my Mandarin class generally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How well do you think students complete their tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>What has been an impressive moment in my Mandarin lessons?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>What do you think of the way that the teacher engages students in learning Mandarin generally? Does the teacher successfully help students engage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Over time, do you think there has been progress in students’ learning of Mandarin?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>What could the teacher do to improve?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.5 Data Analysis

This section outlines the data analysis guidelines and strategies. Initially, after completing each cycle, all the data collected within that cycle were analysed to form one separate chapter. In this thesis, after the first round of data analysis, some primary findings were identified. Following that, a larger scale of data analysis based on subsidiary questions led to revision and reorganization of evidentiary chapters to capture the thesis. Through this two-step data analysis process, I was able to see how students’ engagement improved and how my teaching skills developed in this long-term action research, and to identify the contribution that this research has made to pedagogical and theoretical knowledge.

Three kinds of method were applied to the data analysis. The first was coding, which is suitable for assessment and evaluation. This method is used to analyse self-reflection journals and teachers’ interviews. In addition to that, excerpt commentary was also
incorporated in analysis of this evidence. The answers to the self-assessments were
mainly calculated in a quantitative way first and then were interpreted and analysed
through indicators of three aspects of engagement. In analysis of test results and
worksheet samples, statistics of overall scores were calculated and then the results were
interpreted by co-ordinating it with the former analysis. As evaluation coding and
excerpt commentary are two particular analysis methods, this section focuses on
explaining and describing them explicitly.

3.5.1 Coding

Coding is defined as “the process of examining the raw qualitative data which will in
the form of words, phrases, sentences and assign codes or labels” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 8).
This method is used to produce a coherent, focused analysis for reflection journals,
observation notes and interview recordings. As a “heuristic”, coding is a necessary step
toward a rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation of the data (Saldaña, 2009,
p. 8). The method of coding is regarded as an exploratory problem-solving technique,
which could generate the bones of analysis and provide a guiding structure for the
research. Coding notes in analytic categories is helpful for the researcher to develop
explicit theoretical propositions (Emerson et al., p. 144). A code is “most often a word
or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing,
and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña,
2009, p. 3). A code is usually used to summarise or condense data on the basis of a
particular theoretical perspective from the researcher. It is not necessary to focus on
every single event, person or situation; instead, the research needs to concentrate on
some more general theoretical dimension, which can generate a code for this general
category (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 150).

All the self-reflection journals were analysed through an Evaluation Coding strategy.
This coding strategy emerges from the evaluative perspective of the researcher and
from the qualitative commentary provided by participants. It is an appropriate way for
assessment and evaluation, which is defined as “the application of non-quantitative codes onto qualitative data that assign judgements about the merit and worth of programs or policy” (Rallis & Rossman, in Saldana, 2009, p. 96). This coding method is considered to be able to describe, compare and predict:

- describe the patterned observations or participant response of attributes and details that assess quality
- compare how program measures up to a standard or ideal
- predict changes and provide recommendation for the changes and possible instruction as to how those changes might be implemented

(Saldana, 2009, p. 96)

Therefore, this method is effective for making judgments about the program, and providing ideas for improvement in the future. As this coding strategy is appropriate for action evaluation studies (Rallis & Rossman, in Saldana, 2009, p. 97), I used it to evaluate student engagement and my teaching from an evaluative perspective. In practice, this coding method employs several additional coding methods to supplement it, such as Magnitude Coding, which notes whether the participants allocate a positive [+] or negative [-] code, Descriptive Coding (to note the topic) and Vivo Coding (to note the specific qualitative evaluative comments, especially in relation to emotion and mood) (Saldana, 2009, p. 98).

There are three steps in the coding process which can be summarised as: codes → categories → themes. The diagram of the evaluation coding process is shown as Figure 3.6:
The first step was to code the self-reflection journals. The evaluation started with a descriptive code (the topic) and was followed by a vivo coding. The positive [+ ] and negative [- ] comment were then assigned to the descriptive codes related to specific personnel, such as students, myself or the classroom teacher, and I then added special qualitative evaluative comments, plus a recommendation coding tag with a specific memo/action for follow-up. As Table 3.5 shows, the first step is to generate evaluative codes based on self-reflections.

Table 3.5 An example of evaluation coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partially due to my unclear instruction, students can’t understand what to do.</td>
<td>-me: unclear instruction</td>
<td>Me: giving instruction</td>
<td>Teacher’s pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-*stu: talking</td>
<td>Stu: behaviour</td>
<td>Operative engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of them begin to talk and out of discipline. Then I try to make my instruction clear and I show my anger to the students, and most of them behaved well and listened to me. But one boy still speak out and keep saying ‘I didn’t know how to write it, you didn’t teach me that. . .’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-stu: badly disciplined</th>
<th>Stu: behaviour</th>
<th>Operative engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+me: becoming clearer</td>
<td>Me: giving instruction</td>
<td>Teacher’s pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-me: angry</td>
<td>Me: emotional response</td>
<td>Teacher’s pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-stu: unwilling to finish task</td>
<td>Stu: attitude to work</td>
<td>Affective engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-stu: negative attitude to teacher</td>
<td>Stu: attitude to teacher</td>
<td>Affective engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*stu is short for ‘students’)

After assigning evaluative codes to different personnel, the second step is to generate categories based on these codes. In the example, [-stu: talking] and [-stu: badly disciplined] are both related to students’ undisciplined behaviour in the classroom, while there are also codes about students’ good responses to the teacher. The codes related to students’ negative behaviour and positive behaviour can be put into the same category [stu: behaviour].

The third step is to generate themes based on categories. In the example from step two, students’ behaviour category is one of the aspects that can describe how students behave and participate in learning activities. This is one of the indicators of student operative engagement, so this category can come under the theme of operative
engagement. The discussion of this category then could be one of the evidences to evaluate operative engagement.

The research purpose was to explore the influence of popular culture on students’ engagement; hence, engagement in all three aspects was crucial in the coding process. However, it is impossible to just label the data as ‘affective engagement’ or ‘operative engagement’ because that is just cyclical and doesn't explain what affective engagement might have looked like in my classroom. The forming of themes would partly reflect my overarching theoretical view of engagement, i.e, the themes may include cognitive engagement, affective engagement and operative engagement as headings if the related categories are generated, though other themes will also be included, such as teacher’s pedagogy from the example shown below. The reason to have themes is that I am trying to evaluate the three aspects of student engagement, in terms of [+ and -]. I want to see how much a theme carries a [+ /[-] loading. This sequence of coding could provide the evaluative information for me to analyse engagement, and also assure that the themes were driven by the data from self-reflection (codes and categories) and were not just reflecting my framework.

The interviews were analysed through descriptive coding. This involved line-by-line categorisation of notes and reflection; with a series of analytic and presentational possibilities the researcher examines aspects (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 143).

As a way of opening up research inquiry, it can be seen that qualitative coding is helpful for the researcher to identify and develop concepts and analytic insights through close examination of, and reflection on, field note data. This method could contribute to a clear structure for categorising engagement.
3.5.2 Excerpt commentary

Aside from evaluation coding, self-reflection journals and observation notes and interview transcripts from other teachers were also analysed by excerpt commentary. In this process, the researcher orients a descriptive excerpt from journals or transcripts, and explores and develops ideas by “commentary grounded in the details of the excerpt” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 183). The analysis process begins with an analytic point, which links back to ideas in preceding paragraphs with the theme of the section and overall story, and also points out certain features of the excerpt to provide the reader with instructions on how to read and interpret that excerpt (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 184). Following that, orienting information (usually a short sentence that bridges to the excerpt) is given to identify the name and role. Then the excerpt is presented in indented form. In the process of excerpt commentary, it is necessary to be careful with editing the excerpt, which may consider several criteria, including length, relevance, readability, comprehensibility and anonymity of information (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 187). Analytic commentary, as the most significant part in the analysis, is used to raise issues relevant to themes, for explanation, clarification, justification or supporting theories. An example is given as follows:

. . . Then Anna played a song from Xiaokang Geyao to students. However, the students did not care about it at all. Most of them kept talking and did not pay any attention when Cathy asked them to sing. One student said to me, ‘miss, is every song in your country like this? So stupid!’ I responded immediately, “Absolutely not! We have many popular songs and talented singers and they are very fashionable and cool.” “That’s great! Why don’t you show us?” The student asked . . .

(Shangen High School, 6A, 07/09/2010)

In this excerpt, some students did not engage with the song at all. Although it is useful to embed vocabulary in a song, it is still necessary to consider the type of music, because not every song will attract students’ attention successfully. Based on talking with students, the researcher found that students seem to prefer music with fast rhythms
and popular content, rather than a slow and simple song. Being ‘cool’ seems important for young students, and this could be considered when choosing teaching materials. More interesting teacher materials may result in more active engagement. This kind of excerpt commentary was helpful in the analysis of self-reflection journals and observation notes as well as the interview transcripts in this research.

3.6 Ethical Issues

Research ethics is an important issue in this research, both in the planning stage and in application. This study obeys ethical rules during the entire research process. As Northway (2003, in Flick, 2009, p. 40-41) states, “all aspects of the research process, from deciding upon the topic through to identifying a sample, conducting the research and disseminating the findings, have ethical implications”. Qualitative research is usually more open and flexible than quantitative research, and the openness may result in a comprehensive approach to data collection rather than a clearly focused set of questions.

Ethical involvement includes informed consent forms for participants, avoiding harm to participants in collecting data, doing justice to participants in analysing the data and keeping confidentiality in writing about the research (Flick, 2009, p. 40-43).

Informed consent is a precondition of participation, and it should meet some criteria:

- The consent should be given by someone competent to do so
- The person giving the consent should be adequately informed
- The consent is given voluntarily

(Allmark, 2002, in Flick, 2009, p. 41)

Before starting the research, all participants that I planned to involve were informed about the research and what they would need to do; they were allowed to reflect and
decide whether to consent or not. It was not difficult to inform my VTR colleague and school teachers, who I planned to interview, because they were of a similar or higher education level and had enthusiasm for improving teaching. The process to inform students encountered some problems however. Students, as the vulnerable population, were the most important participants in this study. The students were children from Year 6 and Year 7, and it was necessary to ask another person—students’ parents, caregivers or responsible medical personnel—to provide their consent as a substitute. Children were firstly informed about my research outline—what it was about, what they were going to do, while their parents or caregiver received information sheets about the research design and aim.

One problem was that some students understood it in that lesson, but forgot the next week and were curious. They asked me again, “miss, what is your research about?” Another problem was that it was very difficult to make sure that students could bring the information sheets and consent forms to their parents and take them back to school if the parents agreed to sign. It happened sometimes that students came to me and asked for copies of the forms because they could not find them. Based on research ethics, students and their parents consent are totally voluntary and they should not be forced to give consent. However, it seemed not appropriate where parents did not receive the information at all. These two problems were solved with the help of classroom teachers. The fact that I only stayed with the students for one lesson each week sometimes decreased students’ attention. Classroom teachers were kind enough to provide assistance. They adopted the informed consent as a serious, regular school routine and requested students to show their parents the forms. Through classroom teachers’ repetitive emphasis, the return of consents increased significantly.

In the stage of collecting data, it is crucial to avoid harm to participants, especially for young children. When collecting the self-assessment and test results, students’ self-esteem and privacy should be respected. Tests were regarded as a tool to evaluate the whole class, not any specific student.
Doing justice to participants is also a vital ethics issue in analysing and writing about the data. When coding one student’s behaviour or making a certain judgement about the words of an interviewee, one should be careful with the interpretation, which should be grounded. Flick (2009, p. 42) suggests that judgement and conclusion not be made on a personal level; instead, they should be subject to a “diagnostic assessment”.

Another ethical issue is confidentiality and anonymity in writing about the research. It was guaranteed that none of the participants could be identified from my writing. The two schools, teachers and students all have aliases in this thesis. Moreover, it was also important to store all the data including students’ answer sheets, recordings and transcripts in a secure container, so that others would not be able to access these data (Luders, 2004b, in Flick, 2009, p. 42).

Research ethics are necessary for better research, and appropriate guidelines need to be followed. Action research is a dynamic process and I even encountered unexpected problems and issues. The planning and doing the research have to proceed with consideration of these ethical problems. As Flick (2009, p. 43) suggests, it will always help you develop valid research, if the researcher is more reflective, more sensitive, and thinks from participants’ perspectives.
Chapter 4 Data Analysis: Cycle 1

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses my first cycle of action research. Based on analysis of self-reflection journals, data from students, observation notes and interview with my colleagues, this chapter focuses on analysing students’ learning during a unit using popular songs in terms of student engagement. The chapter begins with an introduction to the research setting and lesson content. Then I discuss the process of data collection and present the data. The self-reflection was coded and I here discuss the key categories that influence student engagement. It then analyses observation notes and interview with my colleague. As the intellectual quality of the tasks is a significant focus in this research, cognitive engagement is separately evaluated through analysis of other evidence such as student self-assessment and test results. Other aspects of engagement in relation to student self-assessment are then discussed.

4.2 Research Setting and Lesson Contents

This cycle took place in Shangen High School (Shangen HS) and Dongxi Public School (Dongxi PS) simultaneously. Two classes from each school were involved in the action research: 7A and 7B in Shangen HS; 6A and 6B in Dongxi PS. In Shangen HS, each lesson lasted 75 minutes, but I was only teaching for 30 to 40 minutes each period because there was a permanent Mandarin teacher there, while I taught the whole period in Dongxi PS; this lasted 45 minutes. In Shangen HS, the cycle started in Week 2 in Term 2, and was completed in Week 8, but during this time there were two weeks in which Mandarin lessons were cancelled. In the primary school, the cycle began from Week 3 in Term 2, and was completed in Week 7. The four-to-five weeks’ lessons involved popular cultural references, and data were collected from:

- my self-reflection,
• students’ self-assessment,
• test results
• teacher interviews.

Table 4.1 Lesson contents in Cycle 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shangen HS</th>
<th>Dongxi PS</th>
<th>Teaching Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7A&amp;7B</td>
<td>6A&amp;6B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Week 2  Week 3
How to ask and answer ‘How old are you/你几岁’
Playing the game *Guess the Celebrity’s Age*, to encourage students to practise dialogue, as well as for a general introduction to Chinese popular culture

Week 3  Week 4
Introduce Chinese pop stars
By using a music video *Shuangjiegun* (nunchakus), talk about the culture of Kungfu
Learn key vocabulary from the song and sing the chorus

Week 6  Week 5
Learn direction words such as up down left and right, and verbs
Listen to song *Duimiande Nvhai Kanguilai*, give them the text of the lyrics and let them find familiar words
Sing the chorus which includes the direction words and verbs

Week 7  Week 6
Recall the song
Teach lexical words from the lyrics, such as boys and girls
Expand *I am a boy/girl* to *I am a pretty girl/I am a handsome boy*
Learn to sing the song *I am a pretty girl*

Week 7  Test

The emphasis in this cycle was on how to engage students through the use of Chinese popular songs. Two songs were taught, but the knowledge on which I focused was different in each case. The first song was a hip-hop song; the content was about Chinese Kungfu and nunchakus (a traditional weapon consisting of two sticks connected at one
end with a shirt chain or rope). The rap song has many lyrics that are difficult to translate word for word, so I explained the main idea of the song to students and taught them to sing the simple chorus. Some focus was on cultural aspects which included an introduction to the history of Kungfu, and some styles and weapons of Kungfu. The second song was a popular ballad, describing the troubles of adolescents when falling in love. I taught the key lexical items from the lyrics, such as gender and direction words. A brief list of each lesson’s content is offered in Table 4.1.

4.3 What Data Were Collected

4.3.1 Self-Reflection

Self-reflection diaries were kept to reflect on each lesson. These discussions start with lesson plan and expected outcomes. Through recording the process of my teaching and students’ behaviour and performance, this reflection leads to introspection about successes and failures in the classroom. These problems are discussed in relation to past experience and literature, and provide recommendations for future teaching and improving the pedagogy.

4.3.2 Interview & observation notes

Sushi, who is a colleague from the ROSETE program, observed one of my lessons in Cycle 1 at Dongxi PS. and was then interviewed. The observations and interview transcript form the second piece of data. The interview questions I used are set out in Table 4.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Have you ever used popular culture in your classroom?</td>
<td>Past experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the end of each lesson, students had five to eight minutes to answer three questions which were selected and revised from the REAL framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006). Those answers aimed to directly reflect students’ thoughts and feelings as evidence to evaluate their cognitive engagement. It was planned to let all four classes—6A, 6B, 7A, 7B—answer the questions for each lesson in this cycle (as the table below shows). However, occasionally, there was not enough time left for some classes to complete the self-assessment because the time was not managed well or due to some unexpected changes in the school schedule. The class in lesson 4 was finished in advance due to a change of school schedule so insufficient data were collected from students. The questions used for this cycle are set out in Table 4.3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Engagement Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was the result?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel about the atmosphere in my Mandarin class generally?</td>
<td>Affective engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about the class atmosphere when I was using popular culture?</td>
<td>Affective engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well do you think students finish their tasks?</td>
<td>Operative engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been an impressive moment in my Mandarin lessons?</td>
<td>Success of the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think of the way that the teacher engages students in learning Mandarin generally? Does the teacher successfully help students engage?</td>
<td>Teacher’s skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over time, do you think there has been progress in students’ learning of Mandarin? Is this positive or negative? Why?</td>
<td>Cognitive engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What could the teacher do to improve?</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.3.3 Self-Assessment

At the end of each lesson, students had five to eight minutes to answer three questions which were selected and revised from the REAL framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006). Those answers aimed to directly reflect students’ thoughts and feelings as evidence to evaluate their cognitive engagement. It was planned to let all four classes—6A, 6B, 7A, 7B—answer the questions for each lesson in this cycle (as the table below shows). However, occasionally, there was not enough time left for some classes to complete the self-assessment because the time was not managed well or due to some unexpected changes in the school schedule. The class in lesson 4 was finished in advance due to a change of school schedule so insufficient data were collected from students. The questions used for this cycle are set out in Table 4.3:
Table 4.3 Self-assessment questions in Cycle 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 1</th>
<th>Lesson 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What were the fun bits in your learning Mandarin today?</td>
<td>What surprised you about learning today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the most important thing you learned today in Mandarin class?</td>
<td>What is your best work today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What new thing can you do now?</td>
<td>List your strengths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 3</th>
<th>Lesson 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was the difficult part?</td>
<td>What would make you feel better about today’s work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel now when it gets difficult?</td>
<td>Name two things to make you think harder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your biggest improvement?</td>
<td>What would you change about today’s work to help you improve?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.4 Test results

At the end of this cycle (Week 7 at Dongxi P), the students had a test that aimed to evaluate their language and cultural knowledge. Classes 7A and 7B from Shangen HS did not undertake the test because the Mandarin teacher had her own test planned. The test paper can be found in Appendix 7.

4.4 Analysis of Self-Reflection

4.4.1 Coding

An Evaluation Coding strategy was used to analyse all the self-reflection journals. This method applies “non-quantitative codes onto qualitative data” that evaluate the failure or worth of activities, programs or policy (Rallis and Rossman, cited in Saldana, 2009,
Since such coding strategies are appropriate for action evaluation studies, I used it to evaluate student engagement and other matters arising from the analysis. Practically, evaluation coding includes a variation of other coding methods, and entails noting whether the participants make positive [+] or negative [-] comments. Positive [+] or negative [-] comment codes were given to all the performances related to specific personnel, such as students, me or the regular classroom teacher, and I then added special qualitative evaluative comments, and a recommendation coding tag with a specific memo/action for follow-up. (Saldana, 2009, p. 97-98)

My coding of the self-reflection diaries in this cycle revealed the following key categories, set out in Table 4.4:

Table 4.4 Coding results: Self-reflection diaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Me</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Classroom Teacher</th>
<th>Other Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowing about students</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving instructions</td>
<td>Emotional reaction</td>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>Ability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible strategies</td>
<td>Learning attitude</td>
<td>Help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>Learning behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These categories were related to each other, and then allocated to several main themes. I analyse them under three key themes:

- Students and affective engagement;
- Students and operative engagement;
- Teaching skill.
There were other, minor, categories, each of which took up only a few sentences in my self-reflection and is not worth presenting in detail.

4.4.2 Limits to reflection

It can be seen that reflection journals formed a significant part of the evidence, and provided important data for later evaluation. Being self-reflective has been seen as having an important impact on improving the teaching profession and teaching practice by bringing the daily teaching routine into a reflective position (Mills, 2007, p. 70). The mutual-benefit relationship between reflection and action enhances the development of cycles in action research. It is widely agreed that reflection can have an enlightenment function for the teacher because it informs teacher understanding and self-awareness about both their own and students’ behaviour, through observing, evaluating and reflecting on classroom practices. Reflection thus has become a key concept in discussion of teacher education (Bengtsson, 1993). Nevertheless, there are some problems and limits to this method, and it is necessary to discuss them in order to consider the accuracy of data and the validity of the methodology.

Although self-reflection is widely considered to have an impact on teacher competence and teacher education, it is possible to exaggerate the autonomy of a teacher. Bengtsson (1995) criticises the assumed relationship between reflection and the teaching profession. He argues that it requires a teacher with complete autonomy who can, with the help of reflection, see through “all political, social, historical and other ideological factors embedded in every educational situation and from this elevated position chooses freely and consciously in order to take full responsibility for his or her actions”.

In particular, a student teacher who has just started teaching may not have the required degree of professional competence. Bengtsson (1995) argues that such a person could become a “victim of the routines and other presuppositions of professional practice”. As an inexperienced student teacher, I was worried about the quality of my self-reflection
journals and had doubts about whether I had the capacity to elucidate those things taking place in the classroom.

Perhaps a more important issue is that self-reflection journals are subjective and this decreases the validity of data. The concerns about validity can be addressed by triangulation of data. Reflection diaries are an important part of the data, but adding evidence from students and regular classroom teachers provides multiple perspectives and is able to alleviate the subjectivity.

4.4.3 Key theme 1: Students and affective engagement

Affective engagement is defined by Munn and Martin (2005) as students being engaged in the classroom with a positive emotion (which they call “feeling good”). It includes their positive and negative feelings about, and reactions to, teachers and peers. In some ways, affective engagement was the easiest to evaluate because this inner process is reflected on the “surface”. It requires focusing on students’ reactions in the classroom such as interest, boredom, happiness, sadness and anxiety (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 63). Indicators of affective engagement may include student-teacher relationships, the value placed on school and schooling, and orientation towards work transferable skills and attitudes.

Based on the coding results, 35 codes were found that describe affective engagement. Most (29) of the codes in this category are positive [+ ] comments, such as “laugh”, “cheer up”, “excited”, while 6 codes referred to negative [-] comments. Two levels were found in the analysis of the affective codes. One is student emotion, reflected as direct emotion appearing in the classroom: for example, “happy”, “laugh” or “bored”. Most vivo codes designed to note specific qualitative evaluative comment, especially in relation to emotion and mood (Saldana, 2009, p. 98), are related to positive emotions. “Excited”, “cheer up”, “laugh” were the most frequent words appearing in the self-reflections related to students. On the other hand, these positive or negative
emotions also have an influence on students’ attitudes to the teacher, the subject and schooling, such as whether students had good relationships with teachers and whether they valued Mandarin. These attitudes are related to their deeper engagement in learning.

When I played their familiar pop stars Justin Bieber and Usher, students were excited (all the students stood up and girls were screaming!) (Shangen HS, 7A, 29/05/2011) because this relates to their background cultural knowledge. According to constructivist theory (Wertsch, 1997), the background and culture of the learner help to shape the knowledge that the learner creates, discovers and attains in the learning process. Then I introduced a similar Chinese popular song which could connect with their local popular culture. Students showed a similar excited mood when they first had access to the Chinese pop star Jay. My entry says, “They watched the music video very quietly”, and I thought they were not interested in it, and then “when the song came to the end, they started to cheer up and asked to watch it again. And several boys shouted, “the best song I’ve listened to ever, ever!” (Shangen HS, 7B, 29/05/2011). Two boys from the high school and primary school told me “I am very impressed (by his talent)” (Dongxi PS, 6A, 15/05/2011; Shangen HS, 7A, 29/05/2011). More interestingly, “some girls asked me to write down the singer’s Chinese name in pinyin as well as in characters, so that they could Google him at home.” (Shangen HS, 7A, 29/05/2011). So it seemed that the introduction to Chinese popular singers inspired interest and the cycle seemingly had a positive beginning.

When vocabulary and cultural knowledge were involved in learning the songs, the excitement was seemingly not dampened by the difficulty of the knowledge. My journal records:

Some students seemed a little distracted when practising numbers. But later introducing Kungfu really caught their attention. Actually when they saw the first picture, they started to cheer up and feel excited about it. Boys stood up and started to do action.
After demonstrating the song, I started to explain and teach them lexical words. Girls were very excited during I taught them to say pretty girl in Chinese….Then I asked students how to say I am a pretty girl in Chinese (the most frequent appearing lyric in the song), a girl sitting in the back who rarely raised hand suddenly wanted to participate. So I let her answer. She was very shy firstly and then I encouraged her to say it. She said the sentence perfectly, and then she nudged her deskmate, and sing the song “see, wo shi piao liang nv sheng (I am a pretty girl)”

They kept a loud voice to sing, and became very a thrill when they cope with the music… And when practising the lexical words from the lyrics, they also happily pronounced the vocabulary and read them loudly. Even though sometimes they have repeated the sentence more than 10 times, most of students kept loud voice and wanted to try to sing them fluently very much.

Students appeared to keep positive emotions when learning cultural and vocabulary content. The first extract above shows that Kungfu culture drew students’ attention. I had all their attention after playing Kungfu texts. By the use of pop culture to change the atmosphere in the classroom, students’ interests and attention were captured. In the second extract, a shy girl was encouraged to say the correct Mandarin and expressed her liking of the song. After practising the song, the girl seemed to have confidence and did not feel bored, so she wanted to try to answer the question. To some extent, singing can play an important role in improving students’ accuracy of pronunciation in the target language (Heusinkveld, 2006). The last extract shows that repetition did not appear to bore students, and even encouraged them to practise their pronunciation, in order to sing the song fluently. Students seemed to like the practices and were interested in the works and in participating.

The use of popular culture seemed to help build a relaxed and happy classroom atmosphere (Cheung, 2001), and students appeared to have fun in learning. This is possible because the knowledge students are learning is something that they consider
“cool”, like a popular song or Kungfu. It is also said that students are comfortable with learning songs. For Australian students, the difficulties of the Chinese pronunciation system could be eased by singing the song. Thus the “comfortable” learning seemed to increase their interest and stimulated them to keep practising.

In addition, my view is that students’ motivation was gradually developed. The following paragraph describes the situation when students were learning a song:

I can’t stop laugh because they are so cute and lovely in practising the song. Several boys sitting front said, “miss, stop laughing! It is serious! We are trying to learn it!” I am really surprised by this attitude. I though students only regard the songs and movies as entertainment and fun, not something for learning, but now they demonstrate to me that they indeed take it serious and really want to learn it by heart, which give me huge confidence and also motivate me to keep this action research.

(Shangen HS, 7B, 24/05/2012)

This excerpt showed students seemingly taking a serious attitude to learning. In the beginning—before I introduced pop culture texts—I was frustrated by their “rejecting and negative attitudes” toward learning Mandarin (Shangen HS, 7A, 02/10/2010). However, after using the popular culture text, the atmosphere gradually changed and their learning attitude also improved to some extent. Students were still required to learn vocabulary and practise saying sentences; however, the difference is that they were now willing to learn, and valued what they were learning because they regarded learning (the song) as something “serious”: like the boy said, “it is serious! We are trying to learn it”. The children appeared to now value Mandarin learning. The change to students’ willingness to do the work could result from the popular song itself or from the more comfortable and relaxed learning environment or they just wanted to learn “cool” songs so that they could “show off” in front of others. Certainly, students’ feeling and reactions to work changed, and this willingness to do the school work is one of the important indicators of affective engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 6). In addition, students’ changing attributes encouraged my own faith in my ability as a
teacher and the researcher. These mutually stimulating and enjoyable emotions associated with classroom work between the teacher and students connected to a sense of strong affective engagement (Munn, 2004b, p. 6). Both the teacher (me) and students appeared to be engaging in a positive and enjoyable learning environment.

In the later lessons, students also achieved some success in speaking and reading, which may have reflected this changed attitude. In one lesson, when I asked students to translate the lyrics on the screen, many hands were raised and the answers were correct. After I praised them, students were very excited and surprised about their ability to translate. When students accomplished speaking the task, such as reading a paragraph from a song, they seemed happy and proud. These behaviours appear to indicate that students were proud of their performance. Popular cultural teaching materials seemed to be providing direct pleasure to students, which resulted in a relaxed and positive classroom atmosphere. I believe that the material helped improve students’ motivation and built a positive learning attitude. With high motivation and a positive learning attitude, students were able to perform better in classroom activities, such as finishing tasks, and in their speaking practice. The achievement seemed to bring direct pleasure (happiness, satisfactions), and this in turn increased their confidence and interest in learning the language.

However, there were some minor [-] codes in respect of the next cycle. The [-] codes were mainly concerned with individual students’ negative emotions, including some showing no interest in the topic, feeling distanced from the content or having a generally negative attitude to the teacher and to the subject. This context obviously fails at engaging some students. Nevertheless, the failure did not necessarily result from popular culture itself; rather, it may be caused by problems of the teacher’s teaching strategies. This issue is discussed in Key theme 3 of this section.

4.4.4 Key theme 2: Students and operative engagement
Operative engagement means a situation in which students actively participate in classroom activities and finish tasks well (Munns & Martin, 2005). From a broader perspective, a good operative engagement refers to aspects of students’ positive behaviour, including student attendance, voluntary classroom participation and completion of homework as well as academic achievement (Jimerson et al., 2003).

In the coding process, positive [+] codes were found overwhelmingly in the self-reflections, 25 [+] vs. 9 [-]. The codes in this category fall into three aspects. These are:

- how students participated in the lesson (participation);
- how they behaved (behaviour)
- the language capability they demonstrated (ability).

**Students’ Participation**

In classroom participation structures (Burboles & Bruce, 2001, cited in Arends, 2004), participation has various forms based on the type of lesson (this includes listening to the teacher, taking notes, answering questions, giving ideas, working alone or cooperating with others). Participation in classroom activities mainly refers to students raising hands to take a turn, answering questions, playing games and finishing tasks (Arends, 2004). Moreover, participation also takes place in the learning processes, and involves effort, persistence, concentration, attention, asking questions and contributing to class discussions (Fredricks et al., 2004; Finn & Rock, 1997). Based on all the codes in this small category, positive aspects of participation were overwhelmingly greater than negative aspects (10[+] vs. 3[-]). Participation in activities related to popular culture was relatively high. The following paragraph is from the journal that describes students answering questions:

After practising the conversation, we started to play the game: How old are the celebrities’ age? And they need answer me in Chinese. The first star is Jackie Chen. One funny boy said, “oh, my favourite! He is my father.”
was speechless…Many hands were raised and gave different answers in correct Chinese, range from 30-60 years old.

(Shangen HS, 7A, 29/05/2011)

Here we see students actively taking part in the games, and interested in practising the language well. Most students concentrated on the game and showed high participation in classroom activity. This appeared to be one good moment in the Mandarin classroom.

In a later lesson, after I introduced the history of Kungfu, a few students came up with some questions, like “Why do different provinces have different Wugong (Kungfu)?”, “Which Wugong school did the Wugong Bruce Lee belong to?”. These questions usually generated some discussion. There were also funny questions arising from the discussion, such as “Can this man (in the picture) beat Bruce Lee or Jackie Chen?”, “How can they break the table so easily?”, “Are they hurt?” or requesting me to demonstrate a part of Kungfu (under the illusion that all Chinese are Kungfu masters). It was important to clear up their mistaken concepts influenced by the media. In this activity, students asked questions, gave ideas and contributed to class discussion. They had active participation in the learning process by providing ideas and engaging in discussion.

Nevertheless, some students hesitated to participate at first. The distance from Chinese popular culture resulted in unfamiliarity and low interest for some students and of course, not all students are fans of popular culture:

Some students were confused about the stars and the songs, and when I asked question to them, they were very confused, “I don’t know.” Two another students did not focus on my teaching at all, and one of them even said, “I am not Chinese, why I should know.”

(Shangen HS, 7A, 29/05/2011)

In the game, most of students were taking part into guessing celebrities’ age. A student who refused to answer question before also raised his hands,
but he had no idea how to say the answer in Chinese because he didn’t listen to the lesson at all. Then he asked me to tell him how to say it and I did it. He indeed tried hard to say it.

(Shangen HS, 7A, 29/05/2011)

When most of the class were participating, the rest of the students were also inspired by the atmosphere and showed interest. Even the student who showed a strong negative attitude towards the subject, saying “I am not Chinese, why should I know?”, also raised his hand and more importantly, asked me to teach him, so that he could engage in the game successfully. Once again, this shows that popular culture cannot automatically engage all students, and sometimes the learning atmosphere and their peers’ behaviours are more important factors in influencing children.

Behaviour

Student behaviour includes positive behaviours and negative behaviours. Positive behaviours include completing homework and complying with school rules, while negative behaviours include frequency of absences and tardiness, fighting or “getting into trouble”, and interfering with the work of others (Finn & Rock, 1997). Based on the [+ codes in this category, students behaved well in terms of the codes: “concentrated more”, “being quiet in listening”, “loud voice in reading”, and “trying hard to sing and read new sentences”. Several examples are as follows:

Then I teach them to sing the part of the song which they have translated. It is still difficult to speak in very fast and fluent way, but students are very willing to practise and repeat the song.

(Dongxi PS, 6B, 25/05/2011)

They kept a loud voice to sing. Most of them can pronounce the vocabulary clear. What surprised me, some of them were very keen to learn the strokes and writing.

(Shangen HS, 7A, 07/06/2011)
Actually they were just so-so when learning the vocabulary. But it was totally different after they watched the MV and started to sing. Firstly I only taught them to sing just for two lines. They sang the learnt part very well, and also sang some unfamiliar part. They asked me to teach them the whole song.

(Dongxi PS, 6B, 01/06/2011)

The first excerpt shows that students had some difficulty in speaking, but this did not have an impact on their attitude to practice. When they were learning, they read and spoke sentences in a “loud voice”. In the second excerpt, students were just “so-so” when learning the vocabulary, but they improved their learning behaviour when singing the song. Most significantly during singing, students were interested in learning more lyrics so that they could sing the whole song.

A few “negative” behaviours were observed. For example, boys were acting negatively when learning “I’m a pretty girl” and some students only focused on learning pinyin instead of characters. They showed tardiness in learning some content in which they were not interested. These [-] codes, in fact, are not ‘very’ negative according to Finn and Rock’s (1997) definition of negative behaviour mainly because students were not absent or “getting into trouble”, and interfering with the work of others. In fact, students did begin to exhibit learning behaviours that were more disciplined, more concentrated, and showed a curiosity to learn.

Students Ability

Improving students’ use of meaningful language is the ultimate goal of teaching language to students. In Cycle 1, songs were mainly used, which put more emphasis on listening, speaking and reading. Consequently, many students did well in singing and speaking the learnt sentences. The most obvious improvement was their clearer and more accurate pronunciation. I found “singing the lyrics really helps them pronounce the vocabulary, and after singing, they could read more fluently and smoothly” (Dongxi
PS, 6A, 01/06/2011). Another development was that they seemed to finish tasks “quickly and correctly”, especially the tasks related to popular culture, such as matching the stars and their songs, and translating the lyrics (Shangen HS, 7A, 29/05/2011). The following is an example.

I ask students to find the learnt words from the lyrics, and they can find the learnt ones very quickly and are able to translate the whole sentence into English.

(Dongxi PS, 6A, 25/06/2011)

This demonstrated that students had some translation ability, although it was very much at the beginning level.

On the other hand, many difficulties also occurred and blocked improvement. While they could say short sentences clearly, some sentences from the song were too long to read, which decreased their confidence. For example, when I taught ‘快使用双节棍，哼哼哈兮，习武之人切记仁者无敌(use your nunchakus, heng heng ha xi, Kungfu master knows that the benevolent has no enemy), students could say the characters fluently in separate sentences, but when the three phrases came together, they could not speak them fluently (Shangen, 7B, 24/06/2011). Practice helped improve but could not solve this problem. Another problem is that students could show achievement during a lesson, but easily forgot new knowledge after two weeks. The last problem observed lack of practice in writing.

4.4.5 Key theme 3: Teaching Skills

The first of several key categories under this heading is a category about me, in terms of teaching skill, emotional reactions to students, and language barriers. This may seem removed from the focus of this study on popular culture and engagement, but through the whole cycle I found that student engagement by using popular culture depends, unsurprisingly, partly on my teaching skills. My teaching skills and strategies had a
significant impact on students’ learning performance, even if in the context they were very interested in the popular cultural teaching content. The teacher’s skill is obviously very significantly influential on the effectiveness of learning and for classroom climate. As a new volunteer teacher engaged in this Mandarin program, I had multiple positions. Zhang (2010) was a volunteer teacher during 2009-2010, and in her self-study she points out that VTRs have at least three “selves”: learner, teacher, and researcher. The “learner”, as beginning teacher, read about and studied teaching; the “teacher” planned, implemented, wrote about and reflected on teaching through journal writing; the “researcher” generated or collected the primary evidence, including reflections, analysed these and wrote a thesis to report on them publicly. The multiple positions are constructing my identity and have mutual influence on each other. As a teacher-researcher, I am learning to become a qualified teacher. It is necessary to take insight into the process of teaching and reflect on that.

My teaching skill and classroom strategies are significant factors in influencing students’ engagement and learning. This theme includes several key categories. Table 4.5 shows the categories belonging to this theme, and their impact.

Table 4.5 Categories in theme Teaching skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Strategies</th>
<th>+ (positive impact)</th>
<th>— (negative impact)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearer instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unclear instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know students’ interests and build on them</td>
<td></td>
<td>Poor at expanding language knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give praise</td>
<td></td>
<td>Low expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy to take students’ advice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Insufficient lesson preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use various strategies to teach</td>
<td></td>
<td>Simply repetition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

97
To be an effective teacher, it is important to master instructional strategies and engagement skills and in the case of this particular context, to know how to use pop culture content effectively. It is important to give clear instructions, prepare sufficient and flexible lesson plans, organise a systematic lesson and also know the students well.

Giving Clear Instruction

One important strategy that impacts on students’ engagement is instructional skill. The quality of the teacher’s instructional skills is a matter of significance in the pursuit of promoting students’ learning (Berry & King, 1988, p. 345). Giving instruction is the sort of teacher action that is involved in all aspects of the classroom, including preparing students to conduct a task or engage in an activity. Unfortunately, as a beginning teacher—more importantly, as a non-English speaker—I often encountered the problem of not giving clear instruction. English itself was one obstacle for me, and having limited knowledge of instructionally oriented “phrases” was also another problem—that is, a limited knowledge of “teacher talk” led to unclear instruction. This unclear instruction sometimes caused a disorder in the classroom, as it resulted in students’ confusion and indiscipline. Their uncertainty about what to do decreased their understanding of the lesson content and discouraged their participation in the task.

When I had trouble managing the class in Shangen HS, I talked with the Mandarin teacher and she gave me some advice about how to deal with it. For example, she suggested that “You need to stop teaching and suddenly be quiet, and students will feel strange and look at you. Once you get their attention, you can establish your expectation and remind them it is a good time to talk.” Marland (2007, p. 318) also suggests that it is important to gain every student’s attention first before giving instructions. In another lesson, when some students were distracted, I stopped talking and looked at them. A few seconds later, students started to find it strange and two students even asked me “What is the matter?” When all of them felt something wrong and turned their faces to me, I drew their attention and made them be quiet. I then gave
them a “well-prepared clear” instruction, and this time most of them behaved well and knew how to finish the task.

Flexible and Various Strategies

It is always difficult to anticipate students’ reactions in the classroom even when the teacher prepares the lesson thoroughly. Faced with unexpected situations in the classroom, a good teacher can be flexible. In using popular culture as teaching material, I sometimes took it for granted that the content would attract students’ interest and would result in good classroom management. However, the reality is that popular culture does not “work” all the time—nor is it always appropriate—and then the teacher needs to find alternative ways to engage students. When learning song lyrics, some students found it “boring” and responded negatively to my teaching. At first I often failed in terms of flexibility:

I only used very simple way to teach the lyrics, through explaining the single word’s meaning and the whole sentence’s meaning, and letting them repeat reading with me. But some of them did not focus on my teaching at all, and when I asked the question they were very confused, “I don’t know. That is boring.”

(Shangen HS, 7A, 29/05/2011)

Even when I used the song, some students did not participate in the learning because of my “boring” teaching. I needed to vary the strategies, instead of just letting students simply repeat. When I taught the lexical words from lyrics, which were direction words, I tried to apply various methods to demonstrate: I used slow, then fast, slow, then fast speeds to demonstrate the pronunciation. I also carried out the corresponding action when saying the direction, such as turning my head to the right when saying 右看 (youkan/“look right”) (Dongxi, PS, 6A, 25/05/2011). This was to decrease a little the boredom of repetition through the use of different pace, a different voices, and rich body movement to drill the practice of vocabulary.
Moreover, not everything one does in the classroom can be planned in advance, as one cannot predict how pupils will react in any situation on any given day (Capel, Leask & Turner, 2005). Unexpected problems can happen in the classroom at any time, and the teacher needs to find solution quickly. For example, the use of songs in teaching relies on the classroom’s technology. One day I encountered the problem that the computer was unable to play the music video:

Another unexpected thing is the computer can’t play the MV. It gives me a very important lesson that to use popular culture often encounter with the problem of the technology that is not expected. Next time I should be careful with the format of songs and video clip. At first I am very worried about how to carry on the lesson. Without other choices, I say “all right, I can sing the song to you.” Students laugh and doubted my singing. Then I start to sing, and they are so surprised about my singing. All of the students clap with the rhythm and get interested with it. Actually, the effect was not worse than using computer to play it.

(Dongxi PS, 6B, 25/05/2011)

Although it is better to sing with music and watch the visual images, teachers need to consider the technology problems and prepare an alternative way to present the materials.

Knowing the students

In addition, the teacher should recognise students as individuals, and understand their various characteristics and different learning capabilities. To improve engagement effectively, students’ background knowledge and characteristics should be taken into consideration. Students have different capabilities in speaking, listening and writing (Van Der Stuyf, 2002). I only went to the school once week, and taught each class for no more than one hour, which is insufficient for me to know every student well. Sometime this resulted in my failure to engage some students:
It’s time to let students copy down the key vocabulary from the lyrics. Two boys sat back and did nothing, and I asked them where their Mandarin books were, and they said they forgot. I am disappointed and give them two choices, one is to borrow a piece of paper, and write down the vocabulary, or they could directly read vocabulary in Chinese to me. They both choose the latter one. Surprisingly, the two boys’ pronunciation is very good and clear. Later, the classroom teacher tells me that the two boys have disability in writing, but they are smart still.

(Shangen H, 7A, 29/05/2011)

Before knowing that they were relatively poor at writing, I thought their resistance to writing down vocabulary was because they were not interested in learning Mandarin. Insufficient information about students made me make only one requirement of all students, without recognising their differences: to copy down the Chinese character. By using another way to help them finish the work, the two boys showed capable language ability and did make an effort to learn. In my own class, I would need to build on this to develop their writing.

Moreover, it can be seen that the regular classroom teacher is an important source of knowledge about students. In the middle of last term, the classroom teacher told me that “students in 7B like singing and dancing very much and they have talent as well” (Shangen HS, 7B, 17/05/2011), which gave me confidence to develop this action research. Through talking with the classroom teacher, I can learn more about the students’ interests and learning habits, helping me be more effective in engaging students based on their learning characteristics.

Appreciation and Respect

Giving praise is one important skill to inspire students’ motivation and give them confidence. Brophy (1999) contends that a teacher’s appreciation has a significant influence on students’ motivation and on building their valuing of learning. I have to admit to being frustrated by the students at first, which meant that I rarely gave praise to them. After implementing this action research and thinking about praising their
learning attitude and behaviour improved significantly and I also changed my attitude in turn. Teachers need to give praise to students, and also make students appreciate their learning (Brophy, 1999), so that they can come to love the subject and have the motivation to work hard. When I praised them and made positive comments on their progress, such as correctly reading a paragraph, being able to sing a part of the song or tell some stories about the origin of Kungfu, many students gradually gained confidence in their Chinese. When students have confidence, they want to learn.

Moreover, it is significant to listen to students’ voices and respect them. As Garner (2005, p. 147) suggests, listening to students and respecting their opinions is important in building good relationships between teacher and students. Students’ voices helped me prepare lessons that would engage them all. Sometimes, students also advised me about activities they liked, which were more effective than the activity I had prepared:

> When we practising the direction vocabulary, I let them look at the direction I say, and some girls asked can we stand up and turn body to that direction because it is more fun. I am happy to take their advises because it shows students really engage in the learning and think more interesting ways to learn it. They like doing this more direct movement, and the participation is much more active.

(Dongxi PS, 6A, 25/05/2011)

It can be seen that students’ advice is worthy of listening to and taking into consideration. They can engage more with the learning, especially in the activities they suggest, when they feel that they are respected by the teacher.

**4.5 Analysis of the interview**

My colleague Sushi observed one of my lessons in this cycle in Year 6. As she is involved in the same program teaching Mandarin, we share similar teaching and academic backgrounds. The benefit of this is that she was familiar with the kind of challenges I encountered. Nevertheless, due to our combined inexperience, there were
some limitations to our understanding of education in Australia. This interview was semi-structured, and I added or changed questions based on the conversation we generated, although there were fixed questions as planned. This is because semi-structured interview enables me to maintain control over the line of questioning, while leaving space for the interviewee to give open answers (Creswell, 2009). Eight questions as planned are related to her experience of using pop culture in her teaching; some evaluation of classroom atmosphere and ability to finish task as well as my engaging pop cultural references; the suggestion to improve my teaching.

4.5.1 Helpfulness by using popular culture

Generally speaking, Sushi thought the lessons very good and she agreed that students were engaged in the classroom. Based on her own past teaching experience, using popular culture in her classroom enabled students to relax:

\[\ldots\text{I think it is good because when they heard the music they found it “wow” and think that kinda of amazing. I think they might never think that China has such kind of music because the song is really fast \ldots it is a relaxation for them. It will be different from the traditional (teaching material) \ldots using popular culture really has some effects, it was effective.}\]

Sushi expressed her appreciation of popular culture by arguing that it gives students an exciting learning experience. Due to the more traditional teaching materials used in teaching Mandarin, the stereotype of an ancient China has been imprinted in students’ belief systems; this can increase their distance to the language and its culture. Bringing Chinese popular songs to them is partially aimed at changing this stereotype and giving students a fresh experience of contemporary Chinese culture. In addition, Sushi also believed that music was a good vehicle for teaching young students. Some advantages in stimulating children’s learning in the classroom were pointed out:

Now children at this stage all like music. That is repetitive, music that is cheerful sounding, so music is a really good vehicle for these children. So
songs, learning and performing songs would be a great way of, I think, of engaging the children.

Some scholars argue the advantage of using music in language teaching. Young students are easily engaged in learning through music because music can decrease the difficulty and anxiety of the distance and unfamiliarity of a foreign language (Ma & Wang, 2009). Other studies address the use of music in developing students’ interests and building their motivation (Heusinkveld, 2006; Claerr & Gargan, 1984; Barnhardt, 2007). The commonalities between music and language can be used to help students develop a sense of the rhythm and intonation patterns of the language (Purcell, 1992).

In evaluating the lesson, that she observed, Sushi gave positive comments on students’ behaviour and performance in terms of their learning. She said that “it was a good lesson because it was well organised, and most of the students kept quiet and listened to you. Generally speaking, they were very engaged.” Sushi was impressed by the students’ disciplined behaviour and active engagement in the class. There were several aspects reflected in her answers.

Affective Engagement: excited mood and a cooperative atmosphere

Sushi firstly talked about the excitement of students which impressed her very much. She described the most impressive moment in the whole lesson as being when I introduced Chinese and Western stars to the students. “They were so excited and screamed, but after your instruction, they calmed down quickly. I think this excitement made the classroom learning atmosphere more motivated, so they were very keen to participate in the game and complete the work.”

Sushi also mentioned students’ cooperation with the teacher. She said, “When you asked them to write the numbers’ characters, most of them raised their hands and came out to the front to write down the characters; When you asked them to do role-play, they were willing to play. The cooperation between you and the students was very good.” It
shows that students reacted positively to the teacher and both the teacher and students had mutually stimulating emotions associated with classroom activities, which is one important indicator of good affective engagement (Munns, 2004b, p. 6). The cooperative atmosphere improved the effectiveness of teaching and learning and helped the teacher apply popular culture successfully.

Operative Engagement: able to finish work

I think most of them can finish their task well . . . and they really did good job because when they came to the front to do role play, they can say what you want them to say. It is not easy. Students were brave and confident.

In assessing student behaviours, Sushi thought that most students finished their task well, and when they came to the front of the room for a role play, they were able to repeat what the teacher requested them to say. However, she also pointed out that some students sitting back were not successfully engaged in the activities and doing work. Teachers need to find different ways to engage different students.

4.5.2 Some factors impacting on students’ engagement

Though Sushi agreed with the usefulness of using popular cultural contexts in teaching young students, she also pointed out several important factors that influence the effectiveness of using popular culture as teaching materials for student engagement. They include:

- When excitement becomes the everyday . . .
- Time and classroom management
- The involvement of the regular classroom teacher
- Suggestions for me
When excitement becomes the everyday....

In talking about the way to use popular culture in teaching, Sushi mentioned her own teaching experience involving popular culture in her classroom. She teaches popular culture mostly when related to cultural aspects of the language, rather than as her main teaching method. She attempts to give students a different sense of culture by bringing the popular culture context into the classroom. Cheung (2001) also argues that one of the reason that student are attracted by the use of popular culture in learning is that this teaching content is novel and different from the ordinary textbooks Therefore, she only introduces it as a part of the lesson. She contends: “If I use popular culture every class, sometimes they won’t feel this difference.” The “different” can easily become the “ordinary”. Students may lose interest when they find popular culture not novel any more.

Time and classroom management

In order to effectively apply popular culture in teaching, Sushi thought time and classroom management played an important role. The use of a popular culture context is often done through activities like singing, role playing and watching video, which are usually time-consuming and can require particular classroom management. In practice, these are not necessarily easy to achieve, especially for a beginning teacher. She contended that this required the teacher to manage time and students very well. Though Sushi gave positive comments on my management on that day, I encountered the chaos of losing control occasionally. It is important to develop the ability to keep the teaching pace appropriate and to control students.

The involvement of classroom teacher

One of the lesson, when the classroom teacher was paying attention to your lesson and also to her students, she always reminded the students “You
need listen to your teacher” “You have to be quiet” “You have to do something”. I think the students in that class were better, or more cooperated with you than the other one . . . [while] another classroom just sit there and didn’t help.

For inexperienced volunteer Mandarin teachers, help from the regular classroom teacher is important to our teaching. Sushi thinks that different classroom teacher involvement could result in different behaviour and different learning performances for students. For students in Dongxi PS, the relationship between the students and their teacher is much deeper than it is between students and myself, who only meets them once a week for 45 minutes. The classroom teacher plays a significant role in students’ school lives. This is the key reason why different engagement in the classroom teacher’s lesson causes different outcomes.

Suggestions for me

Sushi also provided some suggestions for me to improve my teaching and strategies to better engage students. The first advice was to adopt high expectations of students, even in playing games.

But when you asked them to say the celebrities’ age, they just tend to say the number instead of the whole age sentence’s structure. I think, if you have asked to say the sentence structure, you stress more on the sentence structure, which would be better. Because the teaching content in that lesson is the sentence not number. They have learnt number for a long time.

Secondly, Sushi suggested, to draw students’ attention, the teacher could speak in a more animated way. She points out that my voice and tone are very flat when speaking to students, which is not good. Through lowering and raising their voice, teacher can capture or re-capture students’ attention (Garner, 2005, p. 201). To establish a good lesson, the teacher should be flexible and be able to use a variety of strategies to have students’ attention and engage them in activities and learning.
4.6 Cognitive Engagement

In the above Section 4.4, students’ affective and operative engagements are evaluated from my self-reflections. This section analyses the evidence from students, including their self-assessment and test results, and mainly focuses on the evaluation of their cognitive engagement. Whether or not students are engaged in “high” intellectual work is one of the crucial questions in this research. The songs and music videos may affectively engage students, however, do they result in students engaging in higher-order thinking? Firstly I analyse the cognitive aspect of engagement in students’ self-assessment, and secondly I discuss the cognitive aspect from the analysis of test results. The final part of this section discusses the affective and operative aspects of engagement in these two data sources.

Cognitive engagement involves deep understanding of and expertise in the learning process (Munns & Woodward, 2006, p. 194). The term incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills. Cognitive engagement includes self-regulation, being strategic, seeing the value of learning and having personal goals (Jimerson et al., 2003; Fredricks et al., 2004). There are a variety of indicators of this dimension of engagement, according to Fredricks et al. (2004): self-monitoring, exchanging ideas, giving directions, justifying an answer, using learning strategies and control strategies, evidence of persistence, relating the task to prior knowledge, requesting clarification and using analogies as measures of cognitive engagement, motivation, effort and strategy use. The analysis of the self-assessment and test results put emphasis on using the data of students describing the level of their cognitive engagement.

4.6.1 Student self-assessment

In the REAL framework (Munns & Woodward, 2005), every question is linked to a certain aspect of engagement, shown as Table 4.6; however, in practice I found that
the answers to a question that relates to one aspect of engagement can reflect multiple dimensions of engagement. Hence, I list here the questions that generated the answers which I considered reflective of cognitive engagement.

Table 4.6 Dimensions of self-assessment questions used in Cycle 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 1</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Operative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 1</td>
<td>Q1. What were the fun bits in your learning Mandarin today?</td>
<td>Q2. What is the most important thing you learned today in Mandarin class?</td>
<td>Q3. What new thing can you do now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 2</td>
<td>Q1. What surprised you about today learning today?</td>
<td>Q2. What was your best hard work today?</td>
<td>Q3. List your strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 3</td>
<td>Q1. What was the difficult part?</td>
<td>Q2. How do you feel now when it gets difficult?</td>
<td>Q3. What is your biggest improvement?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

L1Q1. What were the fun bits in your learning Mandarin today?

More than a third of 7A students thought the song in that day’s lesson gave them fun in learning. Although these answers were fairly superficial, and only focused on the classroom activities, some students still pointed out that they gained new knowledge from the activities using popular cultural context: for example, “learning how to read numbers from the song”. In 6A, half of the students thought watching the music video was the most interesting thing in that day’s learning, while a third of students regarded improving language ability as the most fun. Several students said learning about Kungfu, weapons and fighting was more fun.
As Grace and Tobin (1998, p. 59) argue, using popular cultural texts as teaching materials can blur the lines between work and play. Students enjoy the popular artifacts, and simultaneously they are learning knowledge in a more relaxed context. More than 40% of students directly referred to “fun” in relation to some cognitive aspect of the lesson.

L1Q2. What is the most important thing you learned today in Mandarin class?

Munns and Martin (2006) suggest that answering questions about “what I learnt” and “what I did” is a way to show students’ higher-order thinking. About 60% of 7A students answered that the most important thing was learning new vocabulary and strengthening past knowledge. Some students directly wrote Chinese words on their answering sheet. On the other hand, nearly half of the students in 6A saw learning about Kungfu culture as the most important thing, while new language ability was for one third of the students’ “the most important thing”.

Rather than saying watching MV or singing, most students gave detailed and specific answers. In both classes, students mentioned learning new vocabulary as the most important task in that day’s learning. Other students also highlighted the “cultural” such as Kungfu, fighting and weapons. Based on students’ answers, it can be seen that, after enjoying singing and watching a music video, at least half of the students realised that learning the language and the cultural knowledge embedded in the music were the most important aspects of the lesson.

L2Q2. What was your best work today?

Two thirds of students in 6B wrote that they worked hard at practising that day’s new vocabulary, such as “learning fang xiang (direction)”, “how to say the new words”, “I work hard to pronounce dong, nan, xi, bei (north, south, east and west)”. Three of them mentioned they were dedicated to writing Chinese characters. Another student
confidently said “I think I did the best I can”. Only three students concentrated on singing. More than half of the students answered that their best hard work was learning the language. Some focused on memorising new vocabulary: “remembering how to say left, right, up and down”, while 6 of them regarded the writing task as their best work. One third of 6A students also thought that listening to and singing the “direction song” was their best work. Fifty percent of students in 7B answered that they did a ‘good job’ in learning that day’s vocabulary. Approximately 17% of the students considered their best work as learning the song. Another 8% of the students thought that their best work was to learning cultural knowledge.

Compared with Lesson 1, students in this lesson paid more attention to the learning than simply listening to the song. The percentages of students focusing on learning vocabulary and doing the writing task increased. Through providing their learning outcomes, students demonstrated engagement in reflecting their own achievement and learning.

L3Q1. What was the difficult part?

The most difficult part for 6A students was learning new vocabulary. More than half of the students’ answers related to this problem. More students thought pronouncing the new vocabulary was difficult. Some boys wrote “it was awkward when we had to say pretty girl”, and other answers said that it was difficult to say handsome boys. Students practised saying pretty girl through singing the song, but there was no song helping them pronounce handsome boy. Some others also pointed out that saying the whole paragraph of self-introduction was difficult. One wrote “I know those sentences well, but it was difficult to say the paragraph fluently.” Moreover, the writing task was selected by two students as the difficult part, partly because the characters I requested them to write were more than in other lessons. One quarter of students in 6A regarded singing as the difficult part, while in 6B that singing was the most difficult was agreed to by more than half the students. In this lesson, I increased the content of the singing
and students were required to sing longer sentences. Students thus may have felt
challenged in learning. This question revealed students' difficulty in that day’s learning.
It shows that students had a clear idea about the weaknesses in their own study.

L3Q3. What is your biggest improvement?

In 6A, 65% students believed their biggest improvement was related to learning
performance. Seven of them wrote about new vocabulary, for example, “knowing boy
and girl off by heart”, “how to say wo shi nan sheng (I am a boy)”, “putting nan sheng
into a sentence”, were seen as their biggest improvements. Others answered that their
written work was their biggest improvement, while some thought they improved more
in speaking, such as developing clearer pronunciation and fluency: “speaking the
language properly”, “to say it a lot clearer”, “saying a paragraph in Mandarin”. Also
three students (about 10%) answered that they improved in learning singing. In 6B, 63%
of students had similar answers viz, that they developed in the writing task and in
speaking Mandarin. One answer stated that “I can pronounce the Chinese better”.
Another 30% of the students in 6B still thought singing was their biggest improvement.

4.6.2 Discussion

It can be seen that there exists a staged response from students which begins with
simply enjoying singing, watching a fascinating music video, but then putting the
emphasis on the learning process and on knowledge. From the first lesson to the final
lesson in Cycle 1, the answers from students were increasingly related to learning
cognition, its challenges and outcomes. The change demonstrates that students have
thought about what they have done in the classroom and how they have learnt the
language, not just concentrating on an affective response to pop cultural artifacts. More
explicitly, students described the knowledge they valued, explained the difficulties they
encountered, and listed the improvement and learning they had achieved in the class.
In my view, there was also a trend from simple recall to deeper, more complex understanding. These are terms borrowed from Cates and Milner (2007). When they observed the performance of students learning through popular cultural references, they found their responses broken down into two kinds of categories:

- simple recall: the recollection of information, primarily one-word responses to questions like who, what, where, when and how;
- complex deeper understanding requiring the students to be more elaborate in response and tending to include personal responses to the materials.

The two responses are dynamic and the former may develop into the latter as students acquire more knowledge. I found students in this cycle, in thinking about and answering questions, moving from simple recall (one or two word answers), to gradually more complex understanding, though not yet necessarily “deep”.

*Bloom’s Taxonomy* (Bloom, 1956) can be applied in analysis of the level of cognitive engagement in some ways. The revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) identifies the knowledge structure and how learners develop cognition, in a progressive contextualisation of the materials. It begins with the lowest level and builds to the highest level: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating. In Cycle 1, cognitive engagement stayed in the first and second layers of *Bloom’s Taxonomy*: remembering, explaining and analysing. It is still important to develop student thinking towards the higher-order stages, such as comparing and synthesising.

### 4.6.3 Test Results

Test Content: aims and requirement
The test in Cycle 1 was designed by me based on the content and on the language level of the students. In designing the test paper and test management I gained significant help from the classroom teacher in Dongxi PS.

The early tasks on the test paper were relatively simple and easy, testing individual vocabulary and writing. These were basic knowledge in my lessons, and students were able to answer most of them as long as they had paid attention to the lesson. When completing these tasks, students were not allowed to use open books or any other learning materials. The first part consisted of four multiple-choice questions, mainly to test students’ knowledge of the accurate pinyin of the words they had learnt, such as Kungfu, weapons and direction words.

The next section asked them to write the correct Chinese based on the given English. Students could write in either character or pinyin, but they could gain higher rewards for writing characters. The aim of this task was to evaluate their knowledge of vocabulary and their Chinese writing skills. More importantly, I wanted to encourage students to try to write characters instead of pinyin.

A matching task was to match the adjective with the correct picture that a word described. The two adjective words were beautiful and handsome, to describe the girl and boy respectively. When teaching gender, I used these two words to say ‘I am a beautiful girl’ and ‘I am a handsome boy’. These words are difficult both to say and to write. To decrease the difficulty, I only required them to recognise the words, and to match them with the same pictures that I used in the lesson, representing girl and boy. The next part of the test paper contained more challenging work for students, including translation and short paragraph writing. It focused more on students’ ability in translation and in building long sentences, and their understanding of Chinese cultural knowledge. In order to encourage them to write rich content, and also to relate it to previous knowledge, I allowed them to look at their notes.
The translation task was to translate two Chinese sentences into English. These two sentences were from two popular songs students had learnt, and they were the most frequent lyrics we sang and practised. One aim was to testify to the effectiveness of singing on their memorisation.

The last task was to write two paragraphs. Students needed to write one paragraph about Kungfu in English. Another task was to write a paragraph to introduce themselves, with information such as their name, age and gender.

Analysis of the test results

In general, the results of two classes showed a similar trend (Figure 4.1), though 6A had a slightly better performance than 6B. Two 6A students gained more than 80% scores, and four more than 70% while the highest score in 6B was 62%. 6A had a greater percentage of “high” scores and a lower percentage of “low” scores than 6B. Nevertheless, it can be seen from the graph that the two classes share a similar trend in distribution of marks. Most students were concentrated in the middle level (40-60%), while the peak shows 42.1% and 42.85% respectively.

![Figure 4.1 The distribution of scores: 6A and 6B in Cycle 1](image-url)
The small gap between the two classes may demonstrate some of the problems of my teaching in 6B. There were more students in 6A than students 6B, and the atmosphere in 6A was usually more “excited” than in 6B. 6B often kept quiet and some boys reacted relatively negatively to their learning.

Most students did a good job in finishing the basic vocabulary task. Content directly related to the song was almost half of the whole test content. Obviously students did not have better outcomes on this content. Many students were unable to complete the two translation tasks. The second sentence was taught one week before the test, hence more than 60% of students translated it correctly, while only a few students remembered where the first lyrics came from and only a few students remembered the meaning. I expect that this resulted from two factors. One is that the first song was taught several weeks before and students mostly forgot it without there being revision. Another reason is that I emphasised the cultural context more than focusing on the language context when teaching this song, which caused most students to engage only with the cultural aspect, such as Kungfu culture and nunchakus, rather than the language and meaning of the song itself.

Nearly half of the students could write paragraphs about their understanding of Kungfu, by using the information they had acquired in the classroom. The rest of them had a range of reasons for failing to accomplish this. Most failed to understand the requirements of the task, which demonstrates how instruction in a test is extremely important for students’ results.

A number of students wrote very accurate sentences to introduce themselves in Chinese. Some of them also put sentences learnt from the songs into the paragraph, such as “I am a beautiful girl/I am a handsome boy”. Unexpectedly, there were even a few students using Chinese characters rather than pinyin.
Discussion

From the results, students demonstrated basic knowledge of relevant vocabulary and sentences. Popular culture may indeed have helped improve their performance in translation and in building long paragraphs. Although some students failed in recalling the knowledge learnt several weeks ago, many of them were able to use the language well. The following two paragraphs are from a student’s test paper:

![Figure 4.2 Work sample from a student](image)

This student could write a full paragraph in Chinese and use some sentences learnt from songs in the paragraph. This shows that some students at least were not just entertained by the popular culture I provided in classroom. They seemed to be genuinely learning key aspects of the language.
4.7 Other Aspects of Students Self-Assessment: Operative and Affective

4.7.1 Affective Engagement

L1Q1. What were the fun bits in your learning Mandarin today?

As I have listed student answers to this question in discussing cognitive engagement, I will not repeat these here. Except for two students who did not give answers, all the rest of the students wrote detailed answers about what kind of fun they had in that day’s learning. More students felt happy because of listening to songs and watching music videos, while some had fun from a feeling of achievement about learning new things and finishing work.

L2Q1. What surprised you about learning today?

The lesson in 6B, “now I can say all the directions in Chinese” surprised many students. This lesson was aimed at teaching students to learn directions through singing a song which included ‘direction’ vocabulary. At the end of the class, students found that they had already mastered those words, and they reflected on this in self-assessment. The ability to write and say the words generated positive feelings. For example, one student wrote that “I know that I can say up, down, left and right”. Another surprise felt by students was due to interesting language points. Two students answered “I am surprised that you means right in Chinese!”, “there is you for right”. Similar answers could be found in 7B, several students felt surprised by “it is gongfu, not Kungfu”.

Music was another great surprise for students. Twenty percent of students in 6B, and more than 50% students of 7B were surprised by the teaching materials. Most of them wrote about their interest and excitement, such as “I like to listen to Jay Chou singing”; “there was a Chinese rap and it was cool”.

118
Interestingly, there were also responses without any special focus in both classes. Some answers were “nothing much”, “nothing really”. It is possible that they did not feel any strong emotion during the class. One answer showed a negative response to the Chinese pop song, “I don’t like rap that is not English”.

L3Q2. How do you feel now when it gets difficult?

In 6A, half of the students had a positive response when facing difficulty. More students felt good and confident, such as saying “I feel more confident”, “feel smarter”. These students may be those who feel good when challenged. Many of them did not think the learning was hard on that day’s lesson. Still, several students felt some confusion in learning about particular words.

4.7.2 Operative engagement

L1Q3. What new things can you do now?

This question was about the ability that students could generate in that lesson. With a review of previous knowledge numbers, I taught them how to ask ages and how to introduce oneself through games and involvement of popular songs and singers. In 7A, about 45% of students thought the new things they could do were still the previous knowledge—counting numbers, such as “say big numbers in Chinese, off by heart”. Those students may have had problems in saying and counting numbers before, and the review and retaining of previous lessons strengthened their knowledge of numbers. Another 32% of the students considered they could master new knowledge. Most of these students answered that “Now I can say how old I am and introduce my name, age and hobby to others”, and “ask people their age”, while fewer thought they were better at the cultural aspect they learnt, such as “singing” and “talking about a Chinese pop singers”. However, answers from the rest of students were either too general or were negative. Twenty percent of students gave general answers like “I can speak Mandarin”.

119
These students may not have been confident about the sentences they had learnt, or they were not quite sure what they needed to answer in this question.

In 6A, more than 58% of students considered that they could master new language and understand Chinese culture, while only 12% chose being able to say the words or sentences that they learnt in previous lessons. Another 20% of the students also gave general answers like 7B.

It can be seen that the lesson helped some students review and retain previous knowledge. More students performed well in mastering the new knowledge they learnt on that day. Nevertheless, a number of students were not clear about their new ability, so they just provided general answers.

L2Q3. List your strengths.

In 6A, half of the students thought they were good at learning today’s new vocabulary and sentences. Some wrote that writing characters was their strength, and some students wrote that they did well in saying the sentences or paragraph. Seventeen percent of the students answered that their strength was singing the song, which indicated that the students were engaging in listening to the song and learning it. Another 13% showed confidence in their answers. One said, “My strength is remembering words quickly”, while another answer was “I have a smart brain”. Students gave answers to indicate their strengths, like good language ability, or “congenital” strengths, such as smart brain, good memorisation. The remaining 20% of the students left the question blank. In 6B, there was a similar result. More than 20% reacted negatively to this question. Unlike 6A, students in 6B did give answers, like “What strength? I don’t have any one.” These students appeared not having clear awareness of their learning in that day.
Students in 7B gave different answers. Although 35% of the students listed strengths as speaking or writing, many students regarded their disciplined behaviour as their strength in that lesson. For example, one student wrote that “Today I was quiet and concentrated on the teacher”. Still 10% of the students showed their uncertainty, like “I don’t know”. Compared with Year 6 students, it was more difficult to manage Year 7 students and keep them in good order. In that day’s lesson, the students behaved well and this made some of them feel they had improved.

L3Q3. What is your biggest improvement?

In 6A, almost 75% of the students thought they improved most in developing language ability. Of these, 24% of the students thought their biggest improvement was to master new vocabulary, another 24% considered that they improved most in speaking the sentences fluently and clearly and about 10% of the students wrote their best improvement was to write down more characters, while 17% said they improved in retaining previous knowledge. The remaining 15% of the students thought their improvement was to learn to sing Chinese songs. A few students did not give any answers. In 6B, more than 60% of the students also answered that they improved a lot in finishing writing tasks and speaking tasks. The rest of students thought that “I can sing the Chinese song right” was their biggest improvement.

The answers from the two classes indicated that most of the students had improvement in developing language ability. For those focusing on singing, they were attached to the popular song and willing to practise. However, there were still some students who did not have clear idea about their improvement. These students may not have been engaged in practising, or they were not confident about what they had learnt.
4.8 Conclusion

In Cycle 1, popular songs were used to maintain students’ interest and engage them in learning Mandarin. The students had generally positive affective response in singing the songs and getting involved in activities and learning. With high participation, the students improved their behaviours and developed their speaking and reading ability to some extent. In this way, they appeared to engage operatively. As for cognitive engagement, the answers from the self-assessment and the test results indicated students had a complex understanding of and thinking about their learning in Mandarin class, although it was not deep enough.

Cycle 1 provided me with the experience to carry out Cycle 2, and it also revealed some obstacles in implementing popular culture to engage students in practice. These problems included:

- my inexperienced teacher’s teaching skills
- insufficient practice for writing
- students having difficulty in speaking long sentences
- ineffective long-term retention of knowledge
- a relatively primary cognitive engagement

These issues will be referred to the next cycle. Although the focus of Cycle 2 will be different from this cycle, the experience and the problems encountered could help me to plan lesson settings better and reduce problems in the classroom.
Chapter 5 Data Analysis: Cycle 2

5.1 Introduction

The implementing of the first cycle of action research showed the potential usefulness of popular songs in stimulating engagement in certain ways. This chapter discusses the second cycle of action research. Based on analysis of self-reflections, data from students, observation notes and interviews with the regular classroom teacher, this chapter focuses on analysing students’ learning and development during a unit using movies and animation and, from there, on evaluating student engagement. The chapter begins with an introduction to the research setting and the lesson content, explains what I learnt from the first cycle and how the second cycle was influenced by the findings from the first. Then I discuss the process of data collection and present the data. Self-reflection in this cycle was coded in the same way as for the previous cycle, and is discussed in terms of the categories generated from the data. An interview with a regular classroom teacher from the primary school is then analysed. In order to address the importance of the intellectual quality of tasks in the research, cognitive engagement is evaluated separately, through analysis of other evidence such as student self-assessment and test results. Finally, other aspects of engagement in relation to student self-assessment are then discussed.

5.2 Research Setting and Lessons

Cycle 2 took place in Dongxi Public School (Dongxi PS) and Shangen High School (Shangen HS), but systematic data was only collected in Dongxi PS since the Mandarin class arrangements were subject to disruptions, by competing school activities in Shangen HS. There were two classes from Dongxi PS involved in the action research: 6A and 6B. There was one lesson for each class per week in Dongxi PS and each lesson lasted 45 minutes. The cycle began from Week 9 in Term 2, and was completed in
Week 6 in Term 3. The seven lessons involved popular cultural references, and data were collected from:

- my self-reflection,
- students’ self-assessment,
- test results
- teacher interviews

Action research ‘cycles’ moves through planning, observing and acting, to reflecting and then re-planning into the next cycle. The reflection and summary from one cycle are significant for planning and preparing the next cycle (Mills, 2007). Based on the analysis of Cycle 1, key issues were

- I needed to create more situational use of the language because it is important to focus on practical use.
- Students are not ‘naturally’ engaged by popular culture. Engagement is influenced by how the teacher relates the pop cultural references to learning and how the teacher engages students through pedagogy. Therefore, my teaching strategies and skills were very important in influencing their engagement. I needed to focus on instructional strategies, especially related to giving instructions and knowing more about students as individuals.
- The self-assessment framework reflected students’ cognition to some extent, but it was still insufficient in giving insight into the students’ inner world. I needed to add ‘why?’ questions or ask specific questions of some students for more adequate information.
- Cognitive engagement occurred at a basic level; Cycle 2 was aimed to engage cognitively in a deeper and more complex way.

Although the basic focus was similar to the last cycle, there were some differences in this cycle, viz:
• The aspect of popular culture I used in the present cycle was movies. Movies can provide students with opportunities to develop listening and speaking abilities, and, more importantly, can extend students’ use of language through practising conversations from the movies.

• I intended to focus more on engaging students in a more interactive way, for example, practising a line from a movie and generating a dialogue based on that line. I also intended to add discussion activities after watching the movies, to develop students’ ability to compare and contrast, and also to better operationalise higher-order thinking.

• I changed the way I tested students. I used a collaborative quiz rather than a simple individual test, and students formed groups to discuss and cooperate in answering the quiz.

• I made changes to the questions from the REAL framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006), to make it relate more to my teaching and to students’ experience. The emphasis was on investigating the reasons behind their choices and answers.

• I put more emphasis on classroom management.

Cycle 2 was about engaging students through the use of Chinese movies and animation. The emphasis was on practising students’ listening and speaking and, more importantly, to create situations for students to practise conversation. They had the opportunity to generate dialogue based on lines from the movie and to enjoy authentic modern Chinese film culture. Two films and three animations were introduced to students. The first two lessons focused on a Chinese legend: The Journey to West. The story itself is traditional, but its representation in this movie gives it many contemporary elements.

大话西游(Dahua Xiyou), one of the best known comedies of Stephen Chow, was a milestone in Chinese film history because it established a new style in the Hong Kong film industry: 无厘头Mo Lei Tau, an ‘anything goes’ form of nonsensical humour that can and does ignore narrative conversations (Pang, 2007). This type of humour subsequently spread through the whole Chinese modern film milieu. Generally, a mo
lei tau scene gives one the feeling of incongruity, consisting of rapid comic banter, non-sequiturs, anachronisms, ‘fourth wall’ references, slang, strong accents and word play. Mo lei tau is said to represent an attitude, particularly towards politics and society, of the younger generation because of its escapist nature (Pang, 2007). Although it is considered by some as a unique and ‘untranslatable’ aspect of Chinese popular culture, I wished to present this interesting and unique culture to students. I began by introducing the traditional story of Journey to the West and then played the mo lei tau version. Students could compare and contrast the two, and enjoy the unique humour. During this process, key lexical words were taught.

Then Kungfu Panda was used to help students revise vocabulary around different animals. Although the movie is a Hollywood product, many Chinese elements can be found in it. Most movies I showed in the classroom had a Chinese sound track with English translation of the text in the subtitles. d’Ydewalle and Van de Poel (1999) found that subtitling in one’s native language can help increase audiences’ comprehension and knowledge of the target language. After revising vocabulary around animals, we focused on a popular Chinese animation The Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf. Students learnt all the characters’ names and lines from the movie, and then they role-played the characters and performed the story in a group. They created their own conversations when performing. In the episode that we watched, the story began with the Lord Tiger demolishing the sheep village and constructing a theme park on it. This reflects the current demolition issue in China. The theme of the final topic was to ‘travel’ around China through five cities. I started with a scene from Karate Kid and then played video clips related to each city from different movies. Students were to become familiar with the location, architectural style and unique culture of those cities.
### Table 5.1 Teaching contents in Cycle 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Teaching Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce the Story Journey to the West, Watch the original animation Monkey King</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch three scenes from Dahua Xiyou Teach conversations and lexical words from the movies Role play and let students compare the two versions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Teaching Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch Kungfu Panda: The Furious Five Learn the vocabulary for all the animals appearing in the movie Role play</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Watch Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf Learn the characters’ names and their lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Learn and practise lines from movies Students take turns to role play characters Talk about the current demolition issue in China and discuss with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Travel around China: five cities in China View scenes from Karate Kid, practise conversation from the movie Teach five cities and watch related video clips Students need to locate those cities on a map of China and complete a matching task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Test</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3 What Data Were Collected

#### 5.3.1 Self-Reflection

A self-reflection diary was written by me for each lesson in each class. This recorded the process of my teaching, and I reflected on students’ general performance in the
classroom. There were seven lessons in this cycle and thus I wrote fourteen self-reflection diaries for 6A and 6B. I also discussed the problems on which I focused and reflected on how to improve my pedagogy.

5.3.2 Interview

Rose, who is one of the classroom teachers in Dongxi PS, has stayed with me in her classroom since Term 1 2011 to observe my lessons and to assist in my teaching. She is an experienced primary school teacher and knows me well. I interviewed her at the end of this cycle. The observation and interview transcript form the second piece of evidence. The interview questions are shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Interview questions of classroom teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long have you been involved in the Mandarin program? Do you have any suggestion</td>
<td>Opinion of the Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for it?</td>
<td>program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever used popular culture in your classroom? What was the result?</td>
<td>Past experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel about the atmosphere in my Mandarin class generally?</td>
<td>Affective engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about the class atmosphere when I am using popular culture?</td>
<td>Affective engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well do you think students finish their tasks?</td>
<td>Operative engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been an impressive moment in my Mandarin lessons?</td>
<td>Success of the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think of the way that the teacher engages students in learning</td>
<td>Teacher’s skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin generally? Does the teacher successfully help students engage?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Over time, do you think there has been progress in students’ learning of Mandarin? Why?

What could the teacher do to improve?

5.3.3 Self-Assessment

As mentioned in the previous chapter, students had several minutes to answer three questions which I selected from the REAL framework at the end of each lesson. Those answers aimed to directly reflect students’ thoughts and feelings as evidence for evaluating their cognitive engagement. It was planned to let students answer the questions for each lesson in this cycle (as Table 5.3 shows), however, occasionally, there was not enough time left for some classes to complete the self-assessment because of changes of school routine or other unexpected problems. So I did not collect very useful answers from students in some lessons. The questions used for this cycle were:

Table 5.3 Self-assessment questions in Cycle 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 1</th>
<th>Lesson 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why were the fun bits fun?</td>
<td>Were you surprised about your learning today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What strategies did you use to learn something important?</td>
<td>How did you know that you had learnt something?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What goals did you set for yourself in today’s activity?</td>
<td>What is the evidence of your achievement from today’s learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well did you achieve them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 3</td>
<td>Lesson 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel when you solved a problem?</td>
<td>Which city or cities do you know about most now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write two questions you could not answer.</td>
<td>Can you tell me something about them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How could we change this lesson next time we do this?</td>
<td>What would you change if you were to do a similar task to improve your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the movie help you understand today’s lesson?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How did it help?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questions used for this cycle were:
5.3.4 Test Results

At the end of this cycle (Week 6 at Dongxi PS), the students had a test that aimed to evaluate their language and cultural knowledge. In this cycle, the test was taken as a quiz, and students worked as a group to complete the quiz. The content of the quiz is shown at Appendix 10.

5.4 Self-Reflection

5.4.1 Coding

All the self-reflection diaries in this cycle were again analysed through evaluation coding. The coding revealed the following key categories (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 Coding results: Self-reflection diaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Me</th>
<th>Classroom Teacher</th>
<th>Other Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotion response</td>
<td>Instructional strategies</td>
<td>Help in classroom management</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests and motivation</td>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Time management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language &amp; cultural</td>
<td>Learning from classroom teacher</td>
<td>Help in correcting my classroom language</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These categories were analysed under the following three main themes:

1. Students and affective engagement
2. Students and operative engagement
3. Teacher’s teaching skills
5.4.2 Key theme 1: Students and affective engagement

Affective engagement can refer to an emotional process such as student affective reactions in the classroom, including interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 63). It consists of interest in, and valuing, learning, teachers and schooling.

In general, students engaged with a positive affection as reflected in the coding results. The attributed [+] code and negative [-] codes were 31 and 5 respectively. The codes I found in this theme had several forms: some are direct emotional reactions such as laughter, excitement and nervousness; a second broad category was the interest and motivation shown towards learning, such as being willing to practise or being attracted to learning. In contrast to Cycle 1, though direct positive emotional response still took an important place in the positive affection category, the codes which related to their interests, motivation and attitudes towards learning increased significantly. Compared with merely having ‘pleasure’ from pop culture, more students seemingly turned to a stage of enjoyment of learning and improving.

In terms of students’ emotional reactions, sixteen positive emotional codes were found while there were only two negative emotional codes. The animations and the Kungfu movies were popular among my students. When watching those video clips, students usually “laugh”, “enjoy” and “be excited”. Since I implemented this action research in Term 2, students “expect” to have Mandarin class in Term 3. When they saw me at school, they were excited and shouted “Yeah, we have Mandarin today!” (6A&6B, 15/06/2011, 22/06/2011). The frequent question they asked me was “Miss, can we watch a movie today”. Although this enthusiasm mostly resulted from their desire to watch movies and animation, it nevertheless suggests that they enjoyed the time in Mandarin lessons; indeed, their motivation increased significantly.
The movies I used in the classroom included movies and animation produced in mainland China, Hong Kong and Hollywood. Most of them were in Chinese with English subtitles. The Hollywood movies were in English, and I added Chinese subtitles to them. There were two Chinese movies without any subtitles. For these two movies, I was worried that students would not understand the plot and would get bored. However, surprisingly, students showed appropriate responses at a given point in the movies. For example, in the movie Dahua xiyou (大话西游, the comedy version of Journey to the West), when the monk talked “mo lei tau” (nonsensical humour that can and does ignore narrative conversations) and makes the devils who kidnapped him suicide, all the students laughed (6A, 22/06/2011). They showed great enjoyment of the unique Chinese humour and the language barrier seemingly was not a problem for their involvement.

Nevertheless, using movies in the classroom is not just about watching movies for its own sake. More importantly, it is to relate them to teaching language and presenting culture. I observed that students remained interested while watching movies. Positive [+ ] codes refer to positive comments on the topic while negative [- ] codes on the contrary mean that the topic was commented negatively. The codes relating to their interests and attitudes were attributed to 23 [+ ] and 5 [- ].

The most exciting task for them was to act as a character using lines from a movie. Although at first some students were shy or had problems in pronouncing sentences, they were willing to repeat and to practise:

Then the boy sitting in the leftish of first row becomes the first character. He is firstly a little shy and nervous, and say the character’ name, too. Immediately, other students remind him that is character’s name not the lines. Then he realizes and says the correct sentences. The pronunciation is not very bad. Then the boy next to him says the next line, and he is much braver, so his voice is louder and pronunciation is clear and good. Sometimes, the girl becomes the Lord Tiger, and a boy should say the pretty goat’s line. The whole class laugh and they are very happy, too. Their performances then are much better, and willing to say it again and again when I correct their pronunciation.
Acting as characters seemed to enhance students’ interest and motivation with relation to speaking and listening. Their interest was not only in knowledge related to movies, but also in the content when they could connect with something they felt was familiar or interesting. For example, when I taught them about cities, they showed the most excitement in learning about Ningbo; because of the program in which I am involved, students felt they had some connection with Ningbo. Ningbo became their favourite city and they had great enthusiasm for learning about this city. Another city was Chengdu which was relatively strange for the children. They were not so interested at first, but became excited when they saw the video clip of Chengdu Panda Zoo. The fact of it being the hometown of the Panda suddenly attracted their attention and they started to become interested in the city. The few negative codes in this category were some complaints that students wanted to watch more movies, and that some felt nervous when first performing as a movie character.

5.4.3 Key theme 2: Students and operative engagement

Many codes on student operative engagement were found accounting for almost 40% of all codes. Similar to Cycle 1, there were several dimensions to the operative engagement. One major dimension was students’ participation; another was their learning behaviours; the third was language and cultural knowledge development. This third dimension included learning ability and memorisation of knowledge; a division that has similarities with the dimensions of behavioural engagement noted by Fredricks et al. (2004, p. 62).

Participation

Participation, as suggested by Finn and Rock (1997), involves effort, persistence, concentration, attention, asking questions and contributing to class discussions.
Students had extensive [+] comments in asking and answering question, attention and concentration, and in contributing to discussions. Engagement in the former three aspects was similar to the previous cycle, which I will briefly reiterate. Most students actively raised hands to participate in answering questions and classroom activities. Movies and animation also drew most of their attention and less students distracted.

Two new classroom activities I added to this cycle also gained strong participation. As mentioned before, acting as movie characters was among their favourite activities (6A & 6B, 17/08/2011; 6A, 24/08/2011). Students were very keen to participate. I designed two types of tasks aim to engage students and to engage them at a deep level. One involved several characters suitable for small group discussion, in which the sentences were long and difficult; the other included more than 10 characters with funny but shorter and easier sentences so that everyone in class could engage, with few problems. Both tasks gained students’ active response and participation, although the easier one was more “welcomed” by students (6A, 17/08/2011). I found the latter more effective in gaining all students’ attention, compared to the more difficult task. Some students had problems in speaking long and difficult sentences, and they “got nervous and resisted to perform in front of classes” (6A, 24/08/2011).

Another new ‘participation’ was in contributing to discussions. I left time for students to discuss after they watched the movies; they could discuss in pairs or small groups, and then talk with me. For most of the time they could generate an understanding of Chinese concepts. A good illustration of this is that when talking about the Kungfu master in Kungfu Panda, students pointed out the importance of discipline, courage, compassion and confidence (6A, 27/07/2011). As one boy said, “Kungfu is not just about fighting, we need use it to help people, to go beyond ourselves.” (6B, 27/07/2011).

Discussion was also useful, of course, for revealing where understanding was lacking. Sometimes the conversation went to strange topics and the questions became less
meaningful. For example, after watching a plot from Karate Kid, we talked about the ancient buildings in Beijing, the Great Wall and the Forbidden Cities. A boy asked a question, and then the talk really opened up:

. . . A boy suddenly asked, “Miss Yu, is it true that Great Wall was built to protects from rabbits…” and the whole class starts to laugh. Some girls said, “don’t be silly, Miss taught us last term. It is to protect from enemy in the north.” Then some boys talk about whether the empire in Mulan live in the Forbidden City, and also whether the Kongfu Panda 2 shoot there. I was speechless…. I have to tell them the history of Forbidden City is only less than 700 years, and the story of Mulan happened in 1000 years ago. As for Kungfu Panda, that is just a fake story, a legend, and it doesn’t exist. How can a cartoon take place in a real palace?

(6B, 31/08/2011)

Behaviours

The term “learning behaviour” can include positive behaviours and negative behaviours. In this category, I found that students were positive in terms of discipline, cooperation and completing tasks (18 [+ comments). Negative behaviours included mostly distraction (9 [-] comments).

Students were normally well disciplined. They were “quiet in watching movies” (6B, 31/08/2011), and paid attention when others were performing and asking questions (6A, 24/08/2011). I cannot discount here the help from the classroom teacher. However, I also focused on their discipline. I recoded early in the cycle: “That really makes difference, then students are so well disciplined today and pay attention on practising new vocabulary and performing the dialogue” (6A, 24/08/2011). This cycle involved many participative activities, such as role-playing, performing movie extracts and discussion, and this required good classroom management. Another reason for the discipline possibly was their “passion” for movies, which motivated how they behaved themselves in terms of participation and completing tasks.
Nevertheless, occasionally they were out of control when getting too excited or distracted by something else. They were obviously attracted to the movies and classroom activities, but sometimes, when the plot was too funny, students “drummed on their desks and made some noise” (6B, 17/07/2011). Moreover, the movies could also be a distraction because students repeatedly requested to watch more movies or would waste time arguing about the meaningless details of movies, which reduced the concentration on learning.

Language and Cultural Ability

The focus of this cycle was more on students “extended use and practice of the language”. d’Ydewalle and Van de Poel (1999, p. 228) assert that original movies can provide “the pictorial information, the original sound track, and the translation of the text in the subtitles”, and that younger learners can have some foreign-language acquisition in a natural context of implicit learning. In this cycle, speaking and listening were extensively practised, and pronunciation was obviously an important dimension. They also showed progress in understanding Chinese grammar and how to construct phrases and sentences. The language ability demonstrated was a considerable improvement on the previous cycle.

There was progress in their speaking, not only in terms of more accurate pronunciation, but also in their confidence to speak out. By listening to the original dialogue from movies, students could hear the native pronunciation of the sentences, and their practice of movie lines improved their pronunciation and confidence. Though at first some students did not want to perform because they were afraid to say sentences wrongly, encouragement from me and their peers helped them overcome this:

…then I let a boy sitting next to her to be as the monk, but the boy hesitated to come to front. I came near him and encouraged him, “Don’t worry! Doesn’t matter if you make mistake. I will help you!” And his friends said, “Come on, it is fun, don’t be afraid!” Then the boy came to front. In
performing, he had problems in pronouncing some words, but got them right finally with my help. And he was happy when role-play finished and every one clapped.

(6B, 18/07/2011)

This boy became very active in later lessons and was very keen to practise sentences and to ask me questions. He improved very quickly and this improvement in pronunciation also increased his confidence to speak out. In a role play in another lesson, the boy became “much braver, so his voice is louder and pronunciation is clear and good” (6B, 31/07/2011). After practice, many students could say those movie lines with very good accents without my demonstration. This confidence made students willingly use Chinese on other occasions. After we learnt how to say 恭喜发财 (gong xi fa cai: “wish you happy and wealthy”) from an animation, they could not wait to use it to greet me and bow to say the words, even after class when meeting me at or out of school. In addition, students desired to know how to say something they were interested in.

The next effect seemed to be a better understanding of grammar. Students were more sensitive to the construction of sentences and phrases and could connect new vocabulary to prior knowledge. For example:

One of Furious Five is tigress. I said that is lao hu (tiger) in Chinese. Then they questioned me that tigress should nv lao hu instead of lao hu because lao hu is just tiger, and tigress should have nv in front of lao hu. Nv means girl, and they have learnt that last term.

(6A, 27/07/2011)

Although students’ construction of tigress was not strictly correct, I appreciated their connection with prior knowledge, and their (over) application of the principle. Moreover, they had a stronger awareness of sentence structure in a clear way. Some students were at first mistaken when I requested them to transform the movie lines into their own words. For example, after performing a plot from Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf, I required them to change the sentences about lang (wolf) and yang (goat) into me,
you or a friends’ name, such as “xiao yang, kuai pao (little goat, run now)” into ‘jess, 
kuai pao’, or “hen gao xing jian dao Hui Tai Lang (nice to meet Great Grey wolf)” to 
“hen gao xing jian dao ni (nice to meet you)”. Some students were very confused at 
first and had no idea how to do that even though I demonstrated many times, but 
working in a group largely solved the problem. However, problems also remained in 
that in some groups the best students were too much relied on by other members.

A third outcome is that they also gained knowledge of China and became more familiar 
with it. Through discussion and answering questions, it seemed that they had good 
understanding of the movies and associated aspects of culture. For example, before I 
located Beijing on a map of China, students volunteered to do so (6B, 31/08/2011). 
When asked them to retell the story of the Butterfly Lovers (a legendary love story of 
Ningbo), many students were able to repeat the story and some students recognised it as 
a version of Romeo and Juliet. They had a certain sense of relating Chinese culture to 
their own culture, and made comparison. In addition, they also gained an 
understanding of cultural and social impact on language. When watching 大话西游 
dahua xiyou which is a Hong Kong movie and speaks in Cantoness, some students 
felt the difference between Cantonese and standard Mandarin and asked for the 
reasons. After I explained the history, students realised the dialects in different parts 
of China and how the language was socially and culturally constructed.

Memorisation

Some researchers have argued that the rhythms of music can develop a learners’ 
memory (Gadzikowski, 2007), and aid their memorisation of language. The long-term 
memory of language resulting from songs was not as satisfactory as I had hoped, but 
their memory of movie lines and sentences was even less. The [-] codes I related with 
memory outweigh the [+] codes: 9[-] vs. 5[+]. Students were normally able to master 
the language in a lesson, and still retained it in the next lesson after revision. However,
after three weeks, or if a Mandarin lesson was missed, they would forget much of the language:

Their pronunciation is still good, and reading of the pinyin get more accurate. But when recalling vocabulary learnt two weeks ago, they could not recognize them and explain their meaning. They seemed totally forget last lesson’ content. I was so disappointed with that.

(6B, 24/08/2011)

It revealed the problem that my revision and practice were insufficient for them to keep in long term memory with such infrequent lessons.

5.4.4 Key theme 3: Teacher’s teaching skills

In this cycle, I still found that some codes related to my teaching skills influenced student engagement significantly, but the number of [-] codes decreased. The main category was instructional strategies, and two new areas were ‘classroom management and time management’. To increase student engagement, giving clear instructions and having a flexible teaching plan were still the two most important strategies I could have, similarly to Cycle 1. Of the two new areas, the key theme was classroom management.

Classroom Management

The lessons in this cycle included many participatory activities, which required good classroom management. As Lyons, Ford and Arthur-Kelly (2003, p. 2) contend, good classroom management is important for creating positive learning environments. They strongly emphasise effective communication to create a positive classroom. Before each lesson, I talked with the classroom teachers about strategies for managing students. For example, “always wait for them to be quiet and gain everyone’s attention before I talk” (6A, 17/07/2011). It was difficult for me to organise them into role plays or into performing the plot. Lyons et al. (2003, p. 128-129) suggest that the, “call to attention
routines and procedures are valuable in facilitating safe and efficient movement around the classroom (Lyons et al., 2003, p. 130). At first it was total chaos, because I didn’t have experience, and students lost control. The process took more than 15 minutes. Then, with help from the classroom teacher, I also learned to supervise them: to give the routines and procedures first, and then to make sure no students were distracting or endangering other students from their own or other classrooms. Over time, the supervision moved from more restrictive to less restrictive, and students could move around freely.

5.5 Analysis of Classroom Teacher Interview

At the end of this cycle, I interviewed Angela who is the classroom teacher of 6B. Angela is an experienced teacher who has been teaching for fifteen years. She has taught in different schools, covering Kindergarten to Year 10, in a special needs high school and primary schools. The interview tried to gain an experienced teacher’s perspective on using popular culture in Mandarin teaching in terms of student engagement. This interview was semi-structured, and I added or changed questions based on the conservation we generated, although there were planned questions. The reason for a semi-structured interview was to enable me to maintain control over the line of questioning, while leaving space for the interviewee to give open answers (Creswell, 2009). Eight planned questions related to her experience of using pop culture in her classroom. There was also some evaluation of the classroom atmosphere, of students’ ability to finish a task and suggestions to improve my teaching. According to the coding results, the interview generated several categories:
Angela’s experience with using popular culture
My classroom atmosphere in the eyes of the classroom teacher
Student participation
Can students finish tasks?
Suggestions for me

Other, new content was also generated in the interview, such as her opinion of this Mandarin program and some advice for keeping continuity in student learning of Mandarin. This is her first year engaged in this Mandarin program, and she showed an appreciation of the program in the interview. Angela thought it was meaningful for Year 6 students to have access to Mandarin, which could provide a solid foundation for them to keep building on into the next level of high school.

5.5.1 Angela’s experience with using popular culture

Angela likes using popular culture and multi-media in her classroom. “Children at this stage all like popular culture”, she said, and she pointed out that popular culture is an important vehicle for teaching young students. She mentioned the importance of music in early childhood education, “In English culture, a lot of learning is done through songs. When children are five or six, they are learning nursery rhymes that tell them colours, counting sequences, whether a thing is big or small, that kind of thing”. Because music is repetitive and cheerful, it seems very effective. As to movies, she stated that they worked well, too: “learning and performing movie plots is a great way of engaging children.”

Moreover, Angela gave me advice about how to apply popular culture in the classroom.

What you need to do is to engage with the children, to find out what they are interested in, what they like. And then you try and match what they like with what is suitable
It is important to know about my students, their interests and hobbies. And then I can import aspects of Chinese popular culture that can connect with them and that is suitable for them in the classroom.

5.5.2 My classroom atmosphere in the eyes of the classroom teacher

In describing the atmosphere in classroom, Angela used words like “excited”, “comfortable” and “happy”. She thought students were very relaxed and were excited about performing movie lines. From movies, as they became familiar with their characters and the sentences, they were very happy to engage in performance and were willing to “practise, practise, and practice”. She also thought some students could speak their lines really loudly and confidently. The movies, just like the music I used in Cycle 1, she described as “changing the atmosphere of the classroom”. In addition, she appreciated my ability to apply multi-media actively, to make the classrooms fun. Being able to use the Smartboard as a teaching tool was very important. As Angela stated, “having it ready to go, plugging in everything, you’ve got everything at your fingertips and for the children, they really appreciated the work you have gone to”. It can be seen that positive emotion appeared to be present in the classroom. As Cheung (2001) argues, one of the advantages of using popular culture is to create a good atmosphere for students so that they can learn in a more comfortable and enjoyable way. Movies, performance and having fun with the multi-media provided students with a relaxed and easy learning environment.

5.5.3 Student participation

Generally, Angela thought that I was likely to get more children well engaged with my teaching, compared to Cycle 1 classes. She felt that most students appeared to love my teaching, especially those who listened and wanted to achieve high scores. The reason was that those students are motivated by interesting teaching materials or high scores. This was the positive reinforcement to my teaching. On the other hand, she also pointed
out that it is hard to engage everyone in the classroom. Some students sitting at the back were not listening, and sometimes acted negatively: when picked to answer a question they said, “Eh... oh, no, I don’t know any of it”. Failure to engage these students, according to her, resulted from the lack of knowledge about these students and lack of skills to draw their attention. She pointed out the reality of teaching in Australian classrooms is that some students, depending on what happened earlier in the day, may not be interested in doing anything, and may be noncompliant. It was good to have the majority engaged, but for those students “sitting back”, I needed to face this reality and explore how to gain their attention as well.

5.5.4 Can students finish tasks well?

In answering this question, Angela thought the movie gave them a link, as something on which they could “hang” their knowledge of Mandarin. It seemed helpful for them to improve their speaking and to correct pronunciation by using the movies, exploring the words in the movie lines, because they liked the stories and the funny plots. She saw that students were more likely to engage with the knowledge I was teaching. Angela stated that the whole class had great progress this year in learning Mandarin. In particular, she was impressed by several boys who were “naughty” formerly, who “have done really well since last term, and now they can say lots of Chinese sentences and can even perform dialogue in front of the class”. The change in these students seemed to be a sign of their improvement in concentrating on and completing tasks.

5.5.5 Suggestions for me

In talking about my teaching, Angela gave praise to my sequential lessons and the way I used movies to make the classrooms fun. She said, “Each lesson is self-contained but also builds on their previous knowledge... students can have a review and still use it [previous knowledge] in the following week”. She appreciated that I gave students the opportunity to have this progression in language learning.
Nevertheless, Angela pointed out some problems in my teaching. One is, I needed to learn more skills to engage inattentive students. Her advice was to state the importance of the day’s knowledge first and let every student know there would be a quiz after that. She showed me an example: “You can tell them in a firm voice: ‘I am going to talk about this, this and this, then I am going to ask you some questions about it. This is important you must listen.’” Firm and clear instructions can make students realise the importance of the knowledge, and knowing there will be a quiz encourages them to learn it well.

She also thought I could be more flexible when a prepared plan did not work. She stated that, “Being a teacher, you should always have something to bring out”. Technology problems sometimes caused me to panic and I usually did not know how to run the rest of the lesson. Angela suggested that I find some easy but quick games that do not need many resources, then I would always have that up my “sleeves” so I could still engage students. These games could include counting games, where they have to leave out certain numbers, or where they have to “guess a number in my head”, which students have to ask in Mandarin. This experienced teacher also listed several other games, and said I should keep them in mind to have in reserve when I encountered unexpected problems. In addition, these games, she believed, were also a good “switch” when a plan was not working well. “If you have only one or two students’ attention, that is when you need to be able to think . . . this is not working, I need to try something different.” A quick change of activity can change students’ mood and let them reengage in learning. She contended that “If you are armed with that, if you have the game you know that they know, you know that they like, that gives them a reason to re-engage with you.”

She thought of this as a teaching strategy that experience gives us, and which is very important for all teachers, not just teachers of other language. She appreciated that these skills come with experience and that I could gradually learn them.
Another issue Angela raised was about retention of knowledge. She admitted that the school usually regarded Mandarin lessons as isolated from the broader teaching of Chinese, and tended to think that we student teachers were already teaching language and culture, so that the regular teacher did not have to do additional work on these. However, the language that students could absorb was insufficient because Mandarin lessons only happened once a week. The insufficient time for Mandarin lessons also had an impact on the negative results of the quiz in 6B, she believed. Angela explained that some knowledge I used to test students had been taught in the last term and that students would forget it without repetition and revision. She suggested that I should do more revision and test more recently learnt knowledge. In addition, Angela thought it would be better to have more cooperations between the Mandarin teacher and the classroom teacher, to build a more connected link between language and culture and to help students have access to Mandarin even during the non-Mandarin lesson. That is what Angela would like to change in the program next year.

5.6 Cognitive Engagement

In the above section, students’ affective and operative engagements have been evaluated from my self-reflection. This section analyses the evidence from students including students’ self-assessments and test results, and mainly focuses on the evaluation of their cognitive engagement. Whether or not students are engaged in “high intellectual” work is one of the crucial questions in this research. Cognitive engagement draws on the idea of investment, and it incorporates thoughtfulness and a willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60). This engagement entails being strategic or self-regulating. Strategic students use meta-cognitive strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate their cognition. They use learning strategies such as rehearsing, summarising and elaborating to aid memory, organise and understand material (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60).
The analysis of student self-assessment and test results is employed to examine whether students have these indicators of cognitive engagement, such as, self-monitoring, exchanging ideas, giving directions, justifying an answer, using learning strategies and control strategies, showing evidence of persistence, relating the task to prior knowledge, requesting clarification and using analogies as measures of cognitive engagement.

The first section analyses the cognitive aspect of engagement in students’ self-assessment; the following section examines the cognitive aspect from an analysis of test results.

5.6.1 Student self-assessment

Students were required to do self-assessment in each lesson. Each self-assessment had three questions, each linked to a certain aspect of engagement according to the categories of the REAL framework. The assessment papers were handed out to students at the end of each lesson. Students had five minutes to write their answers then I collected the paper before they left classroom. The self-assessment questions were adapted from the REAL framework. As explained earlier, although six self-assessments had been prepared for this cycle, only four of them were implemented and had sufficient answers for the purpose of this research.

In the REAL framework, every question was categorised against a certain aspect of engagement, as the Table 5.5 below shows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 2</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Operative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 5.5 Dimensions of self-assessment questions used in Cycle 2
| Lesson 2 | Q1. Why were the fun bits fun? | Q2. What strategies did you use to learn something important? | Q3. What goals did you set for yourself in today’s activity? How well did you achieve them? |
| Lesson 3 | Q1. Why were you surprised about your learning today? | Q2. How did you know that you had learnt something? | Q3. What is the evidence of your achievement from today’s learning? |
| Lesson 4 | Q1. How did you feel when you solved a problem? | Q2. Write two questions you could not answer. | Q3. How could we change this lesson next time we do this? |
| Lesson 5 | Q1. How did the movie feel in today’s lesson? Did the movie help you understand today’s lesson? | Q2. Which city or cities do you know about most now? Can you tell me something about it? | Q3. What would you change if you were to do a similar task to improve your learning? |

L2Q2. What strategies did you use to learn something important?

When answering this question, students were learning about animals through the movie Kungfu Panda and learning about some “secrets” of the Kungfu master. In 6B, 35% of students answered in terms of what might be termed ideological content as to what they had learned from the movies: for example, “to not be afraid and have confidence”, “to be patient”. More than 20% of students thought they had learnt important language knowledge through practice. About 10% of the class gave general answers, like “I tried my best” and “tried hard”. Fourteen percent of students thought watching movies was a key strategy to help learn Chinese knowledge.

In 6A, more students said that they learned from practice, accounting for 45% of the students. These students gave more specific answers about strategies, such as “writing them down in my book, and saying them again and again”. For them, taking notes in
their book was important so that they could look back and revise. Still 17% of students thought the “secrets” of Kungfu were important. One answer was “to have a go at it and be confident”. I supposed that was the reason they performed so well in the role play. Twelve percent of students in 6A also wrote that watching the movie was their key learning strategy. Compared to 6B, students in 6A focused on more learning strategies and practices to develop their learning.

L3Q2. How did you know that you had learnt something?

Forty-five percent of the students answered that they knew they had learnt something because they could master it through various means: “I can pronounce it”, “I can write the character”, “I can understand”, “they are in my head” and “I could remember”. Another 19% of the students gave more vague answers, such as “because it never knew it before, but I know it now” or “because I have never heard the words we were learning”. Eight percent of students did not give any meaningful answer but simply asked “Can we watch more movies?” These students seemed not to be thinking about the outcome of their learning.

L4Q2. Write one or two questions you could not answer.

In this lesson after watching the animation, we practised the movie lines and I taught them a conversation based around “Nice to meet you” and “I am scared, let’s run” conversations. Half of the students wrote difficult sentences from the conversation, such as “Hen gao xing ren shi ni men” and “Xi yang yang kuai pai is really hard”. Eight percent of students did not have any questions; and they thought “It was all very clear” and “It was easy”. These students reflected on their learning, and what problems they had. The rest either left this question blank or asked if they could watch a movie.

L5Q2. Which city do you know about most now? Can you tell me something about it?
In 6A, near 80% of the students wrote that Beijing or Ningbo were their most familiar cities. Before I taught this class, students already had a good knowledge of Beijing. Ningbo was regarded as the symbol of their learning Mandarin and students had a special connection with it. They could recount many things about the cities. For example, “Beijing has the Bird’s Nest and the Olympics were held here, too”, “Beijing is famous for its history” and “I know Ningbo best, and it is located in the southeast of China”, “the story of the Butterfly Lovers is like Romeo and Juliet”. Other students thought they knew other cities better. One student said “Shanghai is very modern, similar to Sydney, and I like Oriental Pearl there”. Chengdu, the hometown of the Panda, was also selected by two students. In 6B, the results were similar.

Students showed good knowledge of those cities and what they are famous for. Some students compared and contrasted them with what they knew—such as with particular cities or with familiar stories.

5.6.2 Discussion

Students in this cycle were able to elaborate their thoughts more and to give examples or reasons for their answers. They had a clearer awareness of their own problems and showed they could learn strategies to solve them. To some extent they had self-monitoring in the sense of knowing themselves and continuing to improve. Some students could also justify their answer and find evidence of their effort. They also had some ability to compare and contrast aspects of Chinese culture and their own.

The indicators of positive cognitive engagement can be analysed by applying of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956). In the revised Bloom taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), learners develop cognition in a progress from remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating. In Cycle 2, student cognitive engagement developed into a deeper level of understanding, analysing and evaluating, and students demonstrated a primary level of being able to synthesis.
Nevertheless, problems also emerged. A few students focused only on watching movies. They seemingly only enjoyed the pleasure of watching and were not focused on learning things from the movies. This signalled to me that I needed to find ways to have every student comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.

Compared with Cycle 1, I believed that their thinking in this cycle improved through practice. As measured by Bloom’s Taxonomy, students had started to demonstrate skills of comparing and contrasting, and elaborating. This was still at an early primary level, but student cognitive engagement continued to improve by their being involved in deeper analytical discussion and practice.

**5.6.3 Test Results**

Test Content

The test took place at the end of this cycle. It was to evaluate students’ knowledge of the linguistic and cultural content from the four movies we viewed. The test took place in the form of a quiz, and students answered in groups of two or three, by means of discussion. There were four sections, and each related to a separate film. Some questions were about the content of the movie itself; some related to cultural knowledge; vocabulary also was tested. The test aimed to investigate not only students’ memorisation of knowledge, but also their ability to translate between the two languages as well as their capability to create conversation by using their current knowledge, and their understanding of culture.

Analysis of Test Results

The general results of the two classes are shown below in Table 5.6 and set out graphically in Figure 5.1. They showed that the two classes demonstrated a gap on this
test. Scores in 6A are distributed from 55 to 90, while all those from 6B are less than 70 points.

The results reveal that some students in 6B were not good at completing tasks in that test. The gap may reflect the different level of language attainment between the two classes; however, it was also possibly related to other factors, such as management, motivation and interests.

Table 5.6 Distribution of test results: 6A and 6B in Cycle 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>6A</th>
<th>6B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1 The distribution of scores: 6A and 6B in Cycle 2
Students performed better in both classes in completing “cultural” questions rather than “language” questions. In writing about famous things for each city, most students could answer correctly, and some of them could even elaborate a story or details of a specific food from one city. The most challenging work for them was to complete a dialogue. They needed to fill the missing words in sentences and to write long sentences based on English meanings, to make the translation complete and meaningful. More than 80% of students in 6A were able to finish the task while 40% of them scored a mark above 70 (good level). On the other hand, students in 6B had more problems in completing this task.

5.7 Other Aspects of Self-Assessment

5.7.1 Affective Engagement

L2Q1. Why were the fun bits fun?

This question aimed to investigate how students felt about the movies and content and to find reasons why they reacted happily in the classroom. In 6A, about 75% of students answered that they had fun because the story was very funny and interesting, which was “enjoyable” and “entertaining” for them. Another 20% of students thought learning some vocabulary made them feel happy. One student said, “because I learnt how to say Furious Five in Chinese, I am so happy with that.” The rest of the students thought the movies and the sentences they learnt were “so cool”. The answers in 6B had a similar trend. More than 60% of students answered the reason was the funny story. A quarter of students had fun because they felt happy to learn some vocabulary and sentences. There were a few students also providing answers like “because the teacher helped us understand the movies”.

L3Q1. Why were you surprised about your learning today?
About 40% of students gave perfunctory answers: viz. because of the movie. They did not write very detailed answers. They could not give an explicit answer. Nevertheless, the rest of students were able to explain their reasons. Forty percent of students focused on their learning. Half of these answers still related to the movies, but they explained they felt surprised because they could understand everything that the characters said in the cartoon. Some also said because they could choose their character and perform it. The other half of the answers referred to the sentences they learnt in that lesson. One student wrote “because some words sound the same”, and “because I learnt so many things that were so cool”.

L4Q1. How did you feel when you solved a problem?

Students rarely gave negative responses to this question. Nearly 80% of students were pleased to be solving their problem, giving answers such as “Awesome”, and “I feel like I did a good job”. The rest of the students were also positive: “I felt relieved”, “I felt I had learnt something new”. There were a few students who declared that “we had to practise it again and again in case we forget it”. Students demonstrated an optimistic attitude towards the problem.

5.6.2 Operative Engagement

L2Q3. What goals did you set for yourself in today’s activity? How well did you achieve them?

Seventy-five percent of students set goals relating to language learning. Some of them said “to learn new vocabulary” was important and they could know all the vocabulary in that lesson. Some students regarded to improve pronunciation and speaking as their goal, through “listening and practising I can say the words properly”. Many students answered remembering more words and sentences was their goal, and thought they did well in that lesson. Another 20% of students wrote their goals were to learn more
about Kungfu Panda or related topics. Still, the rest of 5% of students were not sure of their goals.

L3Q3. What is the evidence of your achievement from today’s learning?

Nearly 40% of students showed their workbooks as the evidence of their achievement. These students worked hard to take notes. One student answered “I have written everything in my Ningbo book”. Thirty-five percent of student thought their improvement in speaking and remembering new words were the evidences of their achievement. About 10% of students said their participation in answering questions and classroom activities were their evidences. For example, “I answered some questions and I volunteered to speak some movie lines.” Another 10% of students regraded the evidence as their ability to sing the theme song of the movie they watched in that lesson, as “I can sing the song yāng yāng.” Students were able to show the evidence of their achievement in various ways. It can be seen that they had good involvement in taking notes and practising speaking and participating in classroom activities.

L4Q3. How could we change this lesson next time we do this?

Students provided plenty of helpful advices to me. Almost 40% of students gave suggestions relating to focusing on language knowledge: “help us more with the characters” and “paying more attention on how to say the words”. Seventeen percent of students advised me to organize more interactive activities and make everyone have a turn. However, more than 30% of students’ suggestions were to watch more movies.

These suggestions revealed some problems in that day’s teaching, such as I did not demonstrate clearly how to write the character, and did not give students sufficient time to practice pronunciation. In addition, some students may not have had a turn in
participating in activities, and I need to be careful with this issue. Considerable number of students still focused on the pleasure of watching movies, rather than learning from them.

L6Q3. What would you change if you were to do a similar task to improve your learning

Only 21% of students answered that they would work harder, in ways of practising pronunciation, writing, engaging in activities and asking questions. Several students were confident with themselves and thought “now it is fine and I wouldn’t change”. More students answered they would watch more movies as a change to improve. It seemed that some students were aware of their weakness and know how to improve, while some students still focused on watching films.

5.8 Conclusion

Cycle 2 investigated the advantages of using movies in teaching young students language. Movies brought pleasure and excitement to students and enabled them to develop listening and speaking abilities. Kungfu movies, animation, and Moleitou movies drew student interest and it was found that Kungfu movies and animations were the most engaging. The humour in the movies helped alleviate the language obstacles and the students ‘digested’ the materials. Through elaborating their thoughts and reflecting on difficulties, students demonstrated their awareness of the learning process and their ability to use strategies to solve them. In this sense, movies offered some advantage in stimulating students to extend the use of the target language, and generate open discussion between the teacher and student. Through this cycle, it can be seen that movies could stimulate positive engagement to some degree, in affective and operative ways particularly, and student cognitive engagement developed as well. This chapter also demonstrated specific strategies for using movies in the L2 classroom, including quizzes, movie line performances and role plays.
Nevertheless, some problems were also revealed in Cycle 2:

- Management issues occurred when I organized students to move and perform the plots from movies
- A few students enjoyed only the pleasure of watching and were not focused on learning things from the movies.
- Long-term memorisation of language was still not achieved
- The quiz was carried out before students had a sufficient review of knowledge previously learnt
Chapter 6 Data analysis: Cycle 3

6.1 Introduction

Cycle 3 focused on analysing students’ learning during a unit using teen magazines, evaluating student engagement based on analysis of my reflections, data from students observation notes and an interview with the classroom teacher. The chapter begins with an introduction to the research setting and lesson content, and a discussion of how this Cycle is different to Cycle 2. Then I discuss the process of data collection and present the data. Based on the data coding, I then discuss the key themes that influenced student engagement. An interview of the Mandarin teacher from Shangen HS is then discussed. Cognitive engagement is separately evaluated through analysis of the evidence from students—self-assessment and worksheet samples, before some conclusions are drawn in the final section.

6.2 The Research Setting and How this Cycle is Different to the Previous

Cycle 3 took place in Dongxi Public School (Dongxi PS) and Shangen High School (Shangen HS). There were two classes from each school involved in the action research: 7A and 7B at Shangen HS, 6A and 6B at Dongxi PS. At Shangen HS, each lesson lasted 75 minutes, but I only taught for 30 to 40 minutes each period while I taught the whole period at Dongxi PS, which lasted for 45 minutes. The cycle began from Week 2 in Term 4, and was completed in Week 8 in Term 4. The seven weeks’ lessons involved popular cultural references, and data were collected from:

- my self-reflection,
- students’ self-assessment,
- students’ worksheets
- teacher interviews
As already discussed, action research ‘circles’ from planning, observing, and acting, reflecting and then re-planning into the next cycle. The reflection and summary from one cycle are significant for planning and preparing a new cycle (Mills, 2007). Based on the analysis of Cycle 2, I speculated that:

- The use of music and movies could to some extent help students extend their use of language in speaking and listening; however, students still lacked the opportunity to practise writing, especially writing characters rather than pinyin.
- Long-term retention of the language was not effective as had been expected. Some students had problems in recalling knowledge learnt weeks before. This revealed that it was necessary to use strategies to help students revise their prior knowledge.
- The classroom management had improved significantly, and most students were engaging in learning and classroom activities. However, some were less active than others. These students may have needed other ways to be ‘stimulated’ other than only relying on pop songs or movies.

Although much was similar to previous cycle, there were some differences:

- The aspect of popular culture I used was teen magazines including fashion magazines and music/movie magazines. Through presenting those texts with colourful and fashionable pictures, students could access Chinese characters directly in paragraph form. Developing student ability in writing was one of the significant focuses of this cycle.
- The use of pop references was more flexible in this cycle. Although the main focus was on magazines, some music video and movie clips related to teaching content were also actively implemented in classroom. The variety of multi-media could serve to decrease the difficulty and boredom of textual materials alone, and also retain keep their interests from the previous two
cycles.

- The way of testing students changed. Instead of a single test paper at the end of the cycle, I designed worksheets and an oral quiz for each lesson. This aimed not only to evaluate student knowledge levels, but also to reveal any problems and weaknesses that I could help them solve in the next lesson. The worksheet was also a good opportunity for all students to revise and hopefully enhance long-term retention.

This cycle was about how to engage students through the use of Chinese teen magazines. The emphasis turned to developing student ability in writing and reading, without neglecting practising students’ listening and speaking.

One fashion magazine and two music/movie magazines were introduced to students in this cycle. These Chinese magazines were downloaded from the Internet in the form of an e-magazine, along with background music. In the first several lessons, the focus was on teaching students vocabulary and sentences related to clothing, colours, prizes and sizes, by reading through the fashion magazine. The conversation about shopping combined all the linguistic knowledge they had learnt in the first three weeks, and was a good opportunity to revise and practise speaking. The last two weeks turned to the use of magazines about music and movies. Students could recall their knowledge of the previous two cycles and learn more about writing longer sentences and paragraphs. The worksheet and quiz in each lesson aimed to examine how well they had mastered the language and to reveal problems that I could help them overcome in the next lesson. The tasks on the worksheets were not simply matching or multiple-choice questions. Students were required to translate phrases and sentences between English and Chinese, and to answer questions in Chinese, or to write a paragraph.
Table 6.1 Teaching contents in Cycle 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shangen HS</th>
<th>Dongxi PS</th>
<th>Teaching Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Introduce a popular Chinese fashion magazine: Rayli Fashion Magazine Teach some clothing vocabulary in Chinese Worksheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Teach vocabulary of colours and sizes, and verbs related to clothing Focus on one page from magazine, understand the main idea of the paragraphs and learn some key words from them Worksheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Teach sentences by applying the words they know: to ask/answer colours, to ask a friend’s opinion about a shirt or a pair of shoes, to ask/answer the price of clothes in a shop. Role-play by using pictures from the magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Watch video about two popular shopping centres in China Teach conversation about shopping Role-play by using the products from the magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Introduce a music magazine and a movie magazine Review the vocabulary related to music and movies Teach more sentences by using passages from the magazines Worksheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Go through the magazines Read several paragraphs in the magazine about Chinese stars Require students to write a paragraph about familiar singers or movie stars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3 What Data Were Collected

6.3.1 Self-Reflection

A self-reflection diary was written for each lesson. This recorded the process of my teaching, and I reflected on students’ general behaviour and performance in the classroom. I also discussed the problems I focused on and reflected on how to improve my pedagogy.

6.3.2. Interview and observation notes

Anna is a permanent Mandarin teacher at Shangen HS. She has observed me teaching her classroom since July 2010. She is of Chinese background but received her secondary and tertiary education in Australia. This was her third year teaching Mandarin in an Australian school. Anna is an enthusiastic teacher and was keen to bring Chinese culture to students. I interviewed her at the end of this cycle. The planned interview questions were the same as the interview questions used in the second cycle. The observation and interview transcripts form the second piece of data.

6.3.3 Student self-Assessment

As discussed in previous chapters, students had several minutes to answer three questions which I selected from the REAL framework at the end of each lesson. Those answers aimed to directly reflect students’ thoughts and feelings as evidence of their cognitive engagement. There were six lessons for each class in this cycle and it was planned to let students answer the questions in all six lessons in this cycle. However, occasionally, there was not enough time left for the class to complete the self-assessment. Finishing worksheets occupied plenty of time in class, which reduced the time left for students to complete self assessment. As a result, I only collected meaningful answers from four lessons. The questions used for this cycle were:
Table 6.2 Self-assessment questions in Cycle 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 1</th>
<th>Lesson 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1.** How do you feel about today’s learning? Are you satisfied or confident? Did you enjoy it?  
**2.** Today you’ve learnt about fashion and clothes in Chinese. Can you think of a way to use it?  
**3.** Can you connect today’s new knowledge to something you already know or can do? | **1.** Is this new knowledge we have learnt today helpful for you? Why?  
**2.** What was the most difficult part you encountered in today’s lesson? How did you feel when the problem appeared?  
**3.** How did you find solutions to solve this problem? |
| **Lesson 3** | **Lesson 4** |
| **1.** After this Mandarin class, is there any difference in how you think about China from yesterday? What is it?  
**2.** Think about the many feelings you have about your work. Use colours or drawing to represent three of these feelings  
**3.** List three places you could use the skills you have learnt during this lesson | **1.** What positive feelings would you like to generate in future Mandarin classes?  
**2.** What advice would you give to the teacher about this lesson?  
**3.** How could you broaden your thinking and learn more about Chinese in to converse about your favourite songs, movies or comics? |

### 6.3.4 Worksheets

Evaluation of student knowledge was planned through the analysis of worksheets and posters. Students needed to complete worksheets in most of the lessons, and they were also required to make a poster by using Chinese words and pictures from magazines as their major assignment for the term. The completion and collection of worksheet was very successful, but no students handed their assignments in even though I asked for them several time. This made me question my position as a teacher. It is possible that my position as a new teacher still did not muster enough authority to make students follow my instruction. Compared to the work in class, any homework after class was not regarded as compulsory by them. I believe that they regarded learning Mandarin as more play than work. In a way, I was regarded much like a RFF (relief from
face-to-face) teacher because I came in to the school once a week and only had 45 minutes to one hour every lesson.

Worksheets were then the key evidence for directly examining student knowledge in this category. At the end of each lesson, students had eight to ten minutes to finish a worksheet or take part in a quiz related to key knowledge from that lesson. Worksheets were collected to analyse how well students had mastered the language and their oral quiz was recorded by an observing teacher, whose notes could help evaluate students’ pronunciation and fluency in speaking.

6.4 Self-Reflection

6.4.1 Coding and main themes

As with the previous chapters, the reflection diaries were coded through an ‘evaluation coding strategy’. My coding of self-reflection diaries in this cycle revealed the following key categories, as outlined in Table 6.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Me</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional response</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Culture knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning behaviour</td>
<td>Concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 In NSW RFF teaching is done by relief teachers in primary schools. Some teachers are entitled to two hours’ release from face to face teaching commitments each week, which allows them to engage in other activities concerned with the fulfillment of their duties (Ardzejewska, McMaugh & Coutts, 2010)
Pronunciation | Memorisation | Keeping appropriate path | Technology
---|---|---|---
Language ability | Classroom management | |

These categories are analysed under the following themes:

- students and affective engagement: emotion and attitudes
- students and operative engagement: participation, behaviour, language ability and memorization,
- Teaching skill: strategies and management

### 6.4.2 Key theme 1: Students and affective engagement

In Munns (2004b, p. 6) evaluation, affective engagement happens when students are involved in “pedagogical conversations that highly negotiate learning situations that can bring about simulating and enjoyable emotions associated with classroom work”. The affective dimension states that positive and enjoyable emotions and simulating attitudes associated with classroom works are both important. From the reflection diaries, 60 codes related to students’ affective engagement were found: 24 were about their emotions in regard to which there were 4 negative [-] comments; 36 were about attitudes to classroom activities and learning, 30 of which were [+ ] comments reflecting stimulation.

Two levels in this category were discerned. The first level related to whether students experienced enjoyable and positive emotions, while the second addresses whether these emotions stimulated them to have a positive attitude towards learning and classroom activities.
Direct emotion

Students’ direct emotional reactions were recorded as the first level in the affective engagement. As many researchers have found out, one advantage of using pop cultural reference is that it can bring fun and excitement to students in the classroom and help to reduce the boredom and difficulty of learning (Cates & Milner, 2007; Grace & Tobin, 1998, p. 59). The popular magazines also worked well in the classroom. When seeing colourful pages from magazines, most students reacted excitedly; many were curious to ask about the meaning of the content and were even “addicted” to seeing those pretty models and clothes. It was their first time having access to Chinese magazines, but they were not “frightened” by the long paragraphs and the strange characters on the screen. On the contrary, they liked to see beautiful models and clothes in the magazines, and especially boys. Two excerpts from the reflection diaries show how the students reacted towards the teaching materials, as follows:

When I showed the first slide which was the cover of the magazine, the girls were exciting, and boys were shouting “is she famous star in China?” Girls were curious about where they could buy those beautiful skirts and shoes, while boys reacted so excitedly towards the pretty girls’ picture, especially with the girls wearing shorts or mini-shirts, they were screaming and shouting. Those pretty models’ pictures were so adorable for students, especially for the boys. They kept “screaming” when the girls’ photo came out. After showing the magazines, some boys sitting in the front changed their attitude a lot. From being lazy and negative, they worked so hard to learn the words, even for the girls’ clothes skirt.

Although this time girls were still cooler than boys, they liked the skirts and accessories part. When the celebrities appeared on the screen, they could not control themselves again. A girl was so excited when I pointed her to say what Justin wears.

(Shangen HS, 7A, 25/10/2011)

It could be seen that boys and girls were both attracted by the materials, although the characteristics of boys and girls resulted in different focuses on the same material: girls paid more attention to fashion trends, clothes and shoes, judged them and said which
one was their favourite, while boys showed more enthusiasm about seeing the pretty models. The young students’ enthusiasm for fashion or beauty resulted in active affection to the teaching content.

Attitudes

In this Cycle, students were required to learn the new vocabulary and some paragraphs from magazines, and the focus on reading and writing increased the difficulty. I was concerned that this would challenge their motivation and interests. Nevertheless, most students were not influenced by the increasing difficulty. 30 of the 36 codes were positive [+] codes related to students’ attitudes to and interest in learning and classroom activities. Their first time access to Chinese magazines, in fact, inspired their curiosity. Students often asked me “who is this girl? Can I know her name? Is she kind of Beyonce in China?” Students’ curiosity towards learning content was significant in learning. Boys were attracted by the pretty models in the magazines and this resulted in an active attitude to learning related vocabulary:

. . . I taught about 20 new vocabulary today, and I was worried about whether they could acquire them or not. It turned out that they could know about them perfectly.

(Dongxi PS, 6A, 02/11/2011)

Given the influence of the “pretty models”, boys were quiet willing to learn vocabulary related to clothes and fashion. The materials were effective in motivating them to keep up interest in learning in some way. Students also showed perseverance with tasks and patience in completing worksheets, to some extent. The content of the worksheets was usually based on the magazine I used in that lesson, and the pictures used in the worksheet came from magazines. I found that this was useful, to keep them sticking to the tasks. In order to make them interested in the worksheets, I designed specific worksheets for boys and girls based on their different interests. These worksheets were
popular among students, and sometimes boys and girls wanted to have an exchange to do each other’s worksheet. Some of them even wanted to do both of the worksheets.

Another aspect of attitudes related to the teacher (me). In the lessons of this Cycle, some students said to me “Miss Yu, you are my favourite teacher”. Compared with the last two cycles, students showed ‘nicer’, more ‘friendly’ attitudes to me. More students behaved quietly when I gave instructions and organised activities. The relationship between students and me became increasingly close and emotionally harmonious as time went by.

Nevertheless, the [-] codes showed that magazines sometimes could not maintain the interests of some students for a long time, especially when the contents became difficult and involved with too many new words. Some students reacted actively first and showed interests in the content. However, they were easily distracted in later teaching, when required to learn long sentences and paragraphs.

**6.4.3 Key theme 2: Students and operative engagement**

Student operative engagement in this cycle was found to include a variety of involvement: participation, learning behaviours, and language ability. Of these, the issues of concentration, memorisation and pronunciation were outstanding in this theme.

**Participation**

Generally, students kept active participation in answering questions, playing games and other class activities. Fourteen [+ ] codes of the total 18 codes related to this category. Students liked participating in “familiar” activities. When watching a music video related to a music magazine, students customarily sang along with it. Students then asked me to give them the lyrics and to teach them to sing so that they could sing the
song better. This was not part of my lesson plan; however, I followed their willingness and taught the song. Another activity was to practise dialogue about shopping. In the example I gave, the dialogue was about buying sandals. Girls reacted excitedly to this and were very keen to say the sentences, while boys felt bored and asked: “Can we buy something else, like games?” I found it was a good idea, so I revised the dialogue and provided boys with options to say the dialogue around the items they were interested in. In this sense, students seemed to become more competent and empowered learners in the classroom through providing their thoughts to the teacher in order to have more interesting and engaging learning. This is one of the significant indicators of good operative engagement (Munn, 2004b).

A new task in this cycle was to complete worksheets. This seemed a boring task for students. However, by using pictures and models from the magazines, students, including ‘naughty’ boys were willing to finish it:

Unexpectedly, most of them were engaging in finishing task so actively. When we handed out the worksheets, boys were yelling for having the worksheet with girl’s picture. A boy used to behave lazy and never actively take notes or ask question, but today he finished the work quickly and then asked me to check whether he completed it correctly or not. And the worksheet he did was good, without major mistakes.

(Dongxi PS, 6A, 02/11/2011)

It can be seen that students were inspired to participate in doing the work. However, their enthusiasm about having an ‘interesting’ worksheet sometimes resulted in mistakes in the answers because some students, boys in particular, ‘rushed’ to do the task once they received the worksheet, oblivious of my instructions. This caused some low quality worksheets, even though students had the ability to do them correctly, simply because they didn’t hear the instructions clearly. Hence, it showed the importance of keeping students in order when giving them a task, although otherwise their participation was quite positive.
Learning behaviour

There were 13 [+] codes and 4 [-] codes in this category. Students demonstrated relatively positive behaviours including finishing work, complying with the teacher, and a diligent working attitude. Through dedication to practising reading and writing, some students worked hard to learn the content from magazines.

Some negative codes related to a few students resisting taking notes and practising writing Chinese characters. The emphasis on writing required students to have extensive writing exercise, in particular, writing characters rather than pinyin. Some students had difficulty in, or did not like, writing characters. This resulted in some negative behaviour. This showed the problematic reality in learning, that some students were happy to do easy tasks, but when encountering with challenges, their motivation was reduced. In terms of concentration, the difficulty of reading long paragraph and writing lowered their interests and resulted in some distraction away from concentration. In this case, for some students, magazines may have been interesting, but they did not reduce the difficulty of learning knowledge.

Language ability

Learning ability, as an important indicator of operative engagement, had improvement in vocabulary enlargement, in speaking and writing ability. In this category, 22 codes were [+] and only one code was [-]. Thirty percent of the codes in this category were related to better pronunciation. Students’ pronunciation also developed through practising conversation around topics generated from magazines, such as shopping, favourite comics and movies. The most impressive improvement is that they finished the worksheets with relatively good quality from my observations. Another important improvement is that students generally spent shorter time to acquire the new knowledge than before.
Memorisation

As for the memorisation, it showed a certain improvement over the previous cycle. There were 8 [+] codes and 4 [-] codes. Through completing worksheets and revising them for most of the lessons, the retention of language strengthened to some extent. Although students sometimes needed to check their books to recall the knowledge, they had a relatively clear and accurate retention of content from several weeks ago.

6.4.4 Key theme 3: Teaching strategies

A teacher’s pedagogical knowledge is important for better teaching. The codes in this theme mainly related to instructional skills, such as how to control the teaching path, and how to use rewards. Class management was still a big issue in my classroom; however, the relevant matters have been discussed in the previous two cycles, so do not appear here. I analyse two new issues arising from my reflections.

Controlling an appropriate teaching path

The focus on reading and writing ability requires extensive practice, so I prepared a number of vocabulary and other exercises, which was obviously ‘heavy’ work for my students. However, I was confident in my students’ learning ability and ambitious in my aims. In several lessons, I required students to learn more than 20 vocabulary items and several long sentences. Although most of them did not show impatience or ill-discipline, the learning outcomes were not good as I expected. Students did not have a good recall of the knowledge in the following week, and some were not confident because of this. This made me think about my teaching. Cheung (2001) argues that it is important to know about the level of languages that students have achieved. Although teen magazines were effective in some way to help students learn vocabulary, it was unwise to assume the materials could burst students’ level of language. To give work beyond students’ competence sometimes results in frustration and low motivation for
them. As Cheung (2001) has suggested, in order to effectively motivate students in learning, teachers should make learning materials “just a little beyond students’ current language competence”. I needed to face the reality that my students were still beginner language learners, and that their improvement should be handled in a gradual and slow way. At this stage, I needed to scaffold students with the basic knowledge, based on their levels of acquisition. There is a Chinese idiom ‘欲速则不达(yusu ze buda)’ describing this situation. Literally, it means that you will fail to achieve your goal if you rush too hard; this extends a meaning of “haste makes waste”. Therefore, I needed to keep my teaching on an appropriate path, instead of giving work that challenged their language competence and confidence beyond appropriate limits.

Using rewards correctly

In order to better engage students, I used some rewards to attract them to participate in activities and complete tasks. I did this because I found that students easily lost interests when the tasks became difficult. I had to use some ‘bait’ to maintain their interests:

The dialogue was long and difficult. When I required students as groups to practise saying the dialogue and then to come in front of the class to demonstrate it, they were a little bit ‘frightened’ and very nervous. Then I brought a box of chocolate and said the groups doing well could have chocolate for rewards. They suddenly became very excited and so eager to participate in practice. All groups raised hands and wanted to finish the tasks to get the chocolate. Surprisingly, most of the groups’ demonstration of the dialogue was good.

(Dongxi PS, 6B, 30/11/2011)

The atmosphere was totally different after I showed the rewards. The difficulty of the tasks had reduced students’ confidence in their ability and their motivation to participate. The use of rewards can increase students’ motivation and inspire them to engage with the current activities. As a way to manipulate students’ behaviour, in many studies, rewards have been found helpful for enhancing achievement.
However, rewards also involve risks. Some studies found that students expecting to receive a reward for completing a task did not perform better than those who expected nothing because “the more cognitive sophistication and open-ended thinking that is required for a task, the worse people tend to do when they have been led to perform that task for a reward” (Kohn, 1994). The motivation caused by rewards is also considered problematic. Rewards usually result in extrinsic motivation, which means completion if the task is seen as a prerequisite for obtaining something else (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This motivation cannot last for a long time, and when the rewards stop, people usually return to the way they acted before. This happened in my case. In later lessons, students kept asking me for chocolate as a reward, instead of concentrating on my teaching. For keeping students’ long term interests, it is necessary to find a way to stimulate their intrinsic motivation (an interest in the task for its own sake; Deci & Ryan, 2008).

6.5 Analysis of Mandarin Teacher’s Interview

Anna teaches Year 7 and Year 8 Mandarin in Shangen HS for two years. There were seven classes about 200 students involving in learning Mandarin in Shangen HS. Anna is the only permanent teacher in that school, thus it is a heavy burden to teach so many students. I interviewed Anna in second last week of Term 4. The planned interview questions related to her opinion of Mandarin program, past experience of using popular culture, and some evaluation of students’ engagements and my teaching. According to the coding results, the interview generates several categories:

- Reality of teaching Mandarin in Australia:
- The influence of using popular culture
- Management issue
- Progress and problems in my teaching
- Students’ unwillingness to write characters
6.5.1 Reality of teaching Mandarin in Australia: Low motivation and low engagement

Anna pointed out some disappointment about the reality of teaching Mandarin that Mandarin teacher had to deal with based on her past experience. As language has been put as one of key learning areas in curriculum and Mandarin is also one of main language to focus on (Acara, 2011), increasing numbers of students are required to involve in learning this language. However, as Anna argued, it was quite difficult to motivate students to learn Mandarin, in her case, because learning Mandarin was more school’s arrangement than students’ own choice. Shangen HS was extensively in Mandarin program and Mandarin was compulsory for the whole Year 7. Anna found that considerable number of students were not really interested in language. This was one of the key challenges for a Chinese-background teacher who teaches a second language in an Australian context encounters that Scrimgeour (2008, p. 130) pointed out. Low motivation and low engagement were obstacles for Mandarin teachers to help improve students’ language level.

6.5.2 The influence of using popular culture

As an enthusiastic language teacher, Anna was keen to use various ways to engage students and popular culture. One of her favourite methods was music video:

I used music video, to teach them phonics and Chinese song and pinyin. I think they like the song, although it was more for children. But I think they like it. I also put on Jay Chou’s MV. . . they are very interested in the video. They sing along even though they don’t really know how to sing. So they are really interested in that.

She used music video and songs in her classroom, and found that students were interested in the materials and became engaging. Popular culture seemed, as Anna said, “irresistible” to young students. Nevertheless, when talking about the
effectiveness of popular culture in stimulating students’ learning, Anna did not give a positive answer: “I think it (popular culture) is interesting for them but maybe it is not really effective for them to learn the language”. She thought it was difficult for students to learn the whole lyrics because they were still beginners.

Based on my experience, playing songs is more like to make them feel it’s really interesting, and something different. Students would like to ask, who he is, how old is he. They want to know this sort of things. The lyrics, they try to understand but they can’t really sing that properly. In my class, I found that students could not master of the language very well.

Anna agreed that using popular culture was an interesting and fun way to engage students, and useful in building relaxed and happy classroom atmosphere. However, from her experience, she found that students’ level of language determined that they were unable to catch up with the lyrics, thus she was not very confident with the effectiveness of stimulating students’ language performance through using popular culture. Whereas she gave praise to my way of incorporating of popular culture in teaching language:

But I think you are good at incorporating popular culture in your teaching. By focusing key lexical vocabulary of lyrics is effective in developing vocabulary acquisition and helping them sing. The magazines you choose has colourful pictures, the clothes, the model are pretty. These are very engaging student in memorising the vocabulary, especially for the boys, they really like reading the magazines.

Anna listed some ways in which I used popular culture in my teaching and she thought these methods had positive influence on students’ motivation and language learning. She pointed out that students had great progress in this year. They were able to “introduce themselves, and say what they like to eat, to wear, and conduct short conversation about shopping and hobbies.” This shows the effectiveness of popular...
culture largely relies on the way of the teacher incorporates them in one’s teaching (Cates & Milner, 2007).

6.5.3 Management issues

In talking about how to engage students, Anna thought classroom management was an important issue. As discussed in 6.5.1, Anna thought that most students were not self-motivated to learn Mandarin. In terms of classroom behaviours, year 7 students were very different from Year 6 students. Some students were really undisciplined in the classroom and even negatively influenced on teaching process. For Anna, it was time-consuming and frustrated to manage the class well in order to maintain the teaching process:

I need constantly remind them to keep quiet and have to stop to catch their attention. Sometime I have to stop more than 10 times in one period. I was really tiring. And I feel like I have to push them to finish the work, otherwise they just sit there, not really willing to do anything.

It can be seen that classroom management impacted on her teaching seriously and she had some way to deal with it, however, it was not very effective because the teacher need to keep pushing students. Then she talked about management issues and the use of popular culture could influence each other mutually. The effective use of popular culture required good classroom management, while some interesting popular culture contents could draw students’ attention and make them behave well. However, the good effect could not last for a long term because, in her opinion, students were not really interested in learning the contents.

6.5.4 Progress and problems in my teaching

In terms of progress, she thought that my focus on students’ interests, motivations and engagement were potential solutions for those “naughty” Year 7 students. Anna gave praise to my efforts to facilitate students motivate in Mandarin:
Since last year, you have chosen suitable topics which you think motivate them, and tried to go to the topic with them, step by step. At first, some topics may fail to engage them, but you revise your lesson plan and bring something they are more interested in. I can see students like your lesson as they look forward for you lesson on Tuesday.

Anna further thought it was effective in giving students worksheet to complete in order to maintain their memorisation of vocabulary and knowledge. Students can revise what they have learnt after I have gone through the lesson. It was a good way to know what students could understand and what they could do from their worksheets.

In terms of problems, Anna pointed out that I did not set up my authority to students, which resulted from my limited time with students, and also my lack of “teacher’s words”. She described that “you had good relationship with students, but students treated you more like a friend, not a teacher”. She suggested me to learn more instructional and classroom management strategies, to position myself more as a teacher than a friend to students.

6.5.5 Students’ unwillingness to write characters

In discussing student language, I talked about my concern that students did not like writing characters. This Cycle focused on writing and reading ability, but in most practices, students tended to write in pinyin instead of characters. Anna agreed with that and had the same concern. In her first year of teaching Mandarin, she required students to write characters for every word, consequently, “I pushed too hard and students hated it”. Then she did not focus on teaching characters any more. Writing characters is complex and time-consuming, which decreased students’ interests and motivation easily. Reading teen magazines were considered by Anna as effective way to help students recognise characters, however, when requiring students to write down
the words, they still tended to write pinyin. This is an inherent problem in teaching Mandarin.

6.5.6 Discussion

Anna, as a Chinese background Mandarin, shared some similar problems that I had, such as classroom management and students unwillingness to learn characters. She thought popular culture was effective to stimulate students’ affective engagement and help develop students’ behaviour to some extent. However, this largely relied on the teacher’s ability to incorporate in one’s teaching.

6.6 Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement draws on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to extend the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and to master difficult skills; the use of intelligence and thinking (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60) being strategic or self-regulating. Strategic students use meta-cognitive strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate their cognition. They use learning strategies such as rehearsing, summarising and elaborating to aid memory, organise and understand material (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60). Indicators of cognitive engagement are self-monitoring, exchanging ideas, giving directions, justifying an answer, using learning strategies and control strategies, evidence of persistence; relating the task to prior knowledge, requesting clarification and using analogies as measures of cognitive engagement.

6.6.1 Analysis of student self-assessment

The questions for self-assessment were adapted from the REAL framework and based on my teaching content. Each self-assessment had three questions, and each linked to a certain aspect of engagement, according to the categories of the REAL framework. The
assessment papers were handed out to students at the end of each lesson. Students had classroom time to write their answers and then I collected them. As explained before, although six self-assessments had been prepared for this cycle, only four of them were implemented with sufficient answers being collected. Table 6.4 below lists all questions used and their main aspects.

Although some questions focused on affective or operative measures, some indicators of cognitive engagement could be reflected in students’ answers to those questions. Therefore, I list the questions that generated some answers that I considered reflective of cognitive engagement, for analysis of the cognitive aspects.

Table 6.4 Dimension of self-assessment in Cycle 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 3</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Operative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 1</td>
<td>Q1. How do you feel about today’s learning?</td>
<td>Q2. Can you connect today’s new knowledge to something you already know or can do?</td>
<td>Q3. Today you’ve learnt about fashion and clothes in Chinese, and can you think of a way to use it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 2</td>
<td>Q1. Is this new knowledge we have learnt today helpful for you? Why?</td>
<td>Q2. What was the most difficult part you encountered in today’s lesson? How did you feel when the problem appeared?</td>
<td>Q3. How did you find solutions to solve this problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 4</td>
<td>Q1. Think about the many feelings you have about your work. Use colours or drawings to represent three of these feelings.</td>
<td>Q2. After this Mandarin class, is there any difference in how you think about China from yesterday? What is it?</td>
<td>Q3. List three places you could use the skills you have learnt during this lesson.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson 6

Q1. What positive feelings would you like to generate in future Mandarin lessons?

Q2. How could you broaden your thinking and learn more about Chinese so as to converse about favourite songs, movies or comics?

Q3. What advice would you give to the teacher about this lesson?

L1Q1. How do you feel about today’s learning? Did you enjoy it?

This was the students’ first Mandarin lesson in this term, and Year 5 and Year 6 students were mixed in one class for the same lesson. It was easy for them to become excited, in particular, when seeing the colourful and beautiful pictures of models and clothes. Except for one blank answer, answers were very positive. More than 70% of students thought they were enjoying it. Students felt “it was really good!” in that lesson and most of them thought it was because they gained new knowledge. Others considered it was enjoyable because the magazine was fun and “awesome”. Another 24% students were “confident” or “satisfied” with what they had learnt. For example, one student said, “I felt confident to say those words, and I did enjoy learning it!”

Students’ feelings were mainly of enjoyment, and having fun, of feeling confident and satisfied. They had a positive experience in that lesson. The use of magazines was motivating and fun, but most of the students’ positive emotion resulted from what they had learnt and their ability to learn. It shows that they valued their learning and felt a sense of achievement or pride in learning new knowledge well. These answers did reveal that students could enjoy direct pleasure from the pop cultural references, but more of them also could have fun in learning and enjoying the pleasure of mastering knowledge. As Jimerson et al. (2003) indicates, the cognitive dimension includes self-regulation, an appreciation of the value of learning and a sense of the relevance of schoolwork. Students at this stage valued their learning.
**L1Q2.** Today you’ve learnt about fashion and clothes in Chinese, and can you think of a way to use what you have learnt today?

This question addresses students’ thinking about ways to apply what they have learnt in the Mandarin classroom to their lives. It was the first time to think about the practical use of Chinese knowledge, for many students. Some students hesitated to give their opinions. Nevertheless, nearly half of the students gave thoughtful answers. In that lesson students learnt vocabulary around clothing and fashion. More than 18% of the students thought they could use Chinese words to teach or talk with friends and family. The knowledge of Chinese was regarded by these students as ‘capital’ which they could ‘show off’ in front of family and friends and feel proud of. About 15% of students argued that the value of the language was to use in a Chinese clothes store or when going to China. For example, one wrote “when I go on a vacation to China I would want to buy clothes so I can say the sentences I have learnt today.” These students focused on practical use of the language.

**L2Q1.** Is this new knowledge we have learnt today helpful for you? Why?

Almost all students thought it was helpful to learn the vocabulary of colours and phrases about clothing. About 35% of the students thought colours the most helpful. Another 35% of the students valued it because they believed they now knew more about China and Chinese culture. Being able to communicate with Chinese people one day is regarded by 30% of the students as useful. They thought what they learnt would help “if I ever go to China”, or “when I go shopping in China I can use these words”. The perceived main value and use of the new knowledge included saying new words, knowing more about China and communicating with Chinese people. Students showed their evaluation of the knowledge and understanding of the practical use of it after understanding the materials.
**L2Q2. What was the most difficult part you encountered in today’s lesson? How did you feel when the problem appeared?**

Students pointed out various problems they had encountered in the lesson. For Year 6 students, the biggest problem was pronunciations, accounting for more than half of the students. Some of these students felt “it was hard pronouncing words” generally, while more students wrote specific vocabulary they could not handle; for example, “saying chen shan (shirt)” or, “to say the words of the accessories, that’s really hard”. The most difficult pronunciation problem for students was those Chinese words that cannot be pronounced in an ‘English way’, which students experience as alien. Other main problems included writing characters (13%) and putting words together to make a sentence (10%). It took time for students to become familiar with Chinese characters and it also took more time to write them. One student’s answer, referred to writing “slowly and carefully because of the strokes”.

Another 10% of the students thought their biggest problem was to remember everything, especially vocabulary. More than 20 vocabulary items were taught in that lesson and some students found difficulty in remembering all of them. Arends (2004, p. 270-1) suggests that to reinforce student short-term as well as long-term memory, teachers could follow principles for presenting information that grow out of ideas from cognitive psychology. These include organising learning materials in a “thoughtful and skilful way”, with cues for drawing information from their long-term to their working memories. This furnished me a way to effectively teach and revise knowledge with students.

Year 7 students had more difficulty in remembering vocabulary (30%) and finishing worksheets (23%). Communicating in long sentences was also regarded as a problem by 15% of the students. Pronunciation seemed to be less challenging for Year 7 students, possibly because they had had access to the language for a longer time — since Year 5
or Year 6. Although many of them had forgotten vocabulary, they were still familiar with the sounds and tones.

The main difficulties students encountered were pronunciation of some particular words, writing characters, making sentences and remembering vocabulary. However, students largely understood the learning materials and knew their own weaknesses.

L2Q3. How did you find solutions to solve the problem?

The problems students had are discussed above. Most students tried to fix them, either through practising or using books, while 10% of the students sought help from me or from friends. Using workbooks is also a solution for students having problems with memorisation and communicating in long sentences: “I’ve got everything in my notebook, I can use my book for hints if I can’t say the right sentence”, and “I tried really hard to remember and my book helped”. These students wanted to fix the problems through learning strategies such as rehearsing and practising. Some of them improved through asking me to clarify their speaking and writing. These are the indicators of cognitive engagement—using specific learning strategies and asking for clarification (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60).

L4Q1. Think about the many feelings you have about your work. Use colours

More than 80% of the students were able to draw pictures and use colour to express their feeling, and most of these students wrote the names of the colours in Chinese. For example, one student answered, “I felt a little difficult 😊 and it is láy sè (green), but for most of the time, I am 😇 họng sè (red) and 😞 họng sè (yellow).” Some students also explained why they felt that way and why they used particular colours. Most students drew a smile or laughing faces, though some students were feeling challenged by or confused with some vocabulary, or felt nervous about performing in front of the
class. The positive feelings were largely overwhelming in the classroom, though they still had some problems with particular knowledge or activities. It is significant that the students could write down their feelings in relation to those events or learning in class and that some students could write colours in Chinese and draw faces to express their feelings.

L4Q2. After this Mandarin class, is there any difference in how you think about China from yesterday? What is it?

About 70% of students in 6A answered “Yes” to this question. Half of these students explained their understanding of China, and several key words appeared frequently in their answers: “modern”, “cool” and “fashion”. One example is: “I think China has a long history, but it is also a modern and fashionable country.” Some students also mentioned their different experience of learning Mandarin: “Yes, China is a great country with so many fantastic things and they have a cool language. It is difficult but I love learning it.” The contemporary culture to which students had access in their Mandarin class had some influence on their opinion of modern China and its language. Apart from traditional views of China as “ancient” and “historical”, students’ understandings also focused on modern facets. The “fantastic things” about China enabled some students to enjoy learning the language, although they found it “difficult”.

However, some students seemed to misunderstand the question and confused China with Chinese; their answers indicated more the development of their Chinese language than their views on China. For example: “Yes, I know how to pronounce words better”, “I have learnt some new words and I can say them fluently”. Nevertheless, their answers still reflect that they knew what they had gained and were satisfied with their improvement. This is partly about valuing learning and showing evidence of persistence.
L6Q2. How could you broaden your thinking and learn more about Chinese in order to converse about your favourite songs, movies or comics?

70% of the students thought the Internet was the best way to know more Chinese. “I could go on to websites on the Internet and learn the language” and “I can look on the Internet and search the Chinese words I want to learn”. This generation has grown up with the Internet, and the use of the Internet for playing and learning is everyday routine. I implemented many online references in the classroom which may have helped them regard the Internet as important tool in learning Mandarin. Another 20% of the students answered that they could broaden their knowledge through “authentic” materials, such as “by listening to Chinese pop music”, “by reading Chinese magazines” or even “visiting China one day”. Also, through exchanging ideas and interacting with people who are good at Mandarin, these students believed they could improve their language and culture level.

L6Q3. What advice would you give to the teacher about this lesson?

About 40% of the students gave me suggestions to improve my teaching strategies. Some students wanted to have more “fun”, with everyone engaged, and requested “more games”. Some suggested having more activities and more opportunities to practise, “to have more activities that we can do in groups or partners” and “to have more performing Mandarin in front of the class”. One student pointed out “how to help”: was to “give us more time to write character because they are so difficult” and “show the strokes slowly so we can see how to write them.

Some students in 6A thought I need improve my spoken English, as possible obstacle for their understanding. However, no students in other classes mentioned this problem, so I supposed that it may have been due to the influence of the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher in 6A is a strict and experienced teacher who helped me improve a lot, and she did not hesitate to correct my mistakes when I was teaching because she
believed “it is important to show the correct English to students”. The language of the teacher is important in building a positive classroom climate for students, whether in terms of the clear formation of concepts or for effective classroom management (Leask, 2005, in Capel et al., 2005, p. 103). English as a second language I do not see as having been a big obstacle in my teaching. Nevertheless, my mispronunciation of some words and my accent may have influenced students’ understanding, and it was regarded as a serious problem by the classroom teacher as having a potentially negative effect on their English, since modelling is a part of the function of being a teacher. Thus, it is important for a teacher to be clear about what language they want students to engage in and to model this correctly as part of their teaching. The rest of the students (almost 30%) gave very affirmative and supportive answers.

6.6.2 Discussion of self-assessment

These self-assessment questions were designed to assess how students were engaged in learning from a cognitive aspect. According to their answers, many students were able to:

Value their knowledge
In L1Q1, students showed their enjoyment of learning Mandarin, and there were positive emotions including confidence and satisfaction. This can be seen in these quotes, which are typical of the answers given: “it was really good!”, “awesome”, “I felt confident to say those words, and I did enjoy learning it”.

In L2Q1, all the students stated that the vocabulary and phrases they learnt in that lesson were helpful. These answers showed that students were happy with the learning and valued what they have learnt. Typical answers were “when I go shopping in Chinese I can use these words” and “I can talk with Chinese people”.

Realise their problems and difficulties
In L2Q2, students reflected on their learning and pointed out their main problems in learning the language, including pronunciation, the writing of particular words and remembering specific vocabulary. The students addressed their specific difficulties in their answers: “it was hard pronouncing words”, “saying chen shan is difficult for me”, “I can’t write the character correctly, it is too hard” and “I can’t say the sentence properly”, “too many words, it is hard to remember all of them”.

Find strategies to overcome these difficulties
In L1Q2, students offered different strategies about how to use particular Chinese vocabulary for practical purposes, such as communicating with a Mandarin speaker, as suggested in quotes above or to “teach my parents”.

In L2Q3, many students provided strategies to solve difficulties. They thought that they could overcome the difficulties through more practice, using books and seeking help from the teacher or their friends: “I need practice more and say the words more”, “I can use my book for hints if I can’t say the right sentence”, “I tried really hard to remember and my book helped”, “I asked miss Yu to help me”, “ask my friend for help”.

Know how to broaden their information
Students also showed that they knew how to find ways to broaden information. When answering L6Q2, most students searched information relating to Chinese culture and language through the Internet, listening to Chinese pop songs and reading Chinese magazines, and talking with Chinese people. Answers included: “I could go on to website on the Internet and learn the language” and “I can look on the Internet and search the Chinese words I want to learn”, “by listening to Chinese pop music” and “by reading Chinese magazines, “talking with Chinese people” and “visiting China one day”.

Give the teacher advice about how to make the lesson better
In the last question L6Q3, students provided the teacher with suggestions about how to improve her teaching. These suggestions involved more games and preparing lessons to be more flexible to leave sufficient time for them to practice. Typical answers were: “to have more games”, “to have more activities that we can do in groups or partners”, “to have more performing Mandarin in front of the class”, “give us more time to write character because they are so difficult” and “show the strokes slowly so we can see how to write them”.

Some students were strategic and knew how to use learning practices to aid memory, to organise and understand materials, while some students valued their learning and showed appreciation of the subject and the teacher. Some indicators of cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60) were shown in students’ answers, such as:

- self-reflection
- exchanging ideas
- requesting clarification
- using learning strategies
- control strategies
- evidence of persistence
- relating the task to prior knowledge

The cognitive level of the students in this Cycle improved to some extent. Figure 6.1 outlines a cognition development process, an application of Bloom’s Taxonomy by Dalton and Smith (1986, p. 26-27) for primary classrooms. Some indicators of
cognitive engagement in this cycle had features at the level of synthesis and evaluation.

Figure 6.1 Bloom’s Taxonomy (adapted for the primary classroom)

Synthesis and evaluation are the highest levels in the process, and they require students not only to master the concepts and be able to apply them but also to have the ability to create, plan, judge and recommend. Students in this cycle talked about how they were going to apply the language and evaluate their language performance and understanding of Chinese culture; they also explained their feeling in relation to the things happening in class by using Chinese, reflected on their own problems and used specific strategies, and gave suggestions to the teacher to improve the lessons.

Although not every student could demonstrate all the features of deep thinking and understanding, some of them indeed seemed to have improved their thinking and understanding from this long journey, compared to the previous two cycles.

6.7 Analysis of Worksheets

Three worksheet pieces were used in this Cycle, and each of them focused on clothing, colours and hobbies. They can be found at Appendix 12.

6.7.1 Worksheet 1: Content and analysis
The first task on the worksheet was to write in the box, the names of the clothes they were wearing, in Chinese: for example, mao zi (hat), chen shan (shirts). Then students needed to write sentences in the lines below the boxes. For example: she/he is wearing . . . (the clothes they have written in the boxes). I designed two kinds of worksheets: one had a pretty girl’s picture, the other one had a boy’s picture on it, so girls could work on the worksheet with the boy’s picture, while boys had the girl’s worksheet. I suppose worksheets with the opposite gender would be more attractive for them.

About 40% of students received full marks as there were not any mistakes. Half of them were “boy” worksheets and half were “girl” worksheets. Several girls also asked me to give them additional work to do after they quickly finished their boy worksheets. So I gave each of them the girl version, which they also finished, even before their classmates had finished one worksheet. The quality was very good; that was very brilliant. The rest of them had various problems.

Problem 1: misusing two verbs

There were 30% of students having this problem. Chuan and dai both mean “wear”, but chuan should be used with clothes while dai is for “wearing accessories”. Although I had emphasized the two separate verbs for “wear” many times in the lesson, some students were still confused about how they are used. Because I had mentioned “dai” recently and had used the picture to show it should go with hat and sun glasses, most students knew about writing ‘dai mao zi’ (wear hat), but some still used dai when it came to clothes. I may need to mark the difference after gaining students’ attention. I can make a slide to explain the two ways to use them, and let them focus on practising it for five minutes. This could work better.

Problem 2: doing it without instruction
More than 20% of students made this mistake. I didn’t write instructions on the paper because it was a tiny piece of paper. When I handed them, I repeated twice what they needed to write in the boxes and on the lines. Some didn’t wait to hear my instruction and already started to do the task; some didn’t pay attention to me. So they had trouble with it. When I walked around and found they didn’t do the right thing, I told them and some corrected it. But still there were students making mistakes whom I had overlooked. They knew to write the Chinese words for the clothing in the box, but they had no clue what to write on the lines, some students just wrote the same Chinese words as in the box. Next time it would be better to put the instructions on the paper or put them on the screen. Then they can check them all the time when doing the task, and I needn’t repeatedly tell them the instructions and check their work one by one.

*Problem 3: can’t remember the words*

Only 5% of students forgot how to write hat and some other vocabulary in Chinese. When writing the sentence “she is wearing hat”, one student only wrote “ta da (she is wearing)” and used an ellipsis (…) for mao zi (hat).

**Summary**

The worksheets that students finished generally were of a good quality. Some students complete them all correctly without any mistakes. They demonstrated a good understanding of the language they had learnt and good attitude in complying with the teacher’s instructions. Several students were even willing to do extra works. Other students had different problems: grammar, ignorance of the teacher’s instruction, or insufficient vocabulary. This informed the teacher to keep students practising and focus on illustrating grammar, giving instruction and enhancing students’ knowledge of vocabulary.
6.7.2 Worksheet 2: Content and analysis

This worksheet had three sections. The first section was to translate English words into Chinese. Those English words were phrase ‘colour + clothing’, and students were required to write both colours and clothing words in Chinese correctly. And second task was to complete the sentences by filling the missing words in the blank. I gave the English meaning of the sentences first, and then only showed part of Chinese on the right side. The third task is to answer two questions in Chinese. Both questions were taught in the lesson. One was to ask price of pants, and the other was about your favourite colour. They needed to write the answers in Chinese.

Problem 1: Lack of vocabulary knowledge

In finishing task 1, ninety percent of students correctly translated the English phrases into Chinese. The rest 10% of them had problem of either writing colour words or clothing words. I should address the vocabulary more preciously in the next lesson.

Problem 2: Unable to understand instructions

Thirty percent of students had problems in finishing the second section. This task is to complete the sentences by filling the missing words. Most students at first were confused what to do with it. I explained again and again, and even gave an example, and then they finally realized it. Still, fifteen of them couldn’t understand the instruction and they left it blank. Another fifteen of students usually made mistakes in spelling xihuan (like), or haokan (pretty). They just wrote xi for like and spelled haokan wrong. Some students could not understand the sentence structure, and did not realize the forming of the words. I should explain the words more explicitly and give them idea how to construct the words and phrase.
Problem 3: Unable to understand sentences different from the example I gave

Task 3 is to answer two questions in Chinese. One is to ask how much for the pants, and another question is about your favourite colour. More than 40% students had problems in answering the first question, while 95% of students were able to complete second question correctly. In my teaching, I used an example “xie zì duō shào qián? (how much are the shoes)” to illustrate how to ask price, but I replaced shoes by pants in the worksheet. Students then had problems in realising the meaning of the question. Some students left the answer blank, and others just copied answer from the example sentence I taught them. It is probable that they didn’t have clear idea about the sentence construction.

Summary

In total 55% of the students did very well in finishing this worksheet. They could answer most of questions in all sections. Twenty five percent of students received full mark and answered every question correctly. Even their spellings were nice and clean, and no mistakes. A few students forgot vocabulary, and some students had problem in understanding instruction. Considerable number of students failed to recognise sentence structure and could not understand a sentence when the subject or object is replaced by another word. It was necessary to address the sentence structure and illustrate the grammar in a more explicit way.

6.7.3 Worksheet 3: Content and analysis

This worksheet was designed to make students review the knowledge of vocabulary and sentences related to favourite music, songs and comedies. The first part was to translate the words and sentences into Chinese. The second task was to answer the questions in Chinese. About 52% of students did a good job in finishing the worksheet. Most of them completed all the questions, and three of them could answer them all
correctly. 38% of them wrote very good Chinese for the two sentences. Other 7 students also could translate most of the two sentences, but most of them only correctly finished the first sentence which is about watching transformer.

Problem 1: Failing to understand instructions

Twenty percent of students had failed to understand the first task. I required them to translate movie/comics/music in Chinese, but some students gave the answers such as Gongfu Xiongmao (Kungfu Panda), Si shen (Bleach) for comics and hei yang dou dou (Black eyed peas) for music. Those Chinese were correct, but students provided singer, and movie and manga name, instead of translating the words.

Problem 2: Spelling mistakes

About 30% of students could not spell some words correctly. They often left out part of words or put them in wrong order. For example, in writing dong man (comic), two students wrote dian mao and one just wrote dong, and also students wrote yue yin for yin yue which meant music.

Problem 3: Unable to write correct phrases

Most students can finish answering writing the sentences in Chinese, but still 40% of the students had problem in this part. The second sentence was ‘listening to Beyonce’s songs’, and students were required to translate it. Some students used wrong sentence pattern. Listen to music is ting + yinyue, but listen to someone’s song is ting + (singer name) de ge, but this student wrote ting yinyue + Beyonce de ge. They seemed having problem understanding the sentence pattern. Other 4 students failed to put de ge (one’s songs) in the end, just wrote the singer’s name.
Summary

More than half students were able to complete all task correctly and showed good understanding of sentence structure and phrase pattern. Failing to understand instruction was still a problem in this task, and some students had spelling mistake. Similar to worksheet 2, the phrase pattern confused some students.

6.7.4 Discussion

The result of worksheets indicated that some students were unable to finish writing tasks and master language knowledge. Most of students could translate phrases, complete sentences, ask and answer questions. Students demonstrated a good language level. Nevertheless, there were also some problems students faced as shown in Table 6.5.

Issue of instruction repeatedly appeared, and this required the teacher to think about how to give more explicit instruction to make every one understand. The problems also informed the teacher to focus on illustrating grammar, and enhancing students’ knowledge of vocabulary and writing practising.

Table 6.5 Problems revealed in worksheets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worksheet 1</th>
<th>Problem 1: misusing two verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem 2: doing it without instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem 3: can’t remember the words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheet 2</td>
<td>Problem 1: lack of vocabulary knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem 2: unable to understand instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem 3: unable to understand sentences different from the example I gave</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Worksheet 3

Problem 1: failing to understand instruction

Problem 2: spelling mistakes

Problem 3: unable to write correct phrases

6.8 Conclusion

Cycle 3 as the last cycle was aimed to develop students’ language ability to a higher level. The improvement in student engagement was impressive. In terms of affective engagement, students showed positive emotions towards teen magazines, and built an increasingly good relationship between the teacher and students. More importantly, they demonstrated a good attitude towards learning, as more students were willing to complete tasks. As for operative engagement, students’ writing and speaking abilities benefited from extensive exercise. Teen magazines were useful to maintain some boys’ interest in particular, especially in terms of finishing writing tasks. Simultaneously, cognitive engagement developed into a higher level than the previous two cycles. According to the student self-assessment answers, students were aware of the applications of language, and of their understandings of Chinese culture, and also could reflect on their own problems and used strategies to overcome them. These abilities include some indicators of primary features at the highest level of synthesis and evaluation in Bloom’s Taxonomy.

However, the focus on reading and writing increased the difficulty and challenge of learning for students. This had some impact in lessening the effectiveness of the teen magazines in stimulating affective engagement.

Magazines in this Cycle were found to offer an advantage in facilitating students’ writing and reading abilities, but problems also emerged in the teaching process:

- The difficulty of these learning materials decreased some students’ interests
• Writing practices were still not “welcomed” by some students
• Students were easily distracted and lost interests when it came to learning difficult language.
Chapter 7 Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The three cycles in this action research investigated student engagement from several aspects and raised a number of issues about engagement. This chapter discusses all the data analysis gathered from the three cycles and explores the research findings. From Cycle 1 to Cycle 3, both the students and teachers experienced development in terms of learning/teaching. The three cycles shared identical settings and similar procedures but had differences in focus and in generating language abilities. This chapter is structured around answering the research questions, to engage with the issues of ‘successful engagement’, ‘high intellectual quality’ and ‘understanding of culture’. The research question was, ‘How can popular culture be used to successfully engage young students in learning Mandarin?’ The three subsidiary questions were:

- Are students engaged by this material?
- Is the engagement of high intellectual quality?
- Do they have a good knowledge of the target culture because of this?

As discussed in the last three chapters, issues arising in the data analysis had an impact on student engagement; one such issue was my teaching skills. The last section of this chapter discusses how a teacher can successfully engage with popular culture in a language context. It analyses the teaching process, reflects on my strategies and failures, and presents ideas on the effective use of pop culture in the L2 classroom through reflecting on constraints in the teaching process.

7.2 Are Students Engaged by this Material?

Student engagement and the usefulness of popular culture were the central issues addressed in this research. In order to engage students, this action research used
popular culture in teaching Mandarin: this included songs, movies, animation and teen magazines. The usefulness of popular culture can be examined through evaluation of student engagement, and the influence of popular culture on the development of their engagement. The three aspects of engagement—cognitive, affective and operative—were analysed throughout in the three cycles driven by the evidence from self-reflection journals, student self-assessment, student works and interviews with classroom teachers. Engagement was defined as student involvement in learning and classroom activities from thinking, emotional and behavioural dimensions of a high order. In order to answer the question, it is necessary to identify engagement in a broader perspective, not just limited to each cycle. This section will examine these three aspects by addressing the data from all three cycles and explore the relationship between popular culture and engagement.

### 7.2.1 Affective Engagement

Affective engagement refers to students’ positive and negative feelings about, and reactions to, teachers, peers, activities and learning. Positive affective engagement is where students are engaged in the classroom with positive emotion, namely, ‘feeling good’ (Munn and Martin, 2005). Students usually show reactions in the classroom such as interest, boredom, happiness, sadness or anxiety (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 63). There are various indicators of affective engagement:

- student-teacher relationships: whether students get along well with teachers
- the value placed on learning: will the subject, in this case Mandarin, be useful in the future and lead to satisfaction with school because learning is taking place
- orientation towards work: sticking to tasks, willingness to do the work and maintain an interest in things that take a long time

(Fredricks et al., 2004)
In addition to student affective response, Munns (2004b, p. 6) also points out that the teacher’s affect should also be involved. In a classroom with good affect, both the teacher and students can have positive emotions associated with classroom work through being involved in pedagogical conversation.

The data used for discussing this aspect consist of the theme ‘students and affective engagement’ from the self-reflection journals, self-assessment reflecting the affective aspects, and the interviews. Before synthesising the data from all three cycles, I will firstly review effective engagement in each cycle by summarising affective engagement from all the evidence.

Cycle 1

The first cycle included four lessons where popular songs were utilised in the classroom to engage students. Music supposedly has a privileged advantage in stimulating students’ interests and motivation and in lowering the difficulty of the second language for beginning language learners (Purcell, 1992; Ma & Wang, 2009; Kirkham, 2004; Hannah, 2009). Music is widely considered to be effective in eliminating ‘threat’ and enriching the classroom environment (Jenson, 2000). Certainly, students had a positive response in listening to music, singing with it and even learning vocabulary from songs.

Students generally showed a positive emotion in this category based on the analysis of data in Cycle 1. In the analysis of the self-reflection journals, there were 35 codes relating student affective engagement in this cycle, and 29 of them were positive [+], while 6 of them were negative [-]. Most of the students also gave answers to describe the fun they had in that day’s lesson in their self-assessment. In the interview, Sushi also indicated that she was impressed by the excitement of students and the good atmosphere in that classroom.
Two levels of affective engagement were identified from the self-reflection coding: ‘direct responses’ and ‘attitude’. The former refers to the most direct emotional reactions, and the second level is their attitudes and feelings towards the teacher, learning and activities. The words referring to direct emotional responses included “excited”, “cheer up” and “laugh” which were the most frequent words appearing in the self-reflections. These mostly took place when they watched music videos and listened to songs. For example, Chinese singer Jay Chou became some students’ favourite singer, and students were very excited about watching his MV and always asked to watch it twice, while some students were keen to know his Chinese name in pinyin. The answers from the student self-assessment also revealed that most of the students thought that watching MV and listening to the song were the ‘fun bit’ in their learning of Mandarin. This indicated that students quite enjoyed the music in this relaxed atmosphere. Another aspect of the classroom atmosphere was pointed out by Sushi who observed that the students and the teacher had good cooperation and that this cooperative atmosphere improved the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

The excitement did not reduce when it involved vocabulary and cultural knowledge in learning. In fact, the introduction of Kungfu culture drew most students’ attention, and they appeared to keep positive emotions when learning cultural and lexical knowledge. Students were patient and behaved well in the repetition of speaking of practice through singing lyrics. Beginning with learning tones through singing could be less difficult for young students (Ma & Wang, 2009).

The second level of affective engagement was that students generally developed a positive learning attitude and motivation. Compared with the earlier “rejecting and negative attitudes” toward learning Mandarin, students in this cycle started to take a ‘serious’ attitude to it. Students’ ‘undeniable’ liking of music was effective in helping to promote students’ interest and motivation in learning the target language (Heusinkveld, 2006; Barnhardt, 2007). Popular songs seemingly had a positive influence on their willingness to do the work. Their change of learning attitude also
motivated me and helped me engage in teaching with more confidence. Both the teacher and students gained more pleasure and development in this cycle.

In addition, students achieved some success in speaking and reading, which made them feel “happy and proud”. In answering the second question from self-assessment, What surprised you about today’s learning today? many students gave answers like “Now I can say all the directions in Chinese”, which showed their surprise about their achievement or some interest in language. Their ‘success’ was possibly related to the relatively low challenge of the tasks and works I provided them in this stage. Nevertheless, students demonstrated progress in learning and participation in classroom activities. Students thus gave mostly positive answers about their feelings when encountering the third question of their self-assessment, What was the difficult part? Most students had a positive response to this question: some felt confident to deal with the problems, and some did not think the learning was hard at all. But still a few students thought they had some challenges and felt confused about them.

Overall, the data indicated that students in this stage enjoyed the direct pleasure of the music more than the learning achievement they reached. Students valued the popular song as something ‘cool’ they could connect with. They were relaxed and happy, and had fun. To the teacher, students, for most of the time, were cooperative and willing to do the work and practise what the teacher required. Moreover, students showed satisfaction and pride in their achievements in the classroom, which helped them maintain long term interest in learning. Therefore, it can be seen that students engaged affectively in enjoying popular songs and learning, but this affective engagement stayed at a relatively low level.

Thus, the research indicated some usefulness of popular culture contexts in the Mandarin classroom in improving student affective engagement. Music has the advantage of:
• building a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere
• helping capture students’ attention and maintain their interests
• helping reduce the boredom of repetition and practice

Cycle 2

The second cycle mainly used movies and animation as teaching materials to engage students. As Kungfu movies and cartoon were popular among my students, there was an automatic assumption that they would enjoy watching them. It was assumed that students would be able to focus on the language through understanding the subtitling and practising the lines from movies.

In general, students were engaged in learning through movies and animation with a positive affect. The positive [+] comments were more frequent than the negative [-] comments in all the codes related to this category: 28 [+] vs. 7 [-]. The observations and interview of Angela, 6B’s regular classroom teacher from Dongxi PS, also indicated that students engaged in classroom activities with a positive emotion. She pointed out that students were very interested in the videos and had great enthusiasm in performing the dialogue from movies.

There were also two levels of affective engagement in this cycle. One was similar to the first cycle, which included students’ direct emotional reactions, and the second level refers to their interest in and motivation towards learning. Direct emotional reactions were still mainly ‘pleasure’ from the video. Rarely were there any negative responses relating to this level. As the movies and animation appealed to students, they usually ‘laughed’, ‘enjoyed’ and ‘were very excited’ when watching them. Even for Chinese movies without English subtitles, students still kept high enthusiasm in understanding the stories and the unique Chinese humour mo lei tau. Students enjoyed the pleasure of the movies and stories. When answering a question from the self-assessment questionnaire which required students to explain their reasons for
having fun, more than half the students wrote that funny and interesting stories were ‘enjoyable’ and ‘entertaining’. Basically, students reacted positively and excitedly, in response to the teacher and teaching content, which are regarded as good affective indicators (Fredrick et al., 2004, p. 63).

There were increasing codes about the second level—interests and motivations in this cycle. This cycle focused on developing students’ listening comprehension and speaking through practising lines from movies. Based on my observation, students showed great enthusiasm in acting the characters from movies, and this enthusiasm seemed to enhance their interest in speaking and listening. Moreover, students’ self-assessment also expressed their surprise and interest that they could understand most parts of videos and also perform as the characters from movies. Some students called the movie ‘so cool’ and they were glad to learn things from it. This is some indication that they were feeling good about watching movies and learning from them. Angela, in the interview, pointed out that students became ‘comfortable’ and ‘happy’ about performing plots from movies, and were willing to keep practising. She agreed about the usefulness of the movies in changing the atmosphere of the classroom. Angela also gave praise to my ability to use the Smart board because she thought the teacher’s ability to utilize multi-media technology was important in engaging students. Students who have grown up in a technological world expect and appreciate teachers who are capable of actively using technology such as the Internet and multi-media in their teaching (Brown, 2001; Beasley, 2002). It appeared that positive emotion was high in the classroom, and students liked learning Mandarin in that environment. In addition, students were especially engaged with content which they could find a connection with or be interested in. An example was when learning about the city of Ningbo. Because of the Mandarin program in which the school was involved, students had a special connection with Ningbo and so they were much more active in learning things about Ningbo rather than other cities.
The problems students encountered in the classroom in this cycle increased because the difficulty increased. With help from me and their peers, many students were able to overcome these. The overcoming of a problem increased their confidence and motivation. In their self-assessment, almost all students felt they “did a good job” when they successfully said the lines from movies or finished tasks. Nevertheless, negative codes (7 [-] codes) still existed. These were in relation to nervousness when first performing as a movie character. Some students were not willing to try, because they had problems in pronouncing particular vocabulary or felt shy at first, but after gaining encouragement from me and their peers, they were engaged to participate.

Student affective engagement in Cycle 2 focused more on classroom work and practice. The direct pleasure generated by the movies was strong in the classroom and their willingness to engage in activities and completing work was high. In terms of influencing affective engagement, it was found in this cycle that movies and animation could:

- change the classroom atmosphere into an interactive one
- extend their interest and maintain their long-term interest
- give pleasure from acting as characters from movies.

Cycle 3

This cycle mainly used teen magazines, with some videos and music as well, to engage students in learning Mandarin. Teen magazines here referred to included fashion magazines, movie magazines and music magazines which contained colourful pictures and ‘fashionable’ contents which were attractive to youth.

Generally positive emotions and attitudes associated with classroom work were found in this cycle. In the analysis of self-reflections, positive [+] codes were found overwhelmingly (50[+] vs. 10[-]). According to the teacher Anna’s observation,
students were very interested in the e-magazines, and those colourful pictures. Moreover, when describing the feeling about that day’s learning in their self-assessment, 99% of students’ answers were very positive and stated that they liked the fashion, beautiful clothes from the magazines or they liked learning with the magazines which made them feel interested.

Similarly to the previous two cycles, there were two levels generated in these codes. The first level was whether students had positive emotion (24 codes), while the second was whether these emotions stimulated them to have a positive attitude towards learning and classroom activities (36 codes).

Student direct feelings in the first level included terms like ‘enjoyable’, ‘good’, ‘curious’, ‘having fun’. It was the first time, for most of the students, of having access to Chinese magazines. Students reacted excitedly and curiously about the content. Colourful pictures, fashionable clothes and beautiful models attracted their attention and helped maintain their interest in learning the content. Noticeably, girls paid more attention to clothes and shoes, while boys liked to see the pretty models. The young students’ enthusiasm for ‘fashion’ or beauty resulted in an active affect towards the teaching content.

In the second level, affective engagement mainly referred to students’ attitude towards learning and classroom activities. The teaching focus in this cycle was on vocabulary and paragraphs from magazines. More than half the students were not overwhelmed by the increasing difficulty of focusing on reading and writing. Positive codes still accounted for nearly 70% of all the codes related to this level. In particular, because of the influence of the ‘pretty models’, boys were quite willing to learn vocabulary related to clothes and fashion. Students were also sticking to tasks and had patience in completing worksheets. In their self-assessment, students also demonstrated that they felt good because they gained new knowledge from the magazines, including vocabulary and some cultural understanding of ‘fashion in China’. Students also
valued what they learnt and had a sense of achievement or confidence when they thought they could use new knowledge well. Anna thought that using e-magazines was impressive and quite engaging for students. In addition, another aspect of attitude related to the teacher (me). Compared to the last two cycles, students were ‘nicer’ and more ‘friendly’ to me. More students behaved well when I gave instructions and organised activities.

However, e-magazines sometimes failed to engage students, when the content became difficult, with too many new words. Another problem was that boys lost interest very quickly. Some boys reacted actively at first and showed interest in the content of magazines; however, they were easily distracted in later teaching, when required to learn long sentences and paragraphs.

The affective engagement in this cycle included positive emotions towards teen magazines, an increasingly good relationship between the teacher and students, and a good attitude towards learning. Some students showed that they valued learning and appeared willing to stick to completing tasks. It was still a problem to engage all of the students and maintain their long-term interest in content. Teen magazines showed some potential to:

- attract students through colourful pictures and ‘fashionable’ contents
- stimulate their learning motivation by the use of multi-media
- increase willingness to practise reading comprehension and writing tasks.

Discussion of affective engagement in all cycles

Students in all three cycles appeared to generate positive affective engagement. Popular songs, movies and teen magazines provided direct pleasure to students and helped build a relaxed and comfortable learning environment. Two levels of affective engagement were found in each cycle:
• direct emotions or feelings,
• attitudes towards learning, activities and the teacher, or interest and motivation

The direct emotions of students here refer to some observable students’ affective reactions in the classroom, including interest, boredom, happiness or anxiety (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 63). Student often commented that they were interested, excited and had fun, with there being few rare negative comments.

The attitudes towards learning and participating in classroom activities created a relatively positive and reflected a willing situation. Increasing cooperation with the teacher was also observed. In all cycles, the use of popular culture contexts maintained most students’ interest and gave them a happy and excited atmosphere, and had an influence on stimulating students to generate positive learning attitudes, although in Cycle 3, the increasing difficulty of the content and tasks caused some students to be unable keep the same ‘enthusiastic’ attitude to learning. Popular culture appeared useful for involving students and the teacher in a meaningful, enjoyable and collaborative classroom atmosphere in terms of affect (Domoney & Harris, 1993, p. 234).

I believe that the material helped make learning ‘fun’, helped improve students’ motivation and built a positive learning attitude. As Grace and Tobin (1998, p. 47) argue, the playfulness and fun of teaching materials can blur the lines between work and play, so that children are able to learn knowledge with pleasure. With high motivation and a positive learning attitude, students were able to perform better in classroom activities, such as finishing tasks, and in their speaking practice. This achievement seemed to bring direct pleasure (happiness, satisfactions), and this in turn increased their confidence and interest in learning the language. The following table shows this cycle:
Nevertheless, problems were revealed in the process:

- Popular culture cannot automatically engage all students; some students have little interest in Chinese popular culture
- some students focused only on direct pleasure from popular culture, such as watching movies, instead of learning language and culture from them
- it was still difficult to maintain students’ interest for a long time

7.2.2 Operative engagement

Operative engagement refers to students’ participation in classroom and the ability to finish tasks. This area includes aspects of students’ behaviours, as Jimerson et al. (2003) suggest, such as student attendance, voluntary classroom participation and completion of homework as well as academic achievement.

Cycle 1

In this cycle, students behaved well in terms of participating in activities and finishing tasks. The analysis of self-reflections generated three dimensions: participation, behaviour and ability.
‘Participation’ in Cycle 1 includes participating in classroom activities as well as in the learning process. Students participated actively in answering questions and playing games. The singing also gained their attention and involvement in practising the language. Most students concentrated on the game and showed high participation in classroom activity. The high participation atmosphere and their peers’ behaviour had a positive impact on some students who were not fans of Chinese popular culture. There were moments when students asked questions to generate discussion. Through giving ideas and contributing to class discussion, students had participation in the learning process.

Students’ behaviour had positive and negative aspects; however, students mostly behaved well in terms of the [+] codes. The positive behaviour reflected in journals was captured in phrases like ‘concentrated more’, ‘being quiet in listening’, ‘loud voice in reading’ and ‘trying hard to sing and read new sentences’. Some Year 7 students, as the most ‘un-controlled’ students I taught, in one lesson’s self-assessment, wrote that they behaved well in that lesson. They used phrases such as ‘being quiet’ and ‘following the instructions’ and they regarded this as a strength. In the observation by Sushi, she also mentioned that she was impressed by the students’ disciplined behaviour and active participation in the class.

In terms of language ability, many students did well in singing and speaking learnt sentences. From singing the lyrics in order to pronounce the vocabulary, students were reading more fluently and smoothly. Their pronunciation became more accurate and clearer. In their self-assessment, many students pointed out that they were good at learning new vocabulary and sentences and their biggest improvement was in developing language ability. In their view, their strengths and improvement included speaking sentences fluently and clearly, writing down more characters and retaining previous knowledge. However, there were some students with little confidence in their learning and they did not give any answers or were confused about what to answer. In evaluating students’ ability, Sushi thought most students finished tasks well. Tasks
were also finished “quickly and correctly”, as Sushi observed in a role-play practice; in particular, the tasks related to popular culture.

In the test, most students were able to finish the tasks that required relevant vocabulary and sentences. Some students failed to recall the knowledge learnt several weeks before when translating Chinese lyrics into English. Nearly half of the students were able to write paragraphs to talk about their understanding of Kungfu and to introduce themselves, which demonstrated that they seemed to be genuinely learning key aspects of the language.

In this cycle, music was considered to have an advantage in influencing student operative engagement because of:

- suiting the level of learning of the students and helping decrease the problem of the Chinese sound system
- helping students pronounce words clearly and more accurately
- motivating students to complete tasks related to songs
- helping maintain student discipline.

Problems arising in this cycle in relation to operative engagement included:

- students still had problems in saying long sentences, and practice through singing could not solve this
- students easily forgot new knowledge after several weeks.
- lack of practice in writing

Cycle 2

Movies and animation were used in this cycle. Videos with subtitles could have some ‘translation’ advantage, and subtitling in one’s native language enables audiences to
increase their comprehension of a second language (d'Ydewalle & Van de Poel, 1999, p. 228). Students should show some development in vocabulary and ability with speaking and listening.

The coding of the self-reflection journals revealed three dimensions of operative engagement. The first was participation, including some similar elements discussed in Cycle 1, and also participating in two new classroom activities. Acting as movie characters and practising lines from movies were important activities in this cycle, as ways to improve their speaking ability. Students were very keen to participate in speaking practice, although some felt nervous and had problems with speaking long sentences. Another new aspect of participation was contributing to discussion. Students discussed in groups and within the whole class, in order to generate understanding of the Chinese concepts from movies.

The second aspect was behaviour. Students were normally well disciplined, being quiet while watching movies and paying attention when the teacher gave instructions. However, compared with Cycle 1, more [-] codes related to behaviour were found in this cycle. This was because they were occasionally out of control when becoming too excited or distracted by something else. Movies could be a distraction when students repeatedly requested to watch more movies, which reduced concentration on learning. In their self-assessment, more than 30% of students mentioned requesting to watch the movie again.

The third aspect of operative engagement referred to language and culture and the retaining of knowledge. Through extensive practice in speaking and listening, students showed progress in several aspects. One improvement was in their speaking, both in terms of more accurate pronunciation and the confidence to speak out. Language should be put into communicative contexts which are meaningful (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2005). The practice of movie lines put language into communicative contexts which improved their extended use of the language, while performing dialogue in front of the
class gradually increased their confidence. Students also showed progress in understanding grammar and Chinese culture. They applied grammar rules to build new sentences. Discussion about movies also helped students to have a good understanding of associated aspects of culture.

The retaining of knowledge was a new category in Cycle 2. The long-term memorisation of language from the movies was not satisfactory. This was the first topic with more [-] codes than [+] codes. It indicated the problem that practice and review was insufficient for students to keep vocabulary in long term memory. The quiz used to test students at the end of this cycle also revealed that this was especially true for 6B students. They performed badly in the quiz and some students could not finish basic tasks which they had learnt before. Nevertheless, both classes were good at finishing ‘cultural’ questions (as opposed to ‘language’ questions). The emphasis on language knowledge seemed not sufficient enough for students.

In this cycle, movies brought new types of classroom activities that had high participation by students. Most students showed disciplined behaviours in the classroom though sometimes they became too excited or distracted because of the movie. Language ability showed a certain progress in listening, speaking and the understanding of grammar and cultural concepts. The possible usefulness of movies in improving operative engagement included:

- extended use and practice of language in communicative contexts
- helping improve listening and speaking ability, especially pronunciation
- stimulating discussion to generate understanding of cultural concepts.

Problems emerging in this cycle were:

- movies could be a distraction, as well as reducing the concentration on learning when students focused only on watching
- the retention of language was only short-term
• insufficient practice and review
• an emphasis on culture but insufficient emphasis on language

Cycle 3

In this cycle student operative engagement generated more dimensions, as did the three categories in the previous cycles—participation, learning behaviours, language ability. There were other categories: concentration, memorisation and cultural knowledge.

Student participation was evident in answering questions and playing games. A new activity in this cycle was to complete worksheets. This seemed a ‘boring’ task for students. However, by using pictures and models from the magazines, students (including ‘naughty’ boys) were willing to finish the tasks and with a good quality. In addition, most students behaved well in the classroom. Through practice in reading and writing, some students worked hard to learn the content from the magazines. A few students did not like writing notes. The emphasis on writing required students to have more extensive writing knowledge, in particular, when writing characters rather than pinyin. As a result, some students had difficulty with, or did not like, writing characters. This resulted in some negative behaviour. Moreover, students showed improvement in vocabulary and speaking and writing ability. Thirty percent of the codes in this category related to better pronunciation. Another important improvement was that students generally spent shorter time on acquiring new knowledge.

On the aspect of concentration, there were 7 [-] codes and 3[+] codes. All the negative codes referred to some boys who were easily distracted and lost interest when required to learn long sentences and paragraphs. This was one failure of engagement in Cycle 3. Memorisation had a certain improvement compared to the previous cycle. Through completing worksheets and reviewing most of the lessons, retention of language strengthened to some extent. Although students sometimes needed to check their
books to recall knowledge, they had a relatively clear and accurate retention of content from several weeks before. Anna also observed that, reviewing and revising each lesson through worksheets was significant in helping them build long term memorisation of knowledge. In terms of cultural knowledge, some students, in particular girls, were enthusiastic about fashion and other popular topics in the magazines like songs, comics and movies, and they were active when I used fashion magazines. Some students were fans of manga, so they were excited to learn language related to manga magazines.

In addition, students appeared to be able to connect the language they learnt in the classroom with their lives. In their self-assessment, when answering how to use new knowledge they had learnt, students had various ideas about how to apply it in daily life, such as ‘for travelling’, or ‘to teach my family’. Most students thought they could solve problems through practising and seeking help from peers and teachers.

In terms of impacting on operative engagement, teen magazines helped:

- focus on reading and writing practices
- maintain some boys’ interest in finishing writing tasks to some extent
- appeal to many students’ interests
- retain knowledge in long term memory.

However, there were also some problems emerging. Some students were not willing to take notes and complete writing practice, and boys were easily distracted and lost interest when it came to learning difficult language.

Discussion of operative engagement in all three cycles

From Cycle 1 to Cycle 3, operative engagement changed and students participation broadened. At the beginning of this action research, students exhibited learning behaviours that were disciplined and showed concentration and a curiosity to learn. In
later cycles, students were guided to become competent and empowered learners in the classroom (Munns, 2004b), in the way of providing advice to the teacher, contributing to discussion, achieving positive learning outcomes. Students had more ways to participate in activities and learning and demonstrated development in language ability along the way. Nevertheless, it is obviously unwise to assume that popular culture contexts can ‘guarantee’ to help students achieve high language ability. Students still had difficulty in saying long sentences fluently, and writing characters and retention of language were other limits in their learning. Students sometimes focused on the popular culture itself instead of learning things from it; in this sense, popular culture contents can be a distraction. Teachers should be careful with these issues and find more appropriate ways to incorporate popular culture in teaching.

7.2.3 Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement is deep understanding and expertise in the learning process (Munns & Woodward, 2006, p. 194). The term incorporates thoughtfulness and being willing to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills. This engagement was evaluated from students’ self-assessment and test results.

Cycle 1

In the first cycle, there were five questions from the REAL framework (Munns & Woodward, 2005) relating to student cognitive engagement. In answering the question, students described the knowledge they valued, explained the difficulties they encountered, and listed the improvement and learning they had achieved in the class. The answers demonstrated a staged response from students, which began with simply enjoying singing, watching a fascinating music video, and then putting an emphasis on the learning process and on knowledge. Students had thought about what they had done in the classroom and how they had learnt the language, not just concentrating on an affective response to pop cultural artifacts. The emphasis of students’ answers
increasingly related to cognition, through analysis of the challenges they encountered and demonstrating outcomes and improvement. The test results demonstrated that students mastered a basic knowledge of relevant vocabulary and sentences. Popular culture seemed to help improve their performance in translation and in building long paragraphs. Many students were able to use the language well, though some students failed to recall knowledge learnt several weeks before. A few students even demonstrated a considerable level of language ability in writing. This shows a trend from simple recall to complex understanding (Cates & Milner, 2007) as students acquired more knowledge. In terms of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), cognitive engagement stayed in the relatively low layers, including remembering, explaining and analysing.

Cycle 2

There were four questions in the REAL framework (Munns and Woodward, 2005) relating to cognitive engagement in this cycle. In answering these questions, students could elaborate their thoughts more and give examples or reasons. Compared to Cycle 1, they had a clearer awareness of their own problems and were able to show they could learn strategies to solve problems. Students had a certain self-monitoring in the sense of knowing themselves and in terms of continuing to improve. In addition, when answering questions that required talking about a Chinese city, students demonstrated some ability to compare and contrast aspects of Chinese culture and their own. Student cognitive engagement showed a certain improvement by being involved in deeper analytical discussion and practice. The cognition of students’ knowledge reached higher layers of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) because students demonstrated a primary level of being able to analyse and synthesise.

In the quiz, most students could write correct answers and even elaborate on details about the cultural concepts they were required to answer. The completion of ‘language’ tasks, however, was not very positive. In particular, a gap emerged between the two
classes and some students from 6B were not able to finish basic tasks. In Cycle 2, the extended practice of Mandarin and discussion about the cultural aspects of movies stimulated some students’ deeper analytical understanding and thinking, while some students seemed not to be always involved. These students did not retain knowledge over the long term.

Cycle 3

In Cycle 3, answers for eight questions from the REAL framework (Munns and Woodward, 2006) were related to the analysis of cognitive engagement. Students in this stage were familiar with the research setting and adapted more readily to the self-assessment. Many students were able to connect new knowledge with prior knowledge, value the knowledge, realise their problems and challenges, find strategies to overcome them, know how to broaden their information and even give the teacher significant advice about how to make the lesson better. Some students were strategic and knew how to use learning practices to aid memory, organise and understand materials, while some valued their learning and showed appreciation of the subject and the teacher. In Bloom’s Taxonomy, synthesis and evaluation are the ‘highest’ levels in the process and require students to not only master the concepts and be able to apply them, but also to have the ability to create, plan, judge and recommend. Some indicators of cognitive engagement in this cycle had features at the level of synthesis and evaluation, such as clarification of their understanding of Chinese culture and explaining how it was different from past, and providing recommendations to the teacher for better lessons. Although not all students could give explicit answers to reflect their cognition, some of them seemed to improve their thinking and understanding compared to the previous two cycles.

Discussion of cognitive engagement in all three cycles
Student cognitive engagement experienced a complex and dynamic change in this action research. In the first cycle, the cognition of students stayed at early primary level. Students had some understanding of challenges, achievement and learning processes. The students’ cognition in contextualisation of the materials was at the level of remembering, explaining and applying. The cognitive engagement improved to more complex thinking in Cycle 2, with self-monitoring and applying of strategies to solve problems. A deeper analytical discussion and extended practice of language also enabled students to compare and contrast the two kinds of culture they were experiencing in the language classroom at a basic level. In the next cycle, cognitive engagement of some students improved to higher-order thinking. Students in their self-assessment discussed more complex issues, including how they were going to apply the knowledge and evaluating their language performance and understanding of Chinese culture. They also explained their feelings in relation to the things happening in class by using Chinese, reflected on their own problems and gave suggestions to the teacher to improve the lesson. In this sense, this cognitive engagement had some features at the level of synthesis and evaluation in Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956).

However, it is necessary to clarify that the cognitive engagement discussed above was not achieved by all students in my Mandarin class. Some students were not willing to, or could not, provide answers in their self-assessment. The evaluation of their cognitive engagement was not easy. The infrequent and insufficient Mandarin lessons limited the further development of cognitive engagement. It was difficult to maintain teaching basic vocabulary knowledge while paying attention to students’ higher order thinking in 45 minutes a week.

**7.2.4 The answers to this question**

This section examined the three aspects of engagement in all cycles. Each aspect of engagement, as discussed, had some improvement, from single or easy involvement to a more complex and multi-faceted involvement. In the process, some problems
emerged, and these impacted on the development of engagement in some ways. Tables 7.1 and 7.2 summarise the helpfulness of and problems with the use of the three aspects of popular culture contexts in engaging students affectively and operatively. Nevertheless, in general, based on the discussion of data from all the cycles, I believe that the answer to the first question is that students were engaged by popular culture. However, this result had many limitations and problems, and it was necessary to attend to the problems I listed in the discussion of each aspect of engagement above.

Table 7.1 The impacts of popular culture on student affective engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective engagement</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Popular songs**    | • building a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere (music, movies)  
                      • helping capture students’ attention and maintain their interests  
                      • helping reduce the boredom of repetition practice  
                      • Popular culture cannot automatically engage all students’ participation and some students were unfamiliar, low interest in Chinese popular culture  
                      • some students focused only on direct pleasure from popular culture, such as watching movies, instead of learning language and culture from them  
                      • it was still difficult to maintain students’ interests for a long term time  
                      • not all students were automatically engaged by the materials  |
| **Movies**           | • changing classroom atmosphere into an interactive one  
                      • extending their interests and maintain their long-term interests  
                      • making students have pleasure from acting as characters from movies  | |
| **Teen magazines**   | • attracting students through colourful pictures and ‘fashionable’ contents  
                      • stimulating their learning motivation by use of multi-media  
                      • increasing willingness to practise reading comprehension and writing tasks | |
Table 7.2 The impacts of popular culture on student operative engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operative engagement</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Popular songs</strong></td>
<td>• suiting the level of learning of the students and helped decrease the challenge of Chinese sounding system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• helping students pronounce words clearly and more accurately</td>
<td>• Student still had problems in saying long sentences, and practice through singing could not solve this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• motivating students to complete tasks related to songs</td>
<td>• Students easily forgot new knowledge after several weeks. Issue of retaining long term knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• helping maintain students in discipline</td>
<td>• Lack of practice in writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movies &amp; Animations</strong></td>
<td>• extended use and practice of language in communicative contexts</td>
<td>• movies could be distraction as well reducing the concentration on learning when students focused only on watching it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• helping improve listening and speaking ability, esp. pronunciation</td>
<td>• retaining of language was only short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• stimulating discussion to generate understanding of cultural concepts</td>
<td>• insufficient practice and review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• emphasis on cultural aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teen magazines</strong></td>
<td>• focus on reading and writing practices</td>
<td>• Some students were not willing to take notes and do writing practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• maintain some boys’ interest in finishing writing tasks, to some extent</td>
<td>• Some boys easily distracted and lost interest when came to learning difficult language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• appeal to students’ hobbies, for some students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• worksheets help retain students’ long term memory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 7.3 Is the Engagement of High Intellectual Quality?

It seems that popular culture has some influence on stimulating students’ interest and engaging them in learning Mandarin. Based on the discussion in 7.2, students were engaged with a relatively high affection and operativeness. In a relaxed learning environment, they were willing, and even keen, to learn about the language and its culture, and had an increasingly positive better performance in tasks and tests. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to ask whether this engagement was of high intellectual quality, because many see an inherent contradiction between intellectual quality and popular culture in the curriculum. However, the key issue may not centre on the content, but on the level of thinking which is activated. It is obviously insufficient that students are only engaged in lower-order thinking activities such as receiving or reciting, or only undertake routine practice; otherwise, students could not go beyond the simple reproduction of knowledge.

Cognitive engagement as a central issue was analysed in the evaluation of engagement, and some indicators of high cognitive engagement were found; students showed a slow but growing trend to higher levels of thinking and understanding in this category. However, this research question does raise the issue of what intellectual quality looks like in learning a second language. In terms of determining an adequate level of good language, there are potential indicators beyond pronunciation, knowing grammatical rules and having knowledge of vocabulary (Ashman & Lê, 2007). Is knowledge about language itself and ability to apply it part of high intellectual quality or only the basic foundation? Is mastery of the system itself of high intellectual quality?

Perhaps the NSW Quality Teaching framework could provide some direction. The section starts with six terms defined in NSW Quality Teaching model and explores the extent to which it might apply in a language context. The analysis will seek to combine the application of Bloom’s Taxonomy with the structure of the Quality Teaching framework. I will then list some other parameters that could be used to assess what
intellectual quality in language learning looks like in relation to an advanced language level. After analysis based on these possible approaches, I will evaluate intellectual quality by employing a combination of parameters, with consideration of some of the constraints of the teaching situation.

7.3.1 Intellectual quality in the Quality Teaching Model

To develop professional learning and teaching in public schools, the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (2003) established the NSW Quality Teaching Model of pedagogy. This model aims to provide a framework to focus attention on pedagogy which can improve student outcomes for teachers and schools. There are three dimensions of pedagogy that are the foci of this model:

- Pedagogy that is based on promoting high levels of intellectual quality.
- Pedagogy that is based on promoting a quality learning environment.
- Pedagogy that develops and makes explicit to students the significance of their work.

Figure 7.2 Quality Teaching Model
Intellectual quality, as the central dimension focused in the Quality Teaching model (NSW DET, 2003) includes six aspects:

- High-order thinking: students are able to synthesise, generalise, explain, hypothesise and arrive at some conclusion.
- Deep knowledge: students are able to make relatively complex connections with substantive knowledge.
- Deep understanding: students develop understanding of the problematic nature of knowledge, or sustain a focus on a significant topic
- Substantive conversation: students have discussions about substantive topics where the interaction is reciprocal between students, and between students and teachers.
- Knowledge as problematic: students perceive that knowledge is not a fixed body of information; rather, it is socially and culturally constructed, and hence subject to political, social and cultural influences and implications.
- Metalanguage: students are able to understand and apply metalanguage which is the language used to talk about language. This metalinguistic knowledge and skills across content areas is encouraged to be maximised.

(NSW Quality Teaching model, 2003; Exley, 2006)

This requires the pedagogy to be focused on “producing deep understanding of important, substantive concepts, skills and ideas, and such pedagogy treats knowledge as something that requires active construction and requires students to engage in higher-order thinking and to communicate substantively about what they are learning” (NSW DET, 2003). High intellectual quality in this model requires high-order thinking and deep understanding, and the ability to actively engage in problematising knowledge. This definition provides some ideas for assessing the intellectual quality of students in language learning: for example, deep understanding is that students are able to understand cultural concepts and realise their changes historically; a degree of high-order thinking could possibly apply to students applying grammatical rules to
form new phrases and sentences (the ability to generalise). Here it is worthwhile to consider student intellectual quality through borrowing notions based on the Quality Teaching model.

In this research, my students demonstrated some indicators of intellectual quality as defined by the Quality Teaching model. In terms of high-order thinking, my students were guided from being passive learners to becoming more competent and empowered learners in the classroom, in the sense of providing advice to the teacher, contributing to discussion, achieving positive learning outcomes. To some extent, students showed some ability to explain and generalise. For example, they could discuss the story of a Kungfu movie they had just watched and explain their understandings about the characters and Kungfu spirits, and relate them to their own lives. Nevertheless, for much of the time in my lessons, students were receivers of knowledge, had to recite factual information and undertake procedural routines. In the worst scenarios, some students could not even follow my instructions and could not finish tasks well.

In terms of deep knowledge and deep understanding, students did have a complex understanding of some cultural concepts and conventions relating to the popular culture learning materials I provided. In tests, quizzes and classroom discussion, students could construct paragraphs or sentences to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge. The most important improvement was that they changed some stereotypes about China and its culture, and had a fresh perspective from which to look at this country. I realised that their understanding and knowledge still stayed at a primary school level and that most of their explanations could not reach beyond the knowledge I provided to them. It may not be reasonable to consider that they had gained a deep knowledge and deep understanding of the cultural conventions and language.

Conversations took place between students, and between students and teachers about substantive topics, such as the essence of Kungfu, current issues in China. Those
conversations were part of the classroom discussion after watching movies, or were driven by some students’ questions or confusion. It was reciprocal to some extent because I became aware of Australian students’ thoughts about Chinese culture and society. Nevertheless, these conversations did not go beyond the IRE—initiate, respond, evaluate—model. Similarly to the ‘understanding’ and ‘knowledge’ aspects, they still stayed at a lower level.

In terms of regarding knowledge as problematic, students indeed realised the influence of cultural and social factors on language; for example, they recognised the difference between Cantonese and standard Mandarin, and understood how history had an impact on the language. Similarly, metalinguistic knowledge and skills were rare in my students.

To sum up, all six aspects of intellectual quality in Quality Teaching model could be found in my students’ language performance, learning behaviour and cognition levels. However, most remained at lower levels.

7.3.2 Application of Bloom’s Taxonomy

Bloom’s Taxonomy is a Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives developed by Benjamin Bloom in the 1950s. This taxonomy has already been applied in some ways in the earlier analysis of cognitive engagement. The taxonomy provides a means of expressing qualitatively different kinds of thinking, and attempts to classify forms and levels of learning. It identifies three “domains” of learning, each of which is organised as a series of levels or pre-requisites. It is suggested that one cannot effectively—or ought not try to—address higher levels until those below them have been covered. As well as providing a basic sequential model for dealing with topics in the curriculum, this also suggests a way to categorise levels of learning, in terms of the expected ceiling for a given program.
Bloom’s knowledge hierarchy includes six levels, and ranges from the lowest level—knowledge—to the highest level—evaluation. It can be viewed as “a sequence of progressive contextualization of the materials” (Atherton, 2011). Later, Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) revised the model and provided a similar model with slight but significant modifications, shown in Figure 7.4. The changes include changing nouns to verbs, and adding a new top category, which refers to being creative about new knowledge within the domain.
Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) taxonomy is suitable for applying in a language context to some extent. This structure could be applied thus (Table 7.3):

Table 7.3 Application of Bloom’s Taxonomy in language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge structure</th>
<th>Possible application in language learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td>Do students remember (vocabulary, grammar etc.)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Do students understand (words, ideas etc.)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying</td>
<td>Can students speak, read, write, listen with degrees of accuracy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Can students understand nuance, rhetorical devices such as humour, explain the grammar etc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>Why are certain areas important in the language/in the language-cultural connection?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating</td>
<td>Can students be creative in using language and cultural conventions?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first two levels deal with remembering and understanding. The former refers to being able to recall previously learned information, and the latter refers to comprehending the meaning, translation, interpolation, and interpretation of instructions and problems (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). In terms of language, it is obvious that we must require language learners to remember and understand vocabulary, grammar and other related knowledge. These are basic requirements for language learners. Every lesson demanded this, although understanding may require high order thinking to think about the ideas and the culture of the target language. It can refer to the ability to translate and interpret aspects of the culture from the target language.
In my lessons, vocabulary, phrases and sentences were the basic foundations of language knowledge. Popular culture contexts were introduced to help them recite and realise this lexical knowledge, and related culture was also explicitly explained and illustrated to students. However, grammar was not a strong focus in teaching, although it is among the most basic knowledge that language learners should remember, understand and master. Grammar refers to “morphological inflections, functions of words, and syntactic word order” (Celece-Murcia, 1991). Teaching grammar had been regarded as a central concern in language teaching for a long time. The centrality of grammar has often provided the content for language teaching, and also the organising principle for curriculum or materials. According to some, applying grammatical rules is a necessary path to achieving advanced levels of language (Celece-Murcia, 1991). Armed with grammatical rules, learners have the possibility to translate language, speaking, reading, writing, and listening with degrees of accuracy. In this sense, in order to use the language correctly, it is necessary to acquire adequate knowledge of grammar. Knowing how words form and sentences are structured helps language learners build a more accurate language system and enables them to achieve higher intellectual quality, such as applying and evaluating. Therefore, knowledge of grammar can be a criteria in evaluating the intellectual quality in language learning.

Although in the past 25 years, the role of grammar in language teaching has become a controversial issue, the significance of grammar should not be ignored. Nevertheless, the acquisition of grammar has been regarded as difficult and ‘frustrating’ (DeKeyser, 2005). Celece-Murcia (1991) reported that beginning L2 learners and young L2 learners were considered as not suitable learners for the conscious study of grammar because beginners usually did not need to present and practise the form-meaning correspondences in context. In my case, although grammar was not a strong focus in my teaching, I embedded grammatical rules in explaining vocabulary and practising conversions. My decision was based on their age. Young students had problems in dealing with complex grammar rules but they could still learn some easy grammatical rules in constructing words and phrases.
Applying is the next level, which in this case relates to applying what was learned in the classroom in novel situations (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). In this stage students are able to speak, read, write, listen with degrees of accuracy. This requires students to apply vocabulary and grammar to language practices.

The next level is analysing, which relates to separating concepts into component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). In this sense, language learners should understand the language structure and cultural conventions. Students can understand nuance and rhetorical devices such as humour, and explain the grammar.

The next level is evaluating, which refers to judgements about the value of ideas or materials (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). Students should know the reason why certain areas are important in the language or in the language-cultural connection.

The highest level is creating. This category refers to building a structure or pattern from diverse elements, with the emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). In terms of language learning, it asks whether students be creative in using the target language and cultural conventions.

Two language competences were found that related to the higher levels of this taxonomy when applied to a language learning context. One was language familiarity and the other was intercultural competence, both of which emphasise the connection between language and culture, which I addressed in my teaching. The importance of culture in language education has been discussed extensively in this research. The intersection of language and culture is not only in ordinary speech, but also all other levels of language and its usage. Acquisition of a new language is more than the manipulation of syntax and a lexicon (Genc and Bada, 2005). It is also the process of understanding another society and culture. As the L2 culture is presented as an
interdisciplinary core in L2 curricular design and textbook. Nowadays language teachers are required to provide cultural literacy to L2 learners who are not exposed to cultural elements of the society (Sysoyev & Donelson, 2002, in Genc & Bada, 2005).

Language familiarity has been considered as having effects in improving learning abilities. “Familiarity with the language” refers to learners’ background knowledge of, and connectedness to, the target language and its culture. In Schmidt-Rinehart’s (1994) studies, topic familiarity was important in improving listening comprehension. Some studies found that prior familiarity with components enhanced the implicit learning of language (Scott and Dienes, 2010). Research conducted by Tsui (2002) found that content familiarity had positive effects on comprehension performance and strategy usage in L2 learners (Tsui, 2002). Here I use ‘familiarity’ to describe L2 learners’ close relationship to the target language and their clear understanding of language and cultural conventions. It includes the ability to understand idiom and humour in the target language, to realise cultural concepts and use appropriate language. A strong language familiarity exists at the high levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, because this requires understanding, analysing and evaluating. Using authentic teaching materials should improve familiarity because the materials provide realistic situations in the target language, so that L2 learners can be aware of social, cultural and linguistic conventions. In my case, presenting and explaining Chinese popular culture to students is a way to increase their familiarity with modern China in order to help develop cultural understanding. Students had to some extent gained familiarity with Mandarin and its contemporary culture as I presented it to them.

In addition, intercultural competence is a concept which shares some understanding with language familiarity. This competence could be considered as the problematic knowledge aspect of intellectual quality in the Quality Teaching model because it helps us to realise that language is socially and culturally constructed.
Intercultural competence is one of the core language competences that L2 learners should develop. Liddicoat (2002) defines intercultural competence as awareness that cultures are relative, and language learners should be able to use the target language properly in a cultural context. This competence allows learners to build an intercultural position that moves beyond their own culture. Developing intercultural competence is through “reflection on one’s own linguistic behaviour and that of one’s interlocutors” (Liddicoat, 2002). I emphasised intercultural competence throughout my teaching, and focused on developing their awareness of the mutual relationship between language and culture. Students had some intercultural competence, in terms of recognising dialects, understanding humour and being able to use words in an appropriate cultural context.

7.3.4 Intellectual quality in this study

My case confronted a number of constraints which influenced the development of student intellectual quality.

The reality in the research was that my students were 11 to 13 years old, and had only one Mandarin lesson each week which lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour. Students were unable in this time to develop deep understanding and thinking around culture and language. One Mandarin class per week was insufficient both for maintaining the necessary language and cultural knowledge and for building students’ high-order thinking through activities and tasks. In addition, as discussed in Cycle 3, my position in school was more like a release-from-face-to-face (RFF) teacher. An RFF teacher is allocated to a school to allow the class teacher to have two hours release per week for “professional time” (Ardzejewska, McMaugh and Coutts, 2010). This often results in students’ view of the RFF teacher’s lessons as ‘relief’ and ‘entertaining’ as well, so students may take a less serious attitude to the lessons. I had a similar situation to an RFF teacher in having at most one hour of lessons a week; this limited time was not enough to develop their acquisition of language and culture in depth. Another
important factor is my own inexperience in teaching, which limited their potential to achieve high intellectual quality.

In many ways, being able to speak the language fluently covers all of Bloom's Taxonomy. I was able to cover at least the lower levels because of constraints caused by time, the students’ age and my own inexperience as a teacher. Whatever constraints there were on high intellectual quality were not the fault of popular culture material per se, but the constraints of pedagogy. Is knowledge about language itself—and ability to apply it—part of “high intellectual quality” or only the basic foundation? As Moffett (1968) argues, a language system is a symbol system that is different from other subjects. Language learning and teaching emphasise thinking and talking about other things by means of this system. Unlike many subject areas in which content is given, mastering the system itself is the content in a language classroom and such mastery of itself can be seen to constitute high intellectual quality regardless of the content material by which this is achieved.

7.4 Do they have a good knowledge of the target culture?

I used popular culture contents in teaching Mandarin and focused on practising different language abilities and on different cultural knowledge in different cycles. The Table 7.4 shows the main foci, teaching methods and knowledge in the three cycles:

From the table we can see that the cultural knowledge students generated were mainly related to contemporary Chinese culture. In the first and second cycle, it appeared that the cultural knowledge was fragmented and perhaps not very systematic. Nevertheless, students still gained some worthwhile understanding of culture, which was reflected in their discussion in the classroom, their self-assessment answers and also their test results. In fact, compared with the purely ‘language’ tasks, students had a better performance in completing tasks related to ‘culture’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cycle 1</strong></th>
<th>Focuses</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Language knowledge</th>
<th>Cultural knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening speaking</td>
<td>Repetition of singing</td>
<td>-Vocabulary of age, direction, gender, Kungfu&lt;br&gt;-Sentences from song lyrics&lt;br&gt;-Paragraph about introducing oneself</td>
<td>Knowing some Chinese singers and the history of Kungfu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cycle 2</strong></th>
<th>Focuses</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Language knowledge</th>
<th>Cultural knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening speaking</td>
<td>Watching part of movies and videos; Performing lines from movies</td>
<td>-Vocabulary of animals and cities, movies and animations&lt;br&gt;-Conversation from movies</td>
<td>Knowing the story The Journey to the West, the current ‘demolition’ issue in China, locations and features of some Chinese cities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cycle 3</strong></th>
<th>Focuses</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Language knowledge</th>
<th>Cultural knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking, reading writing</td>
<td>Doing worksheets and writing sentences about topics from magazines</td>
<td>-Vocabulary of clothing, colours, sizes, price&lt;br&gt;-Sentences to do with asking and answering each other; favorite clothes, movies, songs and comics&lt;br&gt;-Conversations about shopping, paragraphs introducing celebrities</td>
<td>Knowing about fashion, movies and music industries in modern China</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is it problematic to say that students have a good knowledge of culture if they know about Kungfu culture, Sinicism (zhongguo feng) music, some cities and some fashion trends from magazines? Based on the above discussion about intellectual quality, the students may not have achieved deep understanding and deep knowledge because of the constraints I have discussed. Nevertheless, I would argue that using popular culture...
texts changed their stereotypes of China, giving them a fresh experience of contemporary Chinese culture.

7.5 How Can A Teacher Successfully Engage Students by Using Popular Culture in the Language Context?

Popular culture has its own advantages in increasing students’ interests, motivation and in helping to strengthen language abilities to a certain degree. However, in all three cycles, I found that the role of teacher had a significant impact on student engagement. The ways in which a teacher uses popular culture and applies instructional strategies in classroom have the most influence on the success of students engaging in language learning.

7.5.1 My teaching experience in this study

The use of popular culture needs to be positive and enjoyable, but also based on developing linguistic competence and meaning, so that students can not only generate affective responses but also gain significant language knowledge. The teacher also needs to focus on students’ recognition and identification of their own attitudes and feelings towards the target language and culture and towards learning itself. Students can feel good about themselves through interaction with each other and exchange their daily life experiences around popular culture (Cheung, 2001).

The use of songs focused on improving students’ pronunciation and vocabulary through the repetition of singing and the learning of lyrics. I prepared music videos with Chinese subtitles, and transcripts of lyrics with English translations and Chinese pinyin and characters as well. After explaining the main ideas of the song, I played the music video to students. Then I handed out the lyrics’ transcripts and taught some key lexical vocabulary and phrases. Students listened to the music again and I
demonstrated how to sing, and taught students to sing with me. The repetition of long sentences was very important because it could help students improve their speaking.

The use of movies emphasised developing students’ listening comprehension and speaking ability. The practice of lines from movies was the central learning activity in this cycle. In order to improve these abilities effectively, it was better to prepare movies with subtitling, which helps children acquire the second language in a natural context of implicit learning (d’Ydewalle & Van de Poel, 1999, p. 228). The transcripts of lines from movies should have English translations as well as Chinese pinyin and characters. After students watched the video, I usually prepared a quiz to evaluate their understanding of the content and generate some classroom discussion. It was then important part illustrate the main ideas of the stories and key lexical vocabulary and sentences to students. After the students had a certain understanding of the content and the ability to produce the sentences, I had students practise conversation in groups.

In using magazines, it is necessary to choose suitable materials for young students. The teen magazines are useful because they come with colourful pictures and content that should appeal to youth. I first gave an introduction to the pictures and accompanying stories, and then illustrated new vocabulary and sentences. After learning one paragraph, students could revise, with worksheets. It is more effective to help students solve problems on-the-spot when they are doing the worksheet rather than just correcting mistakes after collecting them.

Good instructional strategies were also crucial in effectively engaging students. Based on the evidence from reflection journals, teacher’s observations and also students’ advice on my teaching, I believe that, in order to successful engage students, the teacher should:

- be enthusiastic
- give firm and clear instructions
• have flexible and various strategies to deal with unexpected things in the classroom
• know about students as individuals
• show appreciation and respect to students
• have good classroom management and time management
• co-operate with regular classroom teachers
• manage appropriate teaching strategies by consideration of students’ level
• have high expectations of students
• keep reviewing and revising to enhance retention

7.5.2 Constraints that impacted on teaching popular culture in engaging students

The constraints in this study had a significant impact on the level of student engagement. As an inexperienced beginning student teacher, my limited knowledge of content and pedagogies blocked further development of students’ level of language to some extent.

Teacher’s knowledge and pedagogies can be considered as the most important factors that impact on student learning. To conduct a good lesson that enables students to engage, three aspects should be taken into consideration:

• Teacher’s content knowledge
• Teacher’s pedagogical knowledge
• Teacher’s identity (a beginning teacher in her own foreign language context)

Teacher’s content knowledge

Knowledge of content includes the substantial knowledge and beliefs about the subject which the teacher teaches (Shulman, 1987, in Exley, 2006). Content knowledge in
teaching language includes the knowledge about vocabulary building, sound/symbol relationships, syntactical structures and cultural aspects (festivals and customs). In my case, the content knowledge also included the teacher's understanding of popular culture contexts and the way in which the teacher uses this in teaching language.

I was very confident about the implementation of popular culture in my teaching because I thought my past experience of learning a foreign language through popular culture and my own educational background could guide me an ability as to how to present popular culture to students. Students did generate positive affective responses and gained significant language knowledge. However, the incorporation of popular culture contexts in my teaching did not generate their deep understanding of grammars and cultural concepts. This constraint blocked the possibility of further development of high intellectual quality, while insufficient time, the students’ age and my position in the schools also had impact on the success of engagement.

Teacher’s pedagogical knowledge

Pedagogical knowledge, as Exley (2006) defined it, refers to “principles and strategies of classroom management and organisation particular to content areas, knowledge of the materials and programs that teachers write and use and acknowledge the educational contexts”. It includes the necessary teaching strategies and skills for maintaining good classroom management, organising activities and all the other classroom activities. In the analysis of three cycles, teacher’s pedagogy was one of the most significant themes discussed. Some instructional strategies, such as giving clear instructions, being flexible, appreciating and respecting students, were important skills in my classroom which influenced student’ behaviour and performance. I lacked teaching skills and had insufficient knowledge of classroom management at the very beginning. Over time I gained experience and learned from other classroom teachers. Such support from a ‘tutor teacher’ is regarded as important in the development of a beginning teacher (Lang, 1999, p. 4). In my case, the regular classroom teacher was
significant in helping me improve my teaching pedagogies and overcoming
difficulties in teaching practice. Their involvement, as I discussed when discussing
data analysis, was influential on developing students’ behaviour and engagement.

Teacher’s identity: a beginning teacher in her own foreign language context

A teacher should also be aware of his/her own pedagogical identity. Teaching my own
language in a foreign country led me to experience a ‘crisis’ of identity. Teaching L1
and its associated culture to students, often made me re-recognise the country and
cultural system from which I came. This in itself was a new experience for me. In
addition, experiencing Australian schooling also shaped my identity from the position
of a teacher. From my own educational background in China, I unconsciously
expected students to be disciplined, to show respect and finish tasks conscientiously. I
felt frustrated and disappointed when they did not behave as I expected. On the other
hand, I was impressed by what I perceived to be the student-centred teaching and the
freer learning environment in Australian classrooms. This gradually became my core
teaching faith, so I tried to focus on students’ motivation and interests in my teaching.
The struggle between these two thought systems remains for me contradictory and
unresolved.

Another aspect of my identity is that my position as a teacher in the school sometimes
was ‘awkward’. I only met students for about one hour each week. Students were
negative towards homework and did not regard me the same as their classroom teacher.
This position resulted in some classroom management issues. In Cycle 3, one of my
self-reflection diaries read:

I was going to take it seriously and I wanted the students and staffs to take
it seriously too. I wanted to be seen as an individual person who had
certain ideas about teaching a native language . . . I wanted to let them
know I was not someone who just taught a song or played movies. I also
wanted to show that I was a part of the school and being able or learning to be able to engage students effectively.

(Dongxi, 6B, 16/11/2011)

This extract is important for the way it shows how I negotiated the construction of my pedagogic identity. I wanted to be a ‘real’ teacher who gained students’ and staffs’ ‘serious’ respect. I was aware of my shifting identity from taking on what I perceived to be the role of a ‘traditional’ Chinese teacher to becoming an ‘Australian’ teacher, as well as being aware of my identity as a beginning teacher, and aware of my efforts to promote my professional teacher status.

7.6 Conclusion

The research question focused on how a teacher can use popular culture to successfully engage in learning Mandarin. In this section, discussion of the key findings is presented, followed by a note on the implementation and limitations of this study.

7.6.1 Key findings

Key point one: the usefulness of popular culture in engaging students

The rhythm of music improved students’ pronunciation, and movies inspired them to practise significant conversations while using magazines attempted to enhance their writing and reading abilities. Popular culture has the advantage of stimulating interest and language ability to some extent.

Affective engagement in this study was found at two levels: direct emotional responses and attitudes towards the teacher, learning and classroom activities. It was easy to engage students affectively by popular culture. However, at first, students just enjoyed the direct pleasure of the contexts, and their affective engagement developed
into valuing and having positive attitudes towards both the learning contexts and the learning process. Operative engagement developed towards more complex involvement in classroom activities. Participation, classroom behaviour and learning ability improved to a certain degree. Cognitive engagement developed from a primary level to a relatively deeper and more complex level.

Key point 2: The impact of the teacher’s role in engaging students

The teacher’s teaching strategies cuts across particular curriculum material to significantly impact on the extent of student engagement. It was found that it was not popular culture per se that determined engagement or intellectual quality, but that it was more about how the teacher incorporated this material into the classroom and presented it to students. Becoming a more ‘engaged teacher’ is the path to developing student engagement.

Key point 3: The application of the MeE framework and the REAL framework

The application of the two frameworks was effective in helping to define and evaluate student engagement in this study. The engagement of students had complex aspects and did not neatly ‘fit’ the MeE framework (Munns & Martin, 2005). In addition, questions from the REAL framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006) often overlapped in referring to aspects of engagement. In the REAL framework, each question addresses one aspect of engagement; however, in practice, answers to questions related to affective and operative dimensions could also reflect the cognitive dimensions.

7.6.2 Limitations of this study

The main limitations of this study are:
• as the study embedded specific cultural components in teaching, the findings are not suitable for transferring to other cultural contexts;
• the findings are generated from evidence based on a limited scale of samples;
• although the methodology can be generalised, the specific nature and background of the participants significantly influenced the findings.

7.6.3 Implications of this study

This study has implications for new understanding about the use popular culture in teaching Mandarin, as well as developing engagement in a L2 learning context. In this thesis I applied three aspects of popular culture in teaching Mandarin to Australian young students, and used the MeE framework (Munns & Martin, 2005) and the REAL framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006) to position and evaluate engagement. Besides this, I also attempted to challenge questions about the potentially low intellectual quality of popular culture learning materials. I found that teachers play probably the most important role in the application of popular culture. This study provides some ideas for a positive association between the learning of Mandarin and young Australian learners and suggests possible strategies for language teachers to engage students in L2 learning.
References


Centre for Educational Research. (2011). Innovations in Teaching Chinese to non-background speakers: Research oriented, school engaged teacher education (ROSETE) program. University of Western Sydney: School of Education


Conference on Language Teaching and the Florida Foreign Language Association


Mayberry, J. H. (2004). Using elements of Hip-hip culture as a means of increasing student interest and learning American government, Wayne State University, Detroit, United Stated


Appendix 1: Ethics Committee Approval

1 March 2011

A/Professor Wayne Sawyer,
Centre for Educational Research
Penrith Campus (Kingswood)

Dear Wayne and Xinyu,

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal H8913 “Popular Culture and Engagement in teaching Mandarin”, until 31 December 2011 with the provision of a progress report annually and a final report on completion.

Please quote the project number and title as indicated above on all correspondence related to this project.

Yours sincerely

Dr Janette Perz
Chair, UWS Human Research Ethics Committee
Appendix 2: Letter to the Principle of Participant School

Dear Mr. Chia:

I am writing to you to seek your permission to conduct a research project at Eastern Creek Public School. The study will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Honours) at the University of Western Sydney. The purpose of the study is to investigate how popular culture can successfully engage students in learning Mandarin. Popular culture is an accessible cultural form and an important component in young students’ everyday lives. I want to explore whether using popular culture engages students’ interest in Mandarin. In addition, students will also gain a sense of modern Chinese culture. I have received the approval from Human Research Ethics Committee, and the NEAF approval number is H8913.

I plan to implement four aspects of popular culture in Mandarin teaching: popular songs, Kungfu movies, animation, teen magazines and to find out whether these can help engage students in learning Mandarin.

The study will involve students in Years 5 and Year 6, as well as classroom teachers. After receiving their parents or caregivers’ approval, students are asked for written feedback at the end of classes, which will take approximately take 5 minutes. I will also evaluate their engagement through testing them every school month. The test is aimed at knowledge of the whole class, not individual students, thus, there is no risk to students’ self-esteem. Classroom teachers will be asked to provide observation notes on my teaching and they will be interviewed at the end of the term. The interview will last 30 minutes to 1 hour. To support my teaching, DET language consultants will also be asked to observe my lessons for two or three times.
All of this will take place as normal class practice, and will not disturb school routine. The research will start from this term, the last week of April, and end in term 2. You have the right to withdraw the school from part, or all, of the project at any time without any consequences. I have collected some data in term 1, but I will analyse them only with your and students’ permission.

This study will help students develop their potential in Mandarin learning and also suggest some teaching strategies for other Mandarin teachers. I hope to have your approval and support for my study.

Best Wishes

Xinyu YU
Appendix 3: Information Sheet for Parent/Caregiver

Project: Popular Culture and Engagement in Teaching Mandarin

The study is being conducted by Xinyu Yu. It is part of the Master of Education (Honours), being supervised by A/Professor Wayne Sawyer and Dr Dacheng Zhao.

We are seeking your permission for your child to take part in this project, which is aimed at investigating how popular culture can successfully engage students in learning Mandarin. Four aspects of popular culture will be used in Mandarin teaching: popular songs, Kungfu movies, animation and teen magazines. The information from the study will be used to write a thesis and related publication and we will report the results to the school and to the Department of Education and Communities.

We will ask students to answer some questions about their learning at the end of class. All answers will be anonymous. The researcher will also investigate test results across the whole class to determine the progress of the whole class in learning Mandarin, and will be a normal part of classroom teaching. The results will be collected, but no individual students will be identified because the test is aimed to the language performance of the whole class instead of individuals. All of this will take place in normal class practice.

Participation is voluntary and your child will only take part if both you and your child agree. If you do decide not to take part, it will not affect your child’s results or progress at school. If you or your child change your mind about taking part, even after the study has started, just let the researcher know and any information already collected about your child will be destroyed. You can contact the researcher directly on 47360291.

No-one will be able to identify you or your child from the results of the study. Only the researchers and her supervisors will have access to the information, except when students are identified as being at risk of harm from themselves or others. In this case, the names of these students will be given to the school Principal.
Data will be stored in locked filing cabinets for 5 years, after which they will be destroyed. Data will only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors and used in her thesis and related publications. All data will be anonymous.

If you would like to check information gathered during the study, you need to access information about your child within the period of storage. These information can be accessed by contacting the supervisor, Assoc Prof Wayne Sawyer at the University of Western Sydney on 47360795.

When you have read this information, Xinyu Yu will be available to answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact:

The researcher Xinyu Yu  The Supervisor Wayne Sawyer
Tel:0247360291  Tel:  02 4736 0579
Fax:0247360400  Fax: 02 4736 0400
Email:17098713@students.uws.edu.au  Email: Wayne.Sawyer@uws.edu.au

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

This information sheet is for you to keep. Your child has also been given information about this project.

NEAF Approval No: H8913
Appendix 4: Information Sheet for Classroom Teacher

Project: Popular Culture and Engagement in Teaching Mandarin

The study is being conducted by Xinyu Yu. It is part of a Master of Education (Honours), being supervised by A/Professor Wayne Sawyer and Dr Dacheng Zhao.

We are seeking your permission for your child to take part in this project, which is aimed at investigating how popular culture can successfully engage students in learning Mandarin. Four aspects of popular culture will be used in Mandarin teaching: popular songs, Kungfu movies, animation and teen magazines. The information from the study will be used to write a thesis and related publication and we will report the results to the school and to the Department of Education and Communities.

We will ask you to provide observation notes of some Mandarin lesson given by the researcher, mainly describing student behaviour and engagement. These notes will be used as evidence to evaluate students’ engagement in learning Mandarin. Secondly, you will be asked for an interview on using popular culture in Mandarin class. It will last for 30 minutes to an hour and will be recorded and then transcribed.

Participation is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to be involved and If you do decide not to take part, you can withdraw at any time without giving any reason without affecting your relationship with the researcher now or in the future. If you change your mind about taking part, even after the study has started, just let the researcher know and any information already collected from you will be destroyed. You can contact the researcher directly on 47360291.

No-one will be able to identify you from the results of the study. Only the researchers and her supervisors will have access to the information. Data will be stored in locked filing cabinets for 5 years, after which they will be destroyed. Data will only be used in her thesis and related publications. All data will be anonymous.
If you would like to check information gathered during the study, you need to access information about you within the period of storage. These information can be accessed by contacting the supervisor, Assoc Prof Wayne Sawyer at the University of Western Sydney on 47360795.

When you have read this information, Xinyu Yu will be available to answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact:

The researcher Xinyu Yu                     The Supervisor Wayne Sawyer
Tel:0247360291                           Tel: 02 4736 0579
Fax:0247360400                           Fax: 02 4736 0400
Email:17098713@students.uws.edu.au       Email: Wayne.Sawyer@uws.edu.au

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

NEAF Approval No: H8913
Appendix 5: Consent Form for Parent/Caregiver

Consent Forms for Parents/Caregivers

Research Project: Popular Culture and Engagement in Teaching Mandarin

I (print name)……………………give consent to the participation of my child (print name) ……………………..in the research project described below.

TITLE OF THE PROJECT: Popular Culture and Engagement in Teaching Mandarin: How popular culture can successfully engage students in learning Mandarin?

RESEARCHER: Xinyu Yu, Tel 02 4736 0291 Fax 02 4736 0400 Email 17098713@students.uws.edu.au

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:
1. 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

2. I have read the Parent Information Sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my child’s involvement in the project with the researchers

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

4. I understand that that my child’s participation in this project is voluntary; a decision not to participate will in no way affect their academic standing or relationship with the school and they are free to withdraw their participation at any time.

5. I understand that my child’s involvement is strictly confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about my child will be used in any way that reveals my child’s identity.
6. I understand that collecting information will part of the study. This collecting will take place as:
   a. Writing feedback to be conducted at the end of lessons, for about 5 minutes
   b. Having tests conducted in class, every school month, for about 30 minutes
   Please cross out any activity that you do not wish your child to participate in.

   Signed . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
   Name . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
   Date . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

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

   Return Address: Xinyu YU, Building K.2.23, School of Education, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith NSW 2751

   NEAF Approval No: H8913
Appendix 6: Consent Form for Classroom Teacher

Consent Forms for General

**Research Project:** Popular Culture and Engagement in Teaching Mandarin

I (print name) . . . . . . . . . . . . . give consent to participate in the research project described below.

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT:** Popular Culture and Engagement in Teaching Mandarin: How popular culture can successfully engage students in learning Mandarin?

**RESEARCHER:** Xinyu Yu, Tel 02 4736 0291 Fax 02 4736 0400 Email 17098713@students.uws.edu.au

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. 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

2. 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 researchers

3. 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.

4. I understand that that my participation in this project is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher now or in the future.

5. I understand that my involvement is strictly 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.

6. I consent to observe the researcher’s Mandarin class and provide observation notes. I consent to have the interview with audio recording in the study.
Signed. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Name. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Date. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research you may contact the researcher directly on Tel 02 4736 0883, Fax 02 4736 0013, Email 17098713@student.uws.edu.au, or the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel: 02 4736 0883, Fax: 02 4736 0013 or humanethics@uws.edu.au

Return Address: Xinyu YU, Building K.2.23, School of Education, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith NSW 2751

NEAF Approval No: H8913
Appendix 7: The REAL Framework (Munns & Woodward, 2006)

Thinking about achievement

Looking for evidence

Working with other people

Overcoming barriers

Reframing the task

Unidimensional – recalling basic feelings, thoughts, actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Operative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>🔄 What were the fun bits in your learning?</td>
<td>🔄 Write a memo to someone about the most important thing you learned today/yesterday</td>
<td>🔄 What new thing can you do now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🔄 What surprised you about your learning?</td>
<td>🔄 List your strengths</td>
<td>🔄 Who helped you the most?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🔄 How does working with others make you feel?</td>
<td>🔄 What is your best hard work?</td>
<td>🔄 What is your biggest improvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🔄 How do you feel now when it gets tricky?</td>
<td>🔄 What cooperation helped your learning?</td>
<td>🔄 What would you change about today’s work to help you improve?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🔄 What would make you feel better about today’s work?</td>
<td>🔄 What was the tricky part?</td>
<td>🔄 Name two things to make you think harder?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Multidimensional – developing feelings, thought and actions about learning processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Operative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why were the fun bits fun?</td>
<td>What strategies did you use to learn something important?</td>
<td>What goals did you set for yourself in this activity/task/project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why were you surprised about your learning today?</td>
<td>How did you know that you had learnt something?</td>
<td>How well did you achieve them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why does cooperative learning make you feel great?</td>
<td>What did you learn about working in groups while doing this work?</td>
<td>What is the evidence of your achievement about today’s learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel when you solve a problem?</td>
<td>Write two questions you could not answer. Explain</td>
<td>What is the most valuable advice you could give to students who are involved in similar projects in the future?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How could changes to today’s work make you feel better?</td>
<td>Why do you think doing it differently will help with your learning?</td>
<td>Explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How could we change this (lesson/unit/strategy/skill ) next time we do this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What would you change if you were to do a similar task to improve your learning?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relational—relating feelings, thought and actions to other areas/processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Operative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel when you achieve your goals?</td>
<td>Connect this knowledge to something you already know or can do</td>
<td>Think of a way to use. . . . . . since we practiced it in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other feelings do you have about this work?</td>
<td>How do these processes/content relate to something else you know Who do you know who would find this learning (content) or strategy (process) helpful?</td>
<td>Reflect on the strategy we used and why we used it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can you ensure your group has positive feelings about your work together</td>
<td>Who do you know who would find this learning (content) or strategy (process) helpful?</td>
<td>How could you become more involved in team work next time that would be different that this time??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What problems do you have to solve about how you feel when it gets tough?</td>
<td>Find three sources where this new knowledge could be useful.</td>
<td>List five places you could use the skills you have learnt during this lesson/unit/task?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can you feel like this more in your work at school</td>
<td>When and where else could you use this information?</td>
<td>What would you do differently in your next project given the knowledge you now have?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conceptual- translating into concepts feelings, thought and actions about learning processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Affective</strong></th>
<th><strong>Cognitive</strong></th>
<th><strong>Operative</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Image] Think about the many feelings you have about your work. Use colours and/or drawing to represent three of these feelings.</td>
<td>![Image] Explain how your thinking was different today from yesterday and from what it could be tomorrow.</td>
<td>![Image] Why is what you have learnt critical for you as a person?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image] How can you generate some specific feelings about you work e.g. empathy, curiosity</td>
<td>![Image] Why is it important for you to know/understand/be able to do this?</td>
<td>![Image] List three ways the skills you have learnt can be used elsewhere?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image] Survey the members of your group about how they felt during this task and align them with your own feelings.</td>
<td>![Image] Reflect on a conversation you had with someone else that triggered your thinking about . . . . . .</td>
<td>![Image] How you would help someone else to learn something you discovered today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image] What did you find to be the most difficult part in discussing your feelings about this task? What did you do to overcome this?</td>
<td>![Image] How could you broaden your thinking through and learn more about what you did today/during a task/lesson/unit?</td>
<td>![Image] What did you find out about you problem solving skills and strategies while doing this activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image] What other positive feelings would you like to generate in future sessions?</td>
<td>![Image] Represent how you think, (drawing, matrix, mind map etc.)</td>
<td>![Image] What advice would you give me before we continue this lesson?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8: Test paper in Cycle 1

Test 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class:</th>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Scores:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Multiple-choice Questions**

Select the only one right answer from below choices given, and write a/b/c in the brackets (5 points each)

1. How to say Kungfu in Chinese? ( )

2. How to say Kungfu weapon in Chinese? ( ) North
   a. Bing qi  b. Qi bing  c. Wu qi

3. In below choice, which one shows the right direction as East ↔ West ( )

   ![Diagram](image1)
   a. 南 → 北  b. 东 → 西  c. 西 → 东

4. Which kind of kungfu below focuses the arm movement and hand techniques? ( )
   a. 南拳  b. 北腿  c. 太极

**Writing Task**

Please write the correct Chinese next the word, either in pinyin or character. (Write correct pinyin only gets 3 points each; write correct character gains 6 points each)

1. Left: __________
2. Right: __________
3. Boy: __________
4. Girl: __________

**Matching Task**

Choose the right adjective words to describe the given pictures. (8 points each)

- **piāo liàng de** 漂亮的
- **shuài qì de** 帅气的

![Image1]
![Image2]
Translation

Please translate the sentences into English (each question 10 points)

kuài shǐ yòng shuāng jié gùn
快使用 双截棍

wǒ zuò kàn yòu kàn shàng kàn xià kàn
我 左看 右看 上看 下看

Short Essay (10 points each, you can get more points if you provide more relevant answers)

1. Please write a short paragraph about Chinese Kungfu in English, related to the knowledge you have learnt in Mandarin lesson, such as how to say Kungfu in Chinese, the Kungfu stars and songs you know, different Kungfu styles and weapons.

2. Please write a short paragraph to introduce yourself in Chinese (in pinyin or Character if you can), such as your name, your age, your gender, your favourite food and animals. Try to use the vocabulary you have learnt as more as better!
Appendix 9: Lyrics of 对面的女孩看过来

duì miàn de nǚ hái kàn guò lái
对 面 的 女 孩 看 过 来

女孩 on the other side look and come here

look and come here, look and come here

the show here is really exciting

please don't pretend you don't care

girl on the other side look and come here

look and come here, look and come here

don't be scared by my look

I am very cute, in fact.

the sadness of a lonely boy

if I tell, who can understand

please send me a wink

cheer me up, and make me smile

I look left and right, look up and down

girls are not easy

I think and think again, I guess and guess still

it is so difficult to know what girls think about

by 任贤齐

其实我很可爱
寂寞男孩的苍蝇拍

左拍拍，右拍拍

为什么还是没人来爱

无问津哪，真无奈

I cannot help but be sad

对面前的女孩看过来

看过来，看过来

寂寞男孩情豆初开

需要你给我一点爱

请给我一点爱

我左看右看，上看下看

原来每个女孩都不简单

我想了又想，我猜了又猜

女孩们的心事还真奇怪

it is really difficult to know what girls think about

love is really difficult...

lonely boys ‘flyswatters clapping

clap left, clap right

why no one comes to love me

I look left and right, look up and look down

every girl is not easy

I think and think again, guess and guess again

it is really difficult to know what girls think about
Appendix 10: Test paper in Cycle 2

Test Paper 07/09/2011

Section 1: Journey to The West

1. Why did the Monk 唐僧 go to the West?
2. Where is the ‘West’ located?
3. How many disciples does he have? Can you name one or two of them?
4. In the movie, how did the monk 唐僧 escape when he was kidnapped by the monsters?
5. In the movie, how did the monk 唐僧 persuade the Monkey King 孙悟空 to go to the West with him?

Section 2: Kungfu Panda – Furious Five

1. Who are the Furious Five?
   - A. 螳螂
   - B. 老鼠
   - C. 猴子
   - D. 猫
   - E. 毒蛇
   - F. 老虎
   - G. 兔子
   - H. 牛
   - I. 仙鹤
   - J. 熊猫

2. Translate those words into Chinese.
   - Panda: __________  Kungfu: __________
   - Horse: __________  Snake: __________
   - Mantis: __________

3. What are the secrets of Kungfu?

Section 3: The Pleasant Goat & Big Big Wolf

1. Can you translate their names into Chinese?
   - Pleasant Goat: __________
   - Great Grey Wolf: __________

2. What does the Lord Tiger want to construct after he destroys the sheep village? Can you write it in Chinese pinyin.
3. Please fill in the blanks in Chinese based on the given English.

Nǐ men hǎo
A: 你们好！
B: ______ (Hello!) nǐ men jiào shén me míng zì
A: ____________(My name is A) 你们叫什么名字?
            zhè shì
B: ____________(My name is B) 这是____ (this is C)
A: ______________________(Nice to meet you)
B: 也____________________(Nice to meet you, too)

Section 4: Karate Kids 功夫梦kongfu meng

1. What did Dre’s mother ask him to practice in the airplane? Write them in pinyin.

2. Which place of interest is not in Beijing?
   A. Forbidden City  B. Oriental Pearl
   C. Great Wall  D. Bird Nest

3. Match the items with the city it is located in or comes from.
   Butterfly Lover  北京 Beijing
   Waitan  成都 Chengdu
   Panda  上海 Shanghai
   Kung Pao Chicken  宁波 Ningbo

4. Can you also write down something else you know about these city?
Appendix 11 Lines from movie Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf

慢 羊 羊：你们是谁？ Who are you?

保镖 1：哼，白痴。 Idiot!

保镖 2：这是超厉害 This is the super-deadly

保镖 3：超无敌 super-invincible

保镖 4：超帅气 super-handsome

保镖 5（all body guards together）：虎威太岁！ The majestic Lord Japper

虎威：恭喜发财！恭喜发财！ Wish you happy and wealthy!

旁白：拆我们家也叫恭喜发财? Demolish our houses and still want to greet us Happy New Year?

秘书：你们又是谁？And who are you guys?

慢 羊 羊：我是村长。 I am village head

喜 羊 羊：我是喜羊羊。 I am Pleasant Goat

美 羊 羊：我是美羊羊 I am Beauty Goat

肥 羊 羊：我是肥羊羊 I am Fatty Goat

懒 羊 羊：我是懒羊羊 I am Lazy Goat
灰太狼：我…我是灰太狼！I am Big Big Wolf

Then the Lord Japper orders to demolish the sheep village and wolf castle to construct his amusement park…

喜羊羊：住手！Stop!

美羊羊：快住手！Stop now!

肥羊羊：都住手！You all stop!

虎威：拆了多好！建游乐场！It’s good to demolish them to build an amusement park

村长：那得有多大啊？How big is it?

保镖6：超级超级大！Super super large

All the Goats: 不行！No way!
Appendix 12 Teen magazines used in Cycle 3
Worksheet 1

What is she wearing?

1. _____________________________
2. _____________________________
3. _____________________________
4. _____________________________
Worksheet for Girls

What is he wearing?

1. ____________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________
Worksheet 3

Year 7 Name: ____________  Work Sheet  22/11/2011

Translation

Movie: ____________  Comics: ____________  Music: ____________

I like watching Transformer: ____________________________

I like listening to Beyonce’s songs: ____________________________

Answer the questions.

Nǐ xǐ huān kàn shén me màn huà?

Q: 你 喜欢 看 什 么 漫 画？  A: ____________________________

Nǐ shì shéi de fàn?

Q: 你 是 谁 的 饭？  A: ____________________________