How does a beginning Chinese foreign language teacher improve teaching Chinese through a communicative approach via reflection? An action research project

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University of Western Sydney
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 Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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CHEN Zhu
March 2013
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List of Abbreviations

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching
QT: Quality Teaching
ROSETE: Research-Oriented School-Engaged Teacher Education
ILT: Intercultural Language Teaching
TCFL: Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language
TCSL: Teaching Chinese as Second Language
QICA: Quality Intercultural Communicative Activities
QCA: Quality Communicative Activities
DEC: Department of Education and Communities
NSW: New South Wales
UWS: University of Western Sydney
Abstract

This study is an action research project conducted by a teacher-researcher who is teaching Chinese as a foreign language to students in NSW public schools. It involves two action research cycles in order to investigate how a beginning teacher can improve Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practice through continuous reflective teaching. The first action research cycle employs the NSW Quality Teaching (QT) pedagogical model as a tool to support reflective teaching. The second action research cycle aims at testing out and further improving the findings of the first action research cycle by drawing on principles of intercultural language teaching (ILT). This study seeks to contribute to current language education research in several areas. Firstly, it generates data about Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL) which is an emerging field. Secondly, it includes theoretical and practical understanding about CLT and ILT as foreign language pedagogies. Thirdly, while using action research as the methodology, the reflexivity of action research was further developed in this study through the integration of reflective teaching cycles into action research cycles. Fourthly, an approach to reflective teaching, namely, ‘tension-focused reflective teaching’ has been developed. Fifthly, tension-focused reflection has also given rise to a method for enhancing foreign language teaching via a communicative approach, which I termed Quality Intercultural Communicative Activities (QICA)—in which QT elements are incorporated into the design of classroom activities for intercultural communicative competence development. Sixthly, QICA also constitutes a mode of implementation of QT in the context of CLT and ILT to improve the quality of foreign language pedagogy. Seventhly, this study evaluates and tries to develop QT as a self-reflection tool for teachers.
Chapter 1  Introduction

1.1  Background

This thesis is a documentation of my research journey while working as a volunteer teaching assistant in the Western Sydney region of the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education and Communities (DEC). After I finished my Bachelor degree in China in 2010, I came to Australia and participated in a Mandarin teaching program organised jointly by Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau in China and the NSW DEC in Australia. Sixty-two primary schools in NSW have Chinese language programs even though it is not a compulsory requirement for primary students to learn languages other than English. While these sixty-two programs are conducted by trained teachers with teaching degrees obtained from universities, our program is conducted by volunteer teaching assistants from various backgrounds (DEC, 2011). The general principle of this program is to promote Chinese language and culture in the Western Sydney DEC Region as well as building a bridge of understanding between China and Australia. Volunteer teaching assistants are selected annually by Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau to assist Mandarin teaching in the schools of Western Sydney Region ten hours a week. This particular program runs in 16 schools – 9 primary and 7 secondary. I was assigned to a primary school with about 500 students enrolled from K-6. I taught Chinese to three classes with one in Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 respectively. Only one of my students came from a Chinese background when I was teaching in the school. Schools choose to participate in this Chinese language and culture program on voluntary basis. The NSW DEC is in charge of providing methodology training once a week for three months to prepare the volunteers for Chinese language and culture promotion in schools. The three-month methodology training was actually the starting point of my research journey in
that it led me into the field of foreign language teaching. What impressed me most deeply in the training was a lecture on *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT). As a language pedagogy widely used in second and foreign language teaching, the distinguishing feature of CLT is that communication in the target language is both the ultimate goal and the method of language teaching. It is described as follows: “learners learn to communicate by communicating” (Richards, 2005, p. 6). The lecture on CLT began with a twenty-minute German lesson using a communicative approach. I was fully engaged by the amount of interaction with other learners and the teacher. As a learner who had never learned any German before, I picked up five words and a sentence in German during those twenty minutes. This reminded me of my learning of English at junior high school and university. My junior high school was a foreign language school in which students spent much more time on learning English than other schools. It was also different from other schools in terms of the style of teaching English. Instead of reciting vocabulary lists and learning grammatical structures for exams, we were required to communicate with classmates using English in a variety of forms. When I went to university which is the Chinese campus of a British university, the academic English training I received in my first year was conducted by native English speaking tutors in a similar way to the twenty-minute German lesson discussed above and my junior high school English classes. This was because communication between classmates and the tutor was the fundamental classroom strategy. I enjoyed learning English at junior high school and university much more than at senior high school which followed the Chinese exam-oriented English teaching tradition. It was also during my time at junior high school and university that I achieved my most significant improvement in English. Due to these positive experiences of CLT as a foreign language learner, I decided to study
more about this approach as a researcher and implement it in my own classroom as a foreign language teacher.

Even though volunteers received language methodology training, we were not meant to be formally trained as teachers. The twelve sessions were just brief introductions about language teaching pedagogies. CLT was demonstrated in only one session. Therefore, the methodology training was far from enough for me to perform as well as other teachers who received more formal training in a teacher education program and accumulated rich practical experience in the classroom. As a student who studied finance, accounting and management during my undergraduate years, I had no idea about education and language teaching before I came to Australia. With such a deficiency in my education background, I was worried about how I could develop myself into a competent foreign language teacher who was able to conduct CLT as effectively as my methodology trainer. The Confucian educational thoughts of “教相长” which translates into English as “teaching others teaches yourself” or “teaching and learning help each other” provided me with some ideas. The concept of “teaching others teaches yourself” suggests that teachers can achieve improvements in teaching by combining reflection on their own teaching practice with engaging in teaching. This concept originated from *Li Ji (Book of Rites)*, one of the Chinese Five Classics of the Confucian canon, as follows:

> However fine the viands be, if one do not eat, he does not know their taste; however perfect the course may be, if one do not learn it, he does not know its goodness. Therefore when he learns, one knows his own deficiencies; when he teaches, he knows the difficulties of learning. After he knows his deficiencies, one is able to turn round and examine himself; after he knows the difficulties, he is able to stimulate himself to effort. Hence it is said, “Teaching and learning help each other;’ as it is said in the Charge to Yueh, ‘Teaching is the half of learning.’

*(Book of Rites, n.d.)*
Basically, this notion has three implications for me as a beginning teacher. Firstly, it highlights the value of ‘practice’. It is in practice that we deepen our understanding about deficiencies. Deficiencies guide us on how to improve. The second implication is that the goal of teaching should be the mutual development of teachers and students. Students acquire knowledge from the teacher, while the teacher develops her professional knowledge through practice. Thirdly, it emphasizes the dual roles of teachers in the teaching-learning relationship. Teachers are not only teachers, but also learners who learn through self-reflection. Luckily, my teaching in NSW public schools offered me a great opportunity to accumulate hands-on experience in real classrooms, through which it was possible to develop myself as a foreign language teacher through self-reflection.

1.2 Research question
As a beneficiary of CLT myself, I have a commitment to implement it in my own teaching. However, as a graduate from a School of Business, I was insufficiently prepared to teach immediately in real classrooms, with limited theoretical knowledge about pedagogy and no practical experience of teaching. Therefore, I expected that the quality of my Languages teaching in terms of communicative competence development may not be at the same level as that of graduates from a Languages teacher training program or the in-service development of teachers with rich classroom experiences. Hence, the major concern for me as a beginning Languages teacher in this specific situation was to improve my own teaching, especially for developing learners’ communicative competence—the ability to use Chinese language for meaningful communication. With limited opportunities for formal training, I chose to learn by doing. As a result, this research journey is the search for
pathways to enhance Languages teaching for communicative purposes. This process of learning-by-doing is formalised here through reflective teaching.

What this whole research project seeks to answer is the following research question:

How does a beginning Chinese foreign language teacher improve teaching Chinese through a communicative approach via reflection?

There are also two sub-questions:

1) How can a beginning language teacher use the NSW Quality Teaching (QT) model as a reflection tool to improve teaching Chinese through a communicative approach?

2) How does the integrative application of Quality Communicative Activities (QCA) and Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT) via tension-focused reflective teaching enhance teaching Chinese through a communicative approach?

These two sub-questions are related specifically to the two action research cycles in this research. Therefore, it is more logical to explain these two sub-questions after the theoretical background and overall design of the research have been presented. Considering this, explanations of the origin of the two sub-questions are not dealt with here, but left to Chapters 4 and 5 which describe each action research cycle as a whole.

1.3 Significance of the study

As mentioned above, as a graduate from a School of Business, I have limited language teaching skills which may lead to a lower quality of teaching. By employing a learning-by-doing approach formalised through reflective teaching, the
primary significance of this research lies in its benefits for my professional
development as a beginning foreign Languages teacher. Students’ language learning
will theoretically benefit from my professional development.

Learning Chinese through a communicative approach facilitates student access to the
Chinese community, which may bring future opportunities considering the increasing
connections between Australia and China. This is highly relevant to the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* which stresses that
“Australians need to become ‘Asia literate’, engaging and building strong
relationships with Asia” (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training
and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 4). Learning another language is meant to increase
students’ knowledge of the world, broaden their outlook and reinforce their learning
in other areas. For example, according to the *Chinese K-10 Syllabus* (NSW Board of
Studies, 2003), learning Chinese provides students with another perspective on how
languages work as systems, thereby enhancing literacy and language skills in English,
as well as in Chinese. Furthermore, in their study of Chinese, students use their
numeracy skills in learning topics such as numbers and time. It is one of the
Australian Government’s aspirations that by the end of 2020, at least 12% of Year 12
Australian students should be fluent in Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian or Korean
(Asia Education Foundation, 2008). In 2008, 92931 students in Australian were
studying Chinese (DEEWR, 2010). The number of students enrolled in Chinese
programs in New South Wales is estimated to be more than 20000. However, a high
drop-out rate has been observed in NSW as well as other states. It is found that 94%
of students enrolled in Chinese programs choose to quit Chinese before Year 11. The
students who stayed with Chinese programs are mostly first language speakers of
Chinese (Asia Education Foundation, 2008; DEEWR, 2010). Confronted with these facts, retention of non-background Chinese language learners has been regarded as the first priority for achieving the aspirational goal in 2020 (Asia Education Foundation, 2008; DEEWR, 2010). It is further pointed out that a shortage of high quality teachers is a major obstructive factor. Even though there are quite a few numbers of trained teachers who are native speakers of Chinese, they have often been criticized as incompetent to perform effectively in Australian classrooms (Asia Education Foundation, 2008; DEEWR, 2010). Due to these issues, there is call for pedagogical innovation to address Australian non-background speakers’ key difficulties in Chinese language learning. There is also a strong claim for changes in teacher education to better prepare Chinese language teachers for Australian classrooms. (Asia Education Foundation, 2008) By continuously reflecting on my own experience of teaching Chinese to non-background speakers in Australian primary classrooms, this study hopefully can reveal some of the major difficulties Australian students face with in Chinese learning and investigate solutions to these. In turn, this may provide some directions for future Chinese language pedagogy and Chinese teacher education in an Australian context. This information, then, may make some contribution to the supply of high quality Chinese language teachers and ultimately the retention of non-background learners in Chinese programs.

In addition, the study may contribute to the field of educational research and practice in the following ways. Firstly, it may add a better understanding about the value of reflective teaching for improving teaching practice. By demonstrating my own process of reflective teaching, it may provide other teachers and teacher educators with ideas about approaches to teacher reflection. Secondly, authentic examples of
my teaching of Chinese in a Western Sydney public school enriches data about teaching Chinese as a foreign language to speakers of other languages, especially to very young English speakers. This could be a valuable reference point for the development of the Asian Languages curriculum which has a high priority in the Melbourne Declaration. Thirdly, it may contribute to the development of foreign language pedagogies at both the theoretical and practical levels. My own teaching experience may provide a reference point for practitioners in terms of teaching Chinese as a foreign language to young English speakers for communicative purposes. Fourthly, it may deepen understanding about what constitutes high-quality foreign language teaching, as well as how to enhance the quality of foreign language teaching. This is consistent with the Australian Government’s commitment to promoting high quality schooling for young generations. Additional significance of the study will be gradually unfolded in the following part of the thesis.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

The following thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 2 reviews literature relevant to the main research question. The first group of literature focuses on communicative language teaching. This centres on the theoretical base and practical meaning of CLT as well as its use in teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages. Secondly, literature about teacher reflection is reviewed with a focus on its key features and its role in teachers’ professional development.

Chapter 3 is an overview of action research methodology. Firstly, there is a literature review on action research. Secondly, the use of action research for dealing with this specific research question will be justified. Thirdly, the theoretical foundations of
this action research will be explored. Fourthly, research methods regarding major data sources, and issues of validity, reliability and generalisability, as well as ethics, will also be addressed.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 document the whole research journey, which involves two action research cycles. Each of these chapters presents one complete action research cycle. As each action research cycle has its particular research focus, each of these chapters will explain the research focus, review the literature related to the specific research focus, present the design of the cycle, analyse data and summarize research findings.

Chapter 6, which is the concluding chapter, answers the main research question by reviewing the whole research process and the major findings of the two action research cycles. It also examines the limitations and implications of this study.
Chapter 2  Literature review

This chapter reviews literature related to two key topics in the main research question, namely, communicative language teaching and teacher reflection. The review concentrates on literature which provides definitions or explanations of these two concepts. In addition, literature about the application of communicative language teaching, as well as the relationship between teacher reflection and teachers’ professional development, has also been reviewed.

2.1  Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

2.1.1  What is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?

Approaches to language teaching earlier than CLT, such as Audiolingualism and the Structural-Situational Approach assume that a learner’s ability to communicate in the target language results from the development of linguistic competence, that is, mastery of grammatical rules and memorisation of vocabulary (Ellis, 2003; Littlewood, 2011; Richards, 2005). These approaches view language as a set of phonological, lexical and grammatical systems (Ellis, 2003). CLT, which is also concerned with the ability to use the target language for communication, tries to achieve this differently based on a view of language as a system for meaning expression (Nunan, 1999). While earlier approaches emphasise ‘usage’ or ‘knowing that’ (the ability to use language correctly), CLT emphasises ‘use’ or ‘knowing how’ (the ability to use language meaningfully and appropriately in the construction of discourse) (Ellis, 2003, p. 28). The expected outcome is communicative competence which involves the following aspects of language knowledge:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
- Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or
how to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)

- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one’s language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies)

(Richards, 2005, p. 3)

In this sense, *communicative competence* includes *linguistic competence*, but is much broader. The notion of *communicative competence* has been gradually extended to include *sociolinguistic competence*, *strategic competence* and *discourse competence* since its first introduction by Hymes as a reply to Chomsky’s notion of *linguistic competence* for the conceptualisation of language. Development to 1983 is illustrated in the following figure from Celce-Murcia (2007, p. 43):

![Figure 2.1 Chronological evolution of communicative competence](image)

**Figure 2.1** Chronological evolution of communicative competence

The four dimensions of *communicative competence* in Canale’s (1983) model entail the following:
• **Grammatical competence**: linguistic competence

• **Sociolinguistic competence**: understanding of the social context in which communication takes place, including role relationships, the shared information of the participants, and the communicative purpose of their interaction

• **Discourse competence**: the interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and of how meaning is represented in relationship to the entire discourse or text

• **Strategic competence**: coping strategies that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair and redirect communication

(Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 160)

After 1983, the overall notion of *communicative competence* was developed into a number of different models. Van Ek (1992, p. 8) further expanded *communicative competence* to six dimensions by incorporating another two new components:

- **Social competence** (the ability to use social strategies appropriate to the achievement of one’s communicative goals) and;

- **Sociocultural competence** (awareness of the sociocultural context in which the language concerned is used by native speakers and of ways in which this context affects the choice and the communicative effect of particular language forms).

Celce-Murcia et al (1995) added *actional competence* (the ability to comprehend and produce all significant speech acts and speech act sets) to Canale’s four-dimensional model (Celce-Murcia, 2007, p. 42). In this model, *sociolinguistic competence* is modified to become *sociocultural competence*. Celce-Murcia revised the model again into six dimensions, including *linguistic competence, sociocultural competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, formulaic competence* and *interactional competence*. *Formulaic competence* concerns “fixed and prefabricated chunks of language that speakers use heavily in everyday interactions” (Celce-Murcia, 2007, p. 47). *Interactional competence* consists of *actional competence, conversational competence* and *non-verbal/paralinguistic competence* (ibid).

In addition to the notion of *communicative competence*, what distinguishes CLT from earlier approaches is also the emphasis on meaningful communication as
central to language acquisition. It is argued that under CLT, the ends and the means of language teaching begin to merge, since “learners learn to communicate by communicating” (Richards, 2005, p. 6). This is considered as significantly influenced by two theories of language learning. The first is the comprehensible input hypothesis which states that L2 learning would be more successful if it was done in a similar way to L1 acquisition. This can be achieved through exposing learners to input that is “slightly beyond their current level of linguistic competence but sufficiently comprehensible for the learner to understand” (Spada, 2007, p. 275). The process for ‘input’ to be ‘comprehensible’ is further elaborated by another theory—the interaction hypothesis. It is maintained that comprehensible input is created and integrated when learners make conversational modifications to negotiate meaning during interactions (Spada, 2007). A series of assumptions form the basis of these hypotheses:

1. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchange.
3. Meaningful communication results from students processing content which is relevant, purposeful, interesting, and engaging.
4. Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
5. Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organisation, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.
6. Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language and trial and error. Although errors are a normal product of learning, the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently.
7. Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
8. Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.
9. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator, who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning.
10. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing. (Richards, 2005, pp. 22-23)
It is considered by some authors that by viewing *ability to communicate* as much more complex than *linguistic competence*, traditional classroom activities such as modelling and drills, and syllabuses containing word and grammar lists no longer carry much credibility in CLT. In CLT, greater importance is attached to communicative activities of two types. The first type is *functional communication activities*. Examples of this type include:

- Comparing sets of pictures and noting similarities and differences;
- Working out a likely sequence of events in a set of pictures;
- Discovering missing features in a map or picture;
- One learner communicating behind a screen to another learner and giving instructions on how to draw a picture or shape, or how to complete a map;
- Following directions
- Solving problems from shared clues. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 166)

The second type is called *social interaction activities*, such as “conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues and role plays, simulations, skits, improvisations and debates” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 166).

A way to categorise activities in CLT provided by Richards (2005) is:

- Information-gap activities
- Jigsaw activities i.e. learners fit pieces of information together to complete the whole
- Task-completion activities e.g. puzzles, games, map-reading
- Information-gathering activities e.g. surveys, interviews
- Opinion-sharing activities e.g. comparing values, opinions or beliefs
- Information-transfer activities i.e. learners to take information that is presented in one form and represent it in a different form
• Reasoning-gap activities i.e. deriving new information from given information through the process of inference and practical reasoning

• Role plays

According to Richards (2005), issues needing to be considered in terms of a syllabus include:

• The purpose for language acquisition e.g. for travel, for business, for academic work.

• The setting for language use e.g. in the office, on an airplane, in a store.

• The social roles to be assumed by the learners and their interlocutors e.g. traveller, salesperson, student.

• The communicative events e.g. academic situations, telephone calls, professional situations.

• The language functions associated with these events e.g. making introductions, giving explanations.

• The notions and concepts concerned e.g. leisure, finance, history, religion.

• Discourse and rhetorical skills e.g. storytelling, business presentation.

• The variety of the target language needed and the target level of proficiency.

• Grammatical content

• Lexical content

(Richards, 2005)

However, this should not imply that CLT looks uniform in classrooms. Rather, a group of authors states that there are different manifestations of CLT at the level of syllabus design and methodology which follow the principles of CLT outlined earlier in this chapter (Littlewood, 2011; Nunan, 2005; Richards, 2005; Spada, 2007). In this sense, CLT is considered as an umbrella “approach” (assumptions or theories dealing
with the nature of language, learning and teaching) rather than a specific “method” (a set of fixed and packaged prescriptions or plans for a systematic presentation of language) (Zhang, 2005, p. 7). Some authors describe this current situation in CLT as representing a ‘post-method era’ where the attention is focused on broader conceptualisation or macrostrategies which are then interpreted into personalised and contextualised microstrategies (Hiep, 2007; Littlewood, 2011; Spada, 2007).

According to Richards (2005), the CLT family of methodology can be divided into product-based methodologies and process-based methodologies. Product-based methodologies design courses towards the “the kinds of uses of language the learner is expected to be able to master at the end of a given period of instruction” while process-based methodologies try to “create classroom processes that are believed to best facilitate language learning” (Richards, 2005, pp. 26, 37).

Product-based methodologies include text-based instruction and competency-based instruction. In text-based instruction (a genre-based approach), learners in different communicative contexts learn to master different types of spoken and written texts frequently used in that particular situation. For example, a learner studying in a university may need different text types from another learner working in a store. Therefore, text-based instruction always involves a needs analysis of the learners to identify text types for them to learn. Then, grammar, vocabulary, topics and functions are taught through the mastery of texts. The implementation of a text-based approach may involve a five-phase cycle applied to teaching of all skills: building the context, modelling and deconstructing the text, joint construction of the text,
independent construction of the text, linking to related texts. *Text-based instruction* has been criticised for its disregard of personalised expression as texts are created by simply following models. (Richards, 2005)

While the outcome of text-based instruction is focused on text types, the product of *competency-based instruction* is the language skills which prepare learners for the specific tasks they need to perform. Hence, *competency-based instruction* usually starts with an analysis of the tasks to be carried out by the learner and the language demanded for successful task performance. According to Richards (2005), key features of this instruction are as follows:

- A focus on successful functioning in society
- A focus on life skills
- Performance-oriented instruction
- Modularised instruction
- Explicit outcomes
- Continuous and ongoing assessment
- Demonstrated mastery of performance objectives
- Individualised, student-centred instruction

(Richards, 2005, pp. 42-43)

This approach has been widely adopted particularly in vocational and technical training programs. It is said that compared with other approaches, more accountability is built into language learning by following competency-based instruction. Nonetheless, competency-based instruction has been considered a ‘reductionist approach’ in which thinking skills are omitted, with only a set of lists remaining. The feasibility of breaking situations into tasks is also critiqued (Richards, 2005).
Process-based methodologies include content-based instruction and task-based instruction. Content-based instruction makes a strong claim for teaching content or information in the target language with little or no explicit teaching of the language itself. In other words, the target language is the medium used to learn content or information. Although content or information is always evident in language lessons, content here is selected in order to teach specific grammar, genres, etc. In contrast, in content-based instruction, the decision on content is made prior to any aspects of language. An example of this approach provided by Richards (2005) is the use of English as a foreign language for teaching school subjects. The rationale behind content-based instruction includes the following:

- That language is learnt more successfully when it is used as a means, instead of an end;
- That a content-directed course is tailored to the learners’ communicative needs with respect to the target language;
- That content provides a coherent framework to integrate language skills.

However, the validity of content as a basis for language skill development has been questioned. It raises issues related to the language teacher’s subject-matter expertise in content areas and the assessment of content knowledge or language skill (Richards, 2005).

Another realisation of CLT principles through process-based methodology is task-based instruction in which the entire language curriculum is organised around different kinds of tasks (Littlewood, 2004; Zhang, 2005). This means tasks serve as primary units for both methodology and syllabus. Therefore, it is claimed that task-
based instruction “blur(s) the traditional distinction between syllabus, i.e. a statement of what is to be taught, and methodology, i.e. a statement of how to teach” (Ellis, 2003, p. 30). It is supposed that communicative competence can be developed as a by-product while learners are trying to accomplish the tasks through interaction with each other in the target language (Richards, 2005; Spada, 2007). As a process-based methodology, it specifies only ‘how to learn’ with no direct attempt to ‘define what to learn’. A significant amount of effort has been devoted to clarify what qualifies as a ‘task’ in CLT. A widely used list of criteria of tasks is as follows:

- A task is a workplan
- A task involves a primary focus on meaning
- A task involves real-world processes of language use
- A task can involve any of the four language skills
- A task engages cognitive processes
- A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome

(Ellis, 2003, pp. 9-10)

Ellis (2009) explicitly distinguishes task from activity and exercise. Not every language-teaching activity can be called a task. For a language-teaching activity to be a task, it must have:

- A primary focus on processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning
- An information gap for creating the need for communication
- A requirement for learners to use their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources to complete the activity
- An outcome to be achieved by language use

The last two points outlined above distinguish tasks from exercises. Exercises may have a focus on meaning and an information gap, but not a requirement for learners to use their own resources to achieve an outcome which goes beyond simple use of correct language. In exercises, since the use of correct language is treated as the
outcome - language serves as an end instead of a means. The distinction between task and exercise is related to the distinction between another two concepts, namely, task-based language teaching and task-supported language teaching. While task-based language teaching is composed of tasks, task-supported language teaching employs both task and exercise. Nevertheless, it is further pointed out by Ellis (2009) that the pedagogic value of an exercise should not be denied and task-based language teaching is not necessarily more desirable than task-supported language teaching.

Different criteria will generate different classifications. The following table may provide a general idea about different types of tasks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pedagogic</strong></td>
<td>Listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem-solving, sharing personal experiences, creative tasks, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rhetorical</strong></td>
<td>Genre-based tasks, e.g. political speeches, job application letters, good/bad news letters, medical consultations, and radio-telephonic flight control messages, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive</strong></td>
<td>Information-gap tasks, reasoning-gap tasks and opinion-gap tasks, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psycholinguistic</strong></td>
<td>One-way tasks, two-way tasks, convergent tasks, divergent tasks, closed tasks, open tasks, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Types of tasks (Zhang, 2005, p. 21)

Like the classification of task types, there is diversification regarding how tasks fit into a cycle of teaching. A three-phase model that includes ‘pre-task’, ‘during-task’ and ‘post-task’ is used by many authors (Ellis, 2009). However, no consensus has been reached on which activities fit in specific phases. Also, there are several problems related to the implementation of tasks, such as a lack of clarification of learning outcomes and feasibility of tasks in large classes. (Ellis, 2009)
The absence of universally accepted CLT practice is also related to the distinction between strong and weak versions of CLT (Ellis, 2003). Central to this distinction is the extent to which the learners’ attention is drawn to linguistic items. The general term for describing “any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form” is form-focused instruction (Ellis, 2001, pp. 1-2). The strong version of CLT, by focusing learners’ attention exclusively on meaning, rejects form-focused instruction (Nunan, 2005). It is assumed that learners can discover language structure by themselves during the process of communication (Ellis, 2003). Hence, a top priority is to maximise exposure to language use in communication. The classroom itself is exploited as a resource with communicative potential. On the other hand, form-focused instruction is acknowledged in the weak version of CLT as an integral support to improve the learners’ performance in meaningful communication.

Another aspect related to these two different versions of CLT is the fluency-accuracy debate. Activities in the language classroom have been divided by previous authors into two different types, namely, fluency activities and accuracy activities which can be contrasted as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fluency activities</th>
<th>Accuracy activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflect natural use of language</td>
<td>Reflect classroom use of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on achieving communication</td>
<td>Focus on the formation of correct examples of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require meaningful use of language</td>
<td>Do not require meaningful communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek to link language use to context</td>
<td>Practise language out of context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require the use of communication strategies</td>
<td>Practise small samples of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce language that may not be predictable</td>
<td>Control choice of language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 Comparison between fluency activities and accuracy activities
(Richards, 2005, p. 14)
Since CLT attaches great importance to the development of fluency, fluency activities dominate a communicative classroom. It is the presence and absence of accuracy activities that distinguish the weak version of CLT from the strong version of CLT (Spada, 2007). Under the weak version of CLT, it is recommended that teachers strike a balance between fluency activities and accuracy activities in which ‘accuracy’ activities are used to enhance the learners’ performance in ‘fluency’ activities. In other words, grammar or pronunciation to be practised in ‘accuracy’ activities target learner weaknesses identified in their performance of fluency activities (Richards, 2005). In this sense, the weak version of CLT may be considered a methodology which accommodates both experiential and analytical aspects of learning by incorporating a range of activities on a communicative continuum as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic Strategies</th>
<th>Experiential Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-communicative learning</strong>&lt;br&gt;Focusing on the structures of language, how they are formed and what they mean e.g. substitution exercises, ‘discovery’ and awareness-raising activities</td>
<td><strong>Structured communication</strong>&lt;br&gt;Using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language, but with some unpredictability, e.g. structured role-play and simple problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-communicative language practice</strong>&lt;br&gt;Practising language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g. ‘question-and-answer’ practice</td>
<td><strong>Authentic communication</strong>&lt;br&gt;Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g. creative role-play, more complex role-play, and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicative language practice</strong>&lt;br&gt;Practising pre-taught language in a context where it communicates new information, e.g. information-gap activities or ‘personalized’ questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3 The continuum from focus on forms to focus on meaning (Littlewood, 2011, p. 550)

In summary, the breakthrough in language teaching that has been contributed by CLT can be outlined as follows:

1. Promotion of learner autonomy in the content and process of learning
2. Learning as a social process depending on interaction with others
3. Integration of language learning with other subjects
4. Meaning-focused language learning
5. Recognition of diversity in learners
6. Development of thinking skills through language learning
7. Employment of multiple forms of assessment
8. Teacher as co-learners who constantly try out alternative strategies

(Richards, 2005)

However, unsatisfactory implementation of CLT has been observed. Legutke and Thomas (1991), Nunan (1987) and Thornbury (1996) found that genuine CLT was rare and accuracy activities outweighed fluency activities. In Karavs-Doukas’s research (1996) Greek teachers who taught English as a foreign language rarely taught communicative lessons even though they possessed positive attitudes towards CLT. Sato’s study (1997) showed that communicative interaction among learners was not widespread in Japanese classes in Australia despite pre-service and in-service training on CLT being provided to the teachers. These classrooms were still dominated by teacher-centred approaches, deductive grammatical explanation and mechanical drills. Similar findings were demonstrated in Sakui’s (2004) research on language teaching in Japan, which identified that most class time was spent on activities resembling audiolingual approaches such as teacher-initiated grammatical explanations, chorus reading, vocabulary presentations, sentence-level translation and sentence manipulation exercises, with only five out of fifty minutes in each lesson for CLT activities (Sakui, 2004). According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), the authenticity, acceptability and adaptability of CLT have often been criticised. In terms of authenticity, there seems to be no guarantee of whether meaningful communication can actually be achieved through classroom activity. As
Kumaravadivelu (1993a, p.113) states, “even teachers who are committed to CLT can fail to create opportunities for genuine interaction in their classroom.” In terms of acceptability, there is doubt about the distinctiveness of CLT. It is maintained by some authors (Howatt, 1987; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Swan, 1985) that while seeking to replace previous methods such as direct method and audiolingual methods, the conceptual underpinnings of CLT are actually no different to these methods. In terms of adaptability, CLT has been found to be inappropriate in a number of countries such as India (Prabhu, 1987), South Africa (Chick, 1996), Pakistan (Shamim, 1996), South Korea (Li, 1998), China (Yu, 2001), Japan (Sato, 2002) and Thailand (Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004). This inappropriateness is attributed to several contextual factors. Firstly, CLT is deemed to be an approach for learners with a high level of proficiency and motivation to learn (Wilson, 1995), hence it may not be successful with beginners. It is argued that communicative activities are more useful after students have learned grammar and vocabulary (Sakui, 2004; Nishino, 2008). Secondly, it is maintained that students may have limited incentive to use the target language as the medium of communication when they share the same mother tongues, when they have no need to communicate in that language outside the classroom, or when they have insufficient proficiency in the target language (Hiep, 2007; Littlewood, 2007). Thirdly, it is claimed that the demand for communication among learners creates challenges for classroom discipline, especially when class sizes are large (Ellis, 2009; Hiep, 2007; Littlewood, 2007). Fourthly, according to some authors, CLT, as a skill-oriented approach, may not be compatible with educational systems in which teachers need to prepare learners for knowledge- and form-oriented examinations (Ellis, 2009; Littlewood, 2007; Sakui, 2004). Teachers in these educational systems, even though they may have strong aspirations to use CLT, may
need to compromise for grammar-dominated entrance exams. Fifthly, teachers’ own experiences seem to influence teacher practice and outweigh aspirations towards ideal classroom situations (Sakui, 2004; Woods & Cakir, 2011). When teachers have a strong belief in grammar-dominated instruction for building knowledge about language, their practices may be closer to audiolingualism or a weak version of CLT which integrates linguistic structures in communicative activities. It is pointed out that another more powerful impediment to CLT usually comes from education traditions and the values of particular cultures. The failure of CLT in Asian countries has been partially attributed to teachers’ adherence to a philosophy of teaching and learning that is in conflict with that underlying CLT (Ellis, 2009; Hu, 2002). A contrast between traditional Chinese culture of learning and characteristics of CLT can be illustrated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of teaching and learning</th>
<th>Traditional Chinese culture of learning</th>
<th>CLT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of teachers and learners</td>
<td>Teacher-dominated</td>
<td>Learner-centred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning strategies</td>
<td>Mental activeness</td>
<td>Verbal activeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities demanded in students</td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>Individuality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4 A contrast between traditional Chinese culture of learning and characteristics of CLT (Hu, 2002)

Other constraining factors identified include “lack of school support, preparation time, materials, or in-service programs, different student learning styles” (Sato, 2002, p. 46). In addition to these constraining factors, CLT is sometimes rejected because of teachers’ misinterpretation. Thompson (1996) found four misinterpretations of CLT among teachers. The first misinterpretation was that grammar is not taught in CLT. The second misinterpretation was that CLT only teaches spoken language. The third misinterpretation was that CLT demands role-play and pair work. The fourth misinterpretation was that CLT places high expectations on teachers. Teachers’
fragmented knowledge of CLT was revealed in Sato’s study (1997). Woods and Cakir’s later study (2011) shows that even though teachers demonstrated understanding about CLT principles, there is inconsistency between teachers’ classroom practice and their articulated knowledge of CLT. Newly-graduated language teachers’ understanding about CLT was coloured and personalized by their own experiences including:

… the type of instruction they had received when learning English, the drama courses they had previously taken, the experience they had gained abroad, the contextual factors of the school they were currently teaching in, their current thesis topics and the readings they were currently engaged in, as well as aspects of their personalities”. (Woods & Cakir, 2011, p. 387)

Woods and Cakir showed that when reflecting on the conflict between the theoretical principles of CLT and their own experiences, teachers began to see the coherence between CLT and their own practice as well as realising the underlying “communicativeness” in activities which were originally considered as non-communicative (Woods & Cakir, 2011). This to some extent highlights the value of reflection, especially with a focus on conflicts. As Woods & Cakir (2011, p. 389 argue, “impersonal knowledge must be personalized through a process of interpretation stemming from a teachers’ own experiences”.

these methods into language-centred, learner-centred and learning-centred methods and stated that “there is considerable overlap in the theoretical as well as practical orientation to second language teaching and learning.” Even though there is a wide variety of methods available to them, previous studies show that:

- Teachers who are trained in and even swear by a particular method do not conform to its theoretical principles and classroom procedures.
- Teachers who claim to follow the same method often use different classroom procedures that are not consistent with the adopted methods.
- Teachers who claim to follow different methods often use the same classroom procedures.
- Over time, teachers develop and follow a carefully delineated task-hierarchy, a weighted sequence of activities not necessarily associated with any established method. (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, pp. 29-30)

These facts seem to suggest five myths of Method summarized by Kumaravadivelu (2005; pp. 163-168) as follows:

1. There is a best method out there ready and waiting to be discovered
2. Method constitutes the organizing principle for language teaching
3. Method has a universal and historical value
4. Theorists conceive knowledge and teachers consume knowledge
5. Method is neutral, and has no ideological motivation

Kumaravadivelu (2003) pointed out that methods are based on idealized concepts and contexts which provide no situation-specific suggestions. Secondly, methods tend to shift from one theoretical extreme to the other, which results in an overemphasis on certain aspects and ignorance of others in one method. Thirdly, the concept of methods does not take into account the influence of multiple factors on teacher instruction, such as “teacher cognition, learner perception, societal needs, cultural contexts, political exigencies, economic imperatives and institutional constraints” (p.29).

In response to these myths and shortcomings of the concept of Method, Kumaravadivelu (2003) proposed that what we should search for is not an
alternative method but an alternative to method. He proposes the alternative of Postmethod Pedagogy. Unlike ‘methods’, which are usually claimed to be one-size-fits-all, Postmethod Pedagogy allows teachers to develop more a context-sensitive pedagogy in their own classrooms. While explaining Postmethod Pedagogy, Kumaravadievelu (2003, 2006, 2012) does not list detailed strategies for teaching, but merely three operating principles and ten ‘macrostrategies’ to guide pedagogy in a language classroom. The three operating principles are particularity, practicality and possibility. Particularity means that “any language pedagogy, to be relevant, must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 538). Practicality means theory is useful only if it is generated from teachers’ day-to-day practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2006, 2012). Possibility means that language teaching provides learners with opportunities to form and transform their personal and social identity. Informed by these three principles, ten macrostrategies have been developed as guidelines for classroom activities. These are:

a) Maximize learning opportunities  
b) Facilitate negotiated interaction  
c) Minimize perceptual mismatches  
d) Activate intuitive heuristics  
e) Foster language awareness  
f) Contextualize linguistic input  
g) Integrate language skills  
h) Promote learner autonomy  
i) Ensure social relevance  
j) Raise cultural consciousness  
     (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 69)

According to the idea of Postmethod Pedagogy, teachers’ knowledge of CLT cannot be fully captured by theoretical knowledge (Woods & Cakir, 2011). To make CLT more useful, teachers in the ‘post-method era’ are recommended to embrace ‘the spirit of CLT’, but to develop procedures appropriate to their own condition and
personalized notion of CLT (Littlewood, 2011). This research, aimed at improving my own CLT via reflection, is highly relevant for understanding beginning teachers’ personalized interpretation of CLT. Furthermore, by proposing the second operating principle of *Postmethod Pedagogy* as *practicality*, Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 69) especially encourages teachers to “theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize”, which is highly consistent with the spirit of action research and reflective teaching. In this sense, the current research, which adopts action research and reflective teaching as the approach for a beginning teacher to improve CLT in the real classroom is appropriate and significant.

2.1.2 CLT for teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages

The history of using CLT in teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages is not long. Nevertheless, it is argued that CLT is especially suitable for this purpose. The reason is that compared with other languages, the Chinese language has a less complex inflection of nouns, verbs, pronouns and adjectives, which means sophisticated grammar knowledge is not a prerequisite for communication in the target language. Hence, communicative tasks are not only applicable to intermediate and high level learners, but also to beginning learners (Xiao, 2005). Considering this, it is likely to be appropriate to apply CLT in my classroom in which I teach Chinese as a foreign language to beginning learners. CLT has also been adopted by some of my colleagues whose research will be introduced in the following paragraphs.

There are two different forms of teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages: Teaching Chinese as Second Language (TCSL) and Teaching Chinese as Foreign
Language (TCFL). The distinction is based on the language environment in which the target language is to be used. TCSL takes place within a Chinese-speaking environment, while TCFL occurs in a non-Chinese-speaking environment (Ma, 2011). The recognition of different learning environments raises concerns about the appropriateness of CLT in different contexts. Second language teaching is regarded as more compatible with CLT as it is designed to facilitate involvement in the local community. However, it is considered that in foreign language teaching, with no immediate communicative needs, the appropriateness of CLT depends on learning outcomes specified in local syllabuses. If accuracy of language use is put at a higher priority than fluency, CLT may be improper (Ellis, 2006). On the contrary, if fluency is thought more important, CLT is still deemed as the best option as it can compensate for the lack of communicative opportunities outside school by exploiting communicative potential inside the classroom (Ellis, 2009).

This research is situated in a TCFL context since Chinese is learnt by local students as a school subject in Australia where there are many fewer speakers of Chinese than of English. The use of CLT for TCFL in this project is consistent with the Chinese syllabus in NSW, which specifies “using language for effective interaction” as one of the primary objectives (NSW Board of Studies, 2003). Two previous pieces of research are worth reviewing here. They were conducted by two Masters’ students in the same program and the same context in which I am working and researching, i.e., where Chinese was also taught as a foreign language through CLT in the schools of the Western Sydney region of the NSW DEC. These pieces of research will be reviewed in the following paragraphs with a focus on the actual implementation of CLT.
The first is a study of a beginning teacher’s own learning and using of CLT while teaching Chinese in schools. It was identified that a high level of motivation, good relationships between learners and the teacher, small class size and technological support contributed to the more successful implementation of CLT. On the other hand, the implementation of CLT in her teaching was constrained by several factors. Firstly, lack of experience in organising CLT activities and in managing students’ behaviour was considered as the biggest obstacle. Secondly, unfamiliarity with students created difficulty for the teacher in preparing sufficiently for lessons. Thirdly, inappropriate preparation made the teacher inflexible. Fourthly, CLT was abandoned by the teacher when it was incompatible with certain objectives such as teaching Chinese calligraphy. It is also found that CLT was more successful in senior high school classes than in junior high school classes. (Zhang, 2010) Similar obstructive factors, such as lack of experience, unfamiliarity with students and inflexibility of teaching were also observed in this study. However, unlike other teachers who abandon CLT due to ‘incompatibility’, I was inclined to solve the problem and adapt CLT via reflective teaching and thus worked to improve the outcome of CLT in my classroom.

Another teacher-researcher in the same context investigated beginning Chinese teachers’ perspectives and practices of CLT through semi-structured interviews and self-reflection. The findings were presented in a substantial theory which explained the process of applying knowledge of CLT into practice as follows:
Here, it is argued that teachers’ perspectives about CLT involve three dimensions, namely, an epistemic dimension (*understanding CLT*), a perceptual dimension (*perceiving CLT*) and a situational dimension (*situating CLT*). The *epistemic dimension* is the knowledge of CLT acquired from training. The *perceptual dimension* is the understanding of CLT, which includes the teachers' interpretation of CLT. The *situational dimension* involves how CLT is situated in the classroom, which includes the preferences of the students and the objectives of teaching.
dimension is teachers’ attitudes towards CLT. The situational dimension is the adaption of CLT to an actual situation. In terms of the epistemic dimension, it was found that CLT was not comprehensively understood or even was misunderstood by beginning teachers. For example, CLT was conceived of as teaching speaking and listening or ‘using fun activities’. With regard to the perceptual dimension, teachers demonstrated different attitudes towards CLT. Teachers may have favoured it because of their own past learning experience. They chose a non-CLT approach if they regarded a CLT approach as incompatible with teaching objectives, such as teaching culture. CLT was also rejected when learners were reluctant to engage in communicative processes. To make CLT more feasible, three major strategies were used, namely ‘promoting learning’, ‘adapting self’ and ‘maintaining the status quo’ with practices as follows:

- Promoting learning
  1) Creating a comfortable environment e.g. interesting topics
  2) Reducing learning difficulties
     — Simplifying learning content e.g. teach vocabulary and simple sentences
     — Using clear instructions e.g. explicit explanation of the grammatical rules, use of body language
- Adapting self
  — Lower expectations, or change teaching objectives e.g. develop interests
- Maintaining the status quo
  — Use non-CLT practice e.g. mechanical drills

It was pointed out that many of these adaptations actually resulted in practices which were in conflict with the principles of CLT. (Liao, 2011)
As with other teachers, my perspective about CLT, as reflected in the current study, originated from the three dimensions outlined above: I acquired knowledge of CLT from training (understanding CLT); I favoured it due to my positive experience of learning English as a second language through a communicative approach (perceiving CLT). I contextualized CLT in my situation of teaching Chinese as a foreign language to Australian primary students (situating CLT). Situating CLT occurred in this study through reflective teaching. As the purpose of this study it to improve CLT for improved student learning outcomes, my situating CLT focused on ‘promoting learning’ and ‘adapting self’ rather than ‘maintaining the status quo’.

Several suggestions have been generated for implementing CLT in teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages. Firstly, it is suggested that exposure to communication in real social situations should be maximised. It is often said by learners that it is more difficult to understand other Chinese people’s speech than the teacher’s speech in Chinese. According to some authors, the reason lies in lack of sufficient exposure to the real environment. Hence, incorporating real world experiences into the curriculum has increasingly been recognised as an urgent need for improving students’ learning outcomes. Considering that it is hard for teachers to organise a large number of communicative activities in a real context, an alternative is to establish an inspection system to promote and assess students’ natural acquisition of the target language outside the classroom. For example, learners at the elementary level may be asked to tell what Chinese they have heard in daily life. For intermediate or high level learners, teachers may ask them to interview Chinese people by using language learned in the classroom and then to report responses as well as problems which occurred during the interview to the whole class in the next
lesson. Secondly, in order to lead them into real communication as soon as possible, it is suggested that teachers should help learners to overcome the psychological problems of being afraid of talking with others in Chinese. (Jia, 2005)

2.2 Teacher reflection

2.2.1 What is teacher reflection?

Reflection has been frequently discussed in teaching and teacher education. However, there has been little consensus about the definition of reflection. In the following paragraphs, different interpretations of reflection are presented around four issues, namely:

- Reflective thinking versus reflective action
- Time frames within which reflection takes place
- Reflection and problem solving
- Critical reflection which takes account of wider historic, cultural and political values or beliefs

(Hatton & Smith, 1995)

Secondly, the question of how to reflect will be answered by exploring the characteristics of effective reflection and some current models of reflection.

The roots of teacher reflection can be traced back to Dewey’s *How we think: a restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educational process* and to Schon’s *The reflective practitioner*. Dewey focuses on reflective thinking and defines it as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge which includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality” (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). Reflective thought under
this definition has also been interpreted as “a chain of logical ordering of an idea or event in which the units of thought are cumulatively linked together” (Amobi, 2006, p. 29). Dewey also uses the term ‘reflective action’ for addressing the implementation of ideas generated by reflective thinking into practice. Hence, what is emphasised in Dewey’s concept is the cycle of action and reflection for improving teaching practices.

In addition, there are other definitions of reflection which emphasise thinking about action. For instance, Hatton and Smith (1995, p. 10) define reflection simply as “deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement”. Korthagen and Wubbels (1995, p. 55) define reflection as “a mental process of structuring or restructuring an experience, a problem or existing knowledge or insights”. This definition shares a common notion with Dewey’s idea that reflection is done by framing and reframing a teaching action or experience (Amobi, 2006). Framing is the process by which teachers interpret and organise classrooms, as well as guide their teaching practice based on “their past experiences and their previous efforts to make sense of those experiences”. Teachers reframe their situation when they “deliberately change the way they are looking at a situation”. (Killen, 2006, p. 90) Framing and reframing are also considered as an integral part of reflection by Schon (1987; 1983) who emphasizes that professionals should learn to frame and reframe problems they face, test out various interpretations, and modify their results. Nevertheless, unlike Dewey’s cyclical idea of reflective thinking and action, Schon’s ‘reflection-in-action’ implies that framing and reframing occur simultaneously with teaching.
It will be noticed from the above discussion that whether reflection is bound up in action actually depends on the timing of framing and reframing. Time frames are first introduced by Schon who distinguishes reflection-in-action from reflection-on-action. Reflection-on-action refers to “the process of making sense of an action after it has occurred, and possibly learning something from the experience, which in turn extends one’s knowledge base” (Husu, Toom & Patrikainen, 2008, p.39). In other words, framing and reframing occurs after ‘doing’. Reflection-in-action, on the other hand, involves simultaneous framing and reframing and doing. Therefore, some scholars such as Killen (2006, p. 91) considers reflection-in-action as requiring a much higher level of “mental processing capacity to get outside the act of generation of the performance and to watch its effects and evaluate them”, which is usually absent in early career teachers. In addition to contemporaneous reflection (reflection-in-action) and retrospective reflection (reflection-on-action), Eraut (1995) contributes a third form of reflection, namely, reflection-for-action, which is anticipatory by its nature. In reflection-for-action, the practitioners define their aspirations and purposes for subsequent action (Husu et al., 2008). Teacher reflection here is considered as “a way of relating to the world and a basis for understanding and responding to experiences”, which should integrate all these three forms into an “ongoing process of reflection before, during and after teaching action, revolving around the teacher’s reflecting self” (Husu et al., 2008, p.39). In Eraut’s redefinition of these propositions, in refers to context, on refers to focus, and for refers to purpose (Eraut, 1995).

Despite there being differences in the time frames and focus between the definitions listed above, problem-solving seems to be an inherent characteristic. For example, in
terms of Dewey’s concept, teachers formulate solutions to problematic situations through careful and structured thought (Tauer & Tate, 1998). With regard to Schon’s model, regardless of whether reflection happens during or after the action, both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are directed towards the solutions of problematic situations. However, it is argued that certain approaches labelled as ‘reflective’ currently do not deliberately aim at problem-solving. What these approaches encourage is merely reaction, instead of reflection on a real situation (Hatton & Smith, 1995).

Finally, shifting the focus of reflection beyond the application of professional knowledge towards critical reflection, which locates the analysis of personal action within wider historical, cultural and political contexts, is becoming a major concern in some interpretations of reflection. Most of these interpretations make use of a hierarchy to describe the components of reflection. A representative work is Van Manen’s (1977) three level reflection summarized by Killen (2006, p. 89) as follows:

- **Technical reflection**: which is concerned with the technical application of educational knowledge in the classroom to maintain order and to achieve predetermined outcomes; reflective skills are developed and used to improve the application of research-based knowledge.
- **Practical reflection**: concerned with goals, the connections between principles and practice, the assumptions that underlie their practices, and the value of their goals
- **Critical reflection**: concerned with issues beyond the classroom, so that moral and social issues such as equity and emancipation can inform their reflections on classroom practices

Another example is the ‘onion model’ proposed by Korthagen & Vasalos (2005) as follows:
There are six levels of reflection in this model:

- **Environment** (refers to everything that the teacher encounters outside herself)
- **Behaviour** (both less effective behaviour, such as an irritated response and other—possibly more effective—behaviours)
- **Competencies** (e.g. the competency to respond in a constructive manner)
- **Beliefs** (e.g. novice teachers often assume that pupils are testing them)
- **Professional identity** (what kind of teacher she wants to be)
- **Mission** (what inspires her, and what gives meaning and significance to her work or her life)

(Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, pp. 52-53)

Promoting ‘reflection’ to the level of ‘mission’, actually takes into account “the experience of being part of meaningful wholes and in harmony with superindividual units such as family, social group, culture and cosmic order” (Boucouvalas, 1988, 57-58).

Furthermore, some authors consider reflection as a dynamic and evolving process by using stage theories to link different levels of reflection. The central idea is that teachers adopt a different type of reflection at different stages of their development.
For example, Tauer and Tate (1998) relate Sparks-Langer’s three approaches to reflection—the *narrative approach*, the *cognitive approach* and the *critical approach*—to teacher development. They state that at the beginning of their teaching career, teachers adopt *narrative reflection* which “emphasizes teachers’ interpretations of the context in which their decisions are made and the validity of their judgements drawn from their own experiences” (Tauer & Tate, 1998, p. 146). Teachers at this stage are said to be a *Reflective Person* who is seeking to redefine herself as a teacher in order to survive every school day without failure. Journal writing is often used by these teachers to record their individual expression of thoughts and ideas. When a satisfactory image of self-as-teacher and routine classroom procedures have been established, teachers switch to *cognitive reflection* in which thought is concentrated on teachers’ own teaching practices in relation to effective teaching defined by research. By doing this, they shift their interest from self towards optimizing student learning. These teachers, whose teaching practices are informed by pedagogical and subject matter knowledge, are called *Reflective Technicians*. Instruments employed at this stage include microteaching and peer coaching. After teaching skills have matured, teachers may engage in *critical reflection* to consider the role of education in contributing to a better society, hence, becoming *Reflective Citizens*. Sharing of individual thoughts via group discussion is regarded as essential at this stage (Tauer & Tate, 1998). In addition to these, Hatton and Smith contribute a developmental taxonomy which includes three types of reflection. Firstly, the model starts with technical rationality in order to prepare oneself for entering the teaching career. The focus at this early stage is on the teacher herself and the teaching task. Then, this moves to a second stage which is *reflection-on-action*. *Reflection-on-action* in this model is subdivided into three forms, each of
which can be related to Sparks-Langer’s three approaches to reflection. The ordering of these three forms in the developmental taxonomy is as follows:

**descriptive reflection**: analysing one’s performance in the professional role, giving reasons for actions taken  
**dialogic reflection**: hearing one’s own voice, exploring alternative ways to solve problems in a professional situation  
**critical reflection**: thinking about the effects upon others of one’s action, taking account of social, political and cultural forces.

(Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 18)

The issues for reflecting on here are the teaching task and the impact of education on society. Finally, the developmental taxonomy ends up with a third stage which is *reflection-in-action*. The major concern at this stage is the impact of education on the wider social context. It can be noticed that Hatton and Smith’s taxonomy is different from that of Tauer and Tate for two reasons. Firstly, the whole of Tauer and Tate’s model is actually embedded in the second stage of Hatton and Smith’s taxonomy. Secondly, there is an overlap of concern between the different stages in Hatton and Smith’s taxonomy, but not in Tauer and Tate’s model.

Some other researchers demonstrate that different kinds of reflection should be viewed as mutually reinforcing parts, instead of an increasingly desirable hierarchy. Valli (1997, p. 75; 1990, pp. 219-221) outlined six types of reflection that should all be attended to:

- Technical rationality: directing one’s actions through a straightforward application of research on teaching  
- Reflection-in-action  
- Reflection-on-action  
- Deliberative reflection: weighing competing claims or viewpoints  
- Personalistic reflection: teacher’s voice, personal growth, and professional relations  
- Critical reflection: social and political implications of teaching and schooling, including the ‘possibility that schools are implicated in perpetuating an unjust social order’
Reflection in the current study attended to more technical rationality, reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, deliberative reflection, personalistic reflection, but less on critical reflection. This is because as a beginning teacher-researcher, I focused more on improving the teaching outcomes of CLT within the current educational system in NSW. Likewise, Zeichner and Tabachnick (2001, p. 74) emphasise that all four traditions of reflective teaching practice should be brought into focus since none are sufficient by themselves. These four traditions are:

- An academic version that stresses the representation and translation of subject matter knowledge to promote student understanding
- A social efficiency version that emphasizes the thoughtful application of particular teaching strategies that have been suggested by research on teaching
- A developmentalist version that prioritizes teaching that is sensitive to students’ interests, thinking, and patterns of developmental growth
- A social reconstructionist version that stresses reflection about the social and political context of schooling and assessment of classroom actions for their ability to contribute toward greater equity, social justice and humane conditions in schooling and society

It is claimed that distinguishing critical reflection from other forms of reflection, especially those of a technical nature, is to some extent based on two different views of education, namely, a technicist view and a liberatory view. The technicist view treats teachers as “technicians who have developed certain specifiable skills and who can produce pre-determined learning outcomes in students”, while the liberatory view sees education as “an agent of social change and teachers are innovative professionals whose competence goes well beyond simply having a set of specific, identifiable technical skills” (Gilbert, 1994, p. 514). Based on this, technicist reflection focuses on technical aspects of teaching while liberatory reflection concentrates on moral, ethical, political and social factors that influence teaching.
Apart from these, there are several benchmarks for assessing whether a teacher is reflective. The most fundamental benchmarks seem to be four criteria derived from Dewey’s concept of reflection:

1. Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible, and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society. It is a means to essentially moral ends.
2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry.
3. Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others.
4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others.  
   (Rodgers, 2002, p. 845)

The first criterion clarifies that the function of reflection is to make meaning of experiences. This is realized through reconstruction and reorganization of experience to formulate “the relationships and continuities among the elements of an experience, between that experience and other experiences, between that experience and the knowledge that one carries, and between that knowledge and the knowledge produced by thinkers other than oneself.” (Rodgers, 2002, p. 848)

Therefore, it is asserted that the reflective teacher should not only seek solutions, but also needs to identify connections between solutions to derive a theory which will inform, and be informed by, future practice. In terms of the second criteria, reflection based on scientific inquiry involves six phases, namely:

1. An experience
2. Spontaneous interpretation of the experience
3. Naming the problem or the question
4. Generating possible explanations
5. Ramifying selected hypotheses
6. Experimentation

   (Rodgers, 2002, p. 855)
Thirdly, the rationale for collaborative reflection includes avoidance of missing valuable experience, broadening understanding and increasing accountability. With regard to the fourth criteria, the attitudes that need to be cultivated are: whole-heartedness (genuine enthusiasm to learn), directness (free from preoccupation), open-mindedness (willingness to embrace alternative views), responsibility (considering the consequences) and readiness (readiness to engage in reflection).

Davis (2006) distinguishes productive reflection from unproductive reflection based on two characteristics, namely, integration and analysis. Firstly, productive reflection has to integrate four aspects of teaching: learners and learning, subject matter knowledge, assessment and instruction. Secondly, productive reflection must be analytic by “providing reasons for decisions, giving evidence for claims, generating alternatives, questioning assumptions, identifying the results of one’s teaching decisions, and evaluating (rather than simply judging)” (Davis, 2006, p. 283).

MacKinnon (1986) stated that reflective teachers should be able to reframe the problem situation, view classroom phenomena from different perspective, change conclusions, and understand the students’ position by referring to their own experience of being students. The generic attributes of a reflective student teacher were summarised by Korthagen and Wubbels (1991, p. 7) as:

- Capable of structuring situations and problems and considers it important to do so
- Uses certain standard questions when structuring experiences
- Has no trouble answering questions about what he or she wants to learn (about teaching)
- Adequately describes and analyses his or her functioning in interpersonal relationships with others

Pollard and Tan (1993) provided a more detailed list of the characteristics of reflective teachers which are summarised by Killen (2006, p. 94) as follows:
• Active concern with aims and consequences, as well as means and technical efficiency
• Follow a cycle of monitoring, evaluating and revising their practice continuously
• Competent at gathering evidence from their classrooms to support the development of their teaching competence.
• Open-minded, responsible, dedicated, energetic and enthusiastic
• Make judgements that are informed by self-reflection, by evidence-based inquiry and by insights from educational disciplines (theory)
• Enhance their professional learning and personal fulfilment through collaboration and dialogue with colleagues
• Able to interpret, imaginatively adapt and enhance the requirements of external agencies

In terms of models of reflection, there are a wide variety of other alternatives besides Dewey’s six phases. Firstly, some researchers think of reflection as a three-step process. For example, Laboskey (1993) described it as: problem definition, means/ends analysis, generalization. Another example of a three-step model involves description, comparison and criticism (Akbari, 2007). At the descriptive stage, teachers are required to specify the focus of their reflection with regard to aspects of classroom practice. Then, at the comparison stage, teachers develop comprehensive understanding of teaching through comparing their own ideas with others. It is at the critical stage that teachers evaluate alternatives and make decisions about how to address the problem in their own situation. Additionally, according to Ross and Bruce (2007), reflection occurs through self-assessment, which consists of self-observation, self-judgement and self-reaction. Self-observation focuses on aspects of instruction; self-judgement is concerned with how well goals were met; self-reaction involves interpreting the degree of goal attainment with respect to how satisfied teachers are with the outcomes of their instruction.

Secondly, reflection can be modelled as a four-step process. For instance, it is identified that four processes are essential to critical reflection, namely:
1) **Assumption analysis**: makes explicit our taken-for-granted notions of reality
2) **Contextual awareness**: we realize that our assumptions are socially and personally created in a specific historical and cultural context
3) **Imaginative speculation**: challenge prevailing ways of knowing and acting by imagining alternative ways of thinking about phenomena
4) **Reflective scepticism**: questioning of any universal truth claims or unexamined patterns of interaction

(Pine, 2009, p. 182)

Some literature suggests the use of Smyth’s four-stage learning cycle which emphasises a sustained critical form of teaching as the basis of reflection. The cycle is briefly as follows: 1. Describing (What do I do?) 2. Informing (What does this description mean?) 3. Confronting (How did I come to be like this?) 4. Reconstructing (How might I do things differently?) (Day, 1993, p. 225).

Thirdly, Korthagen & Vasalos (2005) provided a five-phase model in order to facilitate **core reflection**—referring to reflection at the level of professional identity and mission. Like other models, firstly, the core reflection is initiated by an experience or problematic situation. Then, the identification of the problem leads to the second phase in which a teacher develops awareness of a **core discrepancy** (i.e. a tension that touches the very core of the individual) by asking two questions, namely, ‘What is the situation the teacher wants to achieve?’ and ‘What are the limiting factors preventing the achievement of that ideal situation?’ An example of a teacher who experiences core discrepancy may be a beginning teacher who on the one hand wants to feel self-confident and relaxed in the classroom, but on the other hand holds a limiting belief that this can only achieved by an experienced teacher. In the third stage, teachers are required to be aware of **core qualities** (e.g. empathy, compassion, love, flexibility, courage, creativity, sensitivity, decisiveness, spontaneity) needed for overcoming limiting factors and thus achieving an ideal situation. Following this is
phase four in which core qualities must be actualised. Finally, new behaviour will be experimented with, which then triggers the next cycle of core reflection. A major difference between core reflection and other models is that for most models, identifying limiting factors is enough for explaining the situation while core reflection goes one step further to core qualities. The logic behind this is that qualities which come ‘from the inside’ are more powerful than competencies acquired ‘from the outside’ to bring about desirable changes. Hence, core reflection is a process whereby the inner levels determine how a teacher functions at outer levels, but also with the influence moving from outside to inside.

![Phase model of core reflection](Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 54)

Figure 2.4 Phase model of core reflection (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 54)

Writing assignments such as journals, diaries, and autobiographies are widely used as a medium to develop reflective teaching. Writing is believed to be an integral part of reflection for the following reasons. Firstly, it provides space for teachers to record
their thoughts and experiences. This enables teachers to stand outside the experience and reflect on the experience objectively when they go back to the journal later (McGarr & Moody, 2010). Secondly, it serves as a safe outlet for personal concerns and frustrations (Spalding, Wilson & Mewborn, 2002). Thirdly, writing about one’s own experiences promotes self-understanding which may contribute to the establishment of professional identity (McGarr & Moody, 2010). Fourthly, a more important reason mentioned by many researchers is that writing tasks, in which teachers become aware of their own conceptualisation of teaching and then compare and contrast it with other alternatives, encourages teachers to make meaning of their own experiences and elicit personal theories (Akbari, 2007; Freese, 2006; Tann, 1993). This is closely related to Dewey’s first criterion for reflection which highlights the creation of meaning out of experience. Also, the process of eliciting personal theories cultivates skills required for reflection, namely, problematising, hypothesising, extracting and being ready to test new ideas in future practice (Tann, 1993). However, writing tasks can prevent, instead of promote, reflection. This may be caused by the use of writing assignments as part of assessment for teachers. In this context, considering the intended audience, teachers tend to depict a favourable but inauthentic image of themselves. Additionally, a writing task is not always conducive to the reflection of teachers with limited writing skills to elaborate their own ideas (McGarr & Moody, 2010). Furthermore, there seems to be recognition that writing assignments are necessary but not sufficient for reflection. Teachers need to be taught to reflect. Without instruction, they may just stick with descriptive writing i.e. a description of events which is not reflective at all (Hatton & Smith, 1995).
To upgrade writing to the level of reflection, researchers provide suggestions such as the following. Firstly, teachers must be encouraged to move beyond description (Davis, 2006). Modelling the difference between narrative and reflection is a necessary part of instruction (Amobi, 2006). Secondly, thinking about learning processes, learners and content should be evident in their writing (Davis, 2006). Thirdly, ideas should be logically integrated (Davis, 2006). Fourthly, writing must be linked with content and context (Amobi, 2006). Fifthly, teachers should be allowed to express their thoughts with graphic representations to incorporate non-verbal and personalised ways of reflection (Amobi, 2006). Sixthly, the use of reflective prompts such as “What did you intend to do in this lesson?” “What did you do?” “What would you do differently if you were to teach the lesson again?” are recommended (Amobi, 2006).

2.2.2 Teacher reflection for teachers’ professional development

Reflection has been quite prominent in discussions of teachers’ professional development for many years. It is appreciated as an essential mechanism to produce effective teachers. Generally, it may help teachers to learn in the following ways:

- To review a process, such as a teaching episode, to see whether it achieved its intended outcomes
- To make one’s learning explicit
- To complete the learning cycle for each incident in one’s own life
- To give a more considered response to an event
- To achieve meaning and understanding
- To add value to self and to performance
- To help move teachers from novice to expert

(Killen, 2006, p. 93)
Three metaphors were used to describe how reflection makes sense of teachers’ experience through inspiring thinking about oneself, the impact of oneself on the environment, and overarching issues embedded in the larger context:

- **Reflection as a mirror**: helps you to understand yourself, your values, your assumptions and your biases, and to see how your experience has helped you learn more about these dimensions of yourself
- **Reflection as microscope**: helps you to understand how your individual activities impact your students, other people, yourself and your work as a whole
- **Reflection as binoculars**: helps you identify larger issues that surround the work in which you are engaged. It can expand your vision and understanding of overarching issues, causes, effects and impacts and help you to envision future developments and to change future behaviours, attitudes and decisions.

(Pine, 2009, p. 182)

There are a number of other detailed explanations of how professional growth occurs through reflection. Firstly, reflection is considered as having the potential to transition student teachers from an academic program to the professional sector by facilitating change at three levels, namely, professional identity, mission and metacognition (Frick, Carl & Beets, 2010). The development of *professional identity* is said to be mainly concerned with teachers’ curriculum knowledge, understanding about learning and professional attitudes, while *mission* relates to pedagogical content knowledge, understanding learners, classroom management and establishing a community. In terms of *metacognition*, it is argued that reflection enables a teacher to become a “self-regulated learner capable of knowing how and when to use their knowledge constructed in the previous two levels” (Frick et al., 2010). Enhanced *metacognition* fosters recognition, evaluation and revision of personal views, which in turn results in teacher changes in attitudes, perceptions, conceptions and abilities. It is when students experience their teacher’s attitudinal and functional development...
that they really begin to improve their own metacognition and become better engaged in learning activities (Baird et al., 1991).

Secondly, reflection is claimed to bridge the gap between theory and practice by viewing practitioners as producers of knowledge, which enables teachers to consider problems which may add to their knowledge of teaching from a practitioner view. Traditional professional learning is considered as confined to the acquiring of received knowledge, referring to:

…vocabulary of the subject and the matching concepts, research findings, theories and skills which are widely accepted as being part of the necessary intellectual content of the profession. So, currently, it might be accepted that a skilled language teacher will be able (among many other things) to speak the target language to a reasonable degree of fluency, to organise pair and group work, to read a simple phonetic transcription, to be familiar with certain grammatical terms and so on. (Wallace, 1991, p. 14)

Teachers are usually required to implement received knowledge without having significant influence on it. According to Akbari (2007), this leads to the ‘gap’ between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’. Consequently, teachers can no longer resort to theories alone to understand the increasing complexity of the classroom. It is argued that the incongruence between theory and practice may be addressed by giving value to the idea of teachers-as-learners which encourages teachers to continuously construct and renew their knowledge in practice. This leads to the discussion of another kind of professional knowledge, namely, experiential knowledge which is derived from learning by doing. Schon named this kind of knowledge knowledge-in-action. By reflecting on experiential knowledge, personal theories can be generated to solve problems arising from an individual teacher’s unique position (Convery, 1998). The essence of reflection in this context is the promotion of practical knowledge, to the level of theory (Akbari, 2007). Korthagen and Kessels’ theory
(1999, p. 7) provides a more detailed explanation about how this happens. Firstly, reflection on factors that guide actions helps teachers recognise the elements of their own *Gestalts* (unity of feelings, values, needs, meanings, and behavioural predispositions). Then, analysing *Gestalts* contributes to the development of situation-specific knowledge of teaching. This kind of knowledge, which is more perceptual than conceptual by its nature, is called *phronesis*. After that, further reflection on *phronesis* may result in the logical ordering of elements and relations, as well as the development of definitions and propositions. These can be referred to as *episteme* which is theory-level knowledge.

An alternative explanation for the process of making personal theories explicit through reflection is Zeichner and Liston’s (1996, pp. 44-47) five-level approach:

- **Rapid reaction**: something happens, and a teacher reacts instinctively. The teacher’s response is immediate in reflection and action
- **Repair**: the teacher pauses to think about what happened and may try to repair the situation
- **Review**: the teacher takes time out (hours or days) to assess the situation
- **Research**: the teacher systematically researches the situation in all its forms
- **Retheorize and research**: the teacher rethinks the situation in view of what the teacher discovered in the previous four levels of reflection and engages in long-term reflection while looking at what others have done.

Nevertheless, personal theories are by no means crystallised. According to Rogers (2002), if personal theories are no longer applicable to new problems, they are subject to revision through more reflection. Hence, reflection is said to aim at the integration of theory and practice by encouraging formulation, as well as refinement, of teachers’ personal theories. The reflective model of professional development has been illustrated by Wallace (1991) as follows:
Figure 2.5 Reflective model of professional development (Wallace, 1991, p. 15)

Even though reflection is widely adopted in teacher professional learning, some authors argue that many of the forms of reflection are not as effective as they appear to promise. It is commonly reported that what teachers actually do is merely description rather than reflection. Also, it is maintained that most teachers are unable to shift their concern from classroom management to broader historical, socio-political and moral contexts of schooling (Spalding et al., 2002). As a result, some researchers believe that “it is good to reflect, but reflection itself also requires reflection” (Akbari, 2007, p. 205).

According to some authors, disappointing results on reflective teaching can be partially attributed to a number of conceptual problems. Firstly, the term reflection is open to a wide variety of interpretations. The major confusion lies in the “tension between Schon’s notion of practitioner-based intuition, on the one hand, and Dewey’s notion of rational and scientific thinking, on the other” (Fendler, 2003, p. 17). Unclarified definitions may even lead to the misunderstanding that merely keeping a journal is reflective practice, since it is as yet unclear what qualifies as evidence of reflection. Measuring, and comparing and sharing experiences or the
outcomes of reflective teacher education is unlikely to happen without a clear consensus of what we mean by reflection (Rodgers, 2002).

Secondly, most stress is placed on retrospective reflection-on-action, which is criticised for disregarding a teachers’ imagination to foresee future possibilities or address problems creatively (Akbari, 2007). Moreover, reflection-in-action is under scrutiny. There is doubt that reflection-in-action, by concentrating attention on immediate responses to new problems, limits reflection to a technical level and neglects the opportunity to question the assumptions and ends guiding practice. Thereby, it may actually generate reaction instead of reflection. Even worse, it is stated that lacking a stress on collaboration with others, Schon’s conceptions of reflection allow the growth of self-protective individualism which hinders professional development: teachers refuse to change or even use reflection as a defence mechanism to rationalise and justify their practice (Convery, 1998). Nowadays, a significant numbers of authors call for the sharing of responsibilities for professional development in which teachers are required to challenge but also support each other (Day, 1993; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Ross & Bruce, 2007).

Thirdly, specifying teacher development as the ultimate goal of reflection is to some extent considered as problematic. It is said that narrowing a teacher’s thinking to self-improvement reduces the possibility of critically reflecting on broader social factors. To stimulate critical reflection, it is crucial to go one step further by clarifying that the outcome of teacher development should be a better society (Akbari, 2007).
It is further argued by some authors that current approaches to reflection are insufficient to stimulate professional learning. Firstly, they claimed that despite extensive literature on teacher reflection, there is a lack of published empirical evidence to convince teachers that engaging in reflection will result in enhanced student learning outcomes. The correlation between teacher reflection and students’ learning outcomes is usually implicitly described by a couple of sentences without the support of more persuasive data. This problem may be because teachers who have empirical evidence have no access to publication. Secondly, it is found that teachers have not been taught how to identify problems in day-to-day practice. Without training, it is considered to be very difficult for teachers to “look at their journals as a defamiliarisation process where known events are viewed from a novel perspective” (Akbari, 2007, p. 199). Thirdly, reflection introduced at an early stage of teacher development is considered as ineffective, since early career teachers are mainly concerned with day-to-day survival and unable to take effective action. It can even be counter-productive if reflection leads to low self-confidence. Fourthly, it is argued that the assumption that teachers are not reflective unless they follow models specified by academia reduces reflection to “a set of techniques” rather than treating it as a “high-order cognitive/affective/socially conscious activity”, and also ignores teachers’ individuality (Akbari, 2007, p. 201). It is maintained that the undue overemphasis on techniques for reflection results in less attention on the content of reflection. Consequently, insufficient emotional and cognitive reflection directed at self (defined as a composite of images, beliefs and experiences that determine the way teachers regard themselves both as human beings and professionals) negatively affects teachers’ self-improvement as well as professional development (Akbari, 2007). A further issue proposed is that teacher reflection is so local that it cannot

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influence the wider teaching community. Even though the primary purpose of reflection is to solve local problems, reflection which does not explore the relationship between theory and practice is not counted as high-quality reflection (Valli, 1993). If teachers adopt reflection only based on practical knowledge, teacher development seems to be restricted to a technical level and teaching is reduced to a trial-and-error process. An important reason for ignoring the relation between theory and practice may be attributed to a lack of emphasis on propositional knowledge in existing reflective teaching models:

Models that prescribe reflective practice may unintentionally underplay the need for novice L2 teachers to study language, learning and pedagogy explicitly in their preparation courses. (Hedgcock, 2002, p. 300)

There are other explanations provided for teachers’ reluctance to reflect. Firstly, it is discovered that reflection has not been generally considered as a traditional and compulsory part of teachers’ professional practice. Secondly, it is believed that the demanding nature of teaching leaves no time and energy to develop meta-teaching and meta-cognitive skills necessary for reflection, especially for early career teachers whose first worry is to keep all students on task. Thirdly, identifying a suitable knowledge base as a starting point for reflection is also considered as a problem that needs to be resolved. Fourthly, it is found that teachers encounter psychological difficulty in exposing their perceptions to others. (Hatton & Smith, 1995)

More will be written about teacher reflection in chapter 3 which explains the methodology of this study.
Chapter 3  Overview of methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the use of action research in this research. This includes reviewing literature about action research, explaining the action research design in this research, exploring the theoretical foundation of action research, examining methods used in this research. This chapter reviews major sources of data, issues of validity, reliability and generalisability, ethics and thematic analysis. In terms of the close relationship between the research focus and the procedure of data collection and data analysis, more detailed explanations of these procedures of data collection and data analysis are left to later chapters in which the research focus, data collection and data analysis of particular action research cycles are demonstrated together.

3.1  What is action research?

Action research has been defined as:

Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out. (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 162)

In terms of its application in the field of education, which is a social practice, action research is described as:

Studying a real school situation with a view to improving the quality of actions and results within it; (Mertler, 2009, p.12)

A process of systematic inquiry to provide educational practitioners with new knowledge and understanding, enabling them to improve educational practices or resolve significant problems in classrooms and schools (Stringer, 2008, p. 13)

A systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach and how well their students learn. This information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment (and on educational practices in general), and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved. (Mills, 2007, p. 5)
From these definitions, it could be said that the most notable characteristic of action research lies in its aim to deal with a problematic situation that represents a gap between present reality and an ideal situation, and continuously reflecting on, and improving practice towards that ideal.

Action research is selected as the methodology for this study, which seeks to enhance the quality of foreign language teaching conducted by a beginning teacher aiming at the development of learners’ communicative competence in the target language. The use of action research is justified by its two distinguishing characteristics, namely, its problem-solving orientation and reflexivity. Firstly, one purpose of this study—to improve the teacher-researcher’s language teaching skills—is addressed by the problem-solving orientation of action research reflected in its adaptive and fine-tuning processes, which occur while implementing classroom innovations (Kember, 2000). In much empirical research, modification is prohibited in order to keep conditions constant for the purpose of isolating the independent effect of an intervention on students’ outcomes. The strict and deliberate control of variables limits the research potential to clarification of a problem and the evaluation of the effectiveness of a predetermined solution. In contrast, by using a sustained, intentional, recursive and dynamic action learning approach, action research expands research capacity to the refining of a particular innovation which can lead to the solution of problems (Kember, 2000). This is related to the other characteristic of action research, that is, the reflexivity inherent in the whole action research cycle as well as at every stage of it. Reflexivity is regarded as core to this research as it tries to search for solutions via reflective teaching. Action research facilitates teachers to take a self-reflective, critical and systematic approach to examining their own
practice with reflective rationality. By undertaking action research, the teacher-researcher is actually involved in reflective teaching in which she adapts a teaching strategy with some thoughtful consideration of her own experience of teaching, in combination with the outcome of student learning, as suggested by various data sources. In this sense, the teacher-researcher is not only implementing CLT as received knowledge, but also generating knowledge-in-action and following Wallace’s (1991) reflective model of professional development mentioned earlier in Chapter 2.

Action research has also been specifically recommended for the field of language teaching. Edge (2001a, p.6) states that:

I see the TESOL field as committed to a mode of operation for which the umbrella title, action research, is appropriate…of course, perspectives and foci vary, but the broad sweep of the movement is undeniable.

Richards (2003, p. 236) states that “The most powerful form of research for the beginning researcher in TESOL is action research.” The strength of action research to teachers has been explained by one Australian teacher as it encourages teachers “to reach their own solutions and conclusions and this is far more attractive and has more impact than being presented with ideals which cannot be attained” (Burns, 2010, p. 7). It seems that action research has also become increasingly popular and attractive for language teachers. A few recent examples of action research published in the field of language teaching focus on:

- blog projects in the English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classroom in Japan (Pinkman, 2005)
- teaching cultural sensitivity in the French foreign language classroom (Durocher, 2007)
• socializing teachers to the teaching of English language learners in the UAE (Sowa, 2009)

Action research is more likely to bring about desirable changes in teacher practice than other research methodologies because of several distinguishing characteristics. Firstly, the transformational power of action research lies in its integration of action as an essential part of the whole research process. Compared with other research, action research is regarded as change research, which goes one step further than merely thinking and reporting, as emerging understandings are tested by using them as foundations for new actions:

![Figure 3.1 Action research sequence (Stringer, 2008, p. 6)](image)

The integration of action and research is managed through recursive, spiralling processes which basically involve planning, acting, observing and reflecting in each cycle as follows:
Figure 3.2 Cyclical AR model (Burns, 2010, p. 9)

Action research can be characterised as an ongoing systematic approach to studying a problematic situation as well as a recursive way to take action to change that situation. The results of each cycle inform following cycles but are merely regarded as tentative solutions that are subject to continuing revision based on accumulation of data (Mertler, 2009; Pine, 2009). This ensures that theory and practice are mutually enhanced and continually transformed (Mertler, 2009; Pine, 2009). Reflexivity is another important characteristic of action research, which is of great importance for linking ‘action’ and ‘research’, or ‘theory’ and ‘practice’. Merely implementing new ideas is not sufficient for sustaining a transformative process between theory and practice. It is reflection on the effectiveness of new practice that allows continual improvement to occur (Mertler, 2009). By doing action research, teachers bring their daily teaching into a reflective position and develop self-awareness. However, an
essential difference between action research and teachers’ daily reflection on their own teaching has been highlighted by Burns (2010). Talking and thinking about teaching, which happens almost every day in school staffrooms, is regarded as an ordinary part of teachers’ professional lives. Nevertheless, simply talking and thinking about teaching is not equal to reflective teaching required in action research. In such teaching, teachers are more fundamentally “questioning our teaching routines, our assumptions about our teaching approaches, our learners, our teaching contexts, or the philosophies or values that motivate what we do in the classroom….” (Burns, 2010, p. 15).

Unlike other teachers, reflective teachers do not consider students at the centre of the problem, but view the “learning situation as a whole” (Burns, 2010, p. 16), which encourages them to change their own practice for better student outcomes. Action research is seen as a movement towards reflective teaching by incorporating Schon’s notions of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action into the realms of research (Burns, 2010).

Secondly, action research generates contextualised instead of generalised solutions, which are likely to be more immediately applicable to individual practitioners’ local situations. Unlike other positivist research which controls variables to establish objectivity, action research adopts a subjective approach whereby the dynamics and complications of the local situation are acknowledged and embraced. It is such flexibility that makes adaptation to the local situation possible, thus, addressing an issue of immediate practical and personal concern. Another reason for the much
argued relevance of action research findings is that alteration of practice is grounded on solid information contributed by systematic data collection and analysis, rather than hypothesis (Burns, 2010; Mills, 2007).

Thirdly, action research ensures that research has real impact on practice by involving practitioners as researchers. Essentially, action research is research done by practitioners for themselves, not other outsiders. Incorporating research into the daily practice of practitioners, challenges the separation of the researcher from the researched (Pine, 2009). Practitioners are no longer objects of reform but agents of reform who have control of knowledge generation in their field. It denies reform imposed top-down from outsiders, but instead recognises the power of practitioners to reform the field from the inside. It is empowering and democratic in that practitioners determine their own areas of focus, determine research plans, as well as construct their personal knowledge while learning about the complexity of their practice, and exploring creative solutions to their own problems—all for the purpose of improving a given situation (Mertler, 2009; Pine, 2009).

Action research has been widely employed as a form of professional development characterised as:

…an ongoing process of systematic study in which teachers examine their own teaching and students’ learning through descriptive reporting, purposeful conversation, collegial sharing, and critical reflection for the purpose of improving classroom practice (Pine, 2009, p. 93)

The difference between traditional approaches to professional development and action research may be illustrated by the following framework:
The action research movement constitutes an attempt to solve the problems of traditional approaches to professional development. Firstly, sometimes teachers have no choice but to reject traditional professional development simply because it bears little relevance or immediate application to their own situation (Elliott, 1991). This is partly caused by giving priority to knowledge produced by authors who are external to the teaching-learning situation, which can actually make it less persuasive and authoritative for teachers (Pine, 2009). To avoid this remoteness from teachers’ professional knowledge of the realities of the classroom, action research encourages teachers to investigate their own work by which persuasive data about the impact of an intervention on student learning outcomes can be identified and collected by themselves (Mills, 2007). The supposed irrelevance of many other forms of professional development can also be attributed to the emphasis on propositional knowledge over experiential and practical knowledge. Propositional knowledge, defined as knowing about something, is expressed in statements and theories. This type of knowledge produces generalisations about teaching and learning which disregard the contextual aspects of an individual teacher’s daily practice (Pine, 2009).

Table 3.1 Difference between traditional approaches to professional development and action research (Pine, 2009, p. 95)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Traditional Approaches</th>
<th>Action Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Source of expertise</td>
<td>External authority</td>
<td>Participating practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Locus of knowledge</td>
<td>Formalized outside the context</td>
<td>Located in context and problem situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Experience</td>
<td>Draws from a formalized body of knowledge</td>
<td>Draws from teacher interactions with each other, with learners, and with situational realities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Initiative</td>
<td>Arises from system and administrative problems and priorities</td>
<td>Emerges from teaching and learning situations and needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leadership</td>
<td>Program and school administration</td>
<td>Group-centred leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mode of organization</td>
<td>Individual and passive</td>
<td>Collaboration for engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professional development based on this externally-produced and generalised knowledge constitutes the denial of teachers’ experience and daily practice as sources of expert knowledge with the underlying assumption that teachers should be the recipients of knowledge (Pine, 2009). In contrast, action research highlights the teacher’s role as a producer of knowledge and appreciates experiential knowledge (gained through direct encounter with people, places or things) and practical knowledge (knowing how to do something—demonstrated by a skill or competence) as essential parts of professional development (Pine, 2009, p. 98). Action research resists using theoretical abstraction to simplify the case confronted by teachers, but embraces complexity to develop a holistic and context-bound practical understanding of the situation as a whole (Elliott, 1991). Essentially, it recognises teaching competence as “a matter of intuitive craft knowledge, tacitly acquired through experience” (Elliott, 1991, p. 45) and construction of personal knowledge grounded in the reality of context as an integral part of the development of professional practice (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993; Pine, 2009). Compared with traditional approaches, action research may generate deeper understanding about the dynamics of educational practice in that the product is considered in the light of the process leading to it and vice versa (Elliott, 1991).

Secondly, since action research is derived from an initiative to produce timely, immediate solutions to a given problematic situation, it can be more responsive and tolerant to teachers’ actual needs than traditional approaches (Mertler, 2009). Under an action research approach, teachers are required to develop themselves as long as discrepancies between goals and practices are identified. In this regard, action research also develops teachers’ flexibility and problem-solving skills. It not only
sharpens teachers’ sensitivity to the problems of their practice and their professional judgement to discern the more effective course of action, but also builds up teachers’ research skills (Demircioglu, 2008; Elliott, 1991; Mills, 2007; Pine, 2009). Teachers equipped with research skills are deemed to be more competent in detecting a problem and systematically analysing practice, as well as successfully implementing solutions in the classroom (Demircioglu, 2008).

Thirdly, another attraction of action research lies in the potential change to teachers’ attitudes towards professional development. A top-down approach is common in traditional professional training programs where teachers are required to implement theoretical knowledge delivered to them. This passive pattern of professional development places teachers in a ‘double-bind situation’ where they are blamed for a failure to reach a more ideal model of practice, but on the other hand unable to avoid the blame by merely relying on generalised knowledge which does not tell teachers what could have been done in their particular circumstances (Elliott, 1991). On the contrary, by employing an inquiry-based professional development strategy, action research stimulates teachers’ commitment to learn, since teachers ask questions that are most relevant to their problematic situation and then purposefully and systematically seek answers themselves, which could be expected to yield more feasible solutions than those offered by outsiders (Burns, 2010; Mills, 2007). More importantly, sustained lifelong learning is encouraged as a deliberate reflective stance towards their daily practice and is nurtured while teachers are doing action research. Action research is considered as a tool to manage and formalise reflective teaching, since teachers systematically observe, analyse and interpret information about student learning with thoughtful consideration of theoretical as well as
experiential and practical knowledge, and then use these results as foundations for future planning (Mertler, 2009). It potentially increases teachers’ willingness to critically examine their own teaching with the aim of improving it by developing a conviction that regular involvement in reflection is worth time and energy (Mills, 2007, Pine, 2009). Action research enhances the value of reflection due to the application of the rigour of scientific inquiry with regard to data collection and analysis procedures (Parsons & Brown, 2002).

The validity of action research in bringing about change in Australian schools has been documented. Elliott (2011) shows the experience of St Mary of the Sea College in using practitioner-based action research to build a professional learning community which is characterised by shared leadership, shared commitment to students’ learning, collective learning among staff to address students’ needs, peer visitation and review of classroom behaviour among teachers, regular contact with research supervisors and critical friends from university, as well as material resources and administrative support. Mockler (2011) argues that professional learning which allows teachers to expand and reflect on their practice authentically in context has the power to focus teachers’ attention on new and different dimensions of teaching and thus enhance their professional identity. In a study by Needham (2011), the following changes were attested to by teachers who participated in collaborative action research across schools:

- Developing research skills
- Improving understanding about teaching by looking outside their own context
• Becoming observers of process
• Perceiving themselves as a learner
• Increasing the level of sharing ideas, taking risks, criticizing, being open to other ideas and reflecting
• Increased empowerment of staff
• Improved pedagogy
• Shifting ownership of learning from teachers to students
• Affirming or deepening their values
• Changed values and professional identities
• Students’ voice about learning was heard and respected
• Increased passion and energy which led to excitement and professional fulfilment
• Willingness to share and trust

Lingard (2011) argues that for better quality of school outcomes and opportunities for more disadvantaged young people, collaborative action research across schools is needed to facilitate pedagogical and assessment practices. He further argues that the current NAPLAN and My School regimes in Australia which encourage individual teachers and schools to compete with each other are in conflict with such collaborative action research philosophies.

3.2 Action research as the methodology

The action research cycle used in this study is slightly different from many action research cycles. The major difference lies in the integration of reflective teaching cycles into action research cycles. In order to explain the difference, it is important to
first distinguish these two different cyclical processes. One complete action research cycle involves the following steps:

- strategic planning
- acting (implementing the plan)
- observing
- reflecting (on the results of previous processes) and making new plans for the next cycle

Figure 3.3 One ideal action research cycle (NSW DEC, 2010, p. 3)

For this particular research, activities involved in the four stages of each action research cycle are listed as follows:

- Planning stage:
  — Define research focus for the action research cycle
  — Review additional literature related to specific focus of the action research cycle
— Design reflective teaching cycles and specify plan for data collection and analysis

• Acting stage:
  — Implement the plan of reflective teaching cycles
  — Collect data

• Observing stage:
  — Analyse data

• Reflecting stage:
  — Summarise findings of the action research cycle
  — Identify issues to be investigated in the next action research cycle

In chapter 2, while reviewing literature about teacher reflection, I mentioned Schon’s (1983; 1987) *reflection-in-action*, *reflection-on-action* and Eraut’s (1995) *reflection-for-action*. These three forms of reflection are considered as contemporaneous, retrospective and anticipatory reflections respectively which occur during, after and before action. Inspired by the idea that teacher reflection should be considered as an “ongoing process of reflection before, during and after teaching action, revolving around the teacher’s reflecting self” (Husu et al., 2008, p.39), I have integrated these three forms of reflections as a three-stage cycle into my teaching practice and named this cycle as a reflective teaching cycle. The activities involved in each stage of the reflective teaching cycle are as follows:

• reflection-*for*-action (before lesson)
  — define focus of the lesson
  — plan the lesson

• reflection-*in*-action (during lesson)
  — refine lesson plan in response to problems
• reflection-on-action (after lesson)
  — diagnose the lesson
  — elicit personal knowledge to inform future practice

With regard to the difference between these two cyclical processes, the action research cycle shapes the whole procedure of the study while the reflective teaching cycle is the mode of action for weekly lessons. Reflective teaching cycles will be repeated several times during the acting stage of each action research cycle. Unlike other methodologies, under which the substance of action remains unchanged throughout the whole research, the acting stage in action research is always modified in response to issues emerging. Considering this feature of problem-orientation, reflective teaching cycles, as actions to be implemented, are subject to changes to address the particular focus of an individual action research cycle. Thus, the purpose and content of a reflective teaching cycle are redefined in the planning stage of an individual action research cycle. The relationship between the action research cycle and the reflective teaching cycle can be illustrated in the following graph for the action research cycle of this study:
The development and integration of reflective teaching cycles into the acting stage of an action research cycle to some extent enhances the reflexivity of the action research cycle in that reflection is no longer left until the reflecting stage, but built into the acting stage as well. The difference between reflection in the reflecting stage and in the acting stage may be explained by a parallel with the concepts of summative assessment and formative assessment. Summative assessment is cumulative assessment conducted at the end of a course or program to evaluate student learning outcomes against the pre-determined goals of the course after an instructional phase. In contrast, formative assessment is on-going assessment used as a part of classroom practice to provide information needed for timely adjustment of teaching during an instructional phase. Formative assessment helps teachers modify instruction towards students’ better performance in summative assessment (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007). In the action research cycle for this study, reflection in the
acting stage can be considered as a formative assessment of the teacher-researcher’s own teaching informed by data, while reflection in the reflecting stage may be regarded as a summative assessment of the teacher-researcher’s own teaching and researching throughout the whole cycle. This difference is also in relation to the involvement of the different ‘selves’ of the teacher-researcher in the process. In the acting stages, I work as a teacher to conduct reflective teaching; in the planning, observing and reflecting stages, I work as a researcher to plan the research, analyse data and discuss findings. The ‘teacher-self’ stops at generating reflective journals during the acting stage, to reflect on particular lessons. Then, during the reflecting stage, the one doing the reflection is no longer the ‘teacher-self’, but the ‘researcher-self’ who looks back at these journal entries and rethinks beyond initial ideas recorded in the journal to reflect on teaching and researching as a whole. Since the ‘teacher-self’ is different from the ‘researcher-self’, it is possible for different opinions about the same issues to emerge during the acting and reflecting stages. It is also likely that some issues raised by the ‘researcher-self’ during the reflecting stage may not necessarily be noticed by the ‘teacher-self’ during the acting stage.

The details of the reflective teaching cycles within each action research cycle will be further explained in the following chapters when the design of each individual action research cycle is explored.

3.3 Theoretical foundation of the methodology

According to Crotty (1998), for any research, there are four basic elements, namely, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. Methods refer to the techniques used to collect and analyse data. Methodology, is “the strategy, plan of
action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The *theoretical perspective* is the philosophical stance which grounds the logic and criteria of the methodology. *Epistemology* is the theory of knowledge which informs the theoretical perspective.

In terms of this research, the four elements are as follows:

Subjectivism (epistemology) → Interpretivism (theoretical perspective) → Action research (methodology) → Observation, interview, fieldnotes, reflective journal, student work samples, lesson plans, thematic analysis (methods)

The methodology - action research - has been introduced in the previous section. In the next section, methods will be explained. Subjectivism and interpretivism are dealt with in the following discussion on paradigms.

A paradigm can be thought of as the research’s theoretical research framework which involves “a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research” (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998, p. 22). Natural scientists are positivists who subscribe to a normative paradigm with an objectivist conception of social reality (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). They seek to discover and validate generalisable laws using experiments and quantitative analysis which involve deliberate control and manipulation of variables. However, uniform causality generalised in such artificial conditions is considered as an abstraction of reality and a simplification of social behaviour. This simplification
may make it less powerful for dealing with a research question of the “how” type, like that of this action research, which expects a more elaborated answer about what occurred in social reality. More importantly, what this research strives for is contextualisation of a generic model of pedagogy—just the opposite process of generalisation of universally-applicable rules—tailoring a general model of pedagogy to the researcher’s specific situation. Hence, it is essential for the complexity of classroom practice in reality to be taken into account. To capture the complexity, this action research adopts an interpretive paradigm which employs a subjectivist approach to conceptualise social reality (Cohen, et al., 2007; Mack, 2010).

The first group of assumptions to be reviewed are ontological assumptions which reflect one’s view of the nature of social reality or “what we mean when we say something exists” (Mack, 2010, p. 5). The interpretive paradigm aligns itself in a nominalist position in terms of ontology by arguing that reality is subjective and results from individual consciousness and cognition, rather than objective and external to individuals (Cohen, et al., 2007). Therefore, a single social phenomenon may be interpreted differently from multiple perspectives by multiple people. These different interpretations then give rise to different behaviour in response to a single event. Ontological assumptions inform epistemological assumptions which deal with the theory of knowledge—how to uncover knowledge of social reality or “what we mean when we say we know something” (Mack, 2010, p. 5). As an interpretive paradigm views social reality as being subject to individual interpretation, ‘reality’ cannot be ‘objectively’ observed from the outside. Instead, interpretive researchers
choose to acquire knowledge from inside, through direct experience with the subjects being investigated. These two groups of assumptions may be summarised as follows:

Ontological Assumptions:
- Reality is indirectly constructed based on individual interpretation and is subjective.
- People interpret and make their own meaning of events.
- Events are distinctive and cannot be generalized.
- There are multiple perspectives on one incident.
- Causation in social sciences is determined by interpreted meaning and symbols.

Epistemological Assumptions:
- Knowledge is gained through a strategy that “respects the differences between people and the objects of natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action” (Bryman as cited in Grix, 2004, p. 64).
- Knowledge is gained inductively to create a theory.
- Knowledge arises from particular situations and is not reducible to simplistic interpretation.
- Knowledge is gained through personal experience.

(Mack, 2010, p. 8)

Thirdly, regarding the relationship between human beings and the environment, an interpretive paradigm favours voluntarism since human beings are seen as ‘producers’ instead of ‘products’ of their environment. Fourthly, the interpretive paradigm favours an idiographic methodology which is characterised by a primary emphasis on understanding particular individual experience in a subjective, relativist world. This is in contrast to a nomothetic methodology which is in pursuit of universal laws by analysing the relationships between selected factors. An interpretive paradigm, by empowering the individual to construct meaning, is also to some extent underpinned by constructivism which claims that people construct their own knowledge through interpreting their own experience of the social world (Jonassen, 1991). An interpretive paradigm thus also embraces relativism which “asserts that there is no unique truth, no unique objective reality” (Gellner, 1987, p. 85). Thus, action research is characterised by a respect for individual differences. The multiple
interpretations of reality of the teacher-researcher’s teaching practice are captured by analysing qualitative data collected from different sources as well as accommodating the different ‘selves’ of the teacher-researcher in a four-stage cyclical process. In the acting stages, I prepared, implemented and reflected on Chinese lessons as a practitioner of language education; in the planning, observing and reflecting stages, I planned the research, analysed data and discussed findings as a researcher of language education. In addition to these, there is actually a third self. In the whole process of action research, I acquired practical knowledge about CLT through learning-by-doing as a learner of language education. In an action research cycle, the researcher actively interprets and makes their own meaning of events, and then acts intentionally on the basis of their interpretations. Essentially, the combination of action and research constitutes a strong effort to examine educational practice through the eyes of a participant since the researcher is fully participating in the social activity being investigated as a practitioner. This is grounded in the belief that specific solutions “can be developed only inside the context in which the problem arises and in which the practitioner is a crucial and determining element” (Altrichter et al., 1993, p. 202). The research is a subjective undertaking with a central endeavour to reveal meaningful relationships interpreted by the teacher-researcher in the specific context as well as the consequences of actions informed by these relationships. Theory generated in this action research is emergent from this particular situation where a bilingual beginning teacher teaches Mandarin as a foreign language to young speakers of English in the Western Sydney region. It claims no generalisability and allows teachers in a different situation to make their own judgement about its relationship to their context. Given that the findings of this research are contextually-bounded truth rather than ‘absolute’ truth, it is not reduced
to simplistic statements but rather is supported by thick descriptions to retain the integrity of the practice. Furthermore, a constructivist perspective of knowledge generation is advocated in action research as the teacher-researcher organises herself to learn by doing and thus produce her own knowledge based on practical experience through the cyclical processes.

3.4 Research methods

For the problem-solving orientation of action research, the research methods within the acting stage of each individual research cycle are tailored to the particular focus of that cycle. Hence, I here outline the major data sources, as well as discussing issues of validity, reliability, generalisability and ethics and also discussing a general approach to analysing qualitative data (thematic analysis) in this section. The discussion about the details of data collection and the particular data analysis methods will be left to the design of the individual action research cycles in the following chapters.

3.4.1 Data sources

Data can be collected from at least three standpoints, namely that of the classroom teacher, the teacher-researcher and the students. Classroom teachers are interviewed and asked to undertake outsider observation. Data from the teacher-researcher includes reflective journals, fieldnotes and lesson plans. My students’ learning outcomes will be presented through their work samples.
Outsider observation

The purpose of this action research is to improve the teacher-researcher’s own teaching practice. However, though the teacher-researcher is in a sense the object of research, the teacher-researcher is not the only source of data. Classroom teachers are in a good position to observe my teaching precisely and in some depth. They are able to notice aspects of the lesson that are not easily noticed by me, when my time and energy is mostly consumed by central aspects of the lesson, such as managing students and organising activities. Additionally, evaluations and suggestions from
classroom teachers based on their observation of my teaching are valuable for me to improve my action as a teacher.

**Interviews**

Classroom teachers’ observations of my teaching are also supplemented by my interviewing them. Like outsider observations, the information sought here also includes classroom teachers’ evaluation and suggestions for my teaching.

**Students’ work samples**

Since improving students’ learning outcomes is the ultimate goal of this action research, there needs to be a method to track students’ progress, thus providing a solid information basis for the teacher-researcher to determine what is ‘working’. For the student’s learning this is done by having students complete activities constructed by the teacher-researcher, from which students’ understanding of the key concepts or individual lessons can be gathered. Students’ work samples were collected by following ethics guidelines. Students’ and parents’ consent was sought before the students’ work samples were used. Therefore, respondents were chosen based on their consent to participate in the research on a voluntary basis. Their progress was monitored by comparing the extent to which they understood the key concepts of individual lessons.

**Lesson plans**

Lesson plans are collected to present the ways in which lesson design is altered in response to reflection on previous lessons. In this sense, this data source provides evidence on the teacher-researcher’s *reflection-for-action* process.

A lesson plan will specify the various stages of a particular lesson, as well as their duration, as well as learning objectives, activities and resources for each stage. It
may also include reminders for the teacher about aspects of teaching that need to be improved based on previous reflection.

**Fieldnotes**

Fieldnotes in this case are defined as “written observations of what you see taking place in your classroom” (Mertler, 2009, p. 107). In this research, the use of fieldnotes is more than just recording observation. The contents of fieldnotes written during teaching encompass:

- dilemmas and challenges that were confronted in the classroom
- descriptions of modifications made to lesson plans while implementing
- the teacher-researcher’s observation of effects of the action
- the teacher-researcher’s *reflection-in-action*

**Reflective journal**

Journal writing serves as a classic tool in action research to provide first-hand accounts of “observations, feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections, hunches, hypotheses and explanations” (Kemmis et al. 1981 as cited in Elliott, 1991, p. 77). The most important reason for using journal writing as a data source in this research lies in its power of presenting the discipline of reflective thinking (Burns, 2010; Kember, 2000; Pine, 2009; Wallace, 1998). By revisiting, analysing and evaluating what is happening, writing becomes a process of making meaning of personal experience as well as the discovering of wisdom we already possess—all are at the core of Dewey’s concept of reflection. These are essential for improving teaching practice since:

> It is through the telling and retelling of our stories of practice that we construct and reconstruct our understandings of who we are, can create new and more significant versions of ourselves, and can thus transform ourselves. (Beattie, 1995, p. 140)
In this research, the substance captured by the journal is *reflection-on-action* for classroom practice. As a result, journal entries written at different times are used as tangible evidence of changes in the teacher-researcher’s reflection process, which in turn reveals the teacher-researcher’s transformation over time.

### 3.4.2 Issues of validity, reliability and generalisability

Validity is defined as “the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure” (Gay et al., 2006, p. 134). For action research in which decision-making is largely data-informed, validity is important because basing decisions on invalid data will lead to research problems being unresolved or teaching not improving. The approach adopted in qualitative research to ensure validity is to establish trustworthiness—the extent to which we can trust the truthfulness or adequacy of a research project (Stringer, 2008, p. 48). The trustworthiness of action research is managed through credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, participation and utility (Stringer, 2008). Procedures employed for each of these are reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Credibility, referred to as the plausibility and integrity of a study, requires dealing with the complexities and patterns emerging in the study (Mills, 2007; Stringer, 2008). The first procedure adding to credibility is prolonged engagement at the study site (Creswell, 2009). I spent two and half years at the school where I was conducting the research as a Mandarin teacher, in order to gain an insight into the context, to establish relationships with participants and to try to avoid distortions caused by my presence as a researcher. However, simply investing more time in the local context is not sufficient for the teacher-researcher to fully understand the field. Persistent
observation, which is the second procedure, was also carried out. I monitored students’ performances on a weekly basis through classroom observation as well as through work samples produced by them. In addition, classroom teachers took turns to observe my teaching or participate in interviews, which ensured that there was at least one outsider observation or interview. Thirdly, a key procedure is triangulation, defined as “different bearings and measurements are taken to make sure that a particular location is accurate” (Burns, 2010, p. 95). Credibility is enhanced because conclusions cross-checked by more than one angle are more believable than that from a single angle (Kember, 2000). The essence of triangulation is to build coherent justification through intersubjectivity—whenever two individuals share a similar (not necessarily identical) experience (Pine, 2009, p. 70). Intersubjectivity approaches objectivity if the diversity of independent perspectives is increased and they tend to support each other or at least not contradict each other (Pine, 2009). Triangulation not only seeks convergence, but also values points of divergence or contradictions by treating these as opportunities to re-examine and clarify interpretations (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Triangulation is realised in this research by collecting data from different perspectives. By comparing and contrasting these data sources, contradictions hidden in the situation are made visible and misconceptions held by the teacher-researcher are clarified and this enables a deeper and balanced information base for reflecting on a problematic situation (Altrichter, et al., 1993; Stringer, 2008).
Diverse case analysis is employed as the fifth procedure to enhance credibility. This means the final report may also present discrepant information that contradicts the general findings so as to guarantee that all participants have their voice in the research (Creswell, 2009).

Sixth, greater credibility is added to the research through member checks—allowing participants to review the raw data, the analysed data and final reports and to further
explain their ideas to improve the accuracy of representations (Creswell, 2009; Mertler, 2008; Mills, 2007; Stringer, 2008). Following this principle, participants in this research are provided with raw data, as well as a draft of the final report, to verify that their perspectives and experiences are adequately and accurately represented.

Validity is also determined by dependability, referred to as “the extent to which observers are able to ascertain whether research procedures are adequate for the purpose of the study” (Stringer, 2008, p. 50). To make the study dependable, sufficient information about the definition of the research problem, data collection and analysis, as well as construction of reports is made accessible to audiences (Stringer 2008). Also, literature is cited to justify the appropriateness of methodology decisions. Greater dependability is also brought into the study through methods such as triangulation so that any weaknesses of one viewpoint or method can be compensated for by another (Mills, 2007).

The third element of validity is confirmability—the outcomes of the study are demonstrably drawn from the data with neutrality (Mills, 2007, p. 86; Stringer, 2008, p. 48). To enable audiences to confirm that the final report accurately and adequately reflects participants' original perspectives, raw data (including lesson plans, fieldnotes, reflective journals, audio tapes of interviews, students’ work samples, observation sheets from classroom teachers), data reduction and analysis products, as well as other relevant documents are all retained for review. Moreover, it is claimed that by keeping a reflective journal, confirmability is automatically managed since it
“reveals underlying assumptions or biases that cause the researcher to formulate a set of questions in a particular way and to present findings in a particular way” (Mills, 2007, p. 86). Furthermore, confirmability is added by practising triangulation as discussed above (Mills, 2007).

For action research which aims at improving a local situation, it seems that no evidence is more persuasive than the utility of the research for demonstrating validity. If actions resulting from the research enable the teacher-researcher to improve students’ communicative competence in Mandarin, it is probably safe to conclude that the process of inquiry is valid (Stringer, 2008).

To fulfil the requirement of validity or trustworthiness, another element is transferability, which is the likely applicability of research findings to other settings (Stringer, 2008). Transferability is closely related to the external validity or generalisability of the study, namely, “the extent to which findings can be generalized to entire populations or all cases” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 361). This is contrasted with internal validity which relies on:

…sound and rigorous research design and methodology, using data collection and analysis techniques expertly to obtain accurate findings and advance correct interpretations of the study results (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 361).

The value of action research lies in particularity instead of generalisability (Creswell, 2009). Due to the highly-contextualised nature of action research which works towards solution of local problems, findings are not directly transferable to all other cases. However, action research findings still have something to say to other teachers to the extent that their situation bears similarity to the context from which these
findings are obtained (Burns, 2010; Stringer, 2008). For such resonance to actually happen, audiences themselves need to judge the relevance of action research findings based on a comparison of their own contexts and that of the research, and then make intelligent adaptation in anticipation of the differences identified (Kember, 2000; Mills, 2007). Therefore, the responsibility on the part of the teacher-researcher is to make the research process transparent so that the audiences are provided with solid information to draw analogies to their own contexts (Lomax, 1994). To increase transparency, rich and thick description of data, together with clarification of biases, is included in this research to reveal how the teacher-researcher’s findings are shaped by the context.

‘Reliability’ means that another researcher replicating the same research under the same conditions should obtain the same results (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). In general, a high degree of reliability demands strict control of variables. However, this is almost impossible in educational settings and undesirable for action research which incorporates a strong commitment to change that leads to the improvement of a local situation. Considering this, reliability in action research is no longer pursued by controlling variables, but by ensuring the validity of the study:

Action research done by a teacher-researcher will naturally be reliable if it satisfies all criteria for validity, but the reverse is not true since “a reliable test can consistently measure the wrong thing and be invalid” (Mills, 2007, p. 95)

3.4.3 Ethics

This study aimed to benefit all participants and a wider educational community. With improving students’ language learning outcomes as the ultimate goal, each lesson is designed holistically to provide high quality teaching. For students, procedures to be used in this research all belong to the normal activities of Mandarin lessons.
Essentially, students are treated as the ends, not the means, of the research. Data generated by them are used for assessing their learning outcomes, but, more importantly, serve as a foundation of reflection on the part of the teacher-researcher, which ultimately benefits students’ learning. For the teacher-researcher, this study directly supports her professional learning of pedagogical knowledge and reflective thinking about teaching practice. All participants were invited to participate in the research based on informed consent. Formal ethical evaluation procedures including the Australian National Ethics Application process and New South Wales State Education Department Research Approval Process were applied to this research.

3.4.4 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is an approach to data analysis usually applied to qualitative data. It is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Boyatzis, 1998). Through thematic analysis, the essence of data analysis becomes categorising data and arranging them in a systematic in order to consolidate meaning and explanation according to commonalities, relationships and differences across a data set (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Thematic analysis may include the following six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

Step 1: Getting familiar with data

In order to establish a general idea about the depth and breadth of data, the teacher-researcher should carefully read and re-read all the data collected. During repeated reading of the data, sufficient sensitivity is required in order to search for possible patterns.
Step 2: Generating initial codes

Basically, this involves breaking material into lines, paragraphs or sections, segmenting them into categories and labelling these categories with a code (Creswell, 2009). A code is 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). By applying and reapplying codes to data, the result is that all the examples of a specific topic are pooled together. However, this does not mean those data inconsistent with the dominant phenomenon are smoothed out. Examining peculiarities and contradictions is also an integral part of coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 3: Searching for themes

Different codes are analysed and sorted into themes and sub-themes at overarching levels. Essentially, a theme has to “capture something important about the data in relation to the research questions, and represent(s) some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10). The major task at this stage is to examine relationships between codes, between themes and sub-themes and between themes.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Themes are reviewed and refined at two levels to ensure internal homogeneity within themes and external heterogeneity between themes. Firstly, coded data extracts under the same theme are re-read to identify whether they cohere together meaningfully. Creation of new themes and re-classification of data extracts happen if a coherent pattern has not been formed. The second level of review aims to ascertain whether the themes are valid in relation to the data set, as well as whether the existing thematic map accurately represents the underlying relationships embedded in the
data set as a whole. In order to make a thematic map fit the data better, recoding may be necessary to avoid missing something substantial, and new themes may emerge as well. The goal of this step is to establish a fairly good idea about the overall story of the data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

This requires identifying the essential aspect of the data captured by each theme and providing a detailed analysis of each theme in relation to the research questions. All coded data extracts need to be organised around each theme with an accompanying narrative to show to the audience the story behind each theme and how this is significant for the answering of research questions. Even though each theme has been given working titles in previous steps, it is still necessary to consider the names to be used in the final report, in order to give readers an immediate sense of what the theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 6: Writing up the report

With themes being worked out, a report will be written up to provide a “concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell - within and across themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 23). The report not only describes the data, but also answers to the research question by making arguments supported by the data. Data extracts which are compelling evidence of the arguments will be provided within the analytic narrative in the report. (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
Chapter 4   Action Research Cycle One

As mentioned in chapter 3, generally the four stages of each action research cycle and activities involved in each stage are as follows:

- **Planning stage:**
  - Define research focus for the action research cycle
  - Review additional literature related to specific focus of the action research cycle
  - Design reflective teaching cycles and specify plan for data collection and analysis

- **Acting stage:**
  - Implement the plan of reflective teaching cycles
  - Collect data

- **Observing stage:**
  - Analyse data

- **Reflecting stage:**
  - Summarise findings of the action research cycle
  - Identify issues to be investigated in the next action research cycle

This chapter presents the four stages of Action Research Cycle One in the same sequence as above. The planning stage involves defining the application of the NSW Quality Teaching model as the focus, reviewing literature on Quality Teaching, designing reflective teaching cycles and the procedures for data collection and data analysis. The outcome of the action stage is demonstrated by summarising the quantity of data collected and showing samples of various data. The explanation of the observing stage includes reviewing specific coding processes used as well as
discussing the results of coding. The reflecting stage summarises the major findings of this action research cycle and provides implications for the next cycle.

4.1 Planning stage

The planning stage involves three tasks, namely, defining the research focus of this action research cycle, reviewing literature related to the research focus and designing this action research cycle based on the research focus. Now I will start with the first task—defining the research focus of this action research cycle.

4.1.1 Focus of Cycle One

In terms of the research as a whole, the action research cycles aim at improving CLT through learning-by-doing. This journey of learning-by-doing starts with learning of pedagogical knowledge. There is the argument that reflection should start from understanding findings about the elements of effective teaching, then comparing and contrasting these findings with teachers’ own experiences (Killen, 2006). During the three-month methodology training organized by the NSW DEC, I was introduced to the NSW Quality Teaching (QT) model. Quality Teaching (QT) is a model of pedagogy which synthesises the characteristics of effective teaching into three dimensions and eighteen elements. It was developed by the NSW DEC based on Authentic Pedagogy (Newmann et al, 1996) and Productive Pedagogy (QSRLS, 1999). These models focus on the issue of what are the characteristics of good teaching. QT, by outlining the characteristics of effective pedagogy, purports to describe what a good teacher will do. It is used in schools as a benchmark for evaluating teaching practice. However, as a Languages teacher, my concern was more specific, that is “What are the characteristics of good Languages teaching?” and “What are the characteristics of good Communicative Language Teaching?” I was
particularly curious about the relevance of QT as a reference to improve CLT practice. This then led to the decision to use QT as a tool to support my reflection towards improving CLT practice in the early part of my research. This was done by using it as a reflection tool to guide the teacher-researcher’s reflective thinking about CLT. Hence, the subsidiary research question for the first cycle is:

**How can a beginning language teacher use the NSW Quality Teaching (QT) model as a reflection tool to improve teaching Chinese through a communicative approach?**

### 4.1.2 Literature relevant to the focus

Having defined the research focus of Action Research Cycle One as using the NSW Quality Teaching (QT) model as a reflection tool, I will now turn to some literature on QT to explain what is QT, its relationship with teacher’s professional development and some other action research on QT.

#### 4.1.2.1 What is Quality Teaching—Review of QT Documents

Two government documents important here are the *Quality Teaching in NSW public schools: Discussion paper* (NSW DEC, 2008) which provides a thorough description of QT, and the *Quality Teaching in NSW public schools: Annotated bibliography* (NSW DEC, 2008) which summarises empirical and theoretical research contributing to the development of the model. In these documents, pedagogy is defined as (the):

> …art and science of teaching which is evident both in the activity that takes place in classrooms or other educational settings and in the nature or quality of the tasks set by teachers to guide and develop student learning (NSW DEC, 2008, p.15)

The quality of pedagogy is considered by the designers of QT as the most direct and powerful dimension of the school context that promotes students’ learning outcomes. With the aim of improving the quality of pedagogy in NSW, the NSW DEC
developed a model of pedagogy to be adopted by all teachers in NSW irrespective of differences in year of schooling, subjects, key learning areas and learners’ backgrounds. This is achieved by synthesising some generic characteristics of effective pedagogy into a framework known as ‘QT’ which consists of three dimensions and eighteen elements (see Table 4.1). The three dimensions are *Intellectual Quality, Quality Learning Environment* and *Significance*. While *intellectual quality* is highlighted as central to pedagogy, all three dimensions are seen as essential for good learning outcomes. The elaborated elements for each dimension are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual quality</th>
<th>Quality learning environment</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep knowledge</td>
<td>Explicit quality criteria</td>
<td>Background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep understanding</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Cultural knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic knowledge</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Knowledge integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher-order thinking</td>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>Inclusivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalanguage</td>
<td>Students’ self-regulation</td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive communication</td>
<td>Student direction</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Quality Teaching Model (NSW DEC, 2008, p. 5)

The table below lists the interpretations for all these elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QT elements under Intellectual Quality</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep knowledge</td>
<td>The knowledge addressed is focused on a small number of key concepts and the relationship between and among concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep understanding</td>
<td>Students are given the opportunity to demonstrate a profound and meaningful understanding of the central ideas and the relationships between and among them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic knowledge</td>
<td>Students recognise that knowledge is socially constructed and open to question. Students are encouraged to address multiple perspectives or solutions within a discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher-order thinking</td>
<td>Students are regularly engaged in activities that require them to organise, reorganise, apply, analyse, synthesise and evaluate knowledge and information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalanguage</td>
<td>Knowledge is explicitly named and analysed as a specialist language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QT elements under Quality Learning Environment</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit quality criteria</td>
<td>Students are provided with explicit criteria for the quality of work they are expected to produce. These criteria are regularly referred to and students are clear on how they can achieve highly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Activities are designed to seriously engage students in their own learning. Activities are designed such that students can be expected to display sustained interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectation</td>
<td>Activities provide challenging work to all students. Students are often encouraged to take conceptual risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>Promote positive support for learning and mutual respect among teachers and students. Students are given opportunities to support each other in their learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ self-regulation</td>
<td>Students perceive the learning to be purposeful and interesting with clear goals such that they are able to demonstrate initiative and autonomy in the classroom. Minimal attention needs to be paid to discipline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student direction</td>
<td>Students exercise direction over the selection of activities related to their learning and the means and manner by which these activities are carried out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QT elements under Significance</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background knowledge</td>
<td>Regularly and explicitly build on students’ background knowledge, in terms of prior school knowledge, as well as other aspects of their personal lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural knowledge</td>
<td>Regularly incorporate the cultural knowledge of diverse social groupings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge integration</td>
<td>Demonstrate links between and within subjects and key learning areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusivity</td>
<td>Activities are planned to include and publicly value all students across the social and cultural backgrounds represented in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>Knowledge learned is directly applied to real-life problems or within real-life contexts. Students are given opportunities to share their work with audiences beyond the classroom or school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Employ narrative at key points to enrich students’ understanding of the key concepts of the unit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Interpretation of Quality Teaching elements (NSW DEC, 2006, pp. 1-3)
According to *Quality Teaching Discussion Paper*, currently in NSW, this model serves as a framework for principals and school executives to evaluate and improve teaching practice, a tool for teachers to reflect on their own teaching, and a guide for officers of the Department to provide necessary support for schools. In addition, it helps with communicating about teaching and learning in schools to parents. Ultimately, it is said in the documents that this model supports the NSW DEC commitment to delivering equitable student outcomes.

The development of QT was based on theoretical pedagogical research as well as practical knowledge about the links between pedagogical practices and learning outcomes. *Quality Teaching in NSW public schools: Annotated bibliography* (NSW DEC, 2008) offers a comprehensive review of key literature. The following paragraphs will summarise the key points in the document. Like the structure of the document itself, the review here will be organised around the three dimensions of the model.

According to *Quality Teaching Annotated bibliography*, the central general characteristic of effective pedagogy is promotion of high levels of *Intellectual Quality*. The origin of *Intellectual Quality* is traced to the model of *Authentic Pedagogy* (Newmann et al, 1996), which included *higher-order thinking, deep knowledge, deep understanding, substantive communication and connectedness*. In a study conducted by The Centre on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (CORS) during 1991-1995, it was found that when teachers emphasised *higher-order thinking, deep understanding and substantive communication* (elaborated written
communication) in teaching, students at various stages with diverse social backgrounds all showed positive results on assessment tasks. The effectiveness of these elements in improving learning outcomes and promoting educational equity is reinforced by data from the US National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) (Lee, Smith & Croninger 1995; 1997) and a series of other studies in the US including the study of the relationship between “interactive instruction” (which include the key elements of Intellectual Quality as higher-order thinking, problematic knowledge, deep understanding, extended substantive discussion and writing) and learning in Chicago elementary schools. The relationship between the elements higher-order thinking, deep knowledge, deep understanding and substantive communication and student learning outcomes was seen as valid both in performance-based assessment and conventional standardised achievement tests (Avery, 1999). Aspects of Authentic Pedagogy (Newmann et al, 1996) were later introduced by the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study in Australia under the title of Productive Pedagogy. The Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study aimed at examining two questions in the context of systemic, large-scale school reform, namely:

1. What forms of classroom practice contribute to more equitable student outcomes?
2. What forms of classroom practice contribute to increased student outcomes for all students? (The School Reform Longitudinal Study research team, 2001, p. 2)

It was hypothesized in the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study that classroom practice for more equitable and improved student outcomes consists of four dimensions, namely, intellectual quality, connectedness, supportive classroom environment, and valuing and working with difference. These four dimensions together became the framework known as Productive Pedagogy (The School Reform Longitudinal Study research team, 2001). Compared with Authentic Pedagogy,
elements of intellectual quality were expanded in *Productive Pedagogy* to include metalanguage and problematic knowledge.

In addition to *Intellectual Quality*, effective pedagogy according to QT should facilitate the formation of a *Quality Learning Environment*. Elements of this dimension basically draw on the following findings under *supportive classroom environment* in the *Productive Pedagogy* model. Firstly, it is said in the *Quality Teaching Annotated bibliography* that evaluation criteria and instructions must be made clear to students, otherwise groups such as working class children and non-mainstream learners may have difficulty with learning since:

- They do not have the elaborated language codes that invisible pedagogy entails
- Parents cannot provide specific educational support for their children since they do not have a clear understanding of the criteria used or expected for success. (NSW DEC, 2008, p. 14)

Secondly, the designers of the model think it is important to engage students with social support. “Engaging students” refers to producing students who enjoy learning and acquiring competence and understanding instead of merely high marks in assessments. *Social support* for engaging students means that:

At a general, cultural level

- Teachers listened to students
- Students made friends with peers from diverse backgrounds
- Students were not put down by other students
- Students were treated fairly by their peers and by adults

At a classroom level

- Students worked cooperatively on intellectually challenging tasks
- Teachers were relentless in their demands for students’ best efforts
- Teachers were actively attentive to individual students
- Teachers and students shared responsibility for all students’ learning

(NSW DEC, 2008, p. 14)
Thirdly, the document claims that high expectations should be set by teachers in order to generate a positive, upward spiralling cycle of student behaviour improvement. It is said that since high expectations are subject to teachers’ judgement, teachers have to be careful that differentiation of expectations does not lead to discrimination. Fourthly, students’ self-regulation is considered as important for creating a quality learning environment. According to the model, good student self-regulation minimises time wasted on classroom management, thus enabling teachers to focus on academic activities. Also, there is evidence indicating that students’ self-regulation of their own learning is positively related to academic success. Finally, increasing student direction is a feature of a quality learning environment. It is pointed out in the documents of QT that unlike ‘traditional’ teaching in which classroom activity is dominated by teachers, in student-directed classes, learners assume greater responsibility in determining the questions and topics they study, as well as activities and tasks they will do in order to learn and how to complete these tasks. Student direction was promoted by 1970s forms of progressive pedagogy; current middle-schooling curricular models; collaborative learning, and “constructivist” curricula.

Moreover, it is proposed by QT that pedagogy should show students the Significance of their study in order to generate improved learning outcomes. According to the two government documents on QT, there are several ways suggested by research that can be used by teachers to establish the link between students and what they are learning. These findings are incorporated in elements under the connectedness and valuing and working with difference dimensions of Productive Pedagogy. Firstly, it is argued that learning occurs optimally when teachers frequently relate to students’ background
knowledge, including prior knowledge from other subjects, courses and learning areas, as well as community-based experiences. This is grounded in the recognition that education is about a process of connecting new knowledge to background knowledge which is regarded as “structured information stored in medium and long-term memory ‘schemata’” (NSW DEC, 2008, p.20). Based on this, poor learning outcomes are attributed by some researchers to a ‘systematic mismatch’ between students’ background knowledge and new knowledge. Practical solutions for this include using revision and pre-lesson activities to explain the relevance of learning content to students’ background knowledge. Secondly, according to QT, inclusion of non-dominant cultural knowledge into the formal curriculum is another important way of making pedagogy significant. This is concerned with valuing diverse beliefs, languages, practices and ways of knowing from different cultural backgrounds in classrooms. A list of non-dominant cultural knowledge in the Australian context might include:

- Indigenous and women’s interpretations and forms of academic subjects such as mathematics, history, science and literature
- Youth cultural forms of art, music and politics
- Non-European versions of mathematics, science, economics and literature

(NSW DEC, 2008, p. 21)

Thirdly, the official documents of QT mention that there are a number of initiatives advocating knowledge integration which means linking subject areas in pedagogy in order to make learning meaningful, thus improving student outcomes. Among these are programs seeking to integrate key learning areas, including the development of key learning areas in Australia in the 1990s, Queensland’s “New Basics”, and Tasmania’s “Essential Learnings”. There are also initiatives which integrate areas of study, such as the “Learning through the Arts” initiative of the Canadian Royal Conservatory of Music. Fourthly, in QT, another integral element for significance is
inclusivity, concerned with ensuring equitable access for all students to classroom activities, regardless of socio-cultural backgrounds. According to QT, a fifth way to demonstrate significance in learning is by connecting it to the world beyond the classroom, which originates from the element of connectedness in Authentic Pedagogy and from interactive instruction. It is explained in the official documents that unlike the element of background knowledge which emphasises relating learning to prior knowledge, connectedness focuses on the relevance to current and future lives. In QT, the sixth element under Significance is narrative defined as “a series of events, actions or incidents involving people or characters ‘chained together’ in a sequence to constitute a text” (NSW DEC, 2008, p. 24). It is discovered that the conventional use of expository prose for the transmission and exploration of abstract, formal, technical knowledge make it difficult for non-mainstream students to learn. To make this type of knowledge accessible to broader socioeconomic groups, researchers promote employing a “teaching as story-telling” approach for educating learners from communities with strong oral traditions and narrative practices, female students and working-class students.

Despite QT being claimed to be a pedagogical model applicable to all subjects in the official documents, there are limited materials which demonstrate QT elements in language classrooms. The one online document from NSW DEC (n.d.) provides the following outline of QT elements in language classrooms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QT elements</th>
<th>Examples in language classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep knowledge</td>
<td>Teaching in topics makes it easier to look at the relationships between communication, literacy and cultural concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep understanding</td>
<td>Students manipulate language and incorporate nonverbal communication appropriately to greet someone and introduce themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Problematic knowledge

| Different ways to express the same idea and differences in cultures |

### Higher-order thinking

| To listen and understand, to respond in the target language, e.g. create an invitation to a party in German |

### Metalanguage

| Students and teacher use the specialist terminology of language |

### Substantive communication

| A discussion about family including family members, ages, interests and pets; purposeful communication in the target language |

### Explicit quality criteria

| Work samples, feedback, detailed criteria |

### Engagement

| Group work, meaningful learning, scaffolding, open-ended tasks |

### High expectation

| Identify prior learning, challenge your own assumptions, recognise students’ efforts, one-to-one feedback |

### Social support

| Collaborative activities, flexible tasks, value ideas of all students, group or class activity. |

### Student self-regulation

| Clear goals that students perceive to be worthwhile, self-evaluation, shared understanding of classroom behaviour |

### Student direction

| Allow students to choose whether to do a task independently or as a group; to determine the criteria and time duration |

### Background knowledge

| Ask students what language they think they will need to talk about school; what information they would expect to see on a menu. |

### Cultural knowledge

| Discuss how different students celebrate their birthdays at home; find out what are the typical food items on the dinner table. |

### Knowledge integration

| Teaching a unit on the environment; numbers are revisited when teaching time and/or dates; using similar grammar for different topics |

### Inclusivity

| Vary grouping and questioning techniques; involve the whole class in feedback |

### Connectedness

| The use of realia such as menus, timetables, brochures; incorporating skills such as numeracy and literacy; the use of ICT |

### Narrative

| Reading out sample biographies of real people for a “Who am I?” |

#### Table 4.3 Examples of QT elements in language classroom

It can be seen from some of the wording above, such as “nonverbal communication”, and “purposeful communication”, that a communicative orientation is present in the examples of QT elements in Languages provided by NSW DEC. This may be explained by the intention of NSW DEC to deliberately align QT with its curricular
focus on CLT. For my purposes, it is necessary to investigate what these elements look like specifically in Chinese language classrooms. However, no previous research or NSW DEC material has dealt with QT elements with respect to the distinctive features of Chinese. The applicability of the guidelines above in a beginning teacher’s classroom remains to be seen. Finally, there is also a lack of practitioner-based research with rich authentic classroom examples on the application of QT in Languages.

4.1.2.2 QT for teachers’ professional development

It is stated in the official documents of QT that one essential objective of the QT initiative is to promote the professional development of NSW teachers through various forms of professional learning occurring in staff meetings, staff development days, professional reading, professional associations, post graduate courses and in-service courses (Gore & Ladwig, 2006). Basically, QT has been treated “either as a framework against which to assess their own practice or a set of processes designed to promote reflection and deepen understanding about practice” (Griffiths et al., 2006, p. 2).

Apart from the Discussion paper and the Annotated bibliography, the NSW DEC has also provided two essential resources to support teachers’ professional learning in relation to classroom practice, namely, A classroom practice guide and Continuing the discussion about classroom practice. A classroom practice guide is intended to support teacher reflection and analysis of classroom practice, as well as their planning and redesigning of these practices, by providing four types of information for each element. Firstly, there is a detailed description of what might be observed
when the element is highly evident. Secondly, each element “is broken down into five ‘codes’ with a descriptor given for each one”, which is referred to as a coding scale (NSW DEC, 2006, p.6). The third type of information is notes which include reminders and responses to commonly asked questions. Fourthly, suggestions in terms of how to achieve higher scores on each element are provided. The elaboration of the eighteen elements with these four types of information aims at clarifying what high-quality teaching means in ‘authentic’ classrooms. Continuing the discussion about classroom practice offers explanations of how to use A classroom practice guide to code classroom practice in various contexts, together with some examples of lesson extracts that are coded. Generally, the coding process follows four steps:

1. Have a copy of A classroom practice guide and a coding sheet with you. Coding sheets can be found in the Appendix to A classroom practice guide.
2. Observe a lesson, watch a videotaped lesson segment, read or reflect on a lesson or unit plan.
3. While observing, reading or reflecting, note down any comments or evidence of what you see.
4. After you finish watching, reading and reflecting, refer to the guide and go through each element one-by-one assigning a score. (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 9)

In the document, there are also more specific steps for coding videotaped lessons and classroom practice on-site, as well as plans for classroom practice. It is further pointed out that after coding classroom practice, teachers’ reflection and analysis should focus on the following questions:

- What did the students learn? How do you know?
- Did that learning matter to them? How do you know?
- Were the students clear on what they were expected to do? How do you know?
- Were the students clear about how well you wanted them to do it? How do you know?
- What would you change next time? (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 13)

The potential of QT and Productive Pedagogy (the model of pedagogy in Queensland which forms the foundation of QT) for teachers’ professional
development has been investigated in a series of studies. The findings and implications from these studies are examined in following paragraphs, which here constitute in themselves a literature review on the efficacy of QT.

According to the results of a longitudinal study conducted by Gore and her colleagues at University of Newcastle during 2004-2007, “Systemic Implications of Pedagogy and Achievement in New South Wales Public Schools” (SIPA), QT may contribute to teachers’ professional development in several ways. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive approach for teachers to reconceptualise their practice, rather than a technique that merely stresses a few aspects of teaching. Due to its comprehensiveness, it can be used by teachers with different concerns in teaching. By drawing teachers’ attention to elements of pedagogy as well as the relationships between these elements, it serves as guidance for improving teaching practice (Gore, 2006). Secondly, it empowers teachers to make curriculum decisions to cultivate learners’ intellectual quality. Hence, it redirects teachers’ focus to the substance of learning, to generate meaningful ideas about teaching. Thirdly, it is argued that coding their own lessons with QT helps teachers to engage deeply in pedagogy and refine their teaching practice. Fourthly, it serves as a shared language among practitioners which facilitates professional dialogue and collaboration (Gore, 2006). Fifthly, by engaging teachers in thinking about what teaching actually is, it increases teachers’ sense of responsibility for student learning. One teachers’ statement is illustrative of this:

This is the first time since I started teaching that I am actually teaching, rather than just giving students work to do (Gore & Ladwig, 2006, p. 18).
Apart from these, QT is seen as consistent with other principles of effective professional development as well, including with a clearly articulated framework to guide their efforts, with a focus on student learning and with ways of gaining evidence about improvements (Gore, 2006).

In spite of the benefits outlined above, it has been pointed out by Gore and her colleagues at the University of Newcastle that current professional learning based on Productive Pedagogy and QT has not actually produced significant change in practice. In other words, there is a lack of a strong and direct correlation between professional development and the quality of pedagogy (Gore & Ladwig, 2006). Firstly, they claimed that professional learning in these models is regarded as too weak to affect actual teaching practice. Among a wide range of activities reported, some professional learning in the name of Quality Teaching is considered by them as not even really about QT at all (Gore & Ladwig, 2006). From Gore and her colleagues’ point of view, another explanation for weak professional learning from QT is the perception from many school Principals that the model is unnecessary since they already had outstanding teachers in their schools. They found that even in some schools where teaching practice was far from the QT ideal, there was reluctance to extensively implement professional learning based on QT simply because these schools want to avoid disturbance resulting from being challenged by QT. Furthermore, the form of professional learning has been criticised by Gore and her colleagues. Typical in-service training is considered by them to be least effective due to lack of depth and sustainability. According to Gore et.al (2004), even a semester long intervention in the final year of a teacher education program using Productive Pedagogy was insufficient and too late for dramatic advancement in
teaching practice to happen. *Productive Pedagogy* was only viewed by teachers as “additional not integral”, “specific not universal” (Gore, et al. 2004, pp. 381-382). Originally, the designers of the QT model said that it is “a model for pedagogy that can be applied from Kindergarten to Year 12 and across all key learning areas” (NSW DEC, 2008, p. 3). However, it was perceived by teachers as a series of particular teaching strategies that may not be applicable to all years of schooling or all Key Learning Areas. From Gore and her colleagues’ point of view, the second reason for the poor relationship between professional training and pedagogy lies in teachers’ resistance to either the model or professional development. They found that resistance is partially derived from an insecure feeling when teachers’ practices have to be observed and coded by each other. The model was rejected by teachers also because it was not seen as practical enough. Teachers asked for more examples of high-quality lessons as a guide. Thirdly, Gore and her colleagues found that ineffectiveness of professional learning was due to a culture of pedagogical inertia in schools. Some teachers believe that QT will go away just like other initiatives so that they appear to satisfy the criteria of QT in professional training but ignore these criteria within the privacy of their own classrooms (Gore & Ladwig, 2006).

It is pointed out by Gore and her colleagues that for *Productive Pedagogy* and QT to better contribute to teachers’ professional development, they have to be fully integrated into students’ knowledge base for teaching via three ways. Firstly, the learning and using of these models have to be there from the very beginning of teacher education programs. Secondly, they must be used as guidance for all aspects of the teacher education curriculum. Thirdly, they must be modelled in the pedagogy of teacher educators. (Gore, et al., 2004).
4.1.2.3  Action research on QT

In the last five years, a series of action research projects on implementing QT in schools has been undertaken by NSW teacher-researchers. Abstracts of these projects are accessible from the website of the NSW Department of Education and Communities, Professional Learning and Leadership Development Directorate. The following paragraphs will provide a general summary of these findings.

The benefits of implementing QT that is most frequently addressed by teacher-researchers are improved teaching skills and the confidence of teachers. Bleeck (2005) found that with the help of QT, teachers in Heathcote Public School increased their knowledge of explicit teaching of recounts, and the grammatical features of recounts, as well as the ability to analyse and improve student’s writing. In Athelstane Public School, the advancement of staff knowledge about the teaching of Science and Technology was achieved with the support of QT (Johnstone, 2005). Beveridge (2005) found that the use of QT generated a positive spiral effect in Metford Public School where:

Teachers experienced the advantages of QT, and utilised the model to explicitly teach higher order comprehension, their skills developed further, and they increasingly utilised the innovation.

In Westdale Public School, QT facilitated teachers to reorientate teaching and learning cycles to student needs (Mills, 2005). Teachers’ skills in employing higher-order thinking in classrooms were enhanced in Sylvania High School due to the application of QT (Negroh, 2005). Awareness of knowledge integration, student direction and connectedness was raised among the teachers of the Sydney Region in Smith’s (2009) research. More evidence of the positive effect of QT on teachers’ professional learning is also available in other school-based research as well
Despite the positive results of QT implementation, there is work from teachers arguing that, as a self-reflection tool, QT is not easy to use (Foley, 2009). In Bowraville Central School, only 43% of teachers actually applied QT concepts to their own teaching (Joske, 2005). Also, there were negative results in terms of using QT for improving the consistency of student assessment (Sinclair, 2008).

Another achievement of QT implementation in terms of teacher professional development is the building-up of a culture of professional learning and communication, as well as enhanced staff morale in schools. Increased professional networks and dialogue, as well as talking about the role of the school in the community, were observed among teachers in many cases (Brandtman, 2009; Corcoran, 2009; Fogarty, 2009; Gambley, 2005; Joske, 2005; Smith, 2005).

Perhaps attributable to the teacher professional development outlined above, student engagement and learning outcomes seem to have improved in many schools. Students gained higher marks for Writing skills in Heathcote Public School (Bleeck, 2005). Better student performance on literacy and numeracy was shown in Ponder’s (2005) study. Students at Ashfield Boys High School benefited from pedagogy with enhanced student direction and connectedness to the world (Kokkalis, 2009). Greater interest by students in Science and Technology was identified in Athelstane Public School (Johnstone, 2005). Moreover, the value of QT for special education has also been shown (Smith, 2005). Teachers equipped with QT concepts were able to set
challenging but appropriate expectations for special education students, thereby generating improved leaning outcomes. In this sense, QT contributes to special education by breaking the culture of “that won’t work with our students”. Other successful cases include Bowral Public School, Chalmers Road SSP, Metford Public School, Greenway Park Public School, Revesby Public School, Lockhart Central School and Taronga Zoo Education Centre (Beveridge, 2005; Corcoran, 2009; Darling; Gambley, 2005; Maquire & Bodel, 2009; Pantel, 2009; Prasad, 2005).

4.1.3 Design of Cycle One

Now, having discussed the research focus of Action Research Cycle One and the literature related to the research focus, I will turn to the third task of the planning stage—designing Action Research Cycle One. In chapter 3, I have mentioned a slight but essential difference between this action research and other action research, that is, the integration of reflective teaching cycles into action research cycles as follows:

Figure 4.1 The integration of reflective teaching cycle into action research cycle
The action research cycle shapes the whole procedure of the study while the reflective teaching cycle is the mode of action for weekly lessons. Reflective teaching cycles are repeated several times during the acting stage of a particular action research cycle. In this sense, reflective teaching cycles capture the substance of the acting stage in this study. As the substance of acting stage, reflective teaching cycle need to be planned at the planning stage to address research focus of particular action research cycle. Likewise, details of data collection and data analysis methods are also tailored to the research focus of particular action research cycle. Therefore, in terms of the design of each action research cycle, there were three things to plan: reflective teaching cycles, data collection and data analysis.

4.1.3.1 Design of reflective teaching cycles

As the substance of action, reflective teaching cycles embedded in the acting stage of the first action research cycle experimented with using QT as a reflection tool for CLT. The duration of a typical reflective teaching cycle in my research was one week. The detailed activities involved in each cycle were presented in sequence as follows:
Figure 4.2 Design of reflective teaching cycles for Action Research Cycle One

This reflective teaching cycle design was repeated several times during the acting stage of Action Research Cycle One.
4.1.3.2 Plan for data collection

Data collection also needed to be planned while designing each action research cycle. In Chapter 3, I listed major data sources as: outsider observation, interviews, students’ work samples, lesson plans, fieldnotes and reflective journal. Here I will discuss each of these data sources to explain how they were collected in Action Research Cycle One to serve the research focus of using QT as a reflection tool.

Outsider observation

To maximise the usefulness of outsider observation to my self-reflection, classroom teachers were asked to take turns to do systematic real time structured observation and mark a QT checklist while observing. This was deemed to be appropriate since all NSW teachers, with training programs based on QT, were supposed to be equipped with sensitivity to, and practical understanding about QT in classroom situations. The tool provided for them was an observation sheet provided by the NSW DEC, which was a checklist of the elements of QT expected to be observed in actual classrooms. The following is an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Learning Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Element</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit quality criteria (EQC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

125
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement (ET)</th>
<th>Activities are designed to seriously engage students in their own learning. Activities are designed such that students can be expected to display sustained interest.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High expectations (HE)</td>
<td>Activities produce challenging work to all students. Students are often encouraged to take conceptual risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support (SS)</td>
<td>The classroom atmosphere promotes positive support for learning and mutual respect among teachers and students. Students are given opportunities to support each other in their learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ self-regulation (SSR)</td>
<td>Students perceive the learning to be purposeful and interesting with clear goals such that they are able to demonstrate initiative and autonomy in the classroom. Minimal attention needs to be paid to discipline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Direction (SD)</td>
<td>At relevant points in the program students exercise direction over the selection of activities related to their learning and the means and manner by which these activities are carried out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 Quality Teaching observation sheet (NSW DEC, 2006)

By using this, observation notes were expected to combine the elements of QT in the form of a rating scale, and with suggestions about how to improve. The rating scale explicitly highlighted the teacher-researcher’s strengths and weaknesses in terms of
QT, while comments/suggestions further elaborated underlying issues from an outsider’s perspective—all of which supported broader and deeper reflection.

This type of observation satisfies Burns’ (2010, p. 57) criteria for action research in being:

- Focused (seeking specific information on the implementation of QT)
- Objective (seeing classroom events from a ‘stranger’s’ eyes)
- Reflective (the purpose of observation being to stimulate reflection)
- Documented (deliberately recording observation)
- Evaluated (evaluate teaching practice based on QT)

**Interviews**

As well as outsider observation, interviews were conducted once with each classroom teacher for them to further comment on the lessons they had observed. Topics for interviews covered QT, CLT and the relationships between CLT and QT. The interviews were kept in the form of both audio tape and written transcript. The purposes of interviews were:

- showing how a communicative orientation was addressed in my lessons
- presenting how QT elements were implemented in my lessons
- exploring the possible relationships between QT and CLT
- seeking classroom teachers’ suggestions to support my professional progress on QT and CLT

The interviews took a standardised open-ended form. Firstly, standardisation contributes to increased comparability of answers, which aids the organisation and analysis of data. Secondly, the open-ended form acknowledges the individual
differences of interviewees, which may lead to unexpected responses that deepen my understanding about my teaching.

Following was the list of all interview questions:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What is your general impression about my teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>How do you think students’ communicative competence in Mandarin has been developed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>To what extent do you think elements of Quality Teaching were implemented in my lessons and how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Which elements of Quality Teaching do you think need to be improved in my lesson and how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>In what ways do you think emphasising Quality Teaching elements has enhanced the communicative purpose of language teaching?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.5 Interview questions in Action Research Cycle One**

**Students’ work samples**

I also collected students’ work samples as another form of data to show learning outcome and provide solid information basis for me to reflect on my own teaching.

**Lesson plans**

Further data were lesson plans. These were collected to show:

- how elements of QT were translated into classroom activities
- how a communicative orientation was addressed through task design
- how lesson design was altered in response to reflection on previous lessons
Fieldnotes

I also collected fieldnotes. As mentioned in chapter 3, fieldnotes captured the following information:

- dilemmas and challenges that were confronted in the classroom
- descriptions of modifications made to lesson plans while implementing
- the teacher-researcher’s observation of the effects of the action
- the teacher-researcher’s reflection-in-action

Reflective journal

I also kept reflective journals to record reflection-on-action. A reflective journal which demonstrated reflection-on-action can be regarded as the initial, informal data analysis of the research as shown in the following graphs, whereby data collected from different sources during a lesson were consolidated to support self-assessment on QT, which in turn informed the next lesson.
Figure 4.3 Initial data analysis in Action Research Cycle One

The teacher-researcher evaluated the implementation of each element in particular lessons by referring to a QT coding sheet offered by the NSW DEC (see Appendix 8) which contains a scale of 1 to 5 for each element, as well as a detailed explanation.
for each score. In the journal, the teacher-researcher went through each element of QT. The evaluation consolidated:

- results obtained from other data sources
- the teacher-researcher’s emotions, feelings and confusions
- thinking around a successful or disappointing teaching experience
- assumptions and beliefs about relationships between CLT and QT
- preliminary ideas for processing the problematic situations in future teaching episodes

As a result, journal entries written at different times were used as tangible evidence of changes in the teacher-researcher’s reflection, which in turn revealed the teacher-researcher’s transformed practice over time.

4.1.3.3 Plan for data analysis

Having explained design of reflective teaching cycles, data collection, now I will turn to the third aspect that needed to be considered in the design of an action research cycle in order to serve the particular research focus—data analysis. In Action Research Cycle One, data collected from various sources went through two cycles of analysis during which two different types of coding were employed. In Chapter 3, the involvement of the different ‘self’ of the teacher-researcher was discussed to distinguish different kinds of reflection during the acting stage and the reflecting stage of an action research cycle. The involvement of each different ‘self’ of the teacher-researcher is also highly relevant to clarify two cycles of analysis here. The initial analysis was actually the teacher’s reflection-on-action recorded in journals produced by consolidating and coding all the data from the teacher, classroom teachers and students using QT elements. The purpose of doing this was to
generate structured and data-informed reflection. By applying QT elements as *a priori* codes, the initial analysis was conducted through provisional coding which established a provisional list of codes based on theoretical knowledge prior to the examination of data (Saldaña, 2009). Provisional coding belongs to a deductive approach to coding which searches for instances in the data that match predetermined categories (Burns, 2010; Gibson & Brown, 2009). In contrast to this, secondary analysis conducted by the researcher adopts inductive coding which was more data-driven. This involved scanning the reflective journal to see what themes suggest themselves and using empirical codes which emerge from the data itself (Burns, 2010; Gibson & Brown, 2009). The aim of the secondary analysis here was to answer the question ‘In what ways does QT assist the teacher-researcher’s self-reflection on CLT?’ Thus, initial analysis was the *reflection-on-action* in reflective teaching cycles while secondary analysis occurred in the observing stage of action research cycles.

![Figure 4.4 Data analysis process in Action Research Cycle One](image)

*Figure 4.4 Data analysis process in Action Research Cycle One*
4.2 Acting stage

Having explained the three major tasks of the planning stage of Action Research Cycle One (defining research focus, reviewing relevant literature and designing of action research cycle), now I will describe the acting stage by summarising the data collected. As mentioned earlier, a particular reflective teaching cycle design, as the action to be implemented, was repeated several times during the acting stage of a particular action research cycle. During the acting stage of Action Research Cycle One, eighteen complete reflective teaching cycles with the design illustrated in Figure 4.1 were conducted from July 2010 to September 2011. To recap, each reflective teaching cycle lasted for a week. It involved the teacher-researcher planning the lesson, implementing the lesson, writing field-notes and a reflective journal; the classroom teachers observing and evaluating the lesson; the students having the lesson and doing worksheets during the lesson. With the participation of twenty students and nine classroom teachers, the data collected from different sources during the eighteen reflective teaching cycles can be summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outsider observation</td>
<td>18 (2 occasions × 9 teachers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>6 (only 6 classroom teachers participated in the interview)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student work samples</td>
<td>360 (18 reflective teaching cycles × 20 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson plans</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldnotes</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective journal</td>
<td>50 (there were 2-3 journal entries after each reflective teaching cycle)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.6 Data collected in Action Research Cycle One**
Here are some samples of students’ work and outsider feedback:

1. Listen to your teacher and circle the items with corresponding quantity

2. Listen to your teacher and circle the items with corresponding quantity

3. Count each item and write down the number in Chinese

Figure 4.5 A student work sample in Action Research Cycle One
Before doing this worksheet with communicatively oriented tasks, students had learned numbers in Chinese. In the first two questions of this worksheet, the teacher told the students the quantity of different things in Chinese. According to the information given by the teacher, students chose the objects with corresponding numbers. In the third question, students counted the number of each item in the picture and wrote down the numbers in Chinese written characters.

**Quality Teaching Support Unit**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Learning Environment</th>
<th>What does it look like in a program or in the classroom?</th>
<th>not evident</th>
<th>evident</th>
<th>strongly evident</th>
<th>comments/ suggested changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit quality criteria (EQC)</td>
<td>Students are provided with explicit criteria for the quality of work they are expected to produce. These criteria are regularly referred to and students are clear on how they can achieve highly in this program.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement (ET)</td>
<td>Activities are designed to seriously engage students in their own learning. Activities are designed such that students can be expected to display sustained interest.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations (HE)</td>
<td>Activities provide challenging work to all students. Students are often encouraged to take conceptual risks.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support (SS)</td>
<td>The classroom atmosphere promotes positive support for learning and mutual respect among teachers and students. Students are given opportunities to support each other in their learning.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students' self-regulation (SSR)</td>
<td>Students perceive the learning to be purposeful and interesting with clear goals such that they are able to demonstrate initiative and autonomy in the classroom. Minimal attention needs to be paid to discipline.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Direction (SD)</td>
<td>At relevant points in the program students exercise direction over the selection of activities related to their learning and the means and manner by which these activities are carried out.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.6 An outsider observation in Action Research Cycle One

This is an observation sheet completed by a classroom teacher while observing the lesson about food. She evaluated the implementation of each QT element in this lesson by ticking ‘not evident’, ‘evident’ or ‘strongly evident’, as well as making comments on how the element was strongly evident or how it could be improved.
Before showing some samples of reflective journals, it is necessary to remind here that reflective teaching cycles in this particular action research cycle experimented with using QT as a reflection tool to improve my teaching. This was conducted by evaluating the lesson according to QT elements based on data collected from different perspectives. Hence, as mentioned earlier in this chapter under the heading “Plan for data collection”, reflective journals produced in each reflective teaching cycle were organized around QT elements. Under the heading “Plan for data analysis”, it was also mentioned that these reflective journals are actually initial provisional coding which consolidates and codifies all data from the teacher-researcher, classroom teachers and students by applying QT elements as *a priori* codes. The following excerpt \(^1\) is an illustration of how data from different perspectives was used to support my self-evaluation on QT in the journal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>March 9th 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Deep knowledge | The key concepts of this lesson should be family members and the sentence pattern for asking and answering ‘Who is he/she?’. Every week, we actually just have 45 minutes. Such a period of time seems to be too limited for them to review key concepts of previous lesson and acquire the new content. But revision is necessary for these kids who only have 45 minute-lesson once a week. I’ve spent about half of the lesson today to do revision. In this case, key concepts of previous lesson have been enhanced while key concepts of this lesson are not deeply addressed. That possibly explained why there is no deep understanding demonstrated in Y2 students work samples. Every time, we almost have only about 25 minutes for learning new words or sentences. Such a period of time is too limited for Y2 kids to acquire the content, especially when it is the last school period of a day.  
For Y5-6, 18 students out of 23 had all answers correct. For Y3-4, 21 out of 27 students got all the answers correct. For Year 2, learning outcome is unsatisfactory. Only 5 people were able to do the task in the video correctly at the end of the lesson. |
| Deep understanding |  |

---

\(^1\) These are just two of the fifty journal entries.
| Problematic knowledge | As I explained in last journal, the intrinsic nature of language makes it unlikely to be knowledge that can be open to question. This feeling was shared by the classroom teacher since she wrote “difficult to address in learning a language” under this element in the evaluation form. However, it is widely mentioned by other teachers that problematic knowledge can be realised in ‘the cultural’ aspects of learning a language. |
| Higher-order thinking | Most students demonstrate high-order thinking in exercises we did in *Zou ba* did require students to evaluate information and then give appropriate response. |
| Metalanguage | Personally, I don’t think there was any evidence of metalanguage. This is not evident to outsider observation as well. |
| Substantive communication | Pair practice is the major form of substantive communication of the content. I have tried to maximize purposeful use of Chinese language in my classroom. |

**Quality learning environment**

| Explicit quality criteria | As before, explicit quality criteria is one of my weaknesses, as indicated by classroom teacher feedback. The classroom teacher suggests asking students to re-state the criteria for ensuring their understanding about my instruction. |
| Engagement | There is also unsustained engagement today. They are engaged in parts of the lesson, but may appear indifferent during other parts and a few students are off-task. |
| High expectation | Setting the appropriate expectation is challenging for me as a beginning teacher. It requires experience and understanding about kids. Other teachers suggest continuous reflecting on what is appropriate and inappropriate. |
| Social support | I always ask all students to say “很好 (very good)” to praise their classmates. This makes them practise the language as well as appreciate their classmates as good learners. |
| Students' self-regulation | I stopped several times to regulate their behaviour. Inappropriate behaviour is because they felt bored. When we do pair practice, some of them talk with each other in English rather than practise Chinese. They talk about other things irrelevant to the lesson. They also became unsettled when they felt so excited about the activities or things I showed to them. |
| Student direction | There was no student direction observed. |

**Significance**

<p>| Background knowledge | Students’ background knowledge about family is mentioned. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural knowledge</th>
<th>One child policy which influences significantly on Chinese family structure is discussed. Students have also discussed their own family members. These discussions highlight the difference between Australian family and Chinese family.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge integration</td>
<td>This lesson focuses on the topic of family. It is not based on previous learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusivity</td>
<td>Students are all included. Students are allowed to share how they call their parents at home. Some of the words for family members in their own languages sound similar to Chinese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>Talking about family is to some extent related to life outside school. However, as mentioned in previous journals, it is hard for them to apply the words outside school. It is unlikely they will call their family members in Chinese when they go back home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Narrative is used as a minor part of the lesson when we talk about Australian family structure and Chinese family structure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**June 7th 2011**

**Intellectual quality**

**Deep knowledge**
The core concepts of this lesson include colours and ‘dragon boat festival’. The teaching of colours is organized around the topic of ‘dragon boat festival’. The origin of the festival was presented to students through a cartoon in which the language is appropriate to their literacy level.

**Deep understanding**
Students can explain why Chinese people celebrate dragon boat festival as well as eating “Zongzi” very well in their own language, which indicates their deep understanding about dragon boat festival. However, learning outcome of colour names is not that satisfactory according to the worksheets of students. Particularly, they have difficulty in distinguishing ‘huang se’ (yellow) and ‘hong se’ (red): in the colouring task, when I asked them to colour one dragon boat into ‘huang se’ and the other one into ‘hong se’, some of them coloured both of the boats into either yellow or red, others colour those boats in opposite colours.

**Problematic knowledge**
Problematic knowledge is not evident in this lesson. The Chinese words for colours and the origins of dragon boat festival were taught as facts, instead of something that can be questioned.

**Higher-order thinking**
The oral production activities in the game require students’ higher-order thinking to analyse and produce information using what they've learnt.

**Metalanguage**
Metalanguage is not evident in this lesson.
To deal with the situation that students are interested in learning the culture while are reluctant to practise the language, I've tried to teach language through cultural scenario. This is done by connecting colours with specialities of the festival such as dragon boat and Zongzi. Game was designed dragon boat competition. Worksheet was also developed based on the background of the festival.

**Quality learning environment**

**Explicit quality criteria**

Students’ mistake on the worksheet may partially be attributed to my inexplicit instruction. A classroom teacher reminded me after the lesson that since we have always practised the sentence ‘dragon boat is red’ during our lesson (because the boat in the picture I showed to them is red), students may established the impression that all dragon boats should be red. Therefore, they just colouring those boats into red without listening to my instruction. If I could expect this in advance, I should have made my instruction more clear that the worksheet is not simply a colouring activity. I should have emphasized that they are required to colour each item with a specific colour according to my instruction.

**Engagement**

The ‘dragon boat competition’ assists me a lot in terms of engaging students. Because students understand that these vocabularies are important resources for them to win the game, they have strong incentive to try their best to memorize them. Students even spontaneously open their note books and write down these words in their own symbols. They also become more active in repeating these words after me simply because they wanted to get it right in following competition. However, using games always makes students so excited, which may lead to troubles of classroom management.

**High expectation**

Students’ intention to write down pronunciation and the difficulty they’ve encountered in distinguishing “huang se” from “hong se” reminded me of the necessity of Pinyin. Requiring them to do oral recognition and production directly without explicitly distinguishing sounds would be difficult for them, which discouraged them from participating in these activities. Maybe it is more appropriate to expect them do oral production with the help of Pinyin and then do it without Pinyin after sufficient familiarity and sense of the slight difference between sounds are established in their mind.

**Social support**

Games promote students to support their classmates since they all want their own team to win the game. It builds up strong team spirit and support among team members.

**Students’ self-regulation**

Students get so excited in the game. A lot of students always call out the answers. I have to stop several times to regulate their behaviour.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student direction</th>
<th>The learning content and class activities were designed by me, rather than the students. As I mentioned before, students may choose things they are interested in rather than things that are really good for them to learn Chinese.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Background knowledge</strong> Not evident <strong>Cultural knowledge</strong> Cultural knowledge has been appropriately integrated in different stages of language learning in this lesson. The learning contents were introduced through the festival celebration scenario. I have used the picture of the festival to introduce colours and also connects colours with specialities of the festival such as dragon boat and Zongzi. Game was designed as a special festival celebration activity—dragon boat competition. Evaluation of learning outcomes also developed based on the background of the festival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge integration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inclusivity</strong> Individual participation is addressed by asking each member in the team to take turns to compete. All students have a chance to engage and to contribute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connectedness</strong></td>
<td>In the observation feedback, the classroom teacher commented “difficult to share beyond school and classroom”. I guess the underlying reason can be attributed to a big difference between language and other subjects. For other subjects, connectedness to the world outside classroom is easy as these facts and knowledge taught in the classroom are the same everywhere in the world and have the same meaning to all people. However, the meaning of language lies in using it as communication tool. Without need of using it, meaning of language learning is largely decreased. Without being surrounded by target language environment, connectedness of language resources to real-life is hard to be established. What foreign language teacher can do here is to ensure that at least in language classrooms or schools, there is an environment which motivates students to use target language. I am so glad that students always use Chinese to greet me and express their thanks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative</strong></td>
<td>The cartoon which includes narrative communicates the concept of dragon boat festival effectively to students in their language. This lesson also showed the importance of narrative as a tool to organize together learning contents which are usually not supposed to be taught together. For instance, learning content does not necessarily have to be family words, as long as we organize them in a meaningful way through scenario or narrative. By using dragon boat festival celebration as background, I connect colours with vocabularies of the festival such as “Zongzi” and “dragon boat”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.7 A reflective journal excerpt in Action Research Cycle One**
4.3 Observing stage

Having explained the planning stage and the acting stage of Action Research Cycle One, now I will turn to the third stage—the observing stage of Action Research Cycle One. Explanation of this stage involves reviewing specific coding processes and discussing the results of coding.

4.3.1 ‘Versus coding’ in the reflective journal

As explained earlier in this chapter under the heading “Plan for data analysis”, there were two cycles of analysis. In terms of the distinction between the teacher self and the researcher self, initial analysis occurred in a reflective journal in which data from different sources were consolidated and coded by QT elements to support the teacher’s self-evaluation on the QT elements. This was a provisional coding (and belongs to a deductive approach to coding) with QT elements as a priori codes. In the secondary analysis, all reflective journals produced by the teacher were analysed again through inductive coding by the researcher. Unlike deductive coding, inductive coding has no predetermined list of codes, but uses empirical codes which emerge from the data itself. At the first review of these reflective journals, a number of conflicts were noticed by the researcher within the data, such as:

- students’ unsustained engagement was in conflict with language learning
- student-directed language learning was in conflict with the communicative orientation of activities
- the communicative approach to language teaching was in conflict with realisation of metalanguage
- the English-speaking language environment outside the school was in conflict with the realisation of connectedness
During the original journal writing, as the teacher who was evaluating my own teaching according to QT elements, what I recorded were reflections on my performances on each QT element in particular lessons. In going back to the original reflective journals as the researcher, I realised that these conflicts were usually embedded in problems that the teacher found quite difficult to solve by herself in that context. As the researcher, my sense was that the reason for the irresolution of such problems lay in the existence of two conflicting items, often pushing in opposite directions and constraining each other. For example:

- language learning was constrained by students’ unsustained engagement
- student-directed language learning was sometimes leading to activities being conducted in a non-communicative way.
- QT promotes metalanguage (such as talking about grammar) while CLT favours less focus on grammar in the abstract
- the realisation of connectedness (applying learning to the students’ life outside school) was constrained by the lack of a Chinese language environment in which to apply Chinese

I used the word tension to describe such constraints which the two conflicting items imposed on each other. It is possible that these problems do not occur to other teachers as tensions. From their point of view, the irresolution of these problems in my situation may just be interpreted as lack of experience. It may also be criticised that thinking about problems in this way simplifies something complex into two items. However, conceptualising these problems as tensions is valuable to me as a beginning teacher to think these problems through. As the teacher, I just identified problems in teaching. As the researcher, I viewed these problems through tensions. Extracting the conflicting items highlighted the consequence of a problem for me and
generated richer and deeper reflection in which the problem is not addressed in isolation. For example, as the teacher, I encountered classroom indiscipline as a problem. To address this issue, without realising the consequence of behaviour management to the implementation of CLT, the teacher may try to regulate students’ behaviour by avoiding any communication between students. However, such consequence of behaviour management on the implementation of CLT was highlighted to the researcher by the tension student-centred communication VS. classroom discipline derived from the problem. This allows the modification of classroom strategies to be based on more thorough consideration. This is consistent with the ultimate goal of action research—improving my teaching practice. Based on this consideration, for the secondary analysis which is inductive coding of reflective journals, I adopted a coding method which can help me highlight conflicting items in the journal, that is, versus coding. Saldana (2009, p. 94) defines versus coding as “identify (ing) in binary terms the individuals, groups, social systems, organizations, phenomena, processes, concepts, etc. in direct conflict with each other”. The data analysis process of this research including the specific coding methods used may be illustrated thus:

![Figure 4.7 Data analysis process in Action Research Cycle One with specific coding methods](image_url)

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A code in *versus coding* involves “a duality that manifests itself as an X VS. Y (Saldaña, 2009, p. 94)”. In this research, this kind of code was applied to tensions with ‘X’ and ‘Y’ representing the two conflicting items. However, strategies for dealing with tensions were also searched for during analysis. I call them ‘solutions’ towards these tensions. For the convenience of linking solutions to corresponding tensions, each tension identified was assigned a number. For example, the first tension emerging was coded as ‘①.X VS. Y’, with a corresponding solution being marked as ‘Solution to ①: Z’. Some tensions may have more than one solution while some others may not have any solution at all. Moreover, it was also possible that there was a lack of direct solution to some tensions since the solutions for these tensions depend on solutions to other, related, tensions.

Here is an example of how the same reflective journal presented earlier in table 4.6 was coded by versus coding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>March 9th 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectual quality</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I call the strategies for dealing with tensions ‘solutions’ here. In Chapter 6, I will categorise and go through these ‘solutions’ via a number of theories/philosophies.
Deep understanding

That possibly explained why there is no deep understanding demonstrated in Y2 students work samples. Every time, we almost have only about 25 minutes for learning new words or sentences. Such a period of time is too limited for Y2 kids to acquire the content, especially when it is the last school period of a day.

For Y5-6, 18 students out of 23 had all answers correct. For Y3-4, 21 out of 27 students got all the answers correct. For Year 2, learning outcome is unsatisfactory. Only 5 people were able to do the task in the video correctly at the end of the lesson.

Problematic knowledge

As I explained in last journal, the intrinsic nature of language makes it unlikely to be knowledge that can be open to question. This feeling was shared by the classroom teacher since she wrote “difficult to address in learning a language” under this element in the evaluation form.

Higher-order thinking

Most students demonstrate high-order thinking in exercises we done in Zou ba did require students to evaluate information and then give appropriate response.

Metalanguage

Personally, I don’t think there was any evidence of metalanguage. This is not evident to outsider observation as well.

Substantive communication

Pair practice is the major form of substantive communication of the content. I have tried to maximize purposeful use of Chinese language in my classroom.

Quality learning environment

Explicit quality criteria

As before, explicit quality criteria is one of my weaknesses, as indicated by classroom teacher feedback. The classroom teacher suggests asking students to re-state the criteria for ensuring their understanding about my instruction.

Engagement

There is also unsustained engagement today. They are engaged in some parts of the lesson, but may appear indifferent during other parts and a few students are off-task. This may also explain the poor performance on worksheet.

Solution to unsustained engagement:

- students demonstration or feedback
### High expectation
Setting the appropriate expectation is challenging for me as a beginning teacher. It requires experience and understanding about kids. Other teachers suggest continuous reflecting on what is appropriate and inappropriate.

### Social support
I always ask all students to say “很好 (very good)” to praise their classmates. This makes them practise the language as well as appreciate their classmates’ as good learners.

### Students' self-regulation
I stopped several times to regulate their behaviour. Inappropriate behaviour is because they felt bored. When we do pair practice, some of them talk with each other in English rather than practise Chinese. They talk about other things irrelevant to the lesson. They also became unsettled when they felt so excited about the activities or things I showed to them.

### Student direction
There was no student direction observed.

### Significance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background knowledge</th>
<th>Students' background knowledge about family is mentioned.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural knowledge</td>
<td>One child policy which influences significantly on Chinese family structure is discussed. Students have also discussed their own family members. These discussions highlight the difference between Australian family and Chinese family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge integration</td>
<td>This lesson focuses on the topic of family. It is not based on previous learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusivity</td>
<td>Students are all included. Students are allowed to share how they call their parents at home. Some of the words for family members in their own languages sound similar to Chinese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>Talking about family is to some extent related to life outside school. However, as mentioned in previous journals, it is hard for them to apply the words outside school. It is unlikely they will call their family members in Chinese when they go back home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Narrative is used as a minor part of the lesson when we talk about Australian family structure and Chinese family structure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### June 7th 2011

#### Intellectual quality

**Deep knowledge**
The core concepts of this lesson include colours and ‘dragon boat festival’. The teaching of colours is organized around the topic of ‘dragon boat festival’. The origin of the festival was presented to students through a cartoon in which the language is appropriate to their literacy level.

**Deep understanding**
Students can explain why Chinese people celebrate dragon boat festival as well as eating “Zongzi” very well in their own language, which indicates their deep understanding about dragon boat festival. However, learning outcome of colour names is not that satisfactory according to the worksheets of students. Particularly, they have difficulty in distinguishing ‘huang se’ (yellow) and ‘hong se’ (red): in the colouring task, when I asked them to colour one dragon boat into ‘huang se’ and the other one into ‘hong se’, some of them coloured both of the boats into either yellow or red, others colour those boats in opposite colours.

**Problematic knowledge**
Problematic knowledge is not evident in this lesson. The Chinese words for colours and the origins of dragon boat festival were taught as facts, instead of something that can be questioned.

**Higher-order thinking**
The oral production activities in the game require students’ higher-order thinking to analyse and produce information using what they’ve learnt.

**Metalanguage**
Metalanguage is not evident in this lesson.

**Substantive communication**
To deal with the situation that students are interested in learning the culture while are reluctant to practise the language, I’ve tried to teach language through cultural scenario. The learning contents were introduced through the festival celebration scenario. I have used the picture of the festival to introduce colours and also connects colours with specialities of the festival such as dragon boat and Zongzi. Game was designed as a special festival celebration activity—dragon boat competition. Evaluation of learning outcomes also developed based on the background of the festival.

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8 The Chinese words for colours and the origins of dragon boat festival were taught as facts, instead of something that can be questioned.  

8 Problematic knowledge VS. language learning

Solution to 1: language learning & practising with cultural elements
Quality learning environment

Explicit quality criteria

Students’ mistake on the worksheet may partially be attributed to my inexplicit instruction. ⁷ A classroom teacher reminded me after the lesson that since we have always practised the sentence ‘dragon boat is red’ during our lesson (because the boat in the picture I showed to them is red), students may established the impression that all dragon boats should be red. Therefore, they just colouring those boats into red without listening to my instruction. If I could expect this in advance, I should have made my instruction more clear that the worksheet is not simply a colouring activity. I should have emphasized that they are required to colour each item with a specific colour according to my instruction.

Engagement

The ‘dragon boat competition’ assists me a lot in terms of engaging students. ² Because students understand that these vocabularies are important resources for them to win the game, they have strong incentive to try their best to memorize them. Students even spontaneously open their note books and write down these words in their own symbols. They also become more active in repeating these words after me simply because they wanted to get it right in following competition. However, using games always makes students so excited, which may lead to troubles of classroom management.

High expectation

Students’ intention to write down pronunciation and the difficulty they’ve encountered in distinguishing “huang se” from “hong se” reminded me of the necessity of Pinyin. ¹⁰ Requiring them to engage in communication directly without explicitly distinguishing sounds would be difficult for them. Maybe it is more appropriate to expect them do oral production with the help of Pinyin and then do it without Pinyin after sufficient familiarity and sense of the slight difference between sounds are established in their mind.

Social support

Games promote students to support their classmates since they all want their own team to win the game. It builds up strong team spirit and support among team members.
Students' self-regulation

Students get so excited in the game. A lot of students always call out the answers. I have to stop several times to regulate their behaviour.

Student direction

The learning content and class activities were designed by me, rather than the students. As I mentioned before, students may choose things they are interested in rather than things that are really good for them to learn Chinese.

Significance

Background knowledge

Not evident

Cultural knowledge

Cultural knowledge has been appropriately integrated in different stages of language learning in this lesson. This is done by connecting colours with specialities of the festival such as dragon boat and Zongzi. Game was designed dragon boat competition. Worksheet was also developed based on the background of the festival.

Knowledge integration

Not evident

Inclusivity

Individual participation is addressed by asking each member in the team to take turns to compete. All students have a chance to engage and to contribute.

Connectedness

In the observation feedback, the classroom teacher commented “difficult to share beyond school and classroom”. I guess the underlying reason can be attributed to a big difference between language and other subjects. For other subjects, connectedness to the world outside classroom is easy as these facts and knowledge taught in the classroom are the same everywhere in the world and have the same meaning to all people. However, the meaning of language lies in using it as communication tool. Without need of using it, meaning of language learning is largely decreased. Without being surrounded by target language environment, connectedness of

student-centred communication VS. classroom discipline

student-directed language learning VS. communicative orientation of activities

no communicative need VS. meaning of language learning

connectedness VS. lack of target language environment
language resources to real-life is hard to be established. What foreign language teacher can do here is to ensure that at least in language classrooms or schools, there is an environment which motivates students to use target language. I am so glad that students always use Chinese to greet me and express their thanks.

The cartoon which includes narrative communicates the concept of dragon boat festival effectively to students in their language. This lesson also showed the importance of narrative as a tool to organize together learning contents which are usually not supposed to be taught together. For instance, learning content does not necessarily have to be family words, as long as we organize them in a meaningful way through scenario or narrative. By using dragon boat festival celebration as background, I connect colours with vocabularies of the festival such as “Zongzi” and “dragon boat”.

**Table 4.8 An example of versus coding in Action Research Cycle One**

From the perspective of a teacher, the reflective journal documented problems encountered in teaching practice. From the perspective of a researcher who reviewed these problems afterwards using versus coding, what were noticed from these problems are tensions. This can be explained by reviewing the example of coding provided above. In the journal entry for March 9th and June 11th, the teacher, as the writer of the journal recounted several problems in teaching:

- Students’ learning outcome identified from worksheet was unsatisfactory.
- It was difficult to treat language as open to question
- The teacher was bothered to regulate behaviour
- It was difficult to share learning content beyond school and classroom
- The teacher gave inexplicit instruction
- Students had difficulty in distinguishing sounds
- The teacher was reluctant to allow students to direct the lesson

Solution to 5 and 29: create the target language environment in classroom
In the eyes of the researcher, the reasons why the teacher encountered this problem were attributed to several tensions, namely, time limitation VS. deep understanding, unsustained engagement VS. language learning, problematic knowledge VS. language learning, student-centred communication VS. classroom discipline, no communicative need VS. meaning of language learning, explicit quality criteria VS. my insufficient understanding about students, CLT VS. appropriate expectation, student-directed language learning VS. communicative orientation of activities and connectedness VS. lack of language environment.

The teacher also recorded some strategies to deal with problems which occurred in teaching. These problems are listed below, along with direct quotes from the reflective journal entries in which the strategies originated:

- Students demonstration or feedback to help with explicit quality criteria:
  
  …asking students to re-state the criteria for ensuring their understanding about my instruction…

- Teaching and practising language with cultural elements to engage students in language learning:
  
  …to deal with the situation that students are interested in learning with culture while are reluctant to practise the language, I’ve tried to teach language through cultural scenario…

- The use of games to achieve repetitive language practice:
  
  …because students understand that these vocabularies are important resources for them to win the game, they have strong incentive to try their best to memorize them…

- The use of pinyin to scaffold students in pronunciation:
  
  it is more appropriate to expect them do oral production with the help of Pinyin…

- Create the target language environment in classroom to motivate the application of learning content:
…what foreign language teaching can do here is to ensure that at least in language classrooms or schools, there is an environment which motivates students to use target language.

*The researcher* summarised these strategies as ‘solutions’ and related them back to tensions using numbers.

By using the same methods, the following codes were generated from my reflective journals:

1. unsustained engagement VS. language learning
2. connectedness VS. my insufficient understanding about students
3. metalanguage in language class VS. metalanguage in CLT
4. low interest in language repetition VS. deep understanding
5. connectedness VS. lack of target language environment
6. adult VS. children
7. explicit quality criteria VS. my insufficient understanding about students
8. problematic knowledge VS. language learning
9. deep knowledge about language use VS. top-down approach of focus on form
10. CLT VS. appropriate expectation
11. over-high expectation VS. engagement
12. student-directed language learning VS. communicative orientation of activities
13. inclusivity VS. my insufficient understanding about students
14. my learning of English VS. my use of English for teaching children
15. myself as foreign language (Mandarin) teacher VS. myself as foreign language (English) learner
16. high expectation VS. my insufficient understanding about students
17. student-centred communication VS. classroom discipline
18. time limitation VS. deep understanding
19 Pinyin distinguishes sounds VS. Pinyin misleads students about pronunciation

20 time limitation VS. substantive communication

21 focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. students’ limited grammatical foundation

22 interest VS. repetitive language practice

23 interesting activities VS. communicative activities

24 engagement VS. communicative tasks

25 maximize purposeful use of target language VS. my weak sensitivity to opportunities of purposeful use of target language

26 time limitation VS. step-by-step

27 games VS. behaviour management

28 games VS. inclusivity

29 no communicative need VS. meaning of language learning

30 target culture VS. native culture

31 nursery rhymes practice VS. proposed content to be learnt

32 connectedness VS. lack of instrumental or integrative motivation

33 focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. my insufficient understanding about students

Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: interest-directed learning

Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: spread repetitive practice

Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: games

Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: diversity of games

Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: use of technology

Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: language learning & practising with cultural elements

Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: Chinese versions of English nursery rhymes

Solution to 2 6 7 13 14 16 30: develop understanding about students

Solution to 2: exploring connections between languages

Solution to 3: teaching communicative grammar by focus on form

Solution to 5 29 33: create language environment in classroom
These codes were then categorised into the following themes or major tensions. Uppercase was applied to these themes/major tensions to distinguish them from sub-

Solution to ⑤ ⑨ ⑩: maximize purposeful use of target language

Solution to ⑤ ⑨ ⑩: incidental classroom instruction in target language

Solution to ⑤ ⑨ ⑩: teaching learning content more readily applicable at beginning level

Solution to ⑤ ⑨ ⑩: use of authentic materials

Solution to ⑦ ⑩: communicative learning of teacher English

Solution to ⑦ ⑩: instruction in target language

Solution to ⑦ ⑩: student demonstration or feedback

Solution to ⑦ ⑩: use of example

Solution to ⑦ ⑩: use of written rules

Solution to ⑧: problematic knowledge applicable in Chinese character teaching

Solution to ⑨: focus on form with cross-languages comparison

Solution to ⑩ ⑪: Pinyin for confidence in pronunciation

Solution to ⑩ ⑪: step-by-step

Solution to ⑫: negotiating learning process

Solution to ⑬ ⑭: self-identification as language teacher

Solution to ⑬: reflection

Solution to ⑭: make student-centred communication interesting to promote students’ self-regulation

Solution to ⑭: classroom management skills

Solution to ⑮: Pinyin combined with modelling

Solution to ⑭: knowledge integration approach

Solution to ⑮: give consequence to behaviour in games

Solution to ⑮: design for individual participation

Solution to ⑮: self-made lyrics

Solution to ⑮: refer to syllabus

Solution to ⑮: knowledge integration approach

These codes were then categorised into the following themes or major tensions. Uppercase was applied to these themes/major tensions to distinguish them from sub-
tensions. Since some tensions were derived from solutions to other tensions, a category called ‘derivative tensions’ was created to separate these. ‘Further solutions’ were solutions to these derivative tensions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>Sub-tensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 unsustained engagement VS. language learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 low interest in language repetition VS. deep understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 time limitation VS. deep understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 time limitation VS. substantive communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 interest VS. repetitive language practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23 interesting activities VS. communicative activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24 engagement VS. communicative tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 CLT VS. appropriate expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 over-high expectation VS. engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solution to 1 4 13 20 22 24 23: interest-directed learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to 1 4 13 20 22 24 23: spread repetitive practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to 1 4 13 20 22 24 23: games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to 1 4 13 20 22 24 23: diversity of games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to 1 4 13 20 22 24 23: use of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to 1 4 13 20 22 24 23: language learning &amp; practising with cultural elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to 1 4 13 20 22 24 23: Chinese versions of English nursery rhymes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to 10 11: Pinyin for confidence in pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to 10 11: step-by-step</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Derivative tensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27 games VS. behaviour management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 games VS. inclusivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 nursery rhymes practice VS. proposed content to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING ABOUT STUDENTS VS. IMPLEMENTATION OF QT ELEMENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Pinyin distinguishes sounds VS. Pinyin misleads students about pronunciation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Further solutions**

- Solution to 27: give consequence to behaviour in games
- Solution to 28: design for individual participation
- Solution to 11: self-made lyrics
- Solution to 19: Pinyin combined with modelling

**Sub-tensions**

- 6 Adult VS. children
- 30 Target culture VS. native culture
- 2 Connectedness VS. my insufficient understanding about students
- 7 Explicit quality criteria VS my insufficient understanding about students
- 14 My learning of English VS. my use of English for teaching children
- 16 High expectation VS. my insufficient understanding about students
- 13 Inclusivity VS. my insufficient understanding about students

**Solutions**

- Solution to 2 6 7 13 14 16 30: develop understanding about students
- Solution to 2: exploring connections between languages
- Solution to 7 14: communicative learning of teacher English
- Solution to 7 14: instruction in target language
- Solution to 7 14: student demonstration or feedback
- Solution to 7 14: use of example
- Solution to 7 14: use of written rules
- Solution to 16: reflection

**Derivative tensions**

- 33 Focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Table 4.9 Categorisation of codes in Action Research Cycle One
4.3.2 Discussion of major tensions

ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

The *Engagement* element in QT means “activities are designed to seriously engage students in their own learning. Activities are designed such that students can be expected to display sustained interest”. (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 1). However, for young learners, the communicative teaching approach itself is potentially weak in terms of *engagement* as the process of acquiring communicative competence may not always be enjoyable. This problematic situation was described as *ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT*. Details of this situation can be explained by reviewing the group of tensions from which this emerged.

There is rich evidence in previous studies by my colleagues (Chen, 2011; Chen, 2011; Huang, 2011; Li, 2010; Ma, 2011; Mao, 2010; Mao, 2011; Weng, 2010; Weng, 2011; Wu, 2010; Xu, 2010; Yuan, 2011; Zhang, 2010; Zhang, 2010) that what is closely related to the engagement of Australian students, especially primary school students, in learning Chinese seems to be ‘interest’. ‘Interest’ is defined as:

…preference to engage in some types of activities rather than others. An interest may be regarded as a highly specific type of attitude: When we are interested in a particular phenomenon or activity, we are favourably inclined to attend to or give time to it (Gardner & Tamir 1989a, p. 410)

Therefore, to explain *ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT* in my situation where I taught Chinese to non-background primary school students, ‘interest’ becomes an integral topic. Now I will turn to some sub-tensions under the major tension *ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT*. 

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Firstly, there were tensions of *low interest in language repetition VS. deep understanding* and *interest VS. repetitive language practice*. Language acquisition, as partly a habit formation process, requires repetitive practice (Hayes, 2009). When communicative competence is pursued as the students’ language learning outcome, a significant amount of repetition cannot be avoided to build up the learners’ linguistic competence (mastery of grammatical rules and memorisation of vocabulary) as the foundation for communicating in the target language. In the terms of QT, repetition contributes to substantive communication of learning content, which in turn produces deep understanding of language use. It is this deep understanding of every single utterance that gradually builds up students’ linguistic competence which can be used in further communication. With increased linguistic competence, students should be able to engage in more substantive communication in a variety of contexts, and thus are exposed to more opportunities to learn the language in various communicative situations. However, the prerequisite for this to happen is the learners’ tolerance for engaging in repetition and substantive communication in the target language. Unfortunately, it is always not easy for people to sustain enthusiasm about something repetitive, especially when the significance of language learning is not strongly supported by integrative motivation (desire to be involved in the target community) or instrumental motivation (a desire to accomplish some non-interpersonal purpose such as to pass an exam or to advance a career) (Liuolienė & Metiūnienė, 2011, p. 94).

No matter how well a communicative task is designed, if students refuse to participate, it does not contribute to students’ communicative competence at all. Related to this was *engagement VS. communicative task*. For example, role-play has
always been used in communicative language teaching for students to practise communication in the target language. It is hoped that students can develop deep understanding about the linguistic, as well as contextual, aspect of utterances learnt by immersing themselves into scenarios similar to authentic communication. However, such comparatively ‘authentic tasks’ may not be ideal in terms of engaging students. Students may be reluctant to perform role-play. To engage them, activities must be interesting to them. Hands-on activities such as colouring tasks and craft seemed to be favourite activities of young learners to my inexperienced eyes. However, these activities, even though incorporating something about the target culture, may not have direct benefits for substantive communication of the target language. By carrying out these colouring and craft activities, students were engaged in a Chinese-oriented lesson, but were not necessarily engaged in learning the language. Thus came the tension of interesting activities VS. communicative activities, where an ‘interesting activity’ may have limited significance in terms of developing students’ communicative competence, while an activity involving a significant amount of language practice and substantive communication of the target language, which was regarded as efficient for communicative competence development, may not be interesting at all from the perspective of students. ‘Interesting activities’ are activities which involve some topics or objects related to students’ life experiences, preferences and hobbies. Examples of interesting activities for my students are craft and sports. ‘Communicative activities’ are activities which require students to use Chinese to communicate with each other. When both of these two types of activities were used in a single lesson, the engagement level might not be sustained, but varied depending on which type of activities students are doing. In other words, engagement in ‘interesting activities’ did not necessarily lead to
engagement in ‘communicative activities’ which were deemed as of greater importance for the ultimate goal of my teaching. This was described as _unsustained engagement VS. language learning_. Here is an example from my journal:

They listen to me quietly during the first five minutes, however, started to chat with each other after that. Basically, they are interested in the first part of the lesson which is an introduction about China, panda, The Great Wall. Classroom management became a major issue when I started to teach “ni hao (hello)” (Reflective journal, 9-Feb-2011)

It was my view that students were not engaged in learning the language even though they were attracted by the cultural introduction section of the lesson.

The limited time for Mandarin learning in my school intensified the tension _interesting activities VS. communicative activities_ as ‘interesting parts’ of the lesson and communicative language practice were just competing with each other for time in every individual lesson. This contributed to further issues which were captured by the tensions _time limitation VS. substantive communication_ and _time limitation VS. deep understanding_. Increasing ‘interesting activities’ may result in no substantive communication, whereas increasing communicative activities may cause loss of interest and non-engagement—both of these can lead to the same disappointing outcome, that is, shallow knowledge and understanding of learning content, and thus, failure to develop communicative competence. The following example from my journal illustrates this:

We did some paper cutting about these things, such as bird, butterfly and flower. All students were well on-task at this part of lesson. However, this does not necessarily enhance their memory of these words. From the perspective of kids, there may be nothing more than paper cutting. Originally, what I wanted to do was much more than cutting all these images. I wanted to ask them to colour all the images they cut and then paste it on a blank paper to form a picture of Spring, and then tell the whole class what’s in their picture in Chinese, for example, “hongse de hua (red flower)”. Nevertheless, this requires significant amount of time. With time limitation, the original plan was not accomplished and thus finally resulted in a pure interest-
orientated activity without any value for language practice. (Reflective journal, 24-Aug-2011)

The limited time for Mandarin learning in my school, which intensified the tension between inspiring interest for increasing engagement and developing communicative competence also raised my doubt as to whether setting communicative competence development as the ultimate goal of teaching was realistic in my particular situation. I was actually confronted with the repositioning of my core responsibility as a language teacher based on the relative importance of these two aspects. Inspiring interest I considered a higher priority for two reasons. Firstly, as discussed previously, for children, interest in learning is an essential driving force for their sustainable engagement in language practice and thus developing communicative competence. In other words, inspiring interest is always fundamental even if communicative competence development is selected as a higher priority. Secondly, it is argued that interest is always the best teacher. As long as interest has been engaged, learning will take care of itself. In the light of this interest-directed learning approach, the core responsibility of teachers is to inspire students’ strong enthusiasm about things and open a door to them. And then it is believed that learning becomes a process from ‘inside out’. Based on these considerations, the most efficient way to use limited class time seemed to be by treating the inspiring of interest as a core responsibility.

Since the length of time of the students’ learning was not my decision, shifting the attention towards optimisation of time seemed to be a more feasible and efficient solution. The essence of optimisation of time use was to maximise students’ engagement in activities beneficial for their communicative competence
development. What really matters became the manner in which language repetition and communicative activities were conducted. Two ideas emerged. Firstly, the repetition of the same content could be spread among several lessons through revision instead of being concentrated in the single unit of a lesson. The purpose of this was to reduce the intensity of practice in each single lesson but still ensured the total amount of repetitive practice in the long run. Secondly, a more fundamental solution was to make repetitive language practice in communicative activities interesting. The deep-seated issue underlying the compromised transferring of time from language practice to inspiring interest and students’ varying engagement level lied in the division between interest-oriented activities and communicative activities. If repetitive language practices in communicative activities were themselves interesting activities, there would be no competition for time so that engagement in language practice would be increased dramatically.

Games are a good example of the second type of solution. By playing games, the experience of practising language was totally changed from simple repetition of words and sentences. Students’ attention was shifted from repetition to the ‘exciting game’. They were learning while playing without suffering from simple repetition. And I do believe that as teachers, it is our responsibility to make learning enjoyable. The effectiveness of games for engaging students was described in my journal as follows:

The ‘dragon boat competition’ assists me a lot in terms of engaging students. Because students understand that these vocabularies are important resources for them to win the game, they have strong incentive to try their best to memorize them. Students even spontaneously open their note books and write down these words in their own symbols. They also become more active in repeating these words after me simply because they wanted to get it right in following competition. (Reflective journal, 7-Jun-2011)
The game called “cat and mouse” we played today is a simple but effective one for making repetition interesting. Mouse is the student who pretends reading words or sentences like others but without actually making any sounds. Cat is the student who needs to identify the mouse among all students by observation. In the game, all students are willing to read new vocabs with me just because they want to hide who is the mouse. This game overcomes the biggest issue in language learning that is students’ unwillingness to repeat the same thing over and over again. Compared with other activities, the repetition through ‘cat and mouse’ is more substantive and intensive. In other words, it to some extent makes full use of time for practising new words with almost no waste of time on other things which were used for interest concern…. (Reflective journal, 17-Aug-2011)

Nevertheless, other tensions were identified while using games to engage students. Firstly, there was games VS. inclusivity. In a game, students were usually divided into groups and earn points for their own teams by responding to questions. I found that it was always the most active learners in each group who first called out the answers and competed for their own teams, which left no time for the rest of the class to even think and respond. This resulted in exclusivity and unequal distribution of chances for practising. The contributions of quieter learners were especially overlooked. The quieter students in the classroom were actually being excluded by perhaps never getting a turn. This gave rise to a further tension, that is, games VS. behaviour management. When others were getting more sophisticated at playing the game by winning more chances to practice, quieter students were more reluctant to engage, finally becoming unsettled and tending to chat with each other. To address the issue of unequal distribution of opportunities to practise, which was deemed to be the root of the problem, I asked different students in each group to race to be the first to answer the question every time. Thus, overall performance of their team would depend on every individual member’s contribution. This design ensured that assistance from the teacher is targeted at individuals, thus providing equal chances for them to improve. For the least active students, it was necessary to create a safe environment for them to participate by giving them a last turn. Nevertheless, this one-by-one pattern was quite time-consuming and did not eliminate behaviour
problems. As students had to wait for their own turn, there was actually more, rather than less, likelihood of them becoming unsettled, especially when there were few competitors for each turn. One solution to this was to give a consequence to their behaviour in games. Groups were awarded extra points or punished by deducting points depending on how they behaved in the game. This seemed to be more effective if the consequences of their behaviour combined with academic performance are realised further in their school’s or classroom teachers’ management system.

However, using a single game increased, but may not necessarily maximised, engagement in language practice. To achieve the end of optimising the use of limited learning time, a diversity of games is crucial for sustaining students’ engagement. Changing activities frequently for keeping students on-task was widely recommended by classroom teachers:

And I think today…oh…the game, just make sure they don’t go too long because sometimes then they lose the interest so maybe you have two different games so that they play one today and then a different one, it will keep them on task. … Sometimes if they are short and quick, it keeps them on task because you are moving on and you are not doing the same thing. So like we would play the game you play today for 5 mins and then a different one for 5 mins, so just keeps them changing and keeps them interested. (Classroom Teacher B)

Just what I was saying, maybe not so long on the carpet and get them to do activity on their table so their interest is just not always on the one thing all the time. We usually change activities every 20 or 25 minutes. Just they move from the carpet to do it somewhere else. (Classroom Teacher P)

In terms of a diversity of activities, using a group activity and an individual activity alternately was also recommended:

So that’s why if you can have an activity where a few people are involved and have an activity for everybody at desk even if it is a worksheet, that would probably include everybody right through the lesson. And it also gives you an idea of who is understanding the concept because they’ve got their own activities so you can see who understands that quickly because some children really pick up idea quickly and some of them are a little bit slower as they are a little bit younger. So I think
activities could actually include more people if it is at the table and also could be a really good evaluation. (Classroom Teacher P)

Additionally, the use of technology such as a Smart Board and multimedia teaching material were frequently mentioned by classroom teachers in either interviews or observational feedback as an essential enhancement of games in terms of attracting student interest.

Moreover, incorporation of cultural elements may to some extent make language repetition interesting. This also addresses the problem mentioned earlier that students may engage in the cultural aspects of a lesson but not the specific focused language aspect as language learning happened simultaneously with experiencing something about culture. Some examples are:

- Practising saying colours while recognising colours on a Beijing opera costume and mask
- Practising saying directions while playing compass (invented by ancient Chinese people)
- Introducing lucky and unlucky numbers in Chinese culture, and the abacus (a calculating tool used in ancient China), and ancient Chinese mathematics while learning how to say numbers in Chinese
- Learning how to say different shapes in Chinese while playing Tangram (a traditional Chinese game)
- Learning to say the names of stationery in Chinese while introducing traditional Chinese calligraphy
- Practising vocabulary for body parts while learning tai chi quan (a Chinese martial art practiced for health benefits)
Another way to integrate culture and language is to use cultural activities like celebrations and festivals as language teaching materials:

The learning contents were introduced through the festival celebration scenario. I have used the picture of the festival to introduce colours and also connects colours with specialities of the festival such as dragon boat and Zongzi. Game was designed as a special festival celebration activity—dragon boat competition. Evaluation of learning outcomes also developed based on the background of the festival. (Reflective journal, 7-Jun-2011)

An extra benefit of this approach lies in its creativity for knowledge integration, that is, vocabularies which may not be supposed to be taught together can be connected in a meaningful way through cultural scenario. With regard to the example above, by using dragon boat festival celebration as background, I connected colours with vocabularies of the festival such as ‘zongzi’ and ‘dragon boat’.

Apart from games, technology and cultural elements, the elimination of any boredom of repetitive language practice may also be achieved with this young age through the use of nursery rhymes as evident in the following excerpt from my journal:

They really love singing ‘happy birthday’....They told me that they sang ‘happy birthday’ in Chinese to one classmate who had his birthday yesterday. I am so glad that with the help of the song, language practice is extended outside Mandarin lesson. (Reflective journal, 20-Oct-2010)

We practised Chinese version of ‘twinkle, twinkle little star’ several times today. It seems that students never get bored with singing this. They kept asking me: “Miss, can we do that again?” Most of the students were trying so hard to follow the lyrics. (Reflective journal, 20-Oc-2011)

The rationale for the use of nursery rhymes is their possessing “both the communicative aspect of language and the entertainment aspect of music” (Jolly, 1975, p. 11). With nursery rhymes, students’ response to language practice is expected to be engagement with “the pleasant flow of melody” (Jolly, 1975, p. 11).

Nevertheless, there were some negative experiences in teaching nursery rhymes:

I selected a Chinese nursery rhyme 小手拍拍 (clap your little hands) which repeating names of body parts in its lyrics for this lesson. However, most students are
reluctant to follow me singing and doing the actions. It was so different from previous experience of learning other songs. (Reflective journal, 11-May-2011)

I was teaching them a famous Tang poem called “Thought on a quiet night”. They were reluctant to learn that and seemed to have difficulty with repeating complete sentence with even just five characters. It is the first poem to learn for almost every Chinese kid during the stage of pre-school education. That’s why I chose it for foreign language teaching. However, I didn’t realize that those vocabularies which are familiar to Chinese kids are completely new to foreign kids since they never had a chance to come across these Chinese vocabularies in their daily life. That makes the poem so strange to them despite that I explained the relationship between round moon and family reunion in Chinese culture. Unfamiliar cultural experience, unfamiliar vocabularies combined with mixture of different sentence structure lead to the failure of teaching “Thought on a quiet night”. (Reflective journal, 3-Nov-2010)

It can be seen from these contradictory experiences that the effectiveness of nursery rhyme teaching depended on the features of the materials used. In my experience, nursery rhymes did not interest students at all if either the melody sounded alien to them or the content could not be easily understood at their age level. Considering this, better options would be Chinese versions of some English nursery rhymes which were familiar to such young learners, such as Happy Birthday, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, Jingle Bells, Ten Indian Boys, Old MacDonald Had a Farm, Merry Christmas, Silent Night, Walking Walking, Head Shoulders Knees & Toes. Nonetheless, there was a tension evident: nursery rhymes practice VS. proposed content to be learnt in that this approach was not applicable for teaching all topics as the content of learning was highly restricted by the lyrics. A possible solution is to replace the English lyrics of familiar nursery rhymes with self-created Chinese lyrics about the intended learning content. Even for songs already having Chinese lyrics available, some amendment is necessary to make it more tailored to the learners’ level of mastery. This is quite challenging for teachers as the tune of an English song was intended for the English language and thus was difficult to match with Chinese words. It would be even more difficult if the teacher wants to make the lyrics close to dialogue-style expressions for a communicative orientation.
Students’ lack of interest in engaging in communicative language learning may also be described by the tensions of CLT VS. appropriate expectation and over-high expectation VS. engagement. CLT to some extent poses a high expectations about the learners’ imitating capability, since it demands learners imitate whole sentences from the very beginning of foreign language learning, when they are still struggling with individual sounds or words. For beginners who were only recently exposed to another language, even distinguishing individual sounds can be difficult:

Particularly, they have difficulty in distinguishing ‘huang se’ (yellow) and ‘hong se’ (red): in the colouring task, when I asked them to colour one dragon boat into ‘huang se’ and the other one into ‘hong se’, some of them coloured both of the boats into either yellow or red, others colour those boats in opposite colours. (Reflective journal, 7-Jun-2011)

It was much more challenging for them to imitate complete sentences. When they were directly forced to repeat these difficult sentences over and over again but little eventual success, they may get no sense of achievement and can lose their interest in learning. For instance, one of my journal entries read:

The sentence for asking others’ nationality, which is “你是哪国人?” seems to be a difficult sentence for an English-speaker, especially the individual word “哪” (which). Students were reluctant to practise this after trying a few times. （Reflective journal, 23-Feb-2011）

Without being supported by sufficient training for individual sounds, imitating complete sentences directly is unlikely to be a realisable target for many young students. At ages 5-6, very few students could apply the sentence pattern correctly during one single lesson.

According to advice from classroom teachers, phonetic symbols are crucial scaffolding to imitating sounds, thus building up their confidence in pronunciation:

The one thing maybe you could do is like today you were writing on the board the names of what the ruler is but then writing at the end Chinese as well and getting them to write on papers, that’s good so then they have their reference because they
don’t always remember that, there is not that much participation if they don’t remember. So the participation was high today because they actually write it on the sheet to refer back to. Or you can give them a handout at the beginning with what they are doing today……(Classroom Teacher B)

The effectiveness of phonetic symbols lies in their facilitation of phonological awareness about similar sounds. In learning our first language, we noticed slight differences between similar sounds by hearing others articulating these over and over again, through thousands of repetitions. Originally, I tried to teach foreign language sounds following the same approach by constantly modelling the correct pronunciation; however, I found that merely modelling in such limited class time was insufficient to get young learners to recognise similar or different pronunciations. In this situation, we need to make the phonological difference between sounds more explicit, mainly by distinguishing them first using phonetic symbols. Chinese characters are “ideographs without individual characters that represent the component sounds of a word” (Gu & Wu, 2005, p. 583). As written forms of Chinese, characters do not serve the same function as phonetic symbols as English words. For the purpose of denoting the pronunciation of Chinese characters, Pinyin was introduced by the Chinese government in 1958. Since then, Pinyin has been widely used in both first language and second language education. However, as it is pointed out in the literature, the use of Pinyin for teaching Chinese as a foreign language may not result in learners’ accurate pronunciation of Chinese, for two reasons. Firstly, learners’ mental representation and pronunciation of sounds is affected by the orthographic representation of the sounds with which they are familiar. As speakers of English, learners are already literate in another orthography different from Pinyin. Hence, it is easy for them to pronounce Pinyin following orthographic conventions in their first language. Since the Pinyin system shares Roman alphabet letters with English, it may turn out to be a tool that misleads instead of accurately instructs
learners’ pronunciation, since English speakers may read them as if they are English words. Secondly, incorrect pronunciation is often attributed to the feature of Pinyin in which “transcription of some Chinese rimes does not represent the main vowel” (Bassetti, 2007, p. 1). As a phonologically transparent orthography, Pinyin represents one phoneme by one grapheme, i.e. a letter or letter combination. There is generally a one-to-one correspondence between graphemes and phonemes. However, “phonemic accuracy is sometimes sacrificed to make pinyin easier to read or write” (Bassetti, 2007, p. 3). For instance, /i/ which is normally spelled i, will be spelled as y in the syllable-initial position to help readers to distinguish \textit{fanian} /fa niən/ from \textit{fanyan} /fa niən/. The omission of the main vowel in the representation of three Chinese rimes is another example, as below:

Another orthographic convention which was meant to facilitate reading applied to the representation of three Chinese rimes: /uei/, /iou/ and /uən/. When there is no consonantal onset, these syllables are spelled as \textit{wei}, \textit{you} and \textit{wen}. But when these rimes are preceded by a consonant, the main vowel is not represented: /uei/ is spelled as \textit{ui}, /iou/ is spelled as \textit{iu}, /uən/ is spelled as \textit{un}. (Bassetti, 2007, p. 3)

According to Bassetti (2007) since in Chinese there are no /iu/, /ui/ or /un/ rimes, native speakers of Chinese with sufficient exposure to Chinese phonology before learning Pinyin would understand \textit{iu}, \textit{ui}, \textit{un} is always associated with /iou/, /uei/ and /uən/. However, for foreign language beginners with almost no knowledge of the phonological repertoire of Chinese, their pronunciation of Pinyin is likely to be significantly influenced by the orthography of their first language. For instance, in Italian orthography, \textit{iu}, \textit{ui}, \textit{un} are pronounced as /iu/, /ui/ and /un/. Research shows that it is more likely for learners to get the correct pronunciation when they were provided with the transcription \textit{uen} instead of \textit{un} for /uən/ (Bassetti, 2007).
These issues also led to a tension, that is, *Pinyin distinguishes sounds VS. Pinyin misleads students about pronunciation*. In this sense, Pinyin may be regarded as a double-edged sword. The benefit of using Pinyin seems to depend on the extent to which it is supplemented by the teachers’ oral modelling of the sounds to facilitate learners to notice the gap between their pronunciation and the correct pronunciation as well as to increase exposure to Chinese phonological repertoire. Without sufficient modelling to counteract the influence of the students’ native language, Pinyin may just generate counter-productive outcomes.

On the other hand, the underlying reason for too high an expectation working against engagement may not lie in the expectation itself. What really matters here is the way the expectation is managed in lesson design. High expectations could be managed by a series of attainable goals instead of a single ultimate goal out of the reach of students’ current knowledge. In terms of CLT, it would be more feasible to use some focused practice on key points or difficult points in a sentence to support oral production activities for complete sentences or conversations. With attainable goals in a phased and sequenced manner, students’ engagement can be more readily ensured, thereby leading them to achieve the high expectation of learning complete sentences step-by-step. Nevertheless, this is quite time consuming, and cannot be achieved in a single lesson of only 45 minutes.

**MY INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING ABOUT STUDENTS VS. IMPLEMENTATION OF QT ELEMENTS**

Realisation of the elements of QT can be grounded on the teacher’s knowledge of their students. The need for understanding is derived from differences or barriers between people. In the general teacher-student relationship, where teachers and
students share a common culture and language background, the need for understanding is usually in the context of experience, age and educational differences between adults and children. In the foreign language classroom, the differences between the teacher and the students which give rise to the need for understanding are—in addition—related to language and cultural differences where the teacher speaks the foreign language as her first language. Hence, the foreign language teacher herself needs cultural understanding, in addition to understanding students in terms of maturation of development. As a beginning teacher growing up in a different cultural, language and educational background, who had just entered into the Australian culture, I lacked both of these understandings. Hence, in my situation, there were tensions of adult VS. children and target culture VS. native culture. These led to a number of tensions between insufficient understanding about students and some elements of QT. Classroom teachers’ suggestions for my teaching were based on their understanding about students’ interest and local culture:

In this part of country, in Sydney, the most popular sport would be Rugby League. We’ve got a few teams out here. If you could link Rugby League into Chinese, that would be a good lesson. A lot of the children go for the Parramatta Eels or Penrith Panthers. It’s a place where if you ask what Rugby League team you like, everyone will tell you a team, it’s really popular. I noticed you’ve taught animals, just a way of linking it to the football, each team has an animal, mascot. That would be a good way to teach, like there is a dragon, tiger. (Classroom Teacher C)

But I think if you brought simple things like Chinese cooking that they see outside as well, they would then actually connect what they’ve learned to things they see outside school cause a lot of children do see Chinese cooking shows. A bit of more cultural activities will help them see the connectedness there. (Classroom Teacher P)

However, understanding about students and native culture is never a rapid progress. As a result, all these tensions are unlikely to be completely eliminated until a certain level of understanding about students is achieved by future immersion in their culture. Therefore, the solutions mentioned in the following paragraphs may not be considered as fundamental solutions to these tensions, but strategies generated while my understanding about students was still under development.
The first tension was connectedness VS my insufficient understanding about students. Connectedness requires the teacher to ensure “knowledge learned is directly applied to real-life problems within real-life contexts. Students are given opportunities to share their work with audiences beyond the classroom or school.” (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 3). For language—which is a communication tool and a symbol system—connectedness is harder to realise when there is insufficient communication in the target language happening around students in their lives. Therefore, it is necessary to explore connections between language learning and some other aspects of students’ life outside the symbol system. For example:

I made a connection between class opening and ending to one of their school memos “be respectful learner” (Reflective journal, 5-May-2011)

There is connectedness between learning Chinese and Mother’s day by teaching them how to express their love to mums in Chinese. (Reflective journal, 5-May-2011)

I found that the Chinese word most deeply impressed in students’ mind was “海绵宝宝(SpongeBob)”. They remembered that probably because they are interested in the cartoon character. They also remembered the sentence “海绵宝宝是黄色的(SpongeBob is yellow)”. This is related to the idea that “when students are involved in meaningful-focused tasks, then language learning will take care itself”. They learned the words and sentences about SpongeBob quite well simply because it is meaningful to them. (Reflective journal, 28-Jul-2010)

All of these examples above indicated that establishing connectedness outside the symbol system partly demanded understanding about students’ lives both inside and outside school. However, in reality, I had merely a superficial knowledge about my students.

When the teacher’s understanding about students has not yet been sufficiently developed to support connecting language lesson to students’ lives, one possible strategy is to explore connections between the target language and the native language. This does not necessarily require teachers’ substantial understanding about
students, but only the teacher as a bilingual speaker with knowledge about the relationship between the target language and the native language. In terms of similarities, even though English, which is the first language of most of my students, belongs to a language system different from Chinese, it shares some pronunciations with Chinese. A typical example of these is the word ‘mum’ which is pronounced as ‘mama’ in Mandarin. In addition, due to global communication, both English and Chinese have some words borrowed from each other, which sound quite similar to their pronunciation in the original language. Thanks to globalisation, the number of loan-words is increasing, hence providing more opportunity for the exploration of similarities between languages. In addition to pronunciation, connections between the grammars in the two languages can also be explored. Grammatical instruction in CLT takes the form of focus on form, which “draws students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication” (Long, 1991, pp. 45-46). While using focus on form instruction, grammar knowledge of the first language learning can be made use of by foreign language teachers as background knowledge to build up grammatical understanding about the foreign language, while grammar comparison in turn facilitates further understanding about the first language. Nevertheless, there was a tension of focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. my insufficient understanding about students. This tension and its solution will be explored later in detail under the theme METALANGUAGE VS. MY COMMUNICATIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM.

In addition, there was a tension of explicit quality criteria VS. my insufficient understanding about students. Explicit quality criteria in QT requires teachers to
provide students with “explicit criteria for the quality of work they are expected to produce. These criteria are regularly referred to and students are clear on how they can achieve highly” (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 2). The use of correct language based on understanding about students is highly relevant to the production of clear teacher instruction understandable to students. Since I had almost no idea about students’ literacy levels, sometimes I used vocabulary that could not be understood by students:

For example, I used the word “population”. When the classroom teacher noticed that students did not understand me quite well, she explained to students that large population means a lot of people. This makes me realized the importance of choosing appropriate classroom language according to level of target students. (Reflective journal, 9-Feb-2011)

I used the word “nationality” which is again a word beyond student’s literacy capacity. One student asked me what nationality is. (Reflective journal, 23-Feb-2011)

I encountered the same problem as before when I use the word “zodiac” which cannot be understood by Y2 students. The classroom teacher helped me explain this to students by comparing and contrast “star sign” and Chinese zodiac. She said: “in our culture zodiac is related to month while in Chinese culture it is related to year. Our zodiac is star sign while in Chinese culture it is represented by animals.” To introduce the Chinese zodiac, the classroom teacher addressed star sign which is already known to students. I realised that the word “zodiac” may not be understood by students, however, I don’t know how to explain this by relating it to something they’ve already known. The key issue here is that I even have no idea about whether students have already known “star sign” in their culture. Their classroom teachers know what they’ve already known, while I don’t. (Reflective journal, 16-Mar-2011)

When concepts like “population”, “nationality” and “zodiac” in the example above are used, it requires the teacher to relate these back to students’ background knowledge. Without sufficient understanding about what students already knew at different stages, even explaining these concepts would make little sense for young children. Consequently, the situation would be just as Barnes (1986, p. 55) described: “the teacher may not be able to escape from vocabularies equally unfamiliar to children”.

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To improve this, I worked more on the use of language in the classroom situation when I prepared my lessons. Unfortunately, sometimes I thought I had prepared clear explanations and instructions, while these were actually not clear enough from the perspective of students, such as was evident in my own journals and the classroom teachers’ observations:

My instruction was “Firstly, you fill up these cells with all the words on the board. Using each word at least once. Then, cross the word out when you hear the word called by me. You say ‘Bingo’ when all of your cells have been crossed out “Following this instruction, there were some unexpected results. Some students use one letter for each cell instead of a complete word. I should have provided a sample of finished Bingo sheet expected. I haven’t done this because of my overestimation about students’ understanding about the game. Another problem with the instruction was that I haven’t made it clear whether they should cross all the “sunscreen” out when they heard that or just one of those each time. The difference here is that multiple crossing out can lead them more quickly to “Bingo”. I haven’t realized these problems when I prepared lesson. (Reflective journal, 7-Sep-2011)

I thought the instructions on the worksheet should be enough for students to complete the paper cutting. However, I found that students have problems with folding the paper since the instruction does not show them how to fold it step by step. When the classroom teacher added some extra instructions, I realized that the instruction is not enough. (Reflective journal, 16-Feb-2011)

I think that you could be more clear on the expectations of what you want them to do during the lesson so making sure that the instructions are very clear before they start cause sometimes they start to get a bit..., when they play games they really need that clear instruction before they start. (Classroom Teacher B)

Hence, it seemed to me that I was never capable of predicting the effectiveness and appropriateness of my language before I actually implemented it in the classroom.

My unclear instruction was picked up by classroom teachers. Every time I explained a game or a worksheet, classroom teachers would re-explain it to students in their own words. This indicates that I was not making myself understood by students who were still in a process of developing the literacy of their mother tongue.

My deficiency in English may be one of the factors contributing to improper use of language, but it was not the most significant one. The key issue here was my
insufficient understanding about my audience—students. From the perspective of the communicative approach, poor communicative competence can be attributed to either language comprehension or inappropriate application of language in a specific context. As a foreign language learner of English, the ineffectiveness of communication between students and me lies mainly in the latter factor, specifically, undeveloped understanding about the application of English in a classroom context. The underlying reason was likely to be the tension of My learning of English VS. My use of English for teaching children. When I learnt English as a foreign language, the target audience I would have in mind were adults who are sophisticated users of the language. However, as a foreign language teacher who was using English, the audience in front of me were very young children who are still learning their own language. Therefore, my learning of English did not match my communicative purpose of using English to talk with young students as a teacher.

One of my solutions was to address the incongruence between the goals of English learning and English use by treating day-to-day teaching as an opportunity to learn the English of a teacher (‘teacher English’) through communication with students. In this sense, I was learning teacher English in the same way as students were learning Mandarin, that is, through a communicative approach. Communicative learning of teacher English focused on two aspects, namely, understanding the needs of target audiences and the features of ‘typical’ teacher utterances. Developing understanding about students at different stages forces the foreign language teacher to revise a lesson plan from the students’ perspectives and to select vocabulary tailored to the target students’ literacy levels as well as to explain concepts by drawing upon things
already known by students. Nevertheless, this was unlikely to be achieved in the short-run, as indicated in one classroom teacher’s interview:

I have my own classroom management techniques but I really just can’t explain it because I’ve been teaching so long, you just know the children. (Classroom Teacher P)

Considering this, my strategy was to seek as much information as I could from classroom teachers, as well as to observe their lessons. Observing classroom teachers was also related to the second aspect of the communicative learning of teacher English—understanding the features of typical teacher messages. Examples of this could be “sitting properly”, “litter off the floor”, “feet still”, “mouths closed”, “eyes at the front” and “hands on the desk”. These messages shared some common features:

- The sentences were short for clear instruction
- Most of these were imperative sentences
- They carried the emotional message of teacher-power

Having noticed this, I tried to use some of these utterances in my class, and found that these utterances were really much more effective and powerful than the instructions I used before. For example, when I said “pens away” instead of “Can you please put your pens down?”, all students did exactly the right thing at once.

An alternative solution which is more beneficial to the development of students’ communicative competence is the use of classroom instruction in Mandarin to target the purposefulness of the target language. Here is an example:

A good example is the use of “安静” which means “keep quiet” in Chinese. I always put my finger at the front of my mouth and say “安静” when I want students to stop talking. After several times, all students know what it means. Some of them even remind their classmates to stop talking during my lesson. This indicates that students have internalized the word and use it in meaningful-making process. (Reflective journal, 18-May-2011)
As in Australia, teachers in China use messages with the same features listed above to instruct students, such as “举手 (hands up)”, “起立 (stand up)”, “看黑板 (look at the board)”, “注意听 (listen carefully)”. Training students to respond to these instructions in a foreign language classroom serves dual purposes. Firstly, it helps to establish the teacher’s authority and thus realise more effective classroom control. Secondly, it exposes students to a real communication situation by maximizing the purposeful use of the target language.

From another perspective, a particular message of instruction comes into effect after extensive practice. Students respond to these quite well because they have been trained for them countless times. For instance, our school had an instruction that may not be found in other schools, called the ‘four ‘L’s’. This simple phrase contained five instructions for students’ behaviour, including ‘lips are closed’, ‘look at the teacher’, ‘listen to the teacher’, ‘legs are crossed’ (if sitting on the floor), and each time when students were about to be unsettled, classroom teachers said “show me your four ‘L’s”. And children knew exactly what to do. Therefore, the determining factor for the effectiveness of a particular instruction was the extent to which students had been trained to respond to it.

In addition to these, there were some general strategies adopted by classroom teachers to make instruction explicit. Firstly, examples of the outcomes expected were necessary to strengthen the explanation of instructions. It would be better if demonstration of examples or further explanation was provided by other students based on their own understanding, as it gave the teacher an idea about whether
students understand these instructions accurately. Then, if there was any misunderstanding, the teacher could provide more targeted clarification.

And when you’re doing the game, just make sure., like, get one person or two people to demonstrate what you do, so they clearly understand how it’s gonna work. Or have a run through before you start, like asking each group a question before you actually start the real round—this is how it’s going to work (Classroom Teacher B)

And also repeating, so if you find some students are difficult to follow the instruction, give the instruction and say ‘OK, Johnny, what are you going to do when you go back to your desk?’ and get him to tell the instruction again. (Classroom Teacher R)

I think giving them an example or getting some kids to show others what they need to do. (Classroom Teacher I)

Another strategy to make criteria explicit was to use written rules for students to refer back to:

Well, you could put them up on the board. Like you could revise rules each week when you come in, ‘this is what I expect during the lesson’, I wouldn’t do too many cause otherwise they get overloaded with them. Maybe four rules you expect during the lesson. And then just keep referring back to them if you had them on the board—‘are you following this rule’ or something. (Classroom Teacher B)

Moreover, there was a tension of high expectation VS. my insufficient understanding about students. High expectation in QT means that “activities provide challenging work to all students. Students are often encouraged to take conceptual risks” (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 2). However, high expectations must be appropriate to target students. Too high expectations had always been evident in my teaching due to inappropriate predictions about the students’ capability. For example, in a lesson unit on animals, I incorporated oral recognition of animal names into a traditional Chinese game called Tangram (a dissection puzzle consisting of seven flat shapes, called tans, which are put together to form shapes). With these seven pieces, thousands of images can be formed, including animals. Therefore, I made use of this function of Tangram for increasing their engagement in practising these words by asking students to create the corresponding image when I called out the names of animals. However, it was not that easy for students to do this, even when samples of all animal images had
been shown on the whiteboard for them to imitate, and all the seven pieces had been distinguished with different colours to facilitate them to find the right position of each shape in the image. The outcome was that more than eighty per cent of the time was spent on forming the images which left less than twenty per cent of the time for students to actually respond to my instruction in the target language. Obviously, the expected substantive communication of the learning content did not happen. I should have firstly made the students familiar with Tangram and then brought in the practice of language after they became proficient in creating these images, instead of using it directly for language practice. The following is another example of how insufficient understanding about students’ literacy level at different stages can lead to problematic design of activities:

Today I played Bingo game with students to review words we learned during these three weeks. It was like students fill up all the boxes of the Bingo sheet with words we learned and then crossed out these words when I call out the corresponding Chinese names. It was very successful with stage 3 students, but problematic with stage 1 students. When I implemented the game in stage 1 classes, I found that students even cannot spell English words like “sunscreen” “sunbathing” correctly. Even though I wrote all these words on the whiteboard, it takes more than 10 minutes for them to copy these onto their sheet due to unfamiliarity with the spelling. The problem lies in that I haven’t even taken into consideration of students’ literacy level when I prepared this game. A better solution might be to design two versions of Bingo game for Stage 3 and Stage 1. Stage 3 is fine with English words. For Stage 1, replacing English words with pictures to fill the boxes would be better. (Reflective journal, 7-Sep-2011)

Establishing adequate expectations requires teachers to reflect on and challenge their assumptions and preconceptions about the capacities of individual students to engage in challenging work. In this sense, reflective teaching is a necessary tool for teachers to reveal and then reverse misunderstanding about students, hence, avoiding self-fulfilling practices.
Furthermore, there was a tension of inclusivity VS. my insufficient understanding about students. Inclusivity requires that “activities are planned to include and publicly value all students across the social and cultural background represented in the classroom” (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 3). With no recognition about the diversity of students’ backgrounds, it is possible for the foreign language teacher to exclude students coming from cultural groups other than mainstream cultural groups. For instance:

I made a big mistake by assuming that all students are Aussie, thus, only teaching them how to say Australia. Later, when more and more students ask me how to say other countries in Chinese, I found that in every class, students are from at least three different nations. There are students from Spain, New Zealand, Canada, India, Philippines, Ireland, Pakistan and so on. I did not expect that my classroom was so multi-cultural. When doing lesson preparation, I totally forget to include and value all students across the social and cultural backgrounds. I even don’t know how to say some of their countries in Chinese. I think what I should have done based on the principle of “inclusivity” was asking students’ nationality before I prepared the lesson and teaching them all the countries first. I have to fix this problem during the revision part of next lesson. (Reflective journal, 23-Feb-2011)

Moreover, preparing a single lesson plan without taking into account the various abilities of students can lead to excluding students with greater capabilities. In particular, students from the target culture can be unintentionally excluded since doing activities in the same way as other students does not make any sense for their learning. Also, since they are more proficient at the target language, their participation may negatively influence the effectiveness of these activities for other students’ practice.

There is one student in stage 3 class who has Chinese background. Since the student knows everything that is being taught by me, he always chose not to participate in our learning. When I tried to organize a competition between the two teams, someone complained that it is not fair to have that boy in the other team. As a teacher, I am not allowed to exclude him from the game. (Reflective journal, 23-Mar-2011)

Separate activities with higher requirements for language capability can be designed for these students to further improve their level in the target language. However, it would be better if we involve these students in the same activity of the whole class.
by giving them different roles which gives full play to their capability in the target language. For example, in the lesson mentioned above, I engaged the students from Chinese background as judges of the competition between other students. Assigning roles according to students’ individual difference is quite challenging for teachers with limited understanding about students.

STUDENT-DIRECTED LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

Student direction—“students exercise direction over the selection of activities related to their learning and the means and manner by which these activities are carried out”—is listed as an element of a quality learning environment under QT (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 2). It is believed that children, like adults, have their needs and wants to be satisfied by learning (Boomer, 1992). For the purpose of engaging students, the effectiveness of empowering students was acknowledged by many classroom teachers:

I mean maybe you just brainstorm with the children “What would you like to learn?” Sometimes when they get to choose, it helps with make it really interesting. (Classroom Teacher F)

Anything that you can give the students choices and give them ownership, then I think that’s the first step to getting them engaged, or caring about what they are learning because they’ve created themselves. I really like the idea of self-directed learning. (Classroom Teacher C)

It is the ownership given to students that enhanced their commitment to the learning process.

Nonetheless, there was a tension of student-directed language learning VS. communicative orientation of activities. As I mentioned earlier when discussing the tension interesting activities VS. communicative activities, interesting activities from the perspective of students may not always be the activities involving substantive
communication and, in turn, communicative activities may not be interesting enough. Hence, it is possible that students select interesting activities while avoiding communicative activities. In this sense, the activities selected by students may not be the optimal choice for language learning as the communicative orientation of learning activities cannot be guaranteed. Therefore, students do not necessarily direct learning in a useful manner that contributes to communicative competence development. Blindly empowering students for student direction can render the lesson ineffective for developing students’ communicative competence.

Faced with the tension of student-directed language learning VS. communicative orientation of activities, the challenge for the teacher is to empower students while ensuring the communicative orientation of the lesson. The key is to maintain a balance between teacher intervention and student direction so that the learning process is beneficial for communicative competence development while giving students a sense of ownership. Instead of being completely ‘directed’ by students, it is likely to be better for the learning process to be ‘negotiated’ between students and teacher. This can be done by following Boomer’s (1992, p. 19) four questions for negotiating curriculum within the constraints of an imposed syllabus, namely,

1. What do we know already?
2. What do we want, and need, to find out?
3. How will we go about finding out?
4. How will we know, and show, that we’ve found out when we’ve finished?

In the context of communicative language teaching, these questions can be adjusted to the following:

1. For a given communicative scenario, what vocabulary and sentences previously learned are useful?
2. What other vocabulary and sentences do we need to know?

3. Are there any resources available in the community for us to find out? If not, how will we find out?

4. What activities can we do for practising this new content?

5. What can we do to demonstrate our competence to communicate successfully in such a scenario?

Here is an example in my teaching:

…I asked students “if you are going to a Chinese restaurant this weekend, what Chinese vocabulary or sentence we’ve learnt can you use?” They first came up with some polite expressions and basic greeting words such as "请进 (come in please)" "谢谢 (thank you)" "请坐 (sit down please)" "再见 (goodbye)" to be used while talking to waiter or waitress. Some others mentioned that numbers are useful when paying the bill. Students were actively searching for language that can be applied in this scenario. It promotes their active thinking and deep understanding about content they’ve already acquired. I could have required them to practise these. However, it would be better for them to think about how to apply what they’ve learnt…. (Reflective journal, 1-Jun-2011)

STUDENT-CENTRED COMMUNICATION VS. CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

The communicative approach to language learning puts particular emphasis on meaningful communication among students—student-centred communication—as the essence of language acquisition. However, students’ self-regulation is desired for learning through student-centred communication, as activities with substantial opportunities for communication may be taken advantage of by students to do something irrelevant to their learning. Unfortunately, the level of self-regulation of my students was low, which put me into a dilemma, STUDENT-CENTRED COMMUNICATION VS. CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE. On the one hand, I wanted to get learners involved in substantive student-centred communication to improve their communicative competence. On the other hand, there was the worry that excessive opportunities for communication among students may not be made full use of by the students to practise the target language. If that was the case, student-centred
communication did not make any sense for learning, but was merely a waste of time. That possibly explained why some strongly communicative-oriented activities were reluctantly implemented in my classrooms. Here is one example:

I’ve thought about one communicative task like this: I gave different kinds of stationery and then asked them to borrow things from each other in Chinese in order to make sure every group gets a complete set of stationery. I gave up this idea for classroom management concerns. I can imagine that if students are allowed to talk and exchange their stationery freely, the classroom is going to be a huge mess. I don’t want to run the risk of losing control of the classroom because in that case every other thing is impossible. In my opinion, if a teacher loses control of her class, she almost loses everything. (Reflective journal, 20-Jul-2011)

However, the feasibility of certain teaching approaches to a large extent always depends on how teachers adapt it to their individual situation. In other words, it is the teachers’ responsibility to make certain teaching approaches work if they believe they will benefit students. What has been outlined in the literature about teaching approaches may be considered as broad principles. It is never realistic to expect the common steps of implementing certain teaching approaches to satisfy all teachers, since teaching is intrinsically a highly-contextualised task. In terms of my situation, for the communicative approach to be effective, it must be adapted in a way that promotes students’ self-regulation. The extent of students’ self-regulation depends partially on their perception about the significance of language learning. However, for my students, foreign language learning was relatively insignificant due to the lack of need for the target language at their age. This will be explained in detail when the tension, **Connectedness of foreign language learning VS. Lack of need for the foreign language**, is discussed in the next section. Students’ self-regulation is also determined by how interesting the foreign language lesson is. This is highly relevant to the solution of the first tension **ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT**. Students tended to regulate themselves towards learning when students are deeply engaged in interesting communicative language
practice. Hence, promotion of students’ self-regulation relied on solutions to the tension *ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT*.

For students with low levels of self-regulation, student-centred communication also needs to be supported by classroom management skills. Evidence in my teaching showed that classroom management was more effective when behaviour standards were incorporated into the rules of competitive games:

If communicative tasks are designed in a way that incorporates behaviour management rules and is interesting to students, it actually makes classroom management easier instead of harder since it stimulates students’ self-regulation. (Reflective journal, 27-May-2011)

By incorporating standards of behaviour into the rules of the game, students regulate themselves for winning the game. I can see that students remind their team members to keep quiet, and also put their fingers on their lips when they realise that their noise is about to bring negative effects. (Reflective journal, 5-May-2011)

Every time when I say “Oh, too much noise, I am considering taking some points off”, they will calm down or at least lower their voice. (Reflective journal, 11-May-2011)

The essence of this strategy was realisation of the consequences of behaviour and utilisation of peer pressure. They regulated themselves because they wanted to avoid being blamed by team-mates when their bad behaviour negatively affected the performance of the whole team. The realisation of the consequences of behaviour became even more efficient when the consequences had impact on students’ individual performance recorded in the school behaviour evaluation system. In our school, happy and sad faces, and rainbow charts were widely used in all classrooms like this:

You can always use the rainbow awards too, so if somebody does participate really well, after the lesson I will say ‘You can colour three squares on the rainbow charts’. So you could say to them ‘You can have two squares on the rainbow chart or something like that’ to kind of acknowledge that you can see they are doing the right thing. (Classroom Teacher B)
You can do positive classroom management, we have a set of colourful charts there, they call rainbow charts. When students do any good thing, I give them a rainbow box, they go and cross one of their boxes, when they get to the end, they get an award. In your lesson if a child is doing something nice, you can say “Go and give yourself a rainbow box” and they know exactly what to do, that’s a really a good classroom management technique. (Classroom Teacher P)

Sometimes setting up behaviour systems, it’s maybe like you brought some stickers to give to the children. Often when you are with them for a short period of time, they need to have a reward or a consequence. Some teachers bring in a jar and they may have marbles, and every time the children are doing something right, they could put a marble into the jar, and when the jar is full, they can get a prize or… the end of the lesson if you’ve been really sensible, a tiny teddy or a jelly bean, I mean it’s not always the best thing but sometimes it helps when you are not with the class very often. (Classroom Teacher F)

If they are talking, they have to miss out something, give them a consequence if they break the rules. Every classroom in our school has rainbow charts. We have happy and sad faces on a smart board, if someone is doing the right thing, you can put their name up there, that means they get a rainbow box on the charts. They start with green, when they get to the end, they get a certificate, so they work towards the colours. When they finish with blue, they get a big special certificate. (Classroom Teacher I)

Another strategy suggested by classroom teachers was to divide the class into smaller groups, and thus increased the number of students involved at the same time in competitive games. As students waited less time to have a turn, it was expected that they will concentrate more and chat less with each other. Thirdly, the teacher has to make it clear enough what students are expected to do and also remind them frequently. It would be even better to have students demonstrate or restate the rules.

I would definitely talk to them firmly so they know the expectation are there and if you can put rules up on the board when you come and they know what you expect from them. (Classroom Teacher B)

Children like routine; they like to know what they can do and what they can’t. And for me, you’ve done it too, at the beginning, you said the rules so that they know how far they can go. (Classroom Teacher P)

Maybe just remind them what you expected them to do, if only one person is supposed to be talking at a time; just remind them before you start the game. (Classroom Teacher I)

Fourthly, students could be selectively grouped to separate students who do not work well together. Fifthly, the use of voice was often mentioned as an important skill of the teacher.
So initially when you want their attention, be loud and wait, and wait until you have everybody looking at you. Once they are looking at you, you can speak at a soft voice and give them the next instruction (Classroom Teacher R)

Sixthly, addressing students by their names would be effective to get them more concentrated. It would be even better if I gave Chinese names to students.

**CONNECTEDNESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. LACK OF NEED FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

There is a big difference between language classes and other school subjects in terms of *connectedness*—“knowledge learned is directly applied to real-life problems or within real-life contexts. Students are given opportunities to share their work with audiences beyond the classroom or school” (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 3). For other subjects such as Mathematics and Science, the *connectedness* is potentially established when the knowledge taught in the classroom is further elaborated by facts evident outside the classroom. Unlike these subjects, the *connectedness* of language to real life mainly lies in its function as a shared symbol system. The language environment is important for bringing alive a symbol system. It is from the language environment that communicative needs in the target language are derived; it is communicative needs that give rise to the communicative function of a symbol system which is the most significant relevance of language to people’s lives. Different from teaching Chinese as a first language or a second language which takes place within a Chinese-speaking community, TCFL happens without being supported by a Chinese-speaking environment. As a consequence, learners have fewer opportunities to test out their Chinese in authentic communication outside school. This problem may also be explained in the light of Fishman’s (1972) concept of *domains* of language use. *Domains* are the institutional contexts which determine people’s language choice (Adams, Matu & Ongarora, 2012, p. 100; Jeffery & Mesthrie, n.d, p. 1). Home, school and work are typical examples of domains (Jeffery
Nevertheless, *domains* are not equivalent to physical settings, but are more related to the types of activities and events which language is used for (Jeffery & Mesthrie, n.d.). *Domains* are concerned with situation of language use which can be described by “who is using language to whom, how, why, when and where” (Jeffery & Mesthrie, n.d., p. 1). Within one language, register selection defined as “speakers vary(ing) their speech according to the characteristics of their interlocutor and the socio-cultural elements of the situation where they interact” (Rojas, 1995, p. 179) correlates with changes in domains (Jeffery & Mesthrie, n.d.).

For example, while more formal use of the language is the norm in a business setting, informal forms of the language are used with family and friends. In multilingual societies, in terms of *domains*, one language is more likely to be appropriate than another (Adams, 2012). Even though Australian policy gives equal status to different community languages, it must be recognised that not all languages are equally used in all *domains* by students. For example, it is common in Australia that children from Asian backgrounds speak English in school with their teachers and friends while talking to family members in Asian languages. As almost all my students are from non-Chinese backgrounds, it seems that there is no *domain* outside the Chinese lesson in which Chinese is more appropriate to use than English or their own languages. At school, English is the norm. At home, they may speak their own languages with family members. Without any communicative needs to be satisfied by using Chinese and *domains* in which Chinese is appropriate, the *connectedness* of Chinese learning to life is dramatically reduced. That probably explains why *connectedness* was frequently marked as a weakness of my teaching with comments like “difficult to share beyond school and classroom” in classroom teachers’ feedback. This situation was summarised as *connectedness VS. lack of target...*
Without reinforcement by the target language environment, it has been pointed out that the success of foreign language learning, as a part of the school curriculum, to a large extent depends on contextual factors including attitudes of school, local community and government towards foreign language learning (Ellis, 1996). These factors may increase the connectedness of foreign language learning by creating learners’ integrative motivation (desire to get involved in the target community) or instrumental motivation (desire to accomplish some non-interpersonal purpose such as to pass an exam or to advance a career) (Liuolienė & Metiūnienė, 2011, p. 94). In China, learning English is highly significant for students since it is a compulsory subject and the competitive advantage of good English competence is always evident in admission for leading schools and universities as well as recruitment into highly-paid jobs. Unlike this, in Australia, the Chinese language does not have such an obvious significant and direct impact on students’ academic performance or future career in Australia, but is merely a language used in the Chinese community. Even if there are some impacts, they may be far beyond young children’s focus of attention. As a result, there was the tension of connectedness VS. lack of instrumental or integrative motivation.

It is the creation of a target language environment and hence stimulating students’ needs for the language that can assist connectedness. As teachers, the language environment outside the classroom is beyond our control. However, at least we are
able to ensure that there is such an environment in the class that gives full play to the target language as a communication tool. This requires the foreign language teacher to maximise the purposeful use of language previously taught as well as incidental classroom instruction in the target language. For instance,

Learning body parts is closely related to classroom language such as “eyes to the front” “lips are closed” … After learning these words, I can use more Chinese classroom language to regulate their behaviour in future lessons. Actually, I have already started using it today. Instead of saying “eyes to the front”, I used “眼睛看前面”. (Reflective journal, 11-May-2011)

Firstly, she suggested me teaching students to say “I don’t know” in Chinese. I tried my best to use incidental classroom language; however, I ignored this one. (Reflective journal, 22-Sep-2010)

Incidental classroom instruction in the target language, compared with vocabulary and phrases being deliberately taught, can sometimes be more quickly picked up by students:

Another important discovery about vocabulary retention is that simple classroom instructions such as “Be quiet” “Listen to me” “Very good” are the words most deeply imprinted in kids’ mind. Sometimes I put my finger on my mouth to indicate them to stop talking without saying anything. When seeing me doing like this, some kids will say “be quiet” spontaneously. I never teach them to say this, it is so amazing that they’ve just pick up the words, pronounce it correctly with beautiful tones, and use the words in the right situation. I think the reason may be that classroom instructions are the only Chinese words actually serving for communicative purpose in their situation. In other words, among all the Chinese words they’ve learnt, only classroom instructions really make sense in their life. Hence, it is assumed that vocabulary is best to be remembered in the context of real communication. (Reflective journal, 20-Oct-2010)

However, maximising the use of the target language such as incidental use of target language for classroom instruction is not always easy. There was the tension of maximise purposeful use of target language VS. my weak sensitivity to opportunities of purposeful use of target language. Students may be insufficiently exposed to the target language and culture when teachers are not sensitive enough to seize potential opportunities for the purposeful use of the target language. It’s even worse when teachers themselves are foreign language learners unconsciously trying to acquire the local language from students. This was especially true in my situation:
Being in such an environment where English is everywhere in my life, my study, my work, I gradually became uncomfortable to use my native language. I always tried to learn classroom teachers’ language in English and rarely remind myself of my identity as a Mandarin teacher with responsibility to maximize students’ exposure to target language. Actually, for most students, I am the only medium through which they can access Chinese culture and language. (Reflective journal, 1-Jun-2011)

In this sense, the failure to maximise the purposeful use of the target language may be attributed to my ambiguous self-identity described as a tension of *myself as foreign language (Mandarin) teacher VS. myself as foreign language (English) learner*. This tension meant there was a core conflict between my role as a foreign language teacher of Mandarin in schools and my role as a foreign language learner of English in university as well as the local community. As a foreign language teacher who taught Mandarin via a communicative approach, I was required to maximise the use of Mandarin in schools. On the other hand, as a foreign language learner who acquired English following a communicative approach, it was necessary for me to take every opportunity to learn by communicating with native speakers in English as much as possible, including my students. Therefore, which language was finally used in my classroom actually to a large extent depended on how I identified myself. Sometimes I ignored many opportunities for purposeful communication with students in Mandarin because my foreign language learner identity overrode my foreign language teacher identity. For example:

> When I divided the whole class into two groups for the game, I was counting in English in order to ensure that each group has equal number of students. I should have let students do this counting for me in Chinese. Sometimes it’s I who missed a number of opportunities for maximizing communication in the target language. This is related to the design of activities. By doing one of the games, flash cards of stationery were given to individual students. Later on, when I wanted to collect these cards back, I should have called out these words in Chinese and asked students having that picture to respond. In this case, another oral recognition activity could have been organized naturally. The underlying reason for my failure to do this is my insufficient intention to maximize communication in target language. (Reflective journal, 20-Jul-2011)

Using English for classroom instruction was beneficial for improving my English as a teacher, but did no good for the development of my students’ communicative
competence. Considering that the ultimate goal pursued by teachers was better student learning outcomes, any method that merely benefited the teacher but obstructed students’ development should give way to better alternatives for students. Even though improving my English is likely to make classroom management easier in terms of explicit quality criteria, its accompanying disadvantage for students’ communicative competence development is far more than can be offset by this indirect advantage. Hence, the first thing foreign language teachers need to do under a communicative approach is actually to firmly identify themselves as someone who has responsibility to intentionally use the target language in the classroom. Then, they must deliberately talk with students in the target language to overcome possibly negative influences from other possible self-identity as well as from the local language environment.

In addition, to facilitate maximisation of the use of the target language, thus enhancing connectedness, the topics selected for learning must be readily applicable to students’ lives. A good idea was to start from utterances or words frequently used in their own language which are part of their daily habit. For example, “谢谢 (thank you)” is probably a good word to start with, in that the well-established habit of saying ‘Thank you’ in Western culture constitutes a basis for the purposeful use of the corresponding words in Mandarin. If they replace all ‘Thank you’ in their life with ‘谢谢’, or at least I remind them of the corresponding word in Mandarin every time they use the word ‘thank you’, that would lead to a huge amount of application and reinforcement of learning content. In this sense, learning is significantly connected to their communicative needs. In my teaching, I observed that among all
the words I have taught, ‘谢谢’ was most frequently used by students. Every time when I handed out worksheets to them or I was about to leave their classroom after finishing lessons, they definitely responded by saying ‘谢谢’ automatically and naturally without being reminded by their classroom teacher. Likewise, ‘请 (please)’ was another example of such a word. Actually, I taught them ‘请’ because they asked me to do so. Apart from these, vocabulary based on school life was another category with high applicability:

I think that you try to make it relevant to the children by doing things they need, they would need to know for schools, like today you do rulers, pencils, colours, or something that is relevant to them. (Classroom Teacher B)

Something like today’s topic, or numbers, because they like maths. If you could do numbers and how to write numbers, and then you could do subtractions and additions on the board. Get them to answer in Chinese. (Classroom Teacher B)

After all, without the target language environment in the wider community, the number of topics that are readily applied to students’ lives is going to be quite limited. Consequently, in the long run, students may still encounter communication barriers due to a shortage of language resources. Hence, selective acquisition of the target language is only appropriate for beginners in the short-run. For sound development of communicative competence in the long-run, the language environment is still crucial.

Furthermore, authentic materials in the target language are essential for building up scenarios similar to real communication. Facts and dynamic features of language are to some extent lost when teaching materials are deliberately edited for standard use. This usually leads to a divergence between foreign language learning and foreign language use in reality. This may to some extent explain why foreign language
learners encounter barriers to becoming involved in communication when informal language use such as slang turn up in real communication. Hence, there is a need to use authentic materials to capture these deviations from standard or formal Chinese. For instance, a real menu from a Chinese restaurant can be used when teaching language needed for eating out in China. In this case, language practised in classroom activities may be more readily applied in authentic situations.

PROBLEMATIC KNOWLEDGE VS. LANGUAGE LEARNING

Problematic knowledge in QT means “students recognise that knowledge is socially constructed and open to question. Students are encouraged to address multiple perspectives or solutions within a discipline” (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 1). To explain the tension of problematic knowledge VS. language learning, the nature of language must be explored first. Language knowledge itself, as a system of meaning expression established by usage, does not intrinsically have any problematic aspect. There is no right or wrong in language itself as it is a conventional symbol system designated by the people using it. If it is subject to questioning and the meaning of certain sounds or characters is not shared among people, language will lose its function as a communicative tool. Language knowledge is always presented as a fixed body of knowledge to be acquired by learners in a classroom.

Instead of treating language itself as problematic, a better mode of implementation of problematic knowledge in the context of language teaching seems to be promoting learners’ own thinking about the culture and language delivered to them. In this sense, problematic knowledge is applicable and significant for Chinese character learning. As many Chinese written characters originate from real world items, there
is an opportunity to enhance students’ memory of these characters by demonstrating their pictographic origins. For those characters without pictographic origins, the analogy to authentic things can still be made, based on the learners’ own imagination and perception. In this sense, character memorisation becomes a process of personal knowledge construction. For example, the following analogies were usually made when teaching Chinese numbers:

‘一’ (1): one line

‘二’ (2): two lines

‘三’ (3): three lines

‘四’ (4): a window with curtain

‘五’ (5): a rocking chair

‘六’ (6): a person standing with arms out-stretched

‘七’ (7): a letter ‘t’

‘八’ (8): a moustache

‘九’ (9): a dragon with a long tail

‘十’ (10): a cross or a plus sign

When I asked them to use their own imagination for the characters of Chinese numbers, they gave me the following analogies which were far beyond my expectation:

‘五’ (5): an exercycle

‘六’ (6): an apple on a table; a starfish; an insect with three heads, a branch with leaves

‘七’ (7): a fishhook with a knife

‘八’ (8): a mountain; a roof; a tent; a volcano; a banana skin
‘九’ (9): letter ‘H’ or ‘N’

‘十’ (10): a sword

The facilitation of these analogies to the recognition of characters can be shown in the assessment of learning recorded in the following excerpt from my journal:

I showed them a poem which contains numbers 1 to 10 and asked them to find out these numbers. Even though they were not able to match the characters with corresponding Arabic numbers immediately, they were able to distinguish these characters from other Chinese characters in the same poem. (Reflective journal, 02-Mar-2011)

Even for those characters with their own pictographic origin, allowing for the students’ own perception is important since it is an analogy made by themselves that seems to be more rational and thus bears greater means for remembering the character than something imposed on them.

METALANGUAGE VS. MY COMMUNICATIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN PRIMARY CLASSROOM

Among all the elements of Quality Teaching, metalanguage, “explicitly name and analyse knowledge as a specialist language”, involves comment on language and how texts work (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 20) and seems to be a quite special one to be realised in my situation. Firstly, there was a tension of metalanguage in language class VS. metalanguage in CLT. On the one hand, it may be the easiest to achieve in the language classroom since using language to describe language is quite common in language teachers’ instructions. Moreover, metalanguage is strongly evident whenever linguistic terminology, including grammar, is used to deal with the rules of the target language. On the other hand, metalanguage was also the hardest element to be realised in my situation, due to the use of the communicative approach, which does not favour an over-concentration on explicit aspects of grammar. Under traditional language teaching approaches prior to CLT, such as grammar-translation
and audio-lingualism, the presentation of grammar rules constituted a predominant part of the instruction provided by teachers. These approaches pursue linguistic competence—the mastery of the sound system and structural patterns of language—as the objective of teaching and learning, while setting communicative competence aside as something to be developed by learners themselves (Rojas, 1995, p. 173). In contrast, in pursuit of communicative competence as the ultimate goal, teacher instruction under CLT is much more meaning-focused, whereby learners’ attention is directed at understanding and conveying message content rather than explicit concentration on its grammatical forms and structures (Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2002). This does not imply, however, that grammar is denied in CLT. Instead, it is claimed that grammar instruction has “a newly defined but useful role” to play in the communicative approach (Terrell, 1991, pp. 54, 58). What is emphasised in CLT is communicative grammar, which enables learners to understand and construct meaning in various situations spontaneously, rather than merely manipulate grammar rules as exercises (Rojas, 1995). Mastery of grammar rules is not an end in itself, but a means to satisfy communicative needs. Grammar instruction is assigned a service—even marginal—position to complement meaning-focused instruction. This is done by employing a type of instruction called focus on form, which “draws students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication” (Long, 1991, p. 2). This is different from instruction in traditional approaches, since it is initiated by “something problematic in a learner’s utterance or by the learner’s or teacher’s wish to clarify a linguistic feature”, instead of pre-selected targets for teaching (Long, 1991, p. 2). Nevertheless, another tension of deep knowledge about language use VS. top-down approach of focus on form emerged, because it was observed that focus on form was
unlikely to make sense for understanding language use if it was done via a top-down approach, that is, starting directly from grammatical terms without being integrated in a meaningful manner with students’ background knowledge. Focus on form with cross-languages comparison, which draws upon students’ existing grammatical knowledge about their first language seems to be a good alternative. For instance, measure words are “words or morphemes used in combination with numerals or demonstrative pronouns to indicate the count of nouns” (Zhang et al., 2008, p.89). In Chinese, measure words are used very often for both countable and uncountable nouns. Even though measure words are not used for countable nouns in English, they are added for uncountable nouns, such as “bottles” in “three bottles of water”, “cups” in “three cups of coffee”. Using these examples in English facilitates better understanding about measure words than referring to definitions or examples in Chinese language only. However, a prerequisite for this approach is learners’ significant grammatical knowledge in the first language. Proficiency in using one language does not necessarily imply conscious, analytical grammatical knowledge about that language. It is inappropriate to presume that all learners have already been equipped with basic conscious, analytical grammatical knowledge about the first language. When teaching young students such as Stage 1 students, their first language development makes explicit cross-language comparison a problem, which may be described as a tension, of focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. students’ limited grammatical foundation.

Furthermore, students merely having basic conscious, analytical grammatical knowledge is not enough. Existing grammatical knowledge has a significant impact on that teacher’s ability to conduct cross-language comparisons. This is also about
teacher understanding. It is when one gains deep insight into learners’ background knowledge that one gets to know the best point with which to compare. Here is an example:

When explaining a measure word, I have tried to relate it to something they already know, such as “bar” in “a bar of chocolate” or “cup” in “a cup of tea”. The classroom teacher again helped me explain this by relating it to some measure words they’ve learned in other subjects. Even though I tried to relate this to something already known to students, I did not do a better job than their classroom teacher due to my lack of understanding about their background knowledge. (Reflective journal, 30-Mar-2011)

For local teachers who deliver grammatical knowledge to students while teaching the first language, their understanding about students’ existing grammatical knowledge comes automatically. However, this kind of understanding cannot be taken for granted for foreign language teachers from another educational and language background whose contact with students is restricted to Mandarin lessons. Hence, there was a tension of focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. my insufficient understanding about students.

One possible solution to the tensions of focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. students’ limited grammatical foundation and focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. my insufficient understanding about students would be a knowledge integration learning approach consistent with the Confucian concept of “温故而知新” (gain new knowledge by reviewing old) (Confucian Analects, n.d. Chapter. 6). Focus on form with cross-languages comparison, as discussed above, is also to some extent related to ‘gain new knowledge by reviewing old’. However, this new knowledge integration is different from cross-languages comparison, in that old knowledge to be integrated is previously-learned utterances in the foreign language rather than grammatical knowledge in the first language. In contrast to the top-down
approach of focus on form mentioned earlier, introducing grammar points after a few examples have been learned follows a down-top process where rules are generalised from previous learning. Grammar is regarded as a meaningful connection between previous knowledge and new knowledge, in that we employ grammar summarised from previous examples to introduce new learning content. In this sense, the content of every lesson becomes background knowledge to be integrated with the new content of lessons coming after.

With regard to the tension of focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. my insufficient understanding about students, a possible access to target students’ grammatical knowledge about their first language is a syllabus for literacy which outlines the learning objectives of each stage. Syllabus-guided focus on form with cross-languages comparison not only avoids inadequate prediction about students’ grammatical knowledge, but also produces inter-subject knowledge integration.

4.4 Reflecting stage

Having explained the planning stage, the acting stage and the observing stage of Action Research Cycle One, now I will turn to the last stage—the reflecting stage. This stage summarises the major findings of Action Research Cycle One and provides implication for the next cycle.
4.4.1 Findings of Cycle One

4.4.1.1 QT supported tension-focused reflective teaching

![Diagram of Cycle One]

Figure 4.8 QT supported tension-focused reflective teaching

In Action Research Cycle One, my professional development with the support of QT went through three main stages. The first stage involved acquisition of propositional knowledge and experiential and practical knowledge through professional training and application of the QT model. Propositional knowledge is defined as “knowing about something—expressed in statements and theories” (Pine, 2009, p. 98). Quality Teaching, which synthesises some generic characteristics of effective pedagogy, can be viewed as a kind of propositional knowledge. However, since propositional knowledge is usually produced by a process of generalisation, it is highly likely that the contextual aspects of teaching and learning embedded in a teacher’s individual experience are lost. Sometimes it is over-generalisation and the denial of contextual aspects that reduces the usefulness of propositional knowledge. Despite the fact that the QT model is claimed to be a model of pedagogy that can be applied to all
teachers irrespective of differences in subjects, years of schooling, key learning areas, and learner backgrounds, the passive reception of QT by imitating examples is not appropriate, since teaching is intrinsically a highly-contextualised, rather than standardised, activity. What is really necessary here is active internalising of the QT model with the help of examples and then contextualising it to the individual teacher’s own situation for the best mode of application. I contextualised the implementation of the QT model in my teaching through continuous data-informed reflection, which is the second stage of my professional development. This type of reflection is a process by which I evaluate my own teaching with reference to each element of QT by drawing upon evidence collected from various sources. What is emphasised here is integrating propositional knowledge with my experiential knowledge (gained through direct encounter with people, places or things) and practical knowledge (knowing how to do something—demonstrated by a skill or competence) to produce personalised knowledge that is mostly relevant to my individual situation (Pine, 2009, p. 98).

The previous experience of QT training that is evident in literature implies that merely using QT as a benchmark for teaching makes a limited contribution to teacher improvement. Even though it helps teachers notice the gap between their teaching and ‘high-quality’ teaching, it does not necessarily mean the factors leading to such a gap have been made explicit at the same time. Towards the end of identifying issues underlying the gap, my reflection process involved a third stage, during which I identified tensions and dilemmas emerging and tried to resolve these tensions, based on insight into the local situation as well as into my teaching practice and my background.
The first finding in Action Research Cycle One is called QT-supported tension-focused reflective teaching in which the teacher reflects on tensions that emerged in teaching while implementing QT elements in her/his particular situation, as well as solutions to these tensions. It is expected that varying contextual factors, the nature of subjects, teaching objectives and approaches, as well as the characteristics of the students and teachers themselves may lead to different tensions in different teachers’ practices. For instance, the tensions revealed in my teaching may be particular to my situation, in which I am a beginning foreign language teacher of Chinese who teaches primary school beginners through a communicative approach outside the environment of the target language with limited knowledge about students or language teaching pedagogy. It can be to some extent because of the characteristics of primary school beginners and my teaching method that the following tensions are generated:

- **ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT**
- **METALANGUAGE VS. MY COMMUNICATIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM**
- **STUDENT-DIRECTED LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT**
- **STUDENT-CENTRED COMMUNICATION VS. CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE**

It could be argued that it is mainly teaching and learning outside the environment of the target language that gives rise to the tension of **CONNECTEDNESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. LACK OF NEED FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE**. The tension of **PROBLEMATIC KNOWLEDGE VS. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION** could be attributed to the nature of the language subject. As suggested in the tension of **MY INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING ABOUT**
STUDENTS VS. IMPLEMENTATION OF QT ELEMENTS, my lack of understanding about students constitutes a barrier for enhancing the quality of my teaching. Another factor contributing to the persistence of all these tensions in my teaching is that as a beginning teacher, I have had no experience of dealing with these issues before.

4.4.1.2 Reinterpretation of QT elements in CLT

Originally, without sufficient authentic examples of how individual elements are implemented in a real classroom, particularly a language classroom, the guidance provided by QT was very general to me. For a beginning teacher with almost no experience in a classroom, it is likely that merely reflecting according to the definitions of each element and suggestions from the DEC QT training materials makes a very limited contribution to improvement of teaching practice. Good modelling of these elements is essential for someone in my position to understand these concepts.

The demonstration of QT elements in the context of CLT was generated while resolving tensions that emerged during my implementation of QT elements in CLT. This process also stimulated the refinement and specification of QT in the context of CLT. As a result, the original QT elements have been reinterpreted in the context of CLT as in the table below. It is important to point out that, like the tensions revealed in this study, these reinterpetations are also highly contextualised by several factors. Firstly, CLT is used for foreign language teaching purposes. Secondly, the target language is Chinese. Thirdly, the teacher is a beginning teacher with little classroom experience and professional training. Fourthly, the language, educational and cultural
background of the teacher is different from those of the learners. Fifthly, the target learners are young English speakers with almost no previous learning of Chinese.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QT elements</th>
<th>General interpretation</th>
<th>Reinterpretation in CLT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectual quality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep knowledge</td>
<td>The knowledge addressed is focused on a small number of key concepts and the relationship between and among concepts</td>
<td>The knowledge presented focuses on appropriate use of a small number of related vocabulary and utterances according to communicative contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep understanding</td>
<td>Students are given the opportunity to demonstrate a profound and meaningful understanding of the central ideas and the relationships between and among them</td>
<td>Understanding about appropriate language use is evident in students’ competence in using it for meaningful communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic knowledge</td>
<td>Students recognise that knowledge is socially constructed and open to question. Students are encouraged to address multiple perspective or solutions within a discipline</td>
<td>Promote students’ personal knowledge construction for enhancing learning and retention of Chinese characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher-order thinking</td>
<td>Students are regularly engaged in activities that require them to organise, reorganise, apply, analyse, synthesise and evaluate knowledge and information</td>
<td>Students are involved in independent meaning construction to solve communicative problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalanguage</td>
<td>Knowledge is explicitly named and analysed as a specialist language</td>
<td>Incidental teaching of grammar with reference to first language learning or previous foreign language learning to support meaning-focused language use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive communication</td>
<td>Allow students many opportunities to engage in sustained conversations (in oral, written or artistic forms) about the ideas and concepts they are encountering</td>
<td>Maximise opportunities for students to engage in using the target language for purposeful communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality learning environment</td>
<td>Explicit quality criteria</td>
<td>Students are provided with explicit criteria for the quality of work they are expected to produce. These criteria are regularly referred to and students are clear on how they can achieve highly.</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Activities are designed to seriously engage students in their own learning. Activities are designed such that students can be expected to display sustained interest.</td>
<td>Maximise engagement in communicative learning of the language by making classroom activities meaningful and interesting, as well as building a sense of achievement with appropriate scaffolding and management of high expectation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectation</td>
<td>Activities provide challenging work to all students. Students are often encouraged to take conceptual risks.</td>
<td>Activities encourage students to take risks to construct meaning autonomously. The teacher provides scaffolding such as Pinyin to facilitate ‘learning by communicating’ expected in CLT. Expectation of autonomous meaning construction is managed in a programmed manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>Promote positive support for learning and mutual respect among teachers and students. Students are given opportunities to support each other in their learning.</td>
<td>Create incentives for students to support each other by using activities in which they work in teams. Students need to be selectively grouped for them to support and be supported by others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ self-regulation</td>
<td>Students perceive the learning to be purposeful and interesting with clear goals such that they are able to demonstrate initiative and autonomy in the classroom. Minimal attention needs to be paid to discipline</td>
<td>Design communicative language learning into interesting activities so that students are deeply immersed in learning with little need of external regulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student direction</td>
<td>Students exercise direction over the selection of activities related to their learning and the means and manner by which these activities are carried out</td>
<td>Allow students to negotiate with the teacher about how to learn to communicate in a specific scenario.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Background knowledge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cultural knowledge</strong></td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regularity</strong></td>
<td>Regularly and explicitly build on students’ background knowledge, in terms of prior school knowledge, as well as other aspects of their personal lives.</td>
<td>Regularly incorporate the cultural knowledge of diverse social groupings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explicitity</strong></td>
<td>Employ students’ prior learning and experience in family and community life as a starting point to introduce new culture and language.</td>
<td>Pay attention to culture for understanding context of communicative language use. Incorporate cultural experience into language practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.10 Reinterpretation of QT elements in Action Research Cycle One**

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4.4.1.3 Quality Communicative Activities

There is a Chinese idiom called “珠联璧合” (pronounced as: zhu lian bi he). The first word in the idiom “珠 (zhu)” means ‘pearl’. The third word “璧 (bi)” is “a round flat piece of jade with a hole in its centre” (Zhu Lian Bi He, n.d.). The second word “联 (lian)” and the fourth word “合 (he)” both mean ‘unite’ or ‘join’. Therefore, literally this Chinese idiom can be translated as ‘pearls get connected and jades become combined’. It is often used as a metaphor for “an excellent match” (Zhu Lian Bi He, n.d.). Individual pearls or pieces of jade are beautiful on their own. However, the benefit people get from these isolated pearls and pieces of jade is less than if they are joined together as a whole. It is the wholeness brought by joining that enables pearls and pieces of jade to be used by people for decorative purposes. The understanding given by this idiom is that sometimes the practical value of individual items can only be realised when there is wholeness built into them by combination.

The original QT model specifies individual principles of effective pedagogy in a relatively segregated manner with little attempt to give instruction on how to implement these principles in an organised way. In this sense, it is a model of pedagogy with a lack of wholeness on the surface. To build some sense of wholeness and thus enhance the practical value of QT, I have incorporated reinterpreted QT elements into some activities of CLT. The outcome achieved I call Quality Communicative Activities in which QT elements are addressed in a way that contributes to the aim of communicative competence development in language. In Chapter 2, the distinction between activity, task and exercise has been explained. For language-teaching activity to be a task, it must have (Ellis, 2009):
• A primary focus on processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning
• An information gap for creating the need for communication
• A requirement for learners to use their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources to complete the activity
• An outcome to be achieved by language use

The term exercise usually satisfies the first two points, but not the last two points. I have avoided the term “Quality Communicative Tasks” because I recognise the pedagogic value of both tasks and exercises in language classrooms. Activity, which is a more encompassing concept, seems to be a better term to use than tasks. The use of the term activity fits a model which goes beyond individual tasks or exercises, involving all classroom tasks in the lesson procedure as well as the links between them. The term activity not only includes task or exercise design, but also how teachers present, implement and link tasks and exercises in a meaningful way through their own classroom procedures.

*Quality Communicative Activities* can be regarded as a 珠联璧合 (zhu lian bi he) work for two reasons. By outlining elements of high-quality teaching, the QT model provides us with individual pearls that are valuable for us to improve students’ learning outcomes. QCA makes use of communicative activities as the silk thread to connect these pearls into a necklace which may be more useful for language teachers. This is considered as 珠联 (zhu lian) embedded in QCA. Furthermore, QCA also constitutes 璧合 (bi he) due to the combination of “two pieces of jade”—QT and CLT—into a single tool. QT and CLT, as pedagogy, are both valuable to some extent.
in their own. However, each of them is developed by association with the other in QCA. In this sense, QCA promotes the mutual enhancement of QT and CLT.

The absence of instruction on the organised implementation of QT elements in its original form may be justified by its intention to provide the individual features of effective pedagogy while allowing teachers to exert their own creativity to make effective teaching happen. In this regard, QCA is a creative and specific mode of application of QT in my particular context which bears more significance for me as a beginning foreign language teacher than the original form of QT. As QCA was informed by data in my limited teaching experience, it may not be regarded as a generalisable model that can be applied widely in any other context of communicative foreign language teaching. Other foreign language teachers adopting a communicative approach may need to create their own version of QCA or even their own contextualised mode of QT implementation. Nonetheless, in all of these cases, tension-focused reflective teaching may be a useful approach for teachers in their own contexts.
Quality Communicative Activities include two stages, namely a Pre-communicative phase and a Communicative phase. The Pre-communicative phase is intended for demonstrating language and culture to be learned while the Communicative phase is designed as a process of application for learners to internalise the content of learning. In terms of QT, the Pre-communicative phase is organised around the core objective of presenting deep knowledge, while the Communicative phase aim at transforming deep knowledge into learners’ deep understanding through application. In order to realise these goals, different groups of other QT elements need to be emphasised in the Pre-communicative phase and the Communicative phase. In the following paragraphs, the principles for the Pre-communicative phase and Communicative phase will be discussed around the appropriate QT elements related to them.
QT elements in the Pre-communicative phase in the Quality Communicative Activities model

Deep knowledge

Generally, deep knowledge in language teaching could be interpreted as focusing on a small number of key concepts such as vocabulary, utterances or grammatical points as well as the relationship between and among these items. In the context of the communicative approach to language teaching, deep knowledge must be pursued in a way that leads to communicative competence development. Hence, deep knowledge here not only means focusing on a small amount of key vocabulary, utterances and grammatical points, but also involves deep exploration of appropriate use of the target language in different communicative contexts. Towards this end, learning one utterance is more than just learning how to pronounce it or the grammatical rules regulating it. The learning includes understanding the context which shapes its form of use. As a result, realisation of deep knowledge must be supported by a group of other QT elements, including explicit quality criteria, metalanguage, knowledge integration, problematic knowledge, narrative, connectedness and background knowledge, and cultural knowledge.

Explicit quality criteria

Deep knowledge is evident when students are able to distinguish correct from incorrect usage. Quality criteria are needed for clarifying what constitutes high quality work. However, what is really intended here is not procedural instruction, but a holistic picture of what counts as high quality work that students can refer back to for self-evaluation (NSW DEC, 2006). In the context of CLT, in which communicative competence is pursued as the ultimate learning objective, the best
demonstration of expected outcomes is likely to be exemplars of authentic use of certain utterances for purposeful communication. The most feasible form of exemplars in a foreign language teaching situation may be video clips which contain real conversations in the target language. The advantage of video clip use is that it captures non-verbal communication such as body language gestures, facial expression, etc. These non-verbal communications are essential as there are always cultural meanings conveyed. For instance, when Chinese people greet each other by saying “新年好 (Happy new year)” and “恭喜发财 (Congratulations for getting rich)”, there are special hand gestures accompanying and a red envelope is given to children at the same time. Communication cannot be regarded as successful without knowledge about these non-verbal aspects. After that, in the activities that follow, not only are students required to reflect and modify their language use based on these exemplars, but also teachers need to provide feedback by addressing the gap between students’ language use and these exemplars.

Connectedness

To enhance the communicative orientation of foreign language lessons, learning content must be demonstrated as connected to students in the following ways. Firstly, topics for learning should be tailored to learners’ communicative needs, in order to increase application to purposeful communication. A good point to start with would be topics readily applicable to school life (such as numbers, stationery and sports). Adapting learning content to communicative needs creates a virtuous circle of learning. This is because increased engagement in real communication is likely to produce more opportunities for learning and for identifying what needs to be learnt for more effective communication. Based on this, greater satisfaction of communicative needs can be addressed in the future learning process. Considering
this, there is a need to demonstrate potential situations for certain utterances to be used either at present or in the future, during the pre-communicative phase, by addressing the following questions ‘When do we need this utterance?’ ‘Where is this utterance most likely to be used?’ ‘Who do we use this utterance to communicate with?’ Secondly, authentic materials of language use are essential so that the language acquired represents natural and genuine use of the target language, instead of something with limited relevance to native communication. In contrast to genuine language use which demonstrates various grammatical and lexical items in context, traditional foreign language teaching materials are often deliberately modified to present particular grammar and syntax, often becoming too elaborated and unnatural (Rojas, 1995). It is these over-simplified teaching materials that distort communicative use of the target language in reality, thus causing a divergence between language learning and language use for communication. Consequently, communicative barriers emerge when learners come across informal uses of language, such as slang, in the actual experience of communication.

**Student direction**

*Student direction* is employed for building up students’ ownership of learning, thus enhancing commitment to language practice. To empower students while ensuring learning progresses in a proper manner, student direction is adapted as students negotiate the learning process with the teacher, especially negotiating with the teacher about how to learn to communicate in a specific scenario.

**Cultural knowledge**

Language acquisition for communicative purposes requires learners to use the language properly according to context. This means deep knowledge not only
includes knowing what and ‘how to say’, but also ‘when and where to say’. Therefore, particular utterances are accompanied with extralinguistic factors that cannot be omitted from teacher instruction. Culture, is a determining factor affecting register selection, that is, “speakers vary their speech according to the characteristics of their interlocutor and the socio-cultural elements of the situation where they interact”. These should be emphasised as integral knowledge for the communicative use of language (Rojas, 1995, p. 179).

**Narrative**

Cultural knowledge which is an integral part of *deep knowledge* about communicative language use is often delivered in a narrative form. The narrative approach makes even more sense for cultural delivery to very young students. However, the feature of narrative used for these students will be different from that used for adult learners. It must bear more resemblance to early childhood literature. Nowadays, some cartoons are available for introducing legends and customs about Chinese festivals. These may be more useful than traditional video clips used for cultural introduction purposes, as the language used in cartoons is more understandable to young children. Since most Chinese idioms have their origin in ancient stories, it is possible to teach students high-level cultural concepts where forms such as cartoons are created appropriately, based on the stories. It is even more effective for inspiring a learner’s interest if ancient stories are told in an engaging way in cartoons.

**Problematic knowledge**

Knowledge about language use is deeper when students’ own thinking and interpretation about the knowledge is involved. In the context of teaching Chinese, the learners’ own perception about written Chinese characters should be highly
encouraged so that *deep knowledge* about the outlook and meaning of each character is established via personal knowledge construction.

*Background knowledge*

*Deep knowledge* about communicative language use relies on how students’ background knowledge from individual experiences, prior learning, family and community is addressed as a starting point for introducing new concepts.

*Metalanguage*

Even though there was some move from form-focused instruction towards meaning-focused instruction due to the emergence of CLT, this is not to say the importance of grammatical knowledge is been denied under CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Grammatical knowledge has been incorporated into CLT as complementary, working collaboratively with other strategies for the purpose of communicative competence development. What is intended here is not grammar teaching in an abstract sense, but ‘communicative’ grammar which is taught incidentally in response to problems occurring in the actual process of teaching and learning to complement meaning-focused instruction (Basturkmen, et al., 2002). Basically, grammar instruction has three roles to play, including:

1) An “advance organizer” to aid in comprehending and segmenting input

2) A meaning-form focuser that aids the learner in establishing a meaning-form relationship for morphologically complex forms

3) Providing forms for monitoring, which, in turn, will be available for acquisition in the output (Terrell, 1991, p. 58)

Nevertheless, learning communicative grammar is much more than manipulation of linguistic structures. It must involve working with genuine language use at the
discourse level to enable achievement of non-linguistic goals through understanding meaning and construction according to contexts (Rojas, 1995). For instance, comparing and contrasting typical grammatical structures used on different occasions with different people could be an essential aspect of communicative grammar. Considering this, grammatical patterns must be practised in various communicative scenarios to be internalised by learners and integrated into their communicative competence (Rojas, 1995). Prior to that, it is necessary to include the practice of specific parts of discourse in the pre-communicative phase to prepare them for further practice at the discourse level.

Knowledge integration

In order to demonstrate deep knowledge about language use, incidental grammatical discussion may be even more effective when it integrates students’ grammatical knowledge about the first language and involves comparing and contrasting the target language and the first language. This facilitates a holistic view about how languages work as systems of meaning expression, which benefits both foreign language and first language acquisition. Hence, first language learning and foreign language learning become mutually-reinforcing processes, since increasing knowledge in the first language expands the foundations on which foreign language knowledge can be grounded, while in turn grammatical discussion in a foreign language class may contribute deeper insights into the first language. Additionally, it is also crucial for grammatical discussion to be strongly integrated with content already learned in foreign language learning. Besides, knowledge integration is also applicable to other subjects, like mathematics. Concepts about addition and multiplication are helpful for explaining the pattern of pronunciation of numbers of more than one digit in Chinese. Moreover, knowledge integration is strongly evident
in teaching written Chinese, considering that all Chinese characters are constructed based on some basic components and radicals. Components and radicals learned in one Chinese character can be applied when introducing the structure of new characters. Therefore, knowledge about these basic components and radicals is integrated from character to character. Character learning becomes a process of knowledge integration of these basic components and radicals.

**QT elements in the Communicative phase in the Quality Communicative Activities model**

It is possible for *deep knowledge* to be presented, but for students to demonstrate only superficial understanding. Hence, the central task for the following activities is to transform *deep knowledge* imparted by the teacher into *deep understanding* demonstrated by students, that is, their proficiency in applying this knowledge (including both sentence patterns and understanding about the context of language use) effectively for communication.

*Deep understanding*

The best evidence of *deep understanding* under CLT is probably students’ communicative competence in the target language. According to the principles of CLT, communicative competence is developed only when learners are actively engaged with knowledge through application. Hence, activities must ensure that sufficient opportunities are provided for students to apply learning content in response to various communicative scenarios. For understanding to be deep, forms of practice must be diversified to increase the engagement levels in substantive communication, as well as to further stimulate students’ reasoning about knowledge application. During application, support from the teacher is essential for reinforcing
deep knowledge and clarifying any misunderstanding. As with the presentation of deep knowledge in the Pre-communicative phase, the realisation of deep understanding relies on the multiple effects of a number of QT elements, including substantive communication, cultural knowledge, connectedness, higher-order thinking, knowledge integration and high expectation for language practice, as well as engagement, student direction, social support, inclusivity and students’ self-regulation for the language practising environment.

QT elements for language practice

Substantive communication

Under CLT, which promotes language to be acquired through communication among learners, depth of student understanding to a large extent depends on how much the learning content is used for purposeful communication. Hence, in the context of CLT, substantive communication of key concepts is mostly done through substantive use of the learning content. To ensure that new vocabulary, utterances and sentences are substantively communicated, an important responsibility on the part of the teacher is to design activities with structures that encourage communication characterised as sustained, focused and reciprocal. Firstly, to be sustained, the flow of communication must involve a line of reasoning for language use, and not be dominated by only one party—as opposed to a simple IRE (initiate—respond—evaluate) pattern evident in modelling and drill (NSW DEC, 2006). Secondly, the communication must be focused around the substance of the learning content which includes both linguistic aspects and contextual factors influencing language use. Thirdly, ‘reciprocal’ means the communication must be two-way in direction. Realisation of substantive communication also relies on how well students are engaged in activities.
Cultural knowledge

Understanding about language use for communication is unlikely to be deep without sufficient knowledge about the culture behind the language use. Thus, it is necessary to incorporate cultural knowledge as an integral aspect of activities. Activities which are originally intended for language practice can be designed to incorporate a cultural experience. In this approach, cultural understanding is implicitly constructed by what students have experienced in the activities rather than being directly ‘indoctrinated’ by the teacher. Also, more engagement is usually promoted for language practice through cultural activities, hence, increasing the engagement level in substantive communication and contributing to deep understanding.

Connectedness

It is maintained that memorisation only reaches the first stage of language storage, called the ‘word-storage stage’ (i.e. it only deals with pronunciation, stress, definitions, gender, number of syllables, letters or phonemes, etc.). However, for a language to be retained, it must involve a second stage, named the conceptual stage, in which the images and concepts of vocabulary, structures and the situations are conceived (Rojas, 1995). Concept formation is more likely to be achieved through significant usage of the language in communicative situations similar to those in real life (Rojas, 1995). In this sense, the significance of language practice for communicative competence development to a large extent depends on how the actual communicative situations to be confronted are addressed. Also, it seems to be a common experience of foreign language learners of Chinese that they can understand the teacher’s Chinese, but not other Chinese people’s talk outside the classroom. A possible explanation for poor communicative competence could be the irrelevance of
language learning to authentic communication in the target language. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the connectedness exhibited in activities, thereby enhancing the communicative orientation of language practice in turn. This may be enhanced by using authentic materials for language use and for building the field where students’ knowledge about the target language and culture can be applied in a similar way to ‘real’ communication.

*Higher-order thinking*

Language learning through the communicative approach can be regarded as a process moving from lower-order thinking activities to higher-order thinking activities following on from a taxonomy such as Bloom’s. Bloom’s taxonomy (1956) embedded in different stages of communicative language teaching has been outlined in the following figure:

![Figure 4.10 Bloom’s taxonomy embedded in communicative language teaching](image)

Figure 4.10 Bloom’s taxonomy embedded in communicative language teaching
During the first stage, which is embedded in the *Pre-communicative phase*, the presentation of *deep knowledge* will be used for students to gather new knowledge. The orders of thinking required at this stage are the lowest levels, namely, ‘knowledge—gathering information’ and ‘comprehension-confirming or understanding’, at the lowest level of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Following that, at the *Communicative phase*, students are expected to demonstrate *deep understanding* by applying the knowledge gathered in activities. In terms of Bloom’s Taxonomy, this is the phase where more abstract mental processing, including ‘application—making use of knowledge’, ‘analysis—taking apart’ and ‘synthesis—putting together’ is demanded. The occurrence of these processes does not rely on the complexity of content, but the design of activities. For example, asking a student directly how to say ‘This is my mum’ in Chinese requires lower-order thinking. However, asking students to listen to a classmate’s introduction of his own family and draw a family tree involves higher-order thinking skills such as application, analysis and synthesis.

At the last stage of the communicative approach, students are expected to conduct autonomous communication in real situations instead of in analogous scenarios, and then continuously absorb new language resources to satisfy their needs. In addition to the other skills mentioned earlier, the autonomic learning at this stage highlights the highest level of skills in Bloom’s Taxonomy—‘evaluation—judging the outcome’, as an authentic communicative situation may be the best place for them to test their communicative competence, and thus find out their shortcomings and improve them.

Lower-order thinking practices during the *Pre-communicative phase* are foundations for understanding learning content. However, understanding is unlikely to be deep if there is no *higher-order thinking* about appropriate use of the learning content in various communicative contexts. Towards the end of the promotion of *higher-order*
thinking, there is a need to highlight the problem-solving nature of the
Communicative phase by encouraging learners to construct meaning and thus solve
communicative problems with deep knowledge of the language resources presented
in the Pre-communicative phase.

Knowledge integration

In the context of CLT, depth of understanding is present if knowledge integration
brings meaning to communicative competence development. As effective
communication in reality relies on synthesis and application of the vocabulary,
utterances and grammatical knowledge acquired, integrating the key concepts being
addressed from lesson to lesson is of even greater importance for enhancing the
holistic mastery of learning content. Hence, a better communicative activity design
would be one that promotes the application of new knowledge in combination with
previously learned content, for expressing meaning.

High expectation

According to the spirit of CLT, deep insight into language use is more likely to be
generated via learning by communicating. High expectation is imposed on students
due to ‘learning by communicating’ as students are expected to engage in
communication and take risks in constructing meaning independently from the very
beginning. Nevertheless, such expectation should be managed by a series of activities
in a programmed manner, instead of by one single task with an extremely high
expectation of skill. For example, a lesson could go from an oral recognition activity
for vocabulary or short utterances, through to an oral production activity for
vocabulary and utterances, to an oral production activity for complete conversations,
with each activity being supported by a solid foundation formed in the previous stage.
Moreover, scaffolding such as phonetic symbols should be provided to facilitate students to achieve the expectation.

**QT elements for the language practice environment**

What the design of activities intends to achieve is more than just language practice. Another aspect of equal importance is to create an environment that supports the implementation of communicative language practice. Integrating some QT elements into activities designed in the following ways is likely to help with the creation of the environment which is needed.

*Engagement*

Under the principles of CLT, in which language learning is meant to happen mostly during communication, the more students engage in communicative language practice, the better communicative competence they will acquire. Hence, *engagement* has to be maximised to ensure *substantive communication* and *deep understanding* of learning content. To maximise engagement, the activities must be designed in a way that is meaningful and interesting to students. Firstly, it is better to spread repetitive practice instead of concentrate it into a single lesson. The second strategy is employing a diverse variety of games alternately. Thirdly, use of technology can make language practice through games more enjoyable. Fourthly, it is interesting to incorporate cultural elements into language learning. Fifthly, the repetition of content can be done through nursery rhymes and songs familiar to students by changing the lyrics into the Mandarin version. Sixthly, building students’ sense of achievement through appropriate management of high expectations is important for ensuring their sustained engagement.
**Social support**

In a classroom where communication between students is the major strategy for learning, *social support* is essential. Activity design must promote students supporting each other to engage in communication, as well as offering them opportunities to learn from each other. For instance, having students work in groups to accomplish a task or compete in games constitutes a strong incentive for students to support each other. A slight change in the rules could make a big difference to relationships between students, for example:

Today I used a Chinese game called Tangram for language practising. The game was like I call out Chinese names of animals and then students use Tangram to create images of corresponding animals as quickly as possible. To make it more efficient, I divided them into groups to make a competition. Firstly, I said “each time the first group finishing the right animal can get a point”. I found out that it was always the same boy who is the quickest one and win points for his team, which left limited time for a lot of other students to respond. Then, I changed the rule. This time, all members in a group are required to finish creating the right animal image in order to win. The outcome is totally different as they become extremely active in helping their teammates after finishing their own task. (Reflective journal, 29-Jun-2011)

Furthermore, the way students are grouped also has an impact on *social support*. It is more than just putting equal numbers of students in each group randomly.

I think if you do that in smaller groups, they are more likely to help each other. And it’s not so competitive because you will find there will be six students get everything you say, and they are really quick learners, you’ve got some who they learn but not so quick and then you’ve got another six who are at the bottom with no idea. So if you put them in a small group and you make that group to have a few of each of them, they can help each other because they work as a group or a team, they all want to succeed. Then they are not going to argue or put each other down, they all want them to get the answer. (Classroom Teacher R)

**Inclusivity**

Increasing numbers of students involved in activities further promotes *substantive communication*, also exposing them to more opportunities to learn. From others’ use of language combined with the teacher’s comments, it is expected that students will acquire *deeper understanding* about what is appropriate. Hence, activities should be designed in a way that gives every student the opportunity to participate. Small-
group tasks with a strong emphasis on individual contributions are an effective design to allow for a wider range of involvement.

Students’ self-regulation

Students’ self-regulation is essential for CLT since learning relies on students regulating themselves to become involved in substantive communication with each other in the target language. The better they regulate themselves to do communicative activities, the more effectively their communicative competence can be developed. For learners with almost no need of the language for daily life and academic reasons, self-regulation to a large extent depends on their interest. In this sense, the realisation of students’ self-regulation in CLT relies on solutions employed for promoting deep engagement in language practice.

4.4.2 Implications for next cycle

The findings of the first cycle have mainly three implications for the focus of next cycle. Firstly, in terms of further improvement of my teaching practice, it will be beneficial for the teacher-researcher to continue reflective teaching, especially focusing on revealing and resolving tensions emerging in teaching. Secondly, it would be valuable to test out Quality Communicative Activities as a guide for lesson planning, in order to make it a more useful tool for foreign language teachers to use. Additionally, in QT, which is a generic model of pedagogy, cultural knowledge seems to be the only element that explicitly deals with the role of culture in high-quality teaching. According to cultural knowledge, valuing diverse cultures in the classroom is regarded as an element contributing to significance for all learning. However, as a contextual factor of language use, culture, is likely to be relevant to discussion of several elements of QT in a foreign language teaching context,
including *deep knowledge, deep understanding, engagement, explicit quality criteria, inclusivity, connectedness, narrative, higher-order thinking* and *background knowledge*. The relevance of culture (e.g. knowledge of beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, capabilities and habits of members of a particular society) to these QT elements in a foreign language teaching context may be summarised as follows:

- **Deep knowledge**: demonstration of deep knowledge about appropriate language use in different communicative contexts usually involves deep exploration of culture.

- **Deep understanding**: understanding about culture facilitates students’ understanding about appropriate use of the target language in different communicative contexts.

- **Engagement**: cultural elements are helpful for making activities interesting to students, thus, increasing their engagement in language practice.

- **Explicit quality criteria**: culture such as customs and habits is always shown while providing holistic demonstration of authentic language use in its communicative context.

- **Inclusivity**: the relationship between this element and culture has already been explicitly addressed in the original QT model by requiring teachers to value students’ cultural backgrounds.

- **Connectedness**: exploration of culture, as a contextual factor of language use, is highly relevant for connecting language learning to language using in real communication.

- **Narrative**: For young children, narrative seems to be an effective way to teach cultural concepts.
• *Higher-order thinking*: To solve communicative problems, independent meaning construction involves selecting appropriate language to use based on contextual factors, such as culture.

• *Background knowledge*: while introducing the target culture and language, students’ prior learning and experience in family and community life are employed.

This seems to suggest that the role which culture plays in language teaching goes beyond what has been described in *cultural knowledge*. The importance of culture for producing high-quality language teaching may not be fully captured by the element *cultural knowledge* in the original QT. Culture also contributes to high-quality language teaching in other ways, which may be explained by the substance of other elements in QT. Therefore, it may be necessary to further explore the relationship between culture and language teaching in order to investigate pathways for improving the communicative approach of foreign language teaching.
Chapter 5  Action Research Cycle Two

This chapter presents the four stages of Action Research Cycle Two in the same way as the four stages of Action Research Cycle One were presented in Chapter 4. Following Action Research Cycle One, the planning stage here:

• defines the integrative application of the Quality Communicative Activities model and Intercultural Language Teaching as the focus
• reviews literature on Intercultural Language Teaching, and
• designs reflective teaching cycles and the procedure of data collection and data analysis according to the focus.

As in Chapter 4, the outcome of the acting stage is demonstrated by summarising the quantity of data collected and showing samples of various data. The observing stage includes reviewing the specific coding processes used, as well as discussing the results of coding. The reflecting stage summarises the major findings of this action research cycle.

5.1  Planning stage

As in Action Research Cycle One, the planning stage of this action research cycle includes three tasks: defining the research focus of this action research cycle, reviewing literature related to the research focus and designing this action research cycle according to the research focus. Now I will define the research focus of this action research cycle.

5.1.1  Focus of Cycle Two

This cycle aims at further improving CLT-oriented teaching based on findings from the last cycle. In the last cycle, while reinterpreting QT elements in the context of
CLT, it was realised that discussion about culture was relevant to several QT elements, not just cultural knowledge. This made me feel that there may be more potential for culture to enhance the quality of foreign language teaching for communicative competence development. Cultural knowledge (e.g. knowledge of beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, capabilities and habits of members of a particular society) may contribute to high-quality language teaching in other ways more than what has been described in cultural knowledge under the dimension of significance in QT. Following the last cycle, reflective teaching in this cycle focused on testing Quality Communicative Activities and also improving these in the light of enhanced understanding about culture in language teaching. A brief review of the literature about culture in language teaching led me to an intercultural perspective on the relationship between culture and language teaching. This then contributed to a new pedagogical concern in this cycle, that is, intercultural language teaching (ILT) which will be explained later in this chapter. What attracted me to ILT was the emphasis on cultural teaching towards development of communicative competence, which is consistent with the ultimate goal of CLT. Considering this, it is potentially true that Quality Communicative Activities, as advancements on CLT, can be further enhanced by drawing upon the substance of ILT. These ideas give shape to the subsidiary research question for this cycle:

How does the integrative application of Quality Communicative Activities (QCA) and Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT) via tension-focused reflective teaching enhance teaching Chinese through a communicative approach?
5.1.2 Literature relevant to the focus

Having defined the research focus of Action Research Cycle Two as integrative application of QCA and ILT via tension-focused reflective teaching, I will now turn to some literature on ILT.

5.1.2.1 Intercultural Language Teaching

There have been always attempts to define culture. For example, culture may be defined as:

Complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 1871, p. 4)

Culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings - the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ - between the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express their ideas, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world, in a broadly similar way. (Hall, 1997, p. 2)

Raymond Williams defined culture as ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, which involve both common meanings and individual meanings in the following way:

Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. … The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind. The making of a mind is, first, the slow learning of shapes, purposes, and meanings, so that work, observation and communication are possible. Then, second, but equal in importance, is the testing of these in experience, the making of new observations, comparisons, and meanings. A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of a culture: that it is always both traditional and creative; that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings. We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life -- the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning -- the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind. (Williams, 1958, p. 53-54)
In the book *Cultural Globalization and Language Education*, with a particular focus on the effects of globalization on the understanding of culture in relation to language teaching, Kumaravadivelu suggests five shifts regarding culture in language pedagogy.

The inclusion of culture in language teaching is not new. However, the approaches to doing this have evolved over time. Four main approaches to teaching culture in foreign language education currently identified are:

- The traditional approach
- The ‘Culture studies’ approach
- The ‘Culture as practices’ approach
- Intercultural language teaching

(Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet 1999, p.17)

The following table compares the first three approaches:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional approach</th>
<th>Culture studies approach</th>
<th>Culture as practices approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture</strong></td>
<td>High culture mediated through literature</td>
<td>Knowledge about the history, geography and institutions of the other country</td>
<td>A collective, static and homogeneous way of acting through language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural competence</strong></td>
<td>Control of an established canon of literature</td>
<td>A body of knowledge about the country</td>
<td>Knowing about the actions of people from another culture and the underlying cultural values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model for learning</strong></td>
<td>Educated native speakers</td>
<td>Native speakers</td>
<td>No need to be identical to native speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of language learning</strong></td>
<td>Not expected to communicate with native speakers</td>
<td>Expected to communicate with native speakers</td>
<td>Not necessarily expected to communicate with native speakers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship between culture and language

Tenuous connection; Cultural knowledge resides in the text

No inherent connection; Cultural knowledge as a background for understanding language

Connection can be strong (action through language as central to culture) or weak (separated culture learning and language learning)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 5.1 Comparison of three approaches for teaching culture (Lo Bianco et al., 1999)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The distinctions between previous approaches and intercultural language teaching (ILT) will be revealed through a more detailed literature review on intercultural language teaching in the following paragraphs. The innovative features of ILT will be explored around three main issues including:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The underlying view of culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The goal of language teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The methods used to achieve the goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A particular comparison between CLT and ILT will be made in these discussions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It has been pointed out that culture is a missing element in CLT since none of the four elements of *communicative competence*—*grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence*—deals with cultural knowledge (Alptekin, 2002; Corbett, 2003). However, this view is based on the Canale (1983) model of communicative competence. By looking at other models of communicative competence, other scholars maintain that CLT is not a culture-free approach. According to Byram (1997), culture has been taken into account as a part of the knowledge about what is appropriate in language use. The Van Ek (1986) model tries to remove exclusive focus on non-cultural aspects of
language by incorporating *sociocultural competence* (the cultural background knowledge needed to interpret and use a language effectively) as one of the dimensions of *communicative competence* (Celce-Murcia, 2007, p. 43). However, according to Liddicoat (2002, p. 6), this is still based on a static view of culture which “treats cultural knowledge as either facts or artefacts”. Liddicoat (2002, p. 6) maintained that culture is actually “a set of practices in which people engage in order to live their lives”. It is further stated that since the practices of a group are forever being negotiated and renegotiated among its members, culture should be viewed as dynamic (Liddicoat, 2002). Moloney and Harbon (2010) maintain that informed by a static view of culture, cultural knowledge to be learned for effective communication becomes a series of selected facts or information about culture. On the contrary, under a dynamic view of culture, language, as a practice shared by its speakers, is itself a cultural act (Moloney & Harbon, 2010). According to this view of culture, it is claimed that merely teaching culture as artefacts by adding *sociocultural competence* as a component of communicative competence underrates the role of language as a cultural practice (Byram, 1997). Instead, it is believed that “the communicative approach must be a cultural approach if it is to achieve the objectives it has set for itself” (Liddicoat, 2000, p.51). ILT has been considered a new idea to build culture into a communicative curriculum, underpinned by a dynamic view of culture (Corbett, 2003). In this approach, culture learning is integrated with language acquisition so that the dynamic nature of culture is captured through a process of understanding language use in a cultural context. The cultural knowledge to be acquired in ILT is “knowing how to engage with the culture” (Liddicoat, 2002, p. 6). Both CLT and ILT treat communication as the key. However, CLT views culture as
arterfacts while ILT views culture as practices. CLT sees culture as a separated body of knowledge from language while ILT sees language as itself cultural practice.

The goal of ILT is to develop intercultural communicative competence regarded as an extension of communicative competence in CLT (Lázár & Čaňková, 2007). However, it has been stressed that this extension is not simply an expansion of components in communicative competence, but a reconceptualisation of communicative competence within the context of intercultural encounters. Essentially, it emphasises intercultural awareness as part of the capability of communicating effectively (Lo Bianco et al., 1999). It has been pointed out that the shift from communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence involves critiquing the use of the native speaker as the model for learning (Lo Bianco et al., 1999, p. 127). In CLT, definitions of all components of communicative competence are considered as related to native speakers (Aguilar, 2008; Byram, 1997). It is said that implicit in these definitions is that learners are perceived as imperfect native speakers who do not manage to use the language as it is used by native speakers. They need to be trained to behave like a person from another culture in terms of things like body language, intonation and even life view (Alptekin, 2002). In this sense, foreign language learning becomes a process of enculturation where “one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers” (Alptekin, 2002, p. 58). Having a native speaker as the model is regarded as invalid for two reasons. Firstly, it is considered as not easy to separate learners from their own cultural values and beliefs which they have internalised during socialisation since birth. Depending on the compatibility of the target culture to their own culture, learners’ reaction to
enculturation may range from total acceptance to total rejection. Secondly, it is stressed that having a native speaker as the model ignores the diversity of communicative situations where interlocutors are not necessarily native speakers. It is just as likely that the target language is used by two non-native speakers from different countries and who are using that language as a lingua franca (Aguilar, 2008). English as an international language spoken by people from different non-English speaking countries is a good example. Under this context, the ideal is considered to be intercultural speakers who:

...have the ability to manage communication and interaction between people of different cultural identities and languages, coming out from their own perspective and taking up another, able to handle different interpretations of reality (Aguilar, 2008, p. 63)

The ability to function as an intercultural speaker is defined as *intercultural communicative competence*, which is the ability to “interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language” (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey 2002, pp. 70-71) or the “ability to negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries and to establish their own identity as a user of another language” (Moloney & Harbon, 2010, pp. 284-285). The combination of ‘intercultural’ and ‘communicative’ in its name suggests that in addition to communicative competence, another competence is needed—intercultural competence which enables learners to “communicate comfortably with people from the other culture while maintaining one’s own identity” (Liddicoat, 2002, p. 9). It is emphasised that in ILT, learners must be able to understand and negotiate both language and cultural differences (East, 2012). Intercultural competence involves a series of attitudes, knowledge and skills outlined as follows:
Intercultural attitudes (savoir être): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own.

Knowledge (savoirs): of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.

Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre): ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one’s own.

Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire): ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

Critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager): an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries.

(Byram, et al., 2002, pp. 7-9)

It is further explained that intercultural speakers, as bilingual learners, neither restrict themselves to their own culture nor assimilate to the target culture. They stand in a “third place” from which learners move and mediate between their own culture and the target culture (Lo Bianco, et al., 1999). According to Liddicoat (2008), to be a mediator, productive skills and receptive skills may be treated separately. Learners, as receivers, have to understand information given by the interlocutor following the interlocutor’s norm; as producers, they do not need to give information in the same way (Liddicoat, 2008). It is stressed that an ‘intercultural speaker’ does not indicate that there is a perfect model to imitate since it is a dynamic concept varying from context to context (Byram, et al., 2002). Intercultural communicative competence is considered as evident in learners when they:

- display purposeful use of language in interaction and knowledge and modelling of contextual use
- display reflective critical thinking—noticing, describing, analysing
- develop an independent cultural identity and are aware of a relationship between their first language and culture and the target language and culture and of their ownership of a non-native membership of the target culture.

(Byloney, 2008, p. 12)
To build up learners’ *intercultural communicative competence*, ILT incorporates intercultural exploration as an integral part of language acquisition. This is said to involve a cyclical process consisting of:

1. input of a particular cultural element
2. noticing of cultural difference
3. reflection in terms of how far to modify one’s own practice to accommodate new input
4. output based on modification, which initiates further noticing, reflection and revised output

![Pathway for developing intercultural competence](image)

**Figure 5.1 Pathway for developing intercultural competence (Liddicoat, 2002, p. 11)**

An important feature of an intercultural approach is said to be the emphasis on raising intercultural awareness through comparative analysis. According to Corbett (2003), this means that learners’ understanding about the target culture and language is built upon ‘uncovering’ aspects of their own culture and language which may be unnoticed by themselves. Another distinguishing feature is that ILT emphasises experiential learning as the essential tool for developing intercultural awareness, based on the belief that new concepts can be fully absorbed only if learners are extensively and intensively exposed to the target language and culture (Lo Bianco, et al., 1999). Teaching in this sense is not considered as delivery of factual information, but a question-led intercultural exploration (Liddicoat, 2008). In addition, priority is
placed on the development of the ability to analyse experience to uncover cultural differences, not the amount of knowledge transmitted (Aguilar, 2008; Byram, et al., 2002). Moreover, it emphasises that ‘culture’ must be ‘taught’ from the beginning of language learning to avoid inappropriate assumptions and misunderstandings about the target culture being formed by learners (Liddicoat, 2008).

ILT also demands teacher development. Teachers are considered as no longer lecturers about the target culture, but people who provide language experiences enriched with culture, guide learners to raise questions about culture and language and help learners to learn how to learn about culture (Byram, et al., 2002; Liddicoat, 2008). To implement this approach, the intercultural communicative competence of the teacher themselves is considered to be essential. It is argued that non-native teachers may be more suitable than native teachers for ILT given their proven ability to move between two cultures and languages (Corbett, 2003). However, it is also pointed out that both native and non-native speakers can each be competent teachers of ILT as long as they are competent in raising intercultural awareness, stimulating curiosity about other cultures in students and training students to analyse culture independently (Byram et al., 2002).

Nevertheless, it is maintained by some authors that the implementation of ILT does not mean that teachers abandon communicative activities, but rather further develop CLT so that the intercultural dimension is addressed. It is said that a wide variety of practices in CLT still have much to offer in ILT if they are adapted and redesigned to promote awareness of culture, the mediation of cultural differences and construction
of identities via language use, in addition to fluency in language use (Aguilar, 2008; Corbett, 2003). For example, according to Corbett (2003), information gap activities in ILT go beyond merely filling the information gap by communicating in the target language, by emphasising (Corbett, 2003):

1) culture as the focus of the information exchanged

2) the opportunities for learners to reflect on how information exchange is influenced by culture

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, a distinguishing feature of ILT is the great emphasis given to learning-through-experiencing. According to some authors, discovery skills are necessary in order to make experience productive for learning. Based on this, training in ethnographic techniques, “description of a community through systematic observation, usually by living among the community as a participant observer over a period of time”, is considered by some authors as a necessary part of intercultural communicative competence development (Corbett, 2003, p. 9). According to Byram and Fleming (1998), the validity of an ethnographic approach for ILT arises from:

- An integration of linguistic and cultural learning to facilitate communication and interaction;
- A comparison of others and self to stimulate reflection on and (critical) questioning of the mainstream culture into which learners are socialised;
- A shift in perspective involving psychological processes of socialisation;
- The potential of language teaching to prepare learners to meet and communicate in other cultures and societies than the specific one usually associated with the language they are learning.

(Byram & Fleming, 1998, p. 7)

In terms of training students in ethnographic techniques for intercultural communicative competence development, four types of ethnographic activities are recommended by Corbett (2003). The first is concept training in which cultural insights are generated from detailed observation and contemplation of an ordinary concept. For the observation of a bookshop, for example, questions may be asked...
about the opening hours, the reading tastes of the customers, processes of purchasing etc. The second type involves cultural associations in which learners seek and compare information about a specific subject across cultures. Thirdly, Corbett (2003) recommended negative etiquette which raises cultural awareness by listing and comparing ‘how not to behave’ in certain situations in both cultures. Fourthly, it is suggested by Corbett (2003) that learners can investigate culturally-shaped ways of perceiving and behaving by discussing critical incidents which are concerned with unresolved conflicts about values, goals or meanings derived from cross-cultural communications.

Apart from ethnography, another discipline considered as useful to the development of intercultural communicative competence is semiotics or visual literacy. It is believed that by analysing cultural information communicated through visual data, learners develop their skills in noticing, understanding and interpreting cultures (Corbett, 2003).

Activities for ILT may be best summarised by a typology of exercises which classifies activities into different stages of intercultural communicative competence development:

**Stage 1: Tasks developing intercultural awareness and perception**
1. Describing and commenting on visual and auditory impressions
2. Pictures (what one sees)
3. Telling stories (in picture-stories)
4. Evaluating situations and people
5. Describing people (clippings)
6. Telling stories about pictures
7. Personal impression and interpretation of pictures
8. Change of perspective
9. Describing pictures/situations from memory
Stage 2: Concept and meaning
1. Speculating about ‘blank space’ e.g. in a story
2. Writing associograms
3. Making collages from pictures and texts
4. Connotation – denotation; excluding words that do not fit
5. Filling in antonyms and scales
6. Talking about prototypes
7. Finding criteria for concepts
8. Defining one’s own priorities
9. Defining differences (e.g. Café – bar – Kneipe)
10. Formulating questions to define a concept
11. Project research concerning a concept (e.g. living room)

Stage 3 Comparing cultures
1. Comparing and contrasting
2. Finding generic terms
3. Classifying
4. Discussing opinions
5. Socio-cultural units in comparison
6. Ways of expressing indirectness (The German “man”)
7. Comparing stereotypes
8. Culture-specific logical relations

Stage 4 Developing communicative competences in intercultural situations
1. Analysing the effect of speech acts and their linguistic realisations
2. Analysing strategies of communication
3. Analysing socio-cultural features of certain text types
4. Analysing and comparing styles of expression
5. Translation and interpretation
6. Giving feedback (active listening)
7. Cultural interplay
8. Adopting roles in a discussion
9. Paraphrasing
10. Meta-communication (talking about communication)

(Neuner, 2003, pp. 53-54)

Currently, ILT-oriented textbooks are limited compared to CLT-oriented ones. However, there is one textbook—Mirrors and Windows—which is designed with strong adherence to ILT principles. Each unit in this textbook follows the structure of:

- **Introduction of the topic** e.g. time, food, school
- **Reflecting on your own culture**: reflect on their own values, customs, behaviours and attitudes with the help of tasks, questions and cartoons
• **Discovering other cultures:** short reading passages about people in other countries as well as ethnographic tasks

• **Language work:** read and think about how culture is reflected in language

(Lázár, 2003)

It has been mentioned that an intercultural perspective can still be developed even when teachers use textbooks without such a strong intercultural orientation, as long as they have learners ask further questions and compare different cultures (Byram, et al., 2002). Liddicoat (2008) provides an example of how texts about—Japanese schooling—for traditional reading comprehension teaching are used for ILT. This is achieved by revising the questions associated with the texts to extend learners’ attention from decoding information to investigating the target culture presented in the texts. Essentially, reading texts in this example is valued for not only providing a sample of target language use, but also for offering an instance of the target culture for intercultural exploration.

There is not much Australian literature on the implementation of ILT in primary classrooms. Fielding’s study (2009) found that bilingual education programs fostered intercultural communicative competence. This is because, in monolingual education settings, students may be reluctant to use other languages in order to avoid being viewed as different from others. However, in a bilingual education setting, they feel more comfortable and confident in using different languages, as the use of different languages in communication is the norm. Moloney (2007) conducted a case study to investigate indicators of intercultural competence in primary school language learners. The indicators identified included:
• Skills in confident spoken interaction and comprehension
• A sense of natural language use, modelled in student/teacher spoken interactions
• A degree of metalinguistic skill through moving in and out of two language environments
• Positive attitudes to the culture of the target language
• A sense of positive ownership of their non-native status
• Moving beyond both L1 and target language to a multiperspective outlook, interested in many different languages and cultures
• Some reflection about identity issues
• Some limited reflective ability in comparing and analysing the target culture and home culture.  (Moloney, 2007, p. 137)

Moloney (2007) further pointed out that teachers’ interculturality, which has significant impact on teachers’ pedagogical choices and design of experiential learning tasks, is a facilitator of students’ intercultural competence. Apart from these studies, a report from the Asian Languages Professional Learning Project (ALPLP) provides contextualization of ILT in two Australian primary schools. In Clare Primary School in South Australia, ILT has been adopted to teach Japanese in the following ways:

• Writing about ‘my family’ in English and writing about Japanese families in Japanese
• Comparing greetings in Japanese and English
• Discussing differences and similarities between Japan and Australia
• Talking about ‘self’, ‘identity’ and ‘interdependence’ in both cultures
• Comparing purposes, structures, messages and language use of Japanese and Australian postcards

In another school, South Hobart Primary School, ILT was employed to teach Indonesian. By comparing names, students learnt that Balinese names are based on birth order. They learn aspects of the Indonesian language through making masks with Balinese names. Students also learn Indonesian language and culture by reading Indonesian stories and folktales about Indonesian life. Other activities include:
• Analysing cultural and linguistic information disseminated through folk tales, stories, visual arts
• Displaying their thinking and research on culture and language with the support of authentic artefacts
• Learning Indonesian rap songs and using the language learned in role plays
• Comparing cultural gesturing

It can be seen from the above that contextualized implementation of ILT in primary classrooms often involves intercultural comparison and exploratory activities. Other Australian intercultural education in primary schools (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, n.d.; Ko, 2008; The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, n.d.) also focuses on promoting understanding and respect for cultural diversity. The relationship between intercultural education and language learning has not been sufficiently addressed by rich examples of contextualized implementation of ILT in primary schools. This is one sense in which the Australian literature on contextualized implementation of ILT in primary schools is still limited. Some of the significance of the current study lays in its potentially generating rich authentic examples of implementation of ILT in authentic primary classrooms. Based on these authentic examples, it is hoped that better understanding about how to develop primary school students’ intercultural communicative competence can be developed.

A recent development involving intercultural communicative competence development is the use of technology tools such as videoconferencing, e-mail, online chatting, blogs and social networking. International partnerships which involve language learners from different countries in online communication in order to
promote language learning and intercultural awareness are referred to as telecollaboration (Belz, 2007; Blake, 2007; Kern, 2008; Yang & Chen, 2007). These partnerships have been adopted in countries such as United States, France, Germany, Mexico, Russia and Spain based on the belief that they provide opportunities for authentic and immediate intercultural and language exchange which are not generally possible in traditional foreign language classrooms (Bauer et al., 2006; Belz, 2007; Kern, 2006; Train, 2006). These are especially beneficial for students who have little opportunity to communicate with speakers of other languages or opportunity to go abroad (Belz, 2007). With the purpose of promoting intercultural exchange between students from different countries, telecollaboration projects usually employ student-centred learning in which independent exploration and constructivist learning around cultures are emphasized. For example, it is maintained that the *Cultura* project between United States and France reflects a constructivist approach in which student-led communication and analytical skills are highly encouraged (Bauer et al., 2006). In this project, learners of French in the United States and learners of English in France learn about the cultures and languages through comparing materials generated by each other. They start with comparing their own answers to the same set of questionnaires with answers of the students from the other culture. These questionnaires are related to topics such as freedom, work, family, school. By comparing the answers, they discover fundamental cultural differences. Then, they participate in an online forum to discuss their perspectives, hypothesis and findings. Students also reflect on these discussions with their classmates. It is found in O’Dowd’s study (2006) that videoconferencing communication enables quick clarification of meaning, diverse responses to questions about the target culture as well as using learners’ communicative skills in real time. Email also allows more in-
depth and extensive descriptions of cultural issues. *Facebook* is also considered as beneficial for independent intercultural exploration as learners can interact regularly with authentic native speakers who share similar interests. They may notice certain speech acts which are difficult to translate across languages due to cultural reasons (Blattner, 2009). Despite the positive results of telecollaboration reported in previous studies (Furstenberg et al., 2001; Kinginger, 2000; Meskill & Ranglova, 2000; Müller-Hartmann, 2000; von der Emde, Schneider, & Kötter, 2001), it is pointed out by some researchers that telecollaboration projects do not necessarily lead to intercultural competence development (Belz, 2002, 2003; Coleman, 1998; Fischer, 1998; O’Dowd, 2003; Ware, 2003, 2005). For instance, Ware and Kramsch (2005) claimed that online intercultural exchange may not eliminate stereotypes and prejudice. O’Dowd (2006) found that students participating in telecollaboration projects were unwilling to stand back from their own culture and even perceived the other culture as deficient. Hence, teachers still have an important role to play in telecollaboration projects in terms of nurturing an attitude of openness among students (O’Dowd, 2006). It is essential for teachers to clarify to students that the purpose of comparison is not to judge the different cultures as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but to learn more about both cultures. Furthermore, to avoid stereotypes and prejudice, teachers must ensure that students’ opinions and interpretations are evidence-supported.

In addition to its pedagogical advances, ILT has been perceived by some authors as a big movement in language teaching in terms of promotion of respect for human dignity, equality of human rights and democracy in social interaction, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, it is considered that in ILT the learners’ own culture and language
are recognised and valued as important as the target culture and language. Secondly, ILT is considered as highly committed to overcoming stereotypes and misunderstandings in social interaction by encouraging understanding of others as well as oneself (Byram, et al., 2002; Starkey, 2003).

5.1.3 Design of Cycle Two

Now, having explained the research focus of Cycle Two and the literature on ILT, I will turn to the third task of the planning stage—designing Action Research Cycle Two. The basic design of this cycle is the same as in Action Research Cycle One, that is, integrating reflective teaching cycles into an action research cycle as follows:

![Figure 5.2 The integration of reflective teaching cycle into action research cycle](image)

As the mode of action to be implemented, reflective teaching cycles were repeated several times during the acting stage. However, the content of the reflections were adapted to be consistent with the research focus of this cycle. Therefore, activities
involved in reflective teaching cycles were redesigned. Likewise, data collection and data analysis were also replanned to serve the research focus of this cycle. Now I will examine the design of reflective teaching cycles, the plan for data collection and the plan for data analysis in Action Research Cycle Two.

5.1.3.1 Design of reflective teaching cycles

Since the substance of overall action in this action research cycle was to integrate ILT into QCA, reflective teaching cycles here were used to test and refine the outcome of integration while using it as a guide for lesson planning. Moreover, following the implications of cycle one, tension-focused reflective teaching was adopted to foster improvement in teaching practice. Each reflective teaching cycle covered one topic such as ‘numbers’ or ‘family’, which might take two to three 45-minute lessons. The details of each cycle can be illustrated as follows:
Figure 5.3 Design of reflective teaching cycles for Action Research Cycle Two
5.1.3.2 Plan for data collection

As in chapter 4, I will go through how and why each data source was collected in this cycle in the following paragraphs.

Outsider observation

As in Cycle One, outsider observation was used to inform reflection-on-action. Classroom teachers were required to focus on the following questions while observing individual lessons:

1. How do you think students have been taught to use Mandarin for communication?
2. What are the strengths of this lesson?
3. What are the weaknesses of this lesson?
4. Do you have any suggestions for improving this lesson?

Again, this type of observation satisfies Burns’ (2010, p. 57) criteria for action research in being:

- Focused (seek specific information on the strengths and weaknesses of teaching)
- Objective (see classroom events from the eye of a ‘stranger’)
- Reflective (the purpose of observation is to stimulate reflection)
- Documented (deliberately recorded observation)
- Evaluate (evaluate teaching practice in terms of communicative competence development)

Interviews

As well as outsider observation, classroom teachers were asked to further elaborate on their observations while answering two main questions in interviews:

1. What is your general impression about my teaching?
2. How do you think students’ have been taught to use Mandarin for communication?

3. Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

**Student work samples**

As in Cycle One, I also collected student work samples as formative assessment of my instruction to support reflection-on-action and thus modify my instruction in the following lesson towards development of learners’ communicative competence.

**Lesson plans**

As record of reflection-for-action, lesson plans were also collected to demonstrate:

- how QCA and ILT are applied to lesson design
- how QCA is modified in response to reflection-on-action

**Fieldnotes**

In addition, fieldnotes were used in the same way as in Cycle One and aimed at collecting information about:

- dilemmas and challenges that were confronted in the classroom
- descriptions of modifications made to lesson plans while implementing
- the teacher-researcher’s observation of effects of the action
- the teacher-researcher’s reflection-in-action

**Reflective journal**

Furthermore, I kept a reflective journal to record reflection-on-action which can be considered as the initial, informal analysis of data collected from students’ work samples, outsider observation, interviews, lesson plans and field-notes.
Figure 5.4 Initial data analysis in Action Research Cycle Two

Teacher-researcher
- **Lesson plans** presenting *reflection-for-action*
- **Fieldnotes** recording *reflection-in-action* and observation

Inform next cycle

Classroom teachers
- **Outsider observation** including evaluation of teaching
- **Interviews** including further elaboration of evaluation

Students
- **Work samples** showing learning outcomes
5.1.3.3 Plan for data analysis

Having explained the design of reflective teaching cycles, plan for data collection, I now turn to the third part of the design of action research cycle—plan for data analysis. As explained in the plan for data analysis in Cycle One, data analysis went through two stages. The initial analysis and secondary analysis were actually conducted by the two different ‘selves’ of the teacher-researcher, namely, the ‘teacher-self’ and the ‘researcher-self’. They were captured by reflection-on-action in the reflective teaching cycles and the observing stage of the action research cycle respectively. However, the method and focus of analysis in this cycle were different from those in the first cycle. In this action research cycle, initial analysis conducted by the ‘teacher-self’, which was reflection-on-action, focused on improving QCA through tension-focused reflection informed by lesson plans, fieldnotes, outsider observation, interviews and students’ work samples. The teacher in this action research cycle was to some extent different from the teacher in Action Research Cycle One as the approach of doing reflection in Cycle Two was developed based on the researcher’s findings from Cycle One. The teacher in Action Research Cycle One reflected on problems related to QT elements in particular lessons, while the teacher in Action Research Cycle Two approached problems in teaching through tension-focused reflection—to look for tensions suggested by various data and writing analysis about each tension in the reflective journal. To facilitate tension-focused reflection-on-action, versus coding was used again for the initial analysis of Action Research Cycle Two. After these, secondary analysis conducted by the ‘researcher-self’ during the observing stage of the action research cycle concentrated on exploring the evolution of teaching practice, while using QCA as guidance for lesson planning, as well as developing it in the light of ILT by tracking changes of
tensions and solutions evident in teaching. The coding tool used for this purpose was *elaborative coding*. Basically, *elaborative coding* is “the process of analysing textual data in order to develop theory further” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 103).

According to Saldana (2009, p. 168):

Elaborative Coding is appropriate for qualitative studies that build on or corroborate previous research and investigations. Basically, the second study elaborates on the major theoretical findings of the first, even if there are slight differences between the two studies’ research concerns and conceptual frameworks.

The process of elaborative coding is explained as follows:

One begins coding with the theoretical constructs from a previous study in mind. This contrasts with the coding one does in an initial study, where relevant text is selected without preconceived ideas in mind (to develop grounded theory). In elaborative coding where the goal is refine theoretical constructs from a previous study, relevant text is selected with those constructs in mind. (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 104).

It has usually been applied in research projects which involve two different but related studies. One of these studies is completed while the other is in progress (Saldana, 2009). Previous findings from the completed study will be developed further with new data that fit it, while new findings will be yielded if new data inconsistent with old findings is found in the second study. (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Therefore, what is essential to the *elaborative coding* process is a comparison of two pools of data from two studies, which makes “the changes that did occur more apparent” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 172). It was this power of revealing changes that made elaborative coding a suitable analytic tool for Action Research Cycle Two, considering that the primary purpose was to identify changes in teaching practice while applying and developing QCA with the support of ILT. The two related studies involved in elaborative coding were Action Research Cycle One and Action Research Cycle Two. The comparison is focused on tensions and solutions in these two action research cycles. With the findings from Action Research Cycle One as the basis—that is, tensions and solutions identified in Action Research Cycle One—
elaborative coding here tracks the development of these tensions and emergence of new tensions in Action Research Cycle Two. Tensions recorded in reflective journals will be grouped under the codes established in Action Research Cycle One if they fit with these old codes. Inclusion of the new data leads the old codes to be modified or developed further. Furthermore, newly-emerged tensions in this context which do not fit with old codes will be organised under potentially new codes. Both of these are valuable for deepening understanding about QCA as guidance for lesson planning as well as developing QCA in the light of ILT. The process of elaborative coding will be explained later in more detail with examples while reviewing the observing stage of Action Research Cycle Two.

To summarise, the data analysis process of this action research cycle is as follows:

Figure 5.5 Data analysis process in Action Research Cycle Two
5.2 Acting stage

Having explained the planning stage, now I will demonstrate the acting stage by summarising the data collected in Action Research Cycle Two. As mentioned earlier, reflective teaching cycle designed during planning stage were repeated several times during the acting stage. In this cycle, during the acting stage, ten complete reflective teaching cycles with the design illustrated in Figure 5.2 were implemented. With the participation of twenty students and five classroom teachers, the data collected from different sources during the ten reflective teaching cycles in this action research cycle were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outsider observation</td>
<td>10 (2 occasions × 5 teachers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>5 (5 classroom teachers participated in the interview)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student work samples</td>
<td>200 (10 reflective teaching cycles × 20 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson plans</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldnotes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective journal</td>
<td>20 (there were 2 journal entries after each reflective teaching cycle)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Data collected in Action Research Cycle Two
Below are samples of students’ work and outsider observations:

Each number in the chart below stands for a different letter of the alphabet. Once you decode the numbers, you will find out the pinyin of each drink item. Fill in the pinyin, tones and English meaning in the space provided. The first tone has been done for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>13</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>m</td>
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<td>h</td>
<td>v</td>
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<td>a</td>
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<td>n</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pinyin

1. 六 + 一 二十五 一
   1 舌 1++
   cola

2. 六 + 七 二十五 三
   kēi 1 "e "
   coffee

3. 水
   水 + 三
   water 7K

4. 茶
   茶 + 三
   tea

5. 奶
   + 三 + 三
   奶 + 三
   milk

Figure 5.6 A student work sample in Action Research Cycle Two
Before doing this worksheet, students had learned how to ask for some drinks as well as numbers in Chinese. In this worksheet, they had to recognise Chinese characters for numbers to find out pinyin for each drink. Then, they had to translate the pinyin into English as well as write the Chinese character for water.

1. How do you think students have been developed to use Mandarin for communication?
   * Children have learnt proper greetings.
   * Known numbers very well and characters.

2. What are the strengths of this lesson?
   * Great revision of previous lessons (counting)
   * Getting students attention with clapping.
   * Stating expectations of doing the 5 Ls
   * Fabulous resources – (smartboard)

3. What are the weaknesses of this lesson?
   * Children playing with stickers – distracting
   * Just of got them to put them in their bags.
   * Have children use smartboard

4. Do you have any suggestions for improving this lesson?
   * Maybe wait for all students to be quiet.
   * Use happy face also

Figure 5.7 An outsider observation in Action Research Cycle Two

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Before showing some samples of the reflective journal, it is necessary to remind here that the *teacher* in this action research cycle was to some extent different from the *teacher* in Action Research Cycle One. This is because the approach of doing reflection in Cycle Two was developed based on the *researcher’s* findings from Cycle One. As the *teacher* in Action Research Cycle One, I organised my reflection around QT elements and recorded my problems or success in terms of QT elements. However, in this cycle, as the *teacher*, I adopted tension-focused reflection in which I deliberately focused on tensions and solutions informed by data from various sources while doing *reflection-on-action* and applied versus codes to these tensions and solutions identified. By doing tension-focused reflection, I not only reflected on problems and success of teaching practice, but more importantly explored tensions and solutions to tensions behind these. As in Action Research Cycle One, tensions were coded as ‘X VS. Y’ while solutions were coded as ‘Solution to X VS. Y: Z’.

The change of the approach of doing reflection also led to the change of the structure of my reflective journal. In Action Research Cycle One, I structured my reflection according to QT elements while using QT as a reflection tool. However, In Action Research Cycle Two, when I recorded my tension-focused reflection in reflective journals, I used versus codes for tensions and solutions as headings to structure my reflective journal and then wrote analytic narrative about these codes. The analytic narrative recorded the context in which the tensions and solutions were originated from and demonstrated my reflection on the tensions and solutions identified. The use of versus codes for tensions and solutions as headings highlighted the essence of the analytic narrative following them. Here is an example of a journal entry\(^3\) containing this type of tension-focused reflection:

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\(^3\) These are just two of the twenty journal entries.
Learning while doing VS. reliance on teacher's support

They were eager to come to the front to do the information gap activity on Smartboard. This is an activity in which one student has to translate some information given in English into Chinese orally. And another student has to complete a table according to what he/she heard. This activity involves extensive communication and it trains students' reading, speaking, listening and writing skills together. However, they didn't really engage in these intended training. The activity didn't go smoothly, but was being frequently interrupted by questions like “Ms, how do I say this?” “Ms, what does this mean?” It seems that they have difficulty in every step. The student sending the information cannot pronounce correctly, which made it difficult for the other students to understand. In this case, I intervened very often. My increased intervention seems to make them feel that I will always help them with every bit of the activity. As a result, they become more reluctant to try and just wait for me to help. This resulted in no independent thinking and destroyed the original purpose of the activity. This happens in doing the worksheet as well. They relied on me heavily to help them accomplish the worksheet step-by-step. They told me “Ms, it's too hard. I can't do it” and just wanted me to do all the worksheet for them.

Two-phase structure of QCA VS. fluency of lessons

I should have introduced the difference between Chinese names and English names first. Without knowing about that surname comes prior to given name in Chinese names, students were confused when I directly introduced the Chinese way to address teacher. In Chinese, we address a particular teacher by adding his/her surname prior to “老师” which is the professional name of teachers. This is different from calling teachers in English which put teachers’ surname after the titles. The confusion may also be partially caused by the introduction of these two concepts together without addressing the links between these concepts in an understandable and logical way to students.

Solution to “CONNECTEDNESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. LACK OF NEED FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE”: interest-oriented content-based CLT

A possible strategy to create communicative needs is to create opportunities for them to use the target language as the tool to do something they are interested in. In stage one class, every day after lunch, the classroom teacher will ask one of the students to show and introduce his/her favourite toy to the whole class. They enjoyed this part of their school day very much. What I did was introducing the names of some of these toys in Chinese using the sentence pattern they've learnt “我叫… (My name is...).” They were so interested in knowing about Chinese names of their favourite toys. Hence, they listened very carefully. I remembered the survey I did at the very first lesson of this term. The survey shows that students are interested in the Great Wall and Panda in
China. Maybe I can create simple texts about these cultural things and teach them some words and sentence structures useful for them to access information in the texts.

**Solution to “ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT”: character writing competition**

Students love today’s character writing competition: students are required to write a specific character as many times as possible in 1 minute. This is in contrast to character writing practice before in which they became bored quickly after practising for only a few times. Since it’s a competition, all of them want to be the best. Hence, they wrote the character as many times as they can, and never feel bored by doing that. They asked for doing the competition again and again. As a result, their engagement in practice of writing the character is sustained and the practice is intensive.

**14-June-2012**

**Solution to “ILT for problematic knowledge VS. my insufficient understanding about students”: develop students’ intercultural communicative competence to realise self-directed intercultural exploration**

In one class, I introduced the vocabulary by asking them to guess what drinks are "可乐" and "咖啡" which sound very similar to their corresponding English words, cola and coffee. They can get the answers quickly. Then, I asked them to think about the reason why the two different languages share similar pronunciation. Finally, they figure out that these pronunciations are borrowed from English language due to the introduction of these western drinks into China. To my surprise, they even extend this type of deeper thinking to "茶" (pronounced as chá) (Tea) and told me that the Chinese pronunciation for tea "cha" is still used in their own languages to mean tea basically because tea originally comes from China. I did not plan to discuss about this since I do not know some of students’ mother languages at all, not to mention the similarities between Chinese and those languages.

**Inappropriate sequence of presentation VS. ILT**

The independent exploration of association between two languages has not been observed in the other class, even though they also know the reason for the sharing of similar sounds of drink names in two languages with my introduction. It may have something to do with the way in which I introduced the vocabulary to them. I introduced them directly to them without allowing them to think about the reasons by themselves.
Solution to “board game VS. appropriate expectation”: design for incentive to reach high expectation

Students’ interest remained throughout the whole process of today’s board game. Students have stronger incentive to practise difficult vocabularies and sentences as they are awarded extra points if they get it correctly.

Solution to “time-consuming game VS. sustained interest”: shorter time duration for each game cycle

Previously, I set the last space on the board as the finishing point. Today, by specifying the team first accumulating 100 marks as the winner and awarding different marks for different spaces, the outcome of the game can be realized in shorter time. They don't have to wait for so long to get a result. And they can play the game for several times. Their passion is to some extent sustained as the loser always wants to get another go to win back.

Solution to “problematic knowledge VS. communicative function of language”: ILT

Problematic knowledge is to some extent realized in today’s lesson by introducing another meaning of ‘drink tea’ in Chinese culture. “喝茶(drink tea)” which sounds like just enjoying a kind of Chinese drink to most western people actually means a special style of eating in communication among Cantonese people in China. In Cantonese areas, people enjoy a wide variety of snacks with tea for breakfast or lunch. Tea is actually a complementary, not the central part of this activity.

Table 5.3 A reflective journal excerpt in Action Research Cycle Two

In terms of the lessons on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012 and 14<sup>th</sup> June 2012, I experienced some problems in teaching:

- failure of an information gap activity
- students’ confusion about concepts
- absence of students’ independent intercultural exploration,

as well as some success in teaching:

- the use of interest-oriented content-based CLT
- the use of character writing competition
- students’ self-directed intercultural exploration
- the use of incentives in game design to promote students to reach high expectations
• the use of games with short time duration

• introduction of another meaning of ‘drink tea’ in Chinese culture.

As the teacher applying tension-focused reflection, I did not stop my reflection after observing these failures and successes in my teaching. Instead, I went one step further to explore the tensions and solutions behind these problems and successful experiences. For example, the failure of an information gap activity was considered as a tension between the ‘learning while doing’ principle embedded in the activity and students’ reliance on teachers’ support. Students’ confusion about concepts was considered as a tension between inappropriate sequence of introduction due to two-phase structure of QCA and fluency of lessons. Absence of students’ independent intercultural exploration was attributed to the tension between inappropriate sequence of presentation and ILT. These generated three versus codes which were used as headings of analytic narratives in the two journal entries above:

• learning while doing VS. reliance on teachers’ support

• two-phase structure of QCA VS. fluency of lessons

• inappropriate sequence of presentation VS. ILT

The successful experiences in teaching seems to highlight solutions to a group of previously-identified tensions including:

• Solution to CONNECTEDNESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. LACK OF NEED FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE

• Solution to ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

• Solution to ILT for problematic knowledge VS. my insufficient understanding about students

• Solution to board game VS. appropriate expectation:
• Solution to problematic knowledge VS. communicative function of language

It can be noticed from above, I used these tensions and solutions identified as the headings of analytical narratives in my journal.

5.3 Observing stage

Having explained the planning stage and the acting stage of Action Research Cycle Two, now I will turn to the third stage—the observing stage of Action Research Cycle Two. Explanation of this stage involves detailed explanation of elaborative coding process and discussion of the results of coding.

5.3.1 Elaborative coding of reflective journals

As mentioned earlier, data analysis went through two stages and involved the two different ‘selves’ of the teacher-researcher. The initial analysis conducted by the ‘teacher-self’ took the form of tension-focused reflection. Then, in the secondary analysis during the observing stage of the action research cycle, the ‘researcher-self’ tracked the changes of tensions and solutions through elaborate coding, which has been explained earlier. To recap, elaborative coding in this particular study basically intended to elaborate previously-identified tensions and solutions in Action Research Cycle One and identify new tensions and solutions that emerged in Action Research Cycle Two. Each tension or solution recorded in the reflective journal was compared against the list of codes from Action Research Cycle One. It was coded with a previously-used code in that list if it fitted with that code. This might lead to the substance of that code being expanded. If the tension was a newly-emerged one that did not fit with any code in that list, a new code might be developed to accommodate it. As with the coding process in Action Research Cycle One, newly-emerged tensions and their related solutions were given numbers. As the last tension identified
in Action Research Cycle One was numbered as \(33\), numbers for new tensions and solutions of Action Research Cycle Two started from \(34\) to distinguish newly-emerged tensions and solutions of Action Research Cycle Two from those of Action Research Cycle One. Those tensions and resolutions occurring in Action Research Cycle Two but which fitted with codes in Action Research Cycle One were coded with codes previously used in Action Research Cycle One which included numbers \(1\) to \(33\). Here is an example of how the same reflective journal presented in Table 5.3 was coded:

| 01-Mar-2012 | \(36\) learning while doing VS. reliance on teacher's support

Learning while doing VS. reliance on teacher's support

They were eager to come to the front to do the information gap activity on Smartboard. This is an activity in which one student has to translate some information given in English into Chinese orally. And another student has to complete a table according to what he/she heard. This activity involves extensive communication and it trains students' reading, speaking, listening and writing skills together. However, they didn't really engage in these intended training. The activity didn't go smoothly, but was being frequently interrupted by questions like “Ms, how do I say this?” “Ms, what does this mean?” It seems that they have difficulty in every step. The student sending the information cannot pronounce correctly, which made it difficult for the other students to understand. In this case, I intervened very often. My increased intervention seems to make them feel that I will always help them with every bit of the activity. As a result, they become more reluctant to try and just wait for me to help. This resulted in no independent thinking and destroyed the original purpose of the activity. This happens in doing the worksheet as well. They relied on me heavily to help them accomplish the worksheet step-by-step. They told me “Ms, it's too hard. I can't do it” and just wanted me to do all the worksheet for them.
Two-phase structure of QCA VS. fluency of lessons
I should have introduced the difference between Chinese names and English names first. Without knowing about that surname comes prior to given name in Chinese names, students were confused when I directly introduced the Chinese way to address teacher. In Chinese, we address a particular teacher by adding his/her surname prior to “老师” which is the professional name of teachers. This is different from calling teachers in English which put teachers’ surname after the titles. The confusion may also be partially caused by the introduction of these two concepts together without addressing the links between these concepts in an understandable and logical way to students.

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14-June-2012

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Students’ interest remained throughout the whole process of today's board game. Students have stronger incentive to practise difficult vocabularies and sentences as they are awarded extra points if they get it correctly.
Solution to “time-consuming game VS. sustained interest”: shorter time duration for each game cycle
Previously, I set the last space on the board as the finishing point. Today, by specifying the team first accumulating 100 marks as the winner and awarding different marks for different spaces, the outcome of the game can be realized in shorter time. They don’t have to wait for so long to get a result. And they can play the game for several times. Their passion is to some extent sustained as the loser always wants to get another go to win back.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.4 An example of elaborative coding in Action Research Cycle Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the excerpt above, there were three newly-emerged tensions namely, learning while doing VS. reliance on teacher’s support, two-phase structure of QCA VS. fluency of lessons and inappropriate sequence of presentation VS. ILT. They were numbered as 36 38 and 50 respectively. In addition, three solutions to previously-emerged tensions were identified, namely, interest-oriented content-based CLT, games and ILT. They were related to sub-tensions under some major tensions established in Action Research Cycle One, CONNECTEDNESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. LACK OF NEED FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT and PROBLEMATIC KNOWLEDGE VS. COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION OF</td>
</tr>
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</table>

4 As in Action Research Cycle One, uppercase was applied to themes/major tensions to distinguish them from sub-tensions and derivative tensions.
LANGUAGE respectively. These categories occurred in Action Research Cycle One. Therefore, the numbers 5 8 29 32 1 4 18 20 22 24 23 which were previously used in Action Research Cycle One for coding relevant sub-tensions under these categories were applied to the solutions here. Moreover, there were three solutions to newly-emerged tensions: develop students’ intercultural communicative competence to realise self-directed intercultural exploration, design for incentive to reach high expectation and shorter time duration for each game cycle. As these were related to tensions emerged in Action Research Cycle Two, including ILT for problematic knowledge VS. my insufficient understanding about students, board game VS. appropriate expectation and time-consuming game VS. sustained interest, the numbers 41 49 51 were applied to them. Here is the list of all codes in Action Research Cycle Two:

1. CLT VS. appropriate expectation
2. time limitation VS. step-by-step
3. intercultural comparison VS. students’ immaturity
4. student-centred communication VS. limited linguistic competence
5. learning while doing VS. reliance on teacher’s support
6. teacher offers support VS. teacher reserves support
7. two-phase structure of QCA VS. fluency of lessons
8. lack of ‘fluency’ VS. deep knowledge
9. experience for high-quality teaching VS. myself as a beginning teacher
10. ILT for problematic knowledge VS. my insufficient understanding about students
11. intercultural communicative competence of the teacher for ILT VS. poor intercultural communicative competence of the teacher
12. unsustainable language learning VS. communicative competence development
13. ILT VS. CLT
reliance on teacher’s supports VS. validity of formative assessment
sustainably applicable learning content VS. teaching resources available
selecting sustainably applicable learning content VS. exposure to various communicative scenarios
reliance on Smartboard VS. unavailability of Smart board
board game VS. appropriate expectation
inappropriate sequence of presentation VS. ILT
time-consuming game VS. sustained interest
homework VS. Non-serious attitudes towards homework
Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: games
Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: rap
Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: body movement
Solution to 1 4 18 20 22 24 23: role-play with fun scenario
Solution to 2 13 30 41: develop student’s intercultural communicative competence to realise self-directed intercultural exploration
Solution to 2 13 30 41: develop teacher’s intercultural communicative competence to promote understanding about students
Solution to 5 29 32: interest-oriented content-based CLT
Solution to 8: ILT—different expressions of the same meaning
Solution to 8: ILT—different cultural implications of the same notion
Solution to 8: ILT—the different meanings of the same language in different context
Solution to 8: ILT—rationalize language use according to intercultural understanding
Solution to 8: ILT—culture and language use changing over time
Solution to 10: re-thinking CLT
Solution to 19: establish association between sounds in English and Chinese
Solution to 34: intercultural comparison elaborated by the real life of the teacher and the students
Solution to 55: teacher-centred language input for beginners
Solution to 59 77: offer support selectively
Solution to 58 59: cyclical structure of QCA
Solution to ④ : developing intercultural communicative competence of the teacher
Solution to ④ : developing intercultural communicative competence of students
Solution to ⑤ : homework
Solution to ⑤ : embed learning in leisure activity
Solution to ⑤ : teach study and thinking skills
Solution to ⑤ : learning content more sustainably applicable
Solution to ⑤ : maximize opportunities for learning content to be sustainably applicable
Solution to ⑥ : intercultural comparison for understanding language use
Solution to ⑥ : cultural information represented in characters
Solution to ⑥ : teaching sustainably applicable learning content at beginning stage
Solution to ⑥ : design for incentive to reach high expectation
Solution to ⑦ : teacher’s thoughtful consideration about sequence of presentation
Solution to ⑦ : shorter time duration for each game cycle

These codes above were categorised under old themes or newly-created themes. As in Action Research Cycle One, uppercase was applied to all themes/major tensions to distinguish them from sub-tensions and derivative tensions. The table of codes categorisation in Action Research Cycle One has been updated with codes generated from Action Research Cycle Two (shaded) as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>Sub-tensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>① unsustained engagement VS. language learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>④ low interest in language repetition VS. deep understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑮ time limitation VS. deep understanding</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>⑯ time limitation VS. substantive communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑰ interest VS. repetitive language practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑱ interesting activities VS. communicative activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>⑲ engagement VS. communicative tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CLT VS. appropriate expectation</strong></td>
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<td>------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLT VS. appropriate expectation</td>
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<tr>
<td>over-high expectation VS. engagement</td>
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</table>

**Solutions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution to</th>
<th>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : interest-directed learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solution to</td>
<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : spread repetitive practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to</td>
<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to</td>
<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to</td>
<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : diversity of games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to</td>
<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : use of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to</td>
<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solution to</td>
<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : language</td>
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<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : language</td>
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<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : language</td>
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<tr>
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<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : rap</td>
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<td>Solution to</td>
<td>① ④ ⑭ ⑬ ⑫ ⑦ ⑤ : body movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solution to</td>
<td>⑩ ⑩ : Pinyin for confidence in pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to</td>
<td>⑩ ⑩ : step-by-step</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solution to</td>
<td>⑩ ⑩ : re-thinking CLT</td>
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</table>

**Derivative tensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>⑦ games VS. behaviour management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>⑧ games VS. inclusivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑪ nursery rhymes practice VS. proposed content to be learnt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑯ Pinyin distinguishes sounds VS. Pinyin misleads students about pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑳ time limitation VS. step-by-step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-tensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑥ adult VS. children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑩ target culture VS. native culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>② connectedness VS. my insufficient understanding about students</td>
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**Solutions**

- Solution to 38 39: cyclical structure of QCA
- Solution to 50: Teacher’s thoughtful consideration about sequence of presentation

**Derivative tensions**

N/A

**Further solutions**

N/A

### Table 5.5 Categorisation of codes in Action Research Cycle Two

In Action Research Cycle Two, some of the tensions previously appearing in Action Research Cycle One were resolved, while others remained unresolved. For some of the tensions already resolved in the Action Research Cycle One, there were new solutions in Action Research Cycle Two. Moreover, some new tensions emerged in Action Research Cycle Two. Some of these new tensions were resolved during Action Research Cycle Two while others remained to be considered in further iterations. All these outcomes of elaborative coding are discussed below.
5.3.2 Discussion of the major tensions

ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

In Action Research Cycle One, it was mentioned that with very little integrative motivation or instrumental motivation, the engagement of my students mainly issued from their interest defined as:

…preference to engage in some types of activities rather than others. An interest may be regarded as a highly specific type of attitude: When we are interested in a particular phenomenon or activity, we are favourably inclined to attend to or give time to it (Gardner & Tamir 1989a, p. 410)

Therefore, ‘making repetitive language practice in communicative activities interesting’ was listed as one of the solutions to maximise students’ engagement in communicative language learning and thus optimise use of class time. Examples of this solution include using a diversity of games, supporting implementation of games with technology, incorporating practice in cultural scenarios and adapting nursery rhymes familiar to the students. In Action Research Cycle Two, strategies for making communicative activities interesting were further developed. More intensive and repetitive language practice was incorporated into games which students found interesting. A successful instance of this was the adaptation of a board game for language practice with Smartboard technology. The basic procedure for playing the game I chose usually involved: the player throwing the dice and then moving according to the rules and the first player reaching the predetermined goal is the winner.

A board game promotes intensive and comprehensive language practice since various ways of using the target language can be built substantively into almost every
step of the game. By playing a board game, different skills can be practised together. This can be illustrated by the following example:

![Figure 5.8 An example of a board game on Smartboard](image)

In this game, it was supposed that each player was given one hundred RMB to buy drinks of different prices. They needed to say “我喝(wǒ hē)...(I drink...)” correctly to ‘buy’ the corresponding drink on the picture they landed on. The first player spending one hundred RMB won the game. Language practice was integrated into the process of the game as follows:

1. The player rolled the dice at the top right corner to generate a number which was written in Chinese characters. (reading characters)
2. Then, the player counted and moved the corresponding numbers of spaces on the path to land on a particular drink (counting in Mandarin)

3. The rest of the class asked “What do you drink? 你喝什么? (pronounced as nǐ hē shén mé)” (speaking)

4. The player answered “I drink…我喝(pronounced as wǒ hē)”. If the player said the name of the drink correctly, he/she could ‘buy’ the drink on the picture. If he/she failed to say it, he/she lost the chance to ‘buy’ it (listening and speaking in Mandarin)

5. The player who answered correctly then read the price of the drink at the top and translated the characters into numbers on a calculator provided, to figure out how much she/he had already spent. (reading in Mandarin)

However, some tensions emerged with the use of the Smartboard board game. Firstly, there was the tension of reliance on Smartboard VS. unavailability of Smartboard. The implementation of the board game as above relies on the availability of the Smartboard. However, there were several lessons in which pre-designed board games became invalid due to the break-down of the Smartboard, which significantly affected teaching outcomes. The use of internet and multimedia resources has the same weakness. Even though technology has been widely acknowledged as beneficial for engaging students, the danger of reliance on technology is enormous.

The second tension was board game VS. appropriate expectation. Language practice with a board game might impose overly high expectations on students. When a board game was adopted to practise newly-acquired vocabulary and sentences, together with previously learnt content, it can become too complex and difficult. As a consequence, students might fail to engage in the substantive communication expected. This problem can be to some extent alleviated by deliberately designing a
strong incentive to achieve the high expectations. For example, they may automatically choose to practise difficult language use if extra points are awarded. The third tension was *time-consuming nature of game VS. sustained interest*. In some traditional board games, there were specific starting points and finishing points on the board. Players won the game only if they reached the finishing point. Therefore, it took quite a long time for them to move through all the spaces between these two points to win the game. It became even more time-consuming when a board game was used for language practice purposes. Students’ interest might not be sustained when the final outcome of the game was not realised quickly. In particular, when students were not familiar with the vocabulary, they might not reach the finishing point on the board even after half of the lesson had passed. Consequently, they could become impatient and unsettled. In practice even though they were quite interested at the beginning, their interest was gradually reduced as the game went on. This issue did not only occur with board games, but with all time-consuming games as well. To solve this problem, the time duration of each game cycle must be taken into account when setting the finishing point of a board game. One alternative was to award different marks for different kinds of spaces as students arrive and set the finishing point as a specific mark rather than a particular space on the board. The board game above adopted this design to ensure a shorter time duration for each cycle of the game. Students spend different amounts of money when they ‘buy’ different drinks on the board. They win the game when they spend one hundred yuan. In this way, students were awarded marks when they said correctly the words for the drinks they landed on. Each game cycle was finished when students accumulated a hundred marks instead of reaching any particular space on the board.
Another instance of more intensive and repetitive practice with a game was the character writing competition. It was simple, but highly effective in engaging students in practising writing Chinese characters. In most lessons, after teaching students how to write a particular character, I organised a character writing competition in which students competed with each other in writing that character as much as possible in a few minutes. They had an incentive to keep practising a particular character.

In Action Research Cycle One, nursery rhymes were mentioned as another effective way to engage students in repetitive language practice, as they possess “both the communicative aspect of language and the entertainment aspect of music” (Jolly, 1975, p. 11). It has also been pointed out that the melody of nursery rhymes selected for language teaching should be acceptable to the target students. In Action Research Cycle Two, it was further discovered that rapping worked even better for young children than songs for language practice perhaps because of its regular rhyme and rhythm. In terms of engagement, rapping features the entertainment aspect of music just as nursery rhymes do. Students welcomed language practice with rapping more than traditional nursery rhymes, probably because it was similar to what they usually heard in pop music. It was closer to the life and culture of a younger generation.

With regard to the linguistic aspect of language practice, rapping again had a comparative advantage. In songs, while singing with music, the words in the lyrics were usually changed from the original tones in order to cater for the music. However, this decreased the validity of practice for communicative use of Chinese,
considering the role of tones in the Chinese language. Unlike English, Mandarin is a
tonal language, that is, “the same set of sounds can have different meanings
depending on the tone with which they are spoken” (Gu & Wu, 2005, p. 583). For
speakers whose native language is not a tonal language, inappropriate use of tones is
regarded as a significant factor contributing to their foreign-sounding accent (Fu,
2009). With insufficient practice of tones, learners not only have difficulties in
communicating to others, but also encounter failure to understand what is said by
others. In rapping, without background music but with strong rhythm and rhyme,
words are practised in the same tones as in normal Chinese speech, which is
potentially more beneficial for students’ awareness of tones and thus their
communicative use of Chinese.

Students were often eager to perform actions spontaneously while rapping. Young
children’s enthusiasm for physical movement makes their learning process different
from adults’ learning process, “Their own understanding comes through hands and
eyes and ears. The physical world is dominant at all times” (Hashemi & Azizinezhad,
2011, p. 2084). If teachers design relevant body movements according to the
meaning of lyrics, it not only adds more fun to rapping, but also can enhance
retention of vocabulary:

Today’s rapping of polite expressions including ‘sorry’ ‘it’s alright’ ‘good morning’
‘good evening’ ‘good night’ ‘goodbye’ works well. Students follow the rap
spontaneously and asked me for repetition. They enjoyed doing corresponding facial
expressions and actions for each word while rapping. There was one boy who acted
out meaning of each word so vividly and humorously, which brought a lot of
laughter to the lesson. Thanks to the repetition, the majority of the students can do
the rapping and actions on their own without looking at the whiteboard at the end of
the lesson. (Reflective journal, 23-Feb-2012)

For the numbers rap, originally they were doing normal hand gestures. I suggest
them to do Chinese hand gestures for numbers. They even create their own body
gestures based on Chinese characters of each number. Even though it is hard to find
appropriate actions for certain Chinese characters, it recalls their memory of those characters every time when they were rapping the corresponding number and trying to create an action for that. This enhances the function of the rap in terms of engaging students in remembering learning content. Rapping helps them remembering the pronunciation and even enhances their retention of written characters….. (Reflective journal, 15-Mar-2012)

This is supported by James Asher’s Total Physical Response (TPR) approach to language learning in which learners “listen and physically respond to a series of instructions or commands” (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011, p. 2084). According to TPR, theoretically, the effectiveness of body movement for language retention comes from its promotion of storing information into the right brain. Teaching language by explaining leads to information being kept in the left brain for short term memory. However, when active body movement is involved, it can facilitate language being retained in the right brain for long term memory in the same ways as skills like swimming are acquired (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011).

The strength of body movement for engagement was evident in other forms of practice as well. Sometimes, body movement improved the expression of meaning and emotion embedded in the language. For example, hand gestures were recognised as a significant factor which encouraged students to undertake repetitive practice of how to cheer in Chinese for Olympic contestants:

The language for cheering in Chinese is very simple which includes only two Chinese characters “加油 (pronounced as jiayou)”. It could be very boring to practise such a simple expression over and over again. However, students enjoyed the practice for two reasons. Firstly, they felt it is connected to their life. Secondly, they like doing the actions probably because the actions further express and enhance the emotional effect of “加油”. While the actions for cheering are introduced in the video, a lot of them can’t wait and just learn the actions by themselves. The classroom teacher observed the same thing and commented in her feedback that “great actions and chant, students enjoyed” (Reflective journal, 19-Jul-2012)

Another strategy categorised as interesting repetitive language practice was role-play with a scenario interesting to young children. This is different from role-plays
usually used in CLT which emphasise the authenticity of the scenario for communicative language use with no necessary attention to intrinsic interest. The ‘interesting role-play’ does not change the content to be practised, but it changes the scenario. In this kind of role-play, communicative use of the language is often situated in humorous stories rather than ‘authentic’ scenarios. The change of the scenario retains the communicative nature of the language use while adding some fun to the role-play. Here are two examples of interesting role-plays:

![Figure 5.9 Scenario one (Liu, Wang, Zhou, & Li, 2009b, p. 37)](image)

**Figure 5.9 Scenario one (Liu, Wang, Zhou, & Li, 2009b, p. 37)**

This was a role-play for practising some polite expressions. There were two roles to be played, that is, the bear and the talking tree. The bear and talking tree met each other and said “你好 (hello)” to each other. The tree accidentally dropped an apple on the head of the bear and then said “对不起(sorry)” to the bear. The bear replied “没关系(it’s all right)”. Then, they said “再见(goodbye)” to each other.
Figure 5.10 Scenario two (Liu, et al., 2009a, p. 61)

This role-play practised asking about food and drink in a story involving a cat and mice. A number of mice came to the kitchen to look for food and drink. They were having a conversation with each other:

Mouse A: “What do you drink?”

Mouse B: “Cola”
Mouse A: “What do you eat?”

Mouse B: “Spring rolls”.

Then there came the cat, who was hungry. All the mice ran away except one who had not noticed the cat. The mouse A kept asking “What do you eat?” The cat replied “You”. When the mouse heard the cat, it was too late to escape.

In my classes in primary school, these two role-plays above—the imaginative stories about a bear and a talking tree, the cat and mice—bought a feeling of fun to the role-plays and students enjoyed doing them.

Furthermore, some popular cartoons or fairy tales have the potential to be developed into interesting role-plays. One of the successful cases in my teaching was the use of the Simpson family. Students were asked to play the different roles in the Simpson family and to introduce their family members in Chinese. Students liked watching The Simpsons’, and they enjoyed playing their favourite roles in the family. Students seemed more willing to play the humorous roles than the common roles of daily life.

Making repetitive language practice interesting was regarded as a solution to a group of related or similar sub-tensions including unsustained engagement VS. language learning; low interest in language repetition VS. deep understanding; time limitation VS. deep understanding; time limitation VS. substantive communication; interest VS. repetitive language practice; interesting activities VS. communicative activities;
engagement VS. communicative tasks. This to some extent alleviated the major tension ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT. The use of the word ‘alleviate’ instead of ‘eliminate’ here is because there was another group of sub-tensions contributing to the main tension ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT that still cannot be eliminated. These sub-tensions were CLT VS. appropriate expectation and over-high expectation VS. engagement, which were often evident in outside observers’ contrasting comments on the different aspects of the same lesson. For instance, one of my lessons aimed at teaching students how to cheer for Olympic players in Chinese. The practice focused on cheering for different countries. Outsider observers shared the opinion that teaching students “加油” (cheering for sports players) was appropriate for beginners since it was meaningful and easy for them to achieve. It was also engaging. As one of the classroom teachers commented “This is one of your best lessons. Look at the kids, they love it”. However, such a lesson was criticised for the lack of two-way communication between students, as shown in another teachers’ feedback which stated “seldom do they have the chance to communicate with each other in Chinese”. Conversation and dialogue was absent from this lesson since cheering is one-way, which seemed to go against the spirit of CLT. The question became, how was a lesson without two-way communication widely recognised as a good lesson by students and teachers and considered more appropriate than other more communicative-oriented lessons? Does this indicate that CLT is in contrast to high-quality teaching with appropriate expectation? Possible explanations to these questions came up after reviewing the principles of CLT. Even though this lesson did not teach them a conversation or dialogue, teaching “加油” was still communicative-oriented in terms of other principles of CLT. Firstly, it satisfied students’
communicative needs as an audience of the Olympic Games as well as supporters of their team-mates while playing games in future lessons. “加油” was authentic and meaningful language use that was more likely to be applied by them in their life than other conversations further from their daily language. In this sense, this lesson was consistent with two principles of CLT, i.e. that language teaching should be tailored to students’ communicative needs and language learning should reflect authentic language use (Nunan, 1999). Moreover, by viewing language as a system for meaning expression, knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions is defined as one aspect of language knowledge demanded for communicative competence (Richards, 2005).

Halliday’s basic functions of language include:

- The instrumental function: using language to get things done
- The regulatory function: using language to control the behaviour of others
- The interactional function: using language to create interaction with others
- The personal function: using language to express personal feelings and meanings
- The heuristic function: using language to learn and to discover
- The imaginative function: using language to create a world of the imagination
- The representational function: using language to communicate information

(Halliday, 1975, pp. 11-17)

In this case, there may be some situations where communicative use of language does not involve dialogue or conversation, but only one party sending the message and the other party receiving the message. This is likely to happen when using language to get things done (instrumental function), to control the behaviour of others (regulatory function), to express feelings (personal function), to learn and discover (heuristic function), to create a world of the imagination (imaginative
function). In this lesson, “加油” performed the personal function of language for expressing personal feelings and meanings. Concerning these, dialogue or conversation should not be regarded as the only characteristic of CLT, or the only criteria for determining the quality of a lesson for communicative competence development. It is important to bear in mind that the ultimate goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence, which is the ability to use language in a variety of situations, not just conversation or dialogue. Furthermore, as mentioned in the literature review, in the current ‘post-method era’ in which CLT is viewed as a general approach instead of a specific method, teachers are encouraged to follow the generic principles of CLT but exercise their own creativity and experience in developing communicative competence. In this case, no matter what and how students have been taught, the teaching approach itself should not be considered as a breach of CLT or as ‘poor practice’ as long as it contributes to communicative competence development directly and significantly.

In Action Research Cycle One, it was argued that a series of activities instead of a single activity should be the solution to the binary CLT VS. appropriate expectation and over-high expectation VS. engagement. A step-by-step approach helped students reach the expectations of CLT while ensuring appropriate expectation and engagement throughout the whole process. However, the barrier to this step-by-step approach for me was time limitation. The time for Mandarin lessons was never extended and the tension time limitation VS. step-by-step approach was not resolved in Action Research Cycle Two. As a result, the expectations imposed on students were still considered inappropriate in some lessons of Action Research Cycle Two.
On the other hand, a breakthrough in resolving *Pinyin distinguishing sounds VS. Pinyin misleading students about pronunciation* gave full play to the potential of Pinyin as a scaffold for students to achieve the expectations of CLT. As mentioned in Action Research Cycle One, Pinyin, which consisted of the same twenty-six letters as English, could mislead instead of assist students’ pronunciation since students tended to read Pinyin following the rule of pronouncing English letters in words. Therefore, the key to the solution of *Pinyin distinguishing sounds VS. Pinyin misleading pronunciation* was to help learners overcome any negative influence from English letters and establish a new pronunciation system for the twenty-six letters which were already quite familiar to them. Languages share similar individual sounds even though words in different languages are pronounced quite differently. A productive way used in some teaching materials is to teach Pinyin by using similar sounds in English words in combination with relevant pictures for enhancing memory. Here are some examples of how vowels in Pinyin are related to sounds in English words:
Relating Pinyin to the sounds of English words enables students to pick up Pinyin accurately and quickly. Associating Pinyin with relevant pictures may foster a deeper impression of accurate pronunciation and weaken the misleading effects of Pinyin letters. Moreover, accurate mastery of Pinyin has a more sustainable benefit in the long-run for students’ self-learning of Chinese. They can teach themselves how to pronounce new vocabulary with Pinyin.
MY INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING ABOUT STUDENTS VS. IMPLEMENTATION OF QT ELEMENTS

A key feature of all the tensions in this category is that they can be fundamentally resolved only if the teacher’s sound understanding about students has been sufficiently developed through day-to-day interaction with students. In other words, the key to the solution of these tensions seems to be experience in the field and in the particular context in which she/he teaches. With rich experience, teachers are more likely to foresee any potential trouble in implementing particular lesson designs in classrooms and be able to adjust the lesson designs in advance. Considering that teaching is a highly-contextualised task, it is impossible for even experienced teachers to predict all the problems that will occur in the classroom. Nonetheless, when something unexpected happens, experienced teachers are at least flexible and competent enough to respond to it immediately and properly. By remaining flexible, they detect any weakness in their instruction from students’ performance in activities and modify their instruction so that the quality of the lesson is not significantly affected by any classroom occurrence that is unexpected. Flexibility is also evident in dealing with questions from students quickly and sensibly, by taking advantage of these questions to further supplement teacher instruction for enhancing and extending students’ understanding.

However, there was a tension in experience for high-quality teaching VS. myself as a beginning teacher. As a beginning teacher with lack of classroom experience, my capability of predicting problems and the flexibility of responding to unexpected occurrences were both under-developed. This gave rise to problematic situations in the classroom, as evident in these reflective journal entries:
I brought some stickers to the class. This brought a big trouble to the lesson as students’ attention was distracted by the stickers awarded to them. As shown in my own observation and classroom teacher’s feedback that many students were playing with stickers during the class instead of engaging in learning activities. I should have asked them to put stickers back in their school bag before starting the lesson, or award them at the end of the lesson to avoid this problem. (Reflective journal, 26-Apr-2012)

The information gap activity was not very successful. Student A was given a cue card and he has to tell student B the information in Chinese. Student B needs to complete a chat according to the information given. The activity wasn't successful as students are showing their partner the cue card so that there was no information gap any more. I should have made this as a competition in which student A and B play for different teams. Therefore, they have no incentive to showing the cue card to help the other team. (3-May-2012)

Nevertheless, a few cases seemed to indicate that flexibility in dealing with unexpected situations had been gradually developed with increasing experience in the classroom:

In the board game, students were allowed to choose checkers for their own team. However, students care too much about which checker they are going to play with. Boys want blue or green, girls want pink or red. As boys and girls are mixed in one group, it's hard to decide the checker for each team. When I designed the activity, I just think it would be fun for them to choose checkers by themselves. However, I hadn't realized that it could cause troubles. The class time which should have been spent on practising has been wasted on arguing for getting checkers with a certain colour... I could have assigned a checker for them. But I want to respect their own choice. Finally, I remix students into new groups in which boys work together and girls work together. Therefore, all of them become satisfied as all boys can play with green checkers and all girls can play with pink ones. (Reflective journal, 3-May-2012)

One Smartboard activity didn't work properly due to something wrong with the Smartboard. There was a panic 'cause I haven't prepared other activities for them to do. However, as a teacher, I have to decide what to do next. Then I immediately came up with another activity which made use of the only resource I had at that time—the video clip of the greeting rap. It was an acting activity: students back to the whiteboard, I played the video clip, they have to do corresponding action we've practised according to what they heard e.g. when the rap goes "再见", they have to wave farewell. It's simple, but effective for them to practice listening skills. It's better than having nothing to do and handing over to their classroom teacher. (Reflective journal, 23-Feb-2012)

The second example above suggests that remaining flexible is even more crucial when technology is used as a major resource for teaching. Unlike students’ behaviour, the break-down of a computer or a Smartboard is not something that can be predicted in advance whatever one’s previous experience. In most cases, these technology
problems cannot be solved immediately and completely during class. Therefore, in
order to avoid any negative impact on the quality of the lesson, teachers should be
able to respond to a technology breakdown at any time. They need to be flexible
enough to find a way out of that situation by working with what they have at that
moment, which can be quite challenging.

As mentioned in Action Research Cycle One, in the foreign language classroom, the
teacher may find it difficult to understand the students because of the difference in
degree of maturation between adults and children and the differences in language and
cultural backgrounds. In Action Research Cycle Two, a tension of *ILT for
problematic knowledge VS. my insufficient understanding about students* was
identified. This tension suggested that my insufficient understanding about students
created a barrier to the implementation of Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT),
which was considered as essential to approaching *problematic knowledge* in the
Languages classroom. ILT stresses intercultural comparative analysis for raising
learners’ intercultural awareness and mediating between two cultures (Corbett, 2003).
‘Cultural comparison’, by highlighting similarities and differences between two
cultures, is actually trying to build up students’ knowledge about the target culture by
exploring the relationships with their native culture, thereby enhancing the
‘learnability’ of the target culture as well as promoting a deeper insight into one’s
own culture. *Problematic knowledge* is evident as a concept in intercultural
comparative analysis as it reveals to students how the same notion can mean different
things to people from different cultures, how the same thing can be done differently
in different cultures, and how different language is used in different contexts. For
example, asking people where they are going—a normal way of greeting in Chinese
culture may be misunderstood by people from Western culture who are usually cautious about privacy protection. It is also evident when there is further exploration of how specific cultural practice and language use changes over time. Nevertheless, the premise for successful implementation of ILT seems to be that the teacher understands students, especially aspects of their culture. With limited understanding about students’ cultures, there is little ground for the teacher to lead an intercultural comparative analysis. The teacher may either fail to recognise any connections between two cultures or have no idea how to relate the target culture to students’ own cultures in a way that raises their intercultural awareness. A good illustration of the significance of teachers’ understanding about students’ culture for efficient intercultural comparison is the introduction of Chinese written characters with symbols in their lives or even Aboriginal symbols. Since English words are composed of letters, Chinese language, which uses ideographs or symbols for meaning expression, may look unfamiliar to English speakers. I encountered the challenge of explaining the concept of Chinese characters to students. With better understanding about students’ cultures, another experienced teacher suggested linking the concept of Chinese characters to symbols familiar to students, such as those used for toilets, restaurants, or symbols in Aboriginal culture. In this sense, the concept of Chinese characters was communicated more effectively to students by exploring its similarities with something known by students. After applying this idea in my lesson, students’ understanding about Chinese characters was evident in their answer to the question “What are Chinese characters?”, that is, “They are Chinese symbols for writing”. The prerequisite for this way of introducing Chinese characters was the teacher’s intercultural awareness of the difference between cultures and languages (and of the different features of English and Chinese written forms). But
more importantly, this strategy came from the teacher’s sensitivity to the similarities between the two cultures and languages, as well as the ability to make use of the similarities for explaining difference.

The outcome of intercultural comparison may still be unsatisfying even if the teacher understands about the students’ cultures, but not necessarily the students. Intercultural comparison at an inappropriate level makes little sense for raising the intercultural awareness of very young students, but may just cause boredom, as indicated in classroom teachers’ feedback:

Because they are so little, it's a little bit hard for them to understand. We’ve done celebrations this year and we did Chinese New Year and Australia Day. Even Australia Day where we are celebrating Australian Culture, they found it hard to understand. (Classroom Teacher I)

For these students, the essence of intercultural comparison seemed to be the establishment of connectedness to another culture in their life by making sense of what they actually experienced. However, as a foreign teacher with almost no idea about students’ lives outside the Languages classroom, and with only very limited teaching time in a week, there was rarely any opportunity so far to establish this connectedness between cultural concepts and authentic life.

The tension of ILT for problematic knowledge VS. teacher’s insufficient understanding about students was derived partly from the application of ILT principles. What was interesting was that the solution to this tension was also derived from the essence of ILT—the development of intercultural communicative competence. To resolve this tension, both the teachers and the students’ intercultural communicative competence need to be acted on. For me as a teacher who was
teaching my L1 (Chinese) to students from different cultures with my L2 (English), my communication with students was characterised as intercultural communication. Therefore, my failure to communicate cultural similarities and differences to my students may be explained by my weak intercultural communicative competence in handling intercultural communication. Developing intercultural communicative competence enhanced my understanding about students by sharpening my sensitivity to cultural similarities and differences between the students and myself. It also enabled me to move between two cultures and languages and thereby communicate more effectively with students.

Moreover, it is necessary to remind the reader that it is students’ competence to conduct intercultural exploration independently that is the key of ILT, instead of the cultural knowledge only being delivered by the teacher. Since the teachers of ILT are usually not experts on the two cultures, it is reasonable for them not to know everything about students’ native cultures and languages. Their responsibility is to develop students’ skills for self-directed intercultural explorations (Byram et al., 2002). In this sense, a higher priority has been put on students’ intercultural communicative competence and the teacher’s capability in training students’ thinking and analysis skills than on the teacher’s own knowledge about the native culture and language. As long as students’ intercultural communicative competence has been developed, students may be in a better position to lead intercultural comparative analysis than the teacher—for their own better understanding about native culture and language. Some cultural and language differences and similarities noticed by students may not be revealed by the teacher due to insufficient knowledge about the native culture and language. Here is an example:
In one class, I introduced the vocabulary by asking them to guess what drinks are "可乐" and "咖啡" which sound very similar to their corresponding English words, cola and coffee. They can get the answers quickly. Then, I asked them to think about the reason why the two different languages share similar pronunciation. Finally, they figure out that these pronunciations are borrowed from English language due to the introduction of these western drinks into China. To my surprise, they even extend this type of deeper thinking to "茶" (pronounced as chá). " (tea) and told me that the Chinese pronunciation for tea "cha" is still used in their own languages to mean tea basically because tea originally comes from China. I did not plan to discuss about this since I do not know some of students’ mother languages at all, not to mention the similarities between Chinese and those languages…. (Reflective journal, 14-Jun-2012)

Furthermore, developing students’ and teacher’s intercultural communicative competence also has something to offer in terms of resolving other sub-tensions in this category. Firstly, as a foreign language teacher, developing intercultural communicative competence facilitated me to understand students’ cultures and thus overcome barriers in communication with students created by different cultural backgrounds. With the ability to move between two cultures and languages, the teacher can communicate with students more effectively. In this sense, the negative impact of target culture VS. native culture can be reduced. Secondly, strengthened intercultural communicative competence enables both the teacher and students to connect the target culture and language to students’ culture and language via intercultural comparative analysis, thus, alleviating the tension connectedness VS. my insufficient understanding about students. Thirdly, with enhanced intercultural communicative competence, it is more likely for students and the teacher to include students’ own cultural backgrounds as the foundation for their learning of foreign language and culture, thus resolving the tension of inclusivity VS. my insufficient understanding about students. In Action Research Cycle One, developing understanding about students was also mentioned as a fundamental solution to all the sub-tensions under MY INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING ABOUT STUDENTS VS. IMPLEMENTATION OF QT ELEMENTS. However, in Action Research Cycle Two,
by promoting the intercultural communicative competence of the teacher, what was emphasised was not only the development of knowledge about students, but more importantly the development of competence to acquire that knowledge.

CONNECTEDNESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. LACK OF NEED FOR THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE

In Action Research Cycle One, it was argued that Chinese learning can seem to make little sense for foreign language learners who lived in a non-Chinese speaking environment and did not need Chinese in their life or study. In Action Research Cycle Two, a new solution to this came about by my reflecting on my own English language experience at a Chinese university where English was used as medium of teaching and learning for all courses. Since the first year of university, I had been reading English books, attending lectures and seminars delivered in English, doing individual and group work in English, and taking exams in English. During this process, I developed my communicative competence in English while using it as a communicative tool to acquire all my professional knowledge in finance, accounting and management as well as, now, education. According to the literature, the type of language learning approach I followed actually belongs to one category under CLT, known as the content-based approach. The content-based approach means “teaching content or information in the target language with little or no explicit teaching of the language itself.” This is based on the assumption that:

- language is learnt more successfully when it is used as a means, instead of an end
- a content-directed course is tailored to the learners’ communicative needs with respect to the target language
- content provides a coherent framework to integrate language skills

(Richards, 2005)
Even though I was learning English as a foreign language without the support of an English-speaking environment in the wider community, English learning was highly significant for me since I needed it greatly for gathering all the information and content for my study. Concerning this, the content-based approach of CLT is likely to be an effective remedy for the learners’ lack of need for the target language in a ‘foreign language’ teaching context. However, as with any other teaching approach, content-based CLT must be adapted to the individual teacher’s specific situation. In my situation, it would not be feasible to apply the same type of content-based CLT discussed above, namely teaching academic courses or school subjects in the target language. This involves a tremendous revolution in the school in terms of routines, resources and personnel, which cannot be achieved without being strongly supported by government policy. Instead, what I thought would be more appropriate for my students was interested-oriented content-based CLT, that is, that students gained access to content or information they were interested in, with Chinese as the medium. Apart from my own foreign language experience, another source for this idea came from the literacy program “Reading to Learn” which I observed in my school. In this program, students acquired English vocabulary, grammar and sentence patterns while reading books under the leadership of the teacher. These books were usually story books or books about things students were interested in, such as toys. Students enjoyed doing this. With the help of interesting content, students seemed to get a deeper impression and understanding of the vocabulary, grammar and sentence patterns. This reminded me that students’ perception about the significance of foreign language learning may be changed if they learn and practise Chinese while reading, writing, talking about, and listening, to some Chinese content about their
favourite food, animals, cartoons, etc.. It would be even more beneficial if some cultural information was used as the content.

Another new tension identified in Action Research Cycle Two under this category was unsustainable language learning VS. communicative competence development. The different learning outcomes of two classes reminded me of an important issue related to communicative competence development, that is, the sustainability of language learning:

Two stage one classes learnt Chinese numbers together last week. Both of them enjoyed the games in that lesson well. However, one class performed much better than the other class in today’s tasks which involve listening, speaking, reading and writing of numbers in Chinese. For instance, they can recognise Chinese characters for numbers in authentic examples of language use. They can solve the maths questions written in Chinese characters. They can arrange numbers written in Chinese characters in a correct sequence. For the other class, it seemed more difficult for them to accomplish these tasks independently and quickly. They relied on my help more heavily…...When I was about to leave the class with better learning outcome, I noticed that the Chinese number cards were hanging up on the wall at the back of the classroom. The classroom teacher of that class also told me at lunch time that she played the number rap on YouTube a few times during last week when I was not there. (Reflective journal, 29-Mar-2012)

The example above suggested that effective communicative competence development requires more sustainable engagement in language learning both inside and outside class, not just engagement in class activities. Learning outcomes can be unsatisfying if engagement in the class is not sustained after the class. The different performance of the two classes was actually the result of students’ different degrees of engagement in learning outside the Languages classroom. High engagement in a Mandarin class does not indicate the same level of engagement in learning Chinese outside school. One class achieved better learning outcomes because they not only learnt the numbers in the Chinese lesson, but also participated in more sustainable language practices after their Chinese lesson. Classroom teachers often expressed
their concern for sustainable language learning while I was seeking suggestions from
them:

The only thing I would suggest is to organize a workbook for them to write down
what they've learnt in the lesson, like the character, sentences…so we can help them
practice these while you are not there. If not correct, you can correct us in the next
lesson”. "Students can write the character because we review that every week when
you are not there. (Classroom Teacher H)

Both students’ learning outcomes and the classroom teachers’ feedback seemed to
suggest promotion of sustainability of learning as an element of high quality
language teaching, in terms of communicative competence development. In other
words, effective teaching should not only realise engagement in the Languages class,
but also more sustainable language learning. In this sense, the concern of teaching is
extended beyond its immediate impact on students during class time to more
sustainable effectiveness for stronger language learning.

Sustainability is to some extent concerned with the connectedness of language
learning to students’ lives. Whether learners’ language learning is sustained may be
partially explained by their perception about the connectedness of language learning
to them. When students are too young to have this kind of perception, sustainable
language learning to a large extent depends on their parents’ and classroom teachers’
support. I have observed that classes with classroom teachers strongly supporting
Chinese learning and learning Chinese together with students achieved a much more
satisfying learning outcome than other classes. Therefore, parents’ and classroom
teachers’ perceptions about the connectedness of the target language is vital. What
influences parents’ and teachers’ perceptions seems to be the economic and political
context in the society. This point can be elaborated by the different situation of
English learning in China and Chinese learning in Australia. In China, students are
strongly encouraged to learn English due to the significant relevance of English to their academic and future career. English has been included into the national curriculum of China as a compulsory subject for education at all levels. Academic performance in this subject affects school and university entrance, as well as the opportunity for further education after an undergraduate program. English competence is also a prerequisite for them to get well-paid jobs after graduation (Adamson, 2004). Considering the impact of English on students’ futures, parents not only care about the quality of English teaching at school, but also send their children to learn English after school. Unlike English learning in China, the imperative of learning Chinese in Australia has not been widely established. The connectedness of learning Chinese to students’ futures has not been widely acknowledged by parents and classroom teachers despite the increasing emphasis given to Chinese in recent Languages curricula. Under this background, language acquisition is not sustainable and spontaneous, but highly restricted to the Chinese lesson. Related to this is Fishman’s (1972) concept of *domains* of language use which has been drawn upon to explain the tension CONNECTEDNESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. LACK OF NEED FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE. To recap, *domains* are the institutional contexts which determine people’s language choices (Adams, Matu & Ongarora, 2012; Jeffery & Mesthrie, n.d.). In multilingual societies, in terms of certain domains, one language is more likely to be appropriate than another (Adams, 2012). As almost all my students are from non-Chinese background, there is almost no *domain* outside Chinese lessons in which Chinese is more appropriate to use than English or their own languages. Hence, Chinese language lesson becomes the only *domain* for Chinese language use.
This causes difficulty for Chinese language learning to be sustained beyond the Chinese lesson.

To sustain Chinese learning in domains outside the Chinese lesson, several strategies are used. The most frequent is probably homework. Teachers in China often rely on heavy homework to increase students’ retention of content. Homework in the form of a research task can also be used to stimulate independent learning of new content. Homework is valid for promoting sustainable learning only if students accomplish it and treat it seriously. Homework is an established tradition in Chinese education and the majority of Chinese students already consider it as a compulsory part of schooling. Parents also have serious attitudes towards homework and often supervise their children to finish it after school even when homework does not need to be counted in their academic results. In contrast, homework seems to be used much less often and seems to be considered much less seriously in Australia than in China. This in my context in Australia leads to students’ reluctance to finish homework and thus less credibility for homework in terms of sustainable learning, especially when Chinese is an unusual subject in NSW public primary schools with no substantial impact on their overall academic performance. I tried to set homework for my students a few times, most of which resulted in the disappointing outcome that students forgot about the homework or even lost the worksheet.

Another approach to making language learning sustainable is to make language practices into activities which students are willing to do during leisure time. This can be done by integrating a review of learning content into leisure activities which
students usually do. Computer games or online games which are often played by students during their leisure time may be deliberately designed for language learning purposes as well. In one lesson, I tried a resource called *Chinese Paradise* in my class. In this material, almost all exercises were computer games. By playing these games, students were engaged in substantive practice of listening, reading, writing and speaking. They were greatly attracted by these games. As there was only one computer in the classroom, the chances of each student operating the computer was limited, which to a large extent reduced the fun of playing these games. Time can also be wasted on switching between players. So a lot of students asked me if they could borrow the CD-ROM to play it at home individually, which indicated their willingness to practise Chinese with these games as a leisure activity. Once vocabulary and sentences have been taught through board games, computer games and online games can be designed for students to play at any time. In this case, sustainable language practice is organised by the games even without the presence of the Language teacher.

The essence of the third approach to achieving sustainable language learning is related to an old Chinese saying “受之以鱼不如授之以渔 (it is always better to teach a man who is hungry to fish than to give him some fish. Giving some fish to a hungry person only helps him with a single meal. By teaching him how to fish, you help him feed his whole life)”. When applied in the context of teaching and learning, it implies that teaching study skills can have sustainable benefit for students. Following this principle, in the Languages class what needs to be taught is not only the target language, but also a method of more sustainable self-directed acquisition of language. ILT seems to be a language teaching approach with a particular concern
about not only what to learn, but also how to learn. As mentioned in the literature review, ILT stresses learning to communicate in the target language by exploring the differences and similarities between the target culture and the native culture. Particular emphasis is given to the development of the ability to notice, understand and interpret cultural and language differences, not the amount of knowledge transmitted. Students receive training in skills useful for intercultural exploration, such as ethnographic techniques—“description of a community through systematic observation, usually by living among the community as a participant observer over a period of time” (Corbett, 2003). Sustainable learning is realised when learners engage in self-directed exploration of other cultures and languages with those skills taught when they came across an intercultural communicative scenario.

In Action Research Cycle One, one solution recommended for increasing the connectedness of language learning at a beginning level was to focus on learning content that could be readily applied by students. Readily applicable learning content for students is usually about things or people surrounding them in their daily life and study. In Action Research Cycle Two, the concern for sustainability of language learning gave rise to the redefinition of this criterion on learning content, that is, it needs to be sustainably applicable for students. By ‘sustainably applicable’, I mean that the learning content can be applied frequently in various scenarios by learners over an extended period. Polite expressions are an example of learning content that can be sustainably applicable in students’ lives. When the selection of learning content is subject to the teacher’s discretion, the teacher can play a crucial role in making language learning sustainable by choosing sustainably applicable content to teach. For the same topic, there is a distinction between learning content that is
‘unsustainably’ applicable content and ‘sustainably’ applicable content. The key
difference lies in the expected frequency of use in communicative scenarios that
learners will come across in their lives. The following narrative from my reflective
journal provided a good example of how consideration of sustainability leads to a
different selection of learning content under the same topic:

During 2012 Olympic Games, many teachers thought it was a good opportunity to
teach them how to talk about their favourite sports considering that sports is a topic
in their life every day during that period. In this way, content students learnt in
language class is closely related to and reinforced by things that happened in their
life. Nevertheless, in terms of sustainability, talking about favourite sports may not
be the best content to teach since it is unlikely for students to use this language
frequently in their future life. They will talk about sports less often when Olympic
Games finish. Even though they are all sports lovers to whom sports is an important
part of their life, as native speakers of English, they may feel freer to talk about it in
English instead of Chinese. Considering these, I did not focus on sports, but decided
to take the opportunity of Olympic Games to teach something that is more
sustainably applicable. When I watched Olympic Games, I found that despite that
Olympic Games is a sports event, the language repeated mostly frequently in this
event is not names of sports, but some language for cheering such as “go, Australia’
which can be used in any kinds of sports competition. Then, what came to my mind
is the idea of teaching students how to cheer in Chinese. I selected “加油
(pronounced as jiā yóu)” as the learning content which is a commonly used Chinese
word for cheering and is literally translated as “add oil”. This is considered as
sustainably applicable learning content for two reasons. Firstly, it can be frequently
used by students when watching Olympic Games, especially when there are Chinese
players. In this sense, it is tailored to students’ communicative needs as audience of
Olympic Games. Secondly, students can use it not only during Olympic Games, but
also in future Chinese lessons when they play games. This purposeful use of Chinese
helps create a target language environment in the classroom, as well as increase
social support among students. (Reflective journal, 19-Jul-2012)

Another example was also evident in a topic about school:

For the topic of school, there is a wide variety of choices in terms of what to teach,
such as school subjects, timetable…However, I choose to teach classroom
expressions ‘cause it is most likely to be used by the students in future lessons’. In
this sense, the learning content is tailored to their communicative needs and
significance of language learning is increased. (Reflective journal, 10-May-2012)

Apart from choosing learning content that can be sustainably applicable, the teacher
is also responsible for maximising opportunities for learning content to be
sustainably applicable in the language classroom. One idea was to incorporate the
use of learning content into the school routine. An example in my teaching was the
use of the Chinese character “好” which means ‘good’ in a reward system:
I taught them a Chinese character that is used in a lot of greetings, “好” (good). To reinforce students’ retention of this character, I used it to reward students when they behave and study well in my lesson. They were even allowed to write the character under their own name by themselves when they have been awarded one. Originally, the classroom teacher recommended the smiling face chart which is widely used in the school. However, I prefer to use 好 instead of smiling face for this replacement does not affect the function of a reward system, but rather has an additional benefit to students’ language learning. (Reflective journal, 16-Feb-2012)

Nonetheless, by following sustainability as an essential criterion, I encountered another two tensions of sustainably applicable learning content VS. teaching resources available and selecting sustainably applicable learning content VS. exposure to various communicative scenarios. The problem captured in the first tension was the difficulty of finding appropriate resources to support teaching content that was regarded as more sustainably applicable, especially materials that demonstrated authentic use, for instance:

However, there is almost no video about real Chinese classrooms that demonstrates classroom expressions. In most of the teaching materials developed by others, the language taught under the topic "school" is usually stationery or subjects. There are some materials that incorporate classroom expressions: however, demonstration of authentic use of these expressions is absent…… As a result, I used some video clips about Chinese schools which are not quite appropriate for the objectives of this lesson. They only show what real Chinese classrooms look like, but not classroom expressions. With these videos, sufficient exposure to culture maybe achieved. However, these are not all necessarily helpful to understanding about language use. (Reflective journal, 10-May-2012)

The unavailability of teaching resources for sustainably applicable learning content or the absence of sustainably applicable content in existing teaching materials to some extent implied that the issue of sustainability was weakly addressed in current Languages teaching. Another possible explanation may be that there is no uniform set of sustainably applicable learning content which satisfies all learners. Sustainably applicable learning content is a particular concept subject to individual teacher’s judgment based on knowledge about the students, such as the learners’ particular social context and their proficiency level in the target language. Therefore, what was counted as ‘sustainably applicable learning content’ for my students may not be as
sustainably applicable for other students. That was probably why I could not find resources that were a perfect match for my intended learning content. The second tension concerns another problem accompanying the teaching of sustainably applicable learning content, namely decreased exposure to various communicative situations. Since my teaching happened outside a Chinese-speaking environment, potential communicative scenarios in which Chinese can be used substantially as a medium were highly restricted to school and classroom situations. In this case, sustainably applicable learning content, which can be frequently applied by students in the long run, mainly centred on school and classroom situations. Therefore, if all the learning content was selected based on the criterion of sustainability, students may have limited content to learn. With limited content to learn, language learning may not be sustained in the long run. Moreover, communicative competence is the competence to communicate in various scenarios. Students who have been insufficiently exposed to various communicative scenarios may be able to handle communication in one or a few situations, but be incompetent in others. In this sense, learners suffer from weaker development of communicative competence. Even though I myself have been learning English since junior high school and acquired a significant level of proficiency in academic English, I still found it difficult to communicate with Australian students when I first came to Australia. The factor contributing to this apparent lack of communicative competence was that I was sufficiently exposed to English use in academic situations, but not in daily life situations. It was not until I came to Australia to be a Language teacher that I started to be sufficiently exposed to English use for everyday living activities. Living in an English-speaking country provides opportunities for me to further develop my English and achieve sound communicative competence in English. Considering that
insufficient exposure to various communicative scenarios resulted from selectively teaching content that is regarded as sustainably applicable in a particular foreign language teaching context, teaching sustainably applicable learning content may only be employed at the beginning stage of foreign language teaching to initiate a target language environment in the Languages classroom. To foster sustainable language learning and sound development of communicative competence, teaching at a later stage needs to cover other communicative scenarios outside the school and classroom as well.

**PROBLEMATIC KNOWLEDGE VS. LANGUAGE LEARNING**

In Action Research Cycle One, one possible strategy mentioned to approach *problematic knowledge* in teaching Chinese as a foreign language was to encourage students to construct their own perceptions about the connection between Chinese characters and images in life, in order to increase retention of Chinese characters. In Action Research Cycle Two, more approaches to *problematic knowledge* were found.

ILT makes strong claims for comparative analysis between cultures and languages as an essential route to language acquisition. According to Raymond Williams, a culture can be seen through ordinary processes of human societies and human minds. Culture is both traditional and creative, which involves both common meanings and individual meanings (Williams, 1958). Under ILT, learners’ understanding about the target culture and language is built upon exploring aspects of their own culture and language which may be unnoticed even by themselves (Corbett, 2003). By undertaking intercultural and inter-language comparative analysis, language and culture are both recognised as *problematic knowledge* since it explores languages as
different systems of meaning expression and cultures as various ways of living which underlie differentiated language use.

Firstly, exploration of languages as different systems of meaning expression is evident when there is discussion about different expressions of the same meaning in the two languages. For instance, it is common for Australian people to greet each other by saying “How are you?” in daily life while it is more usual for Chinese people to use “Have you eaten your lunch/dinner?” or “Where are you going?” as daily informal greetings.

Secondly, intercultural and inter-language comparative analysis supports implementation of problematic knowledge by revealing the different implications of the same notion to people from different cultures. For example, “喝茶 (drink tea)” which sounds like just enjoying a kind of Chinese drink to most Western people actually means much more than that to many Chinese people. The literal translation of this word does not tell us anything about the cultural importance of tea drinking in the Cantonese areas of China where drinking tea is actually a special style of eating. In these areas, people enjoy a wide variety of snacks with tea for breakfast or lunch. Tea is actually a complementary, not the central, part of this activity.

Thirdly, problematic knowledge can also be enhanced by introducing and distinguishing the different meanings of the same language in different contexts. For example, the word “加油” takes its literal meaning ‘add oil’ when it appears in the
Chinese word for petrol station “加油站”. It is also the most commonly used Chinese word for expressing support and encouragement, just like the expression “Go! Go!” in English.

Fourthly, the most important ways in which problematic knowledge is advocated in ILT lies in its promotion of rationalising language use according to intercultural understanding. For instance, in China, asking someone’s age is not thought as impolite as in Western culture, as long as it is done in an appropriate way. There are various ways to ask someone’s age in Chinese according to their approximate age range. One of the polite ways to ask someone’s age that is particular to Chinese language is to ask people’s zodiac and then figure out their age indirectly, instead of asking ‘How old are you?’ straightforwardly. Moreover, a discussion about culture and language use changing over time also contributes to the realisation of problematic knowledge under ILT, in that cultural and language knowledge are not viewed as something static and fixed. For example, traditionally in Chinese we distinguish between cousins and natural brothers and sisters, as well as cousins from the mother’s side and the father’s side in address. Due to the one-child policy, fewer people of the young generations have natural brothers and sisters. As a consequence, the form of address for natural brothers and sisters has been applied to cousins in some big families to enhance the affinity.

However, several other tensions were derived from drawing upon ILT principles to resolve Problematic knowledge VS. Language acquisition. Firstly, there was the tension of intercultural comparison VS. students’ immaturity. Intercultural and inter-
language comparison at an abstract level was incompatible with teaching students at a lower stage, as they were too immature to understand abstract concepts. For these students, the intercultural and inter-language comparison needs to be abundantly elaborated by what occurred to them in daily life. This was to some extent enlightened by my observation of a Science class in which gravity, a quite abstract concept in physics, was introduced to Stage One students. The task for students was to design and make monkey bars with plastic straws. These monkey bars were subject to a test for capacity. The strongest monkey bars that could stand longer with the same capacity or stand under bigger weight won. By doing this, students developed an understanding about what gravity is, as well as its impact on things around us. Instead of telling them the definition of gravity directly, the knowledge delivery was organised through something that is closely related to students. It showed that even abstract concepts such as gravity can be taught to very young students as long as connectedness to their life has been established. However, Australian non-Chinese students’ lives are relatively short of examples of the target culture. In this case, the foreign language teacher is probably the only channel for them to access the target culture. Hence, it is significant for the teacher to explore the potential of herself as an authentic example of the target culture to bring abstract cultural concepts alive. This idea was also shared by some classroom teachers:

Kids are really interested in learning about China, especially when you related to yourself, because the children always want to learn about their teacher. (Classroom Teacher F)

Maybe talk a bit more about yourself, your family and compare to what their family does (Classroom Teacher I)

I think like if you are talking about the family, maybe you could get them to talk about their own family first and get them to know their own families in English and maybe bring photos…… Or relate back to them, especially the little ones, “do you have a bigger brother”, “do you have a bigger sister”, “this is the way we say it in Chinese”, So ask them about their family, and get them to bring photos or draw pictures of their family when you’re talking about family. (Classroom Teacher R)
Nevertheless, another tension of intercultural communicative competence of the teacher for ILT VS. poor intercultural communicative competence of the teacher emerged, while exploring the self as an authentic example of the target culture to increase students’ exposure to the target culture. With poor intercultural communicative competence, the teacher may be insensitive to their own culture let alone making it explicit for students to notice:

I taught them the general terms for addressing brothers and sisters, and mentioned about most of young generations don’t have brothers and sisters due to one-child policy. However, one teaching material reminded me about another impact of one-child policy on the addresses for relatives: the terms including “哥哥 (older brother)” “姐姐 (older sister)” “弟弟(younger brother)” “妹妹(younger sister)” have been widely used to address cousins in some big families. This is true in my family. When I use the words “姐姐 (older sister)” “哥哥 (older brother)” while talking to my friends, usually they know I am talking about my uncle’s and auntie’s daughter or son. Normally they won’t think I’m talking about other children of my parents. (Reflective journal, 31-May-2012).

Likewise, a teacher’s weak awareness of intercultural and inter-language differences was also in conflict with all the strategies mentioned above for problematic knowledge. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, a teacher’s poor intercultural communicative competence can also block effective communication between the teacher and students, which negatively impacts on the outcome of ILT. Even if the teacher has recognised some intercultural and inter-language differences and similarities, his/her poor competence of moving between two cultures and languages prevents him/her from communicating these efficiently to students, as evident in my teaching:

Every time when I selected students to come to the front to write the character on whiteboard, they always say “can I draw it”. From the perspective of students, writing characters is just like drawing pictures. Consequently, they didn’t follow the stroke order to write the character, which makes the characters too bad to be recognized. Even though I’ve emphasized the importance of stroke order, the instruction seems to be ineffective. They classroom teacher explained it more effectively by comparing it with writing English letters. She said “like you write English word, there is sequence for writing the letters for the word and certain rule for writing each letter”. I never thought about explaining characters writing by exploring its similarities with writing English words. (Reflective journal, 31-May-2012)
The fundamental solution to *intercultural communicative competence of the teacher* for ILT VS. poor *intercultural communicative competence of the teacher* seems to be developing the intercultural communicative competence of the teacher. This requires the teacher to consciously and deliberately reflect on his/her own culture to explore intercultural and inter-language differences. Here is an example in my teaching:

At first glance, I can’t identify any cultural issues related to stationery. But then I noticed that a lot of students in China use a box for their stationery while stationery bags are more common in Australian classrooms. I asked myself why Chinese students prefer a box. One possible answer came up to my mind, that is related to the name of traditional stationery for calligraphy, namely “文房四宝 (four treasures of study)” which refers to pen brush, ink, ink stone and paper. The use of the word ‘treasure’ for stationery indicates Chinese people’s serious attitudes towards learning and stationery. Since Chinese people think stationery is important for study, there is tradition to keep them in good condition. The use of a box for stationery maybe originated from this. (Reflective journal, 24-May-2012)

In this case, it was the teacher’s deliberate observation and reflection on the different methods of stationery preservation, as well as exploration of the relevant reasons for this, that revealed the underlying intercultural differences. In this sense, ILT brought a change of the relationship between the teacher and students in language teaching since the teacher was not only a leader or a facilitator, but also a learner who was learning the two cultures and languages and intercultural exploration skills together with students.

In terms of intercultural communicative competence, in some literature, native speakers of English are considered as more advantaged than non-native speakers to teach Mandarin to speakers of English. They may be more capable of noticing aspects of the target culture that are similar or different from their own culture. They may also be more capable of explaining the target culture by relating it back to their own culture in an appropriate way. On the other hand, teachers from cultural and language backgrounds other than English may bring new perspectives on
intercultural issues, which is more beneficial for students. As native speakers of the same language from the same culture, intercultural differences and similarities noticed by an English-speaking teacher are likely to be the same as those noticed by students. However, what is observed by non-English-speaking teachers may be different from what the students observe. In this way, these teachers may reveal issues unnoticed by students and decentralise them from their own culture to think about something they have already taken for granted.

While watching the video about festivals in China, most of the students were impressed by the tradition that Chinese people gave red envelopes containing money on Spring Festivals, birthdays or weddings. To take advantage of their curiosity, I put fake Chinese money in a red pocket to reward students with good performance. When they received the red pocket, they just opened it directly and counted the amount of money in front of the whole class. When I noticed that, I showed them the video again and asked them to focus on people’s response to the red pocket. After that, they noticed the Chinese tradition that people usually don’t open gifts in front of gift-giver. Originally, what they’ve observed is merely the difference in the forms of gifts. However, the difference in the appropriate responses towards gift-giving seems to be unnoticed by them. (Reflective journal, 28-Jun-2012)

For both non-English and English-speaking teachers, intercultural communicative competence is necessary if the target language is taught following an intercultural approach.

In addition, at the beginning of my implementation of ILT principles in communicative-oriented language lessons, a tension of ILT VS. CLT emerged. These two teaching approaches are consistent in terms of the ultimate goal (communicative competence development), but to some extent conflict in approaching the goal. Since CLT promotes “learn(ing) to communicate by communicating”, it requires the teacher and students to maximise the purposeful use of the target language to immerse students in the target language environment. This underplays the role of the students’ own language since it may only be used as a last resort. On the contrary, in
ILT, by employing intercultural and inter-language comparison as the essential means to develop intercultural communicative competence, students’ own language is the important foundation of foreign language acquisition. More importantly, discussion about intercultural issues relies to a large extent on students’ native language when students have not acquired sufficient linguistic competence to understand and express meaning completely in the target language. Whenever ILT principles and CLT principles were applied simultaneously in a single lesson, there was conflict between the use of the students’ language for intercultural discussion and the use of the target language as the medium of communication. For learners with a significant level of proficiency in the target language, this conflict can be resolved by integrating intercultural discussion and language learning into the same task. In this type of task, cultural similarities and differences are the information being communicated through the target language. For example, students may be provided with a reading or listening material in Chinese about Chinese schools. They are required to talk or write a paragraph in Chinese about similarities or differences between Chinese schools and Australian schools as well as any cultural explanations behind these, after reading or listening to the material provided. In this way, the task serves the dual purposes of raising intercultural awareness and developing language comprehension. However, for beginners with limited linguistic competence, intercultural exploration and language practice were unlikely to be integrated completely into a single task like this. Even if a task involved both intercultural exploration and language practice, they were to some extent separated from each other since the target language was not the medium for discussing intercultural issues. There were some examples in which the content of the language task was deliberately adapted for raising cultural awareness. For instance, students were asked
to label family members in two family trees in Chinese which stood for a ‘typical’ Chinese family and Australian family respectively. After that, they were asked to find out the differences between the Australian family and the Chinese family and tell the difference by using the sentence pattern “有/没有 (have/don’t have) ....”.

While completing family trees in two cultures, they were also exposed to cultural difference in terms of the impact of marriage on surnames. In a Chinese family tree, surnames of family members were designed as an important clue for them to tell grandfather and father from grandmother and mother based on the Chinese tradition that women carry on the surname from father’s side and keep it even after marriage. In contrast, in an Australian family tree, all family members usually share the same surname as most women adopt their husband’s surname after marriage. This activity intended to raise students’ awareness of intercultural differences in family structure and the impact of marriage on women’s surnames while practising language skills.

However, in tasks such as this, intercultural discussion in the native language could not be avoided, due to the students’ limited linguistic competence in the target language. Even though students were discussing intercultural issues in the target language by using the sentence pattern “有/没有”, it was not enough in terms of deep understanding. For deep understanding to be established, it should raise the cultural reason for a difference—that is, the implementation of the one-child policy and the rationale behind it. Also, the impact of marriage on women’s surnames must be introduced to facilitate completion of the task. These discussions about culture demanded higher linguistic competence as the basis. When students’ linguistic competence in the target language was insufficiently developed to handle this in-depth discussion, the teacher has no choice but to use the native language instead. Moreover, intercultural exploration interrupted, instead of occurring simultaneously.
with, language practice. In this sense, ILT (use native language for intercultural discussion) VS. CLT (use target language as medium of communication) remained as a problem in the beginners’ classroom.

The tension of ILT VS. CLT may be regarded as resolved if intercultural discussion in the native language fosters maximising purposeful and appropriate use of the target language. When students’ communicative competence in the target language has been gradually built up with intercultural understanding, intercultural discussion can be done more substantially in the target language to realise integration of intercultural exploration and language practice. Intercultural discussion benefits communicative use of the target language whenever it is highly relevant to understanding certain language use. In order to make sure that the intercultural comparison serves the purpose of language learning, cultural input needs to be delivered selectively and appropriately in a manner that helps with students’ understanding about language use. In other words, the cultural content to be discussed must be relevant and meaningful for explaining language use. The culture needs to be discussed as something that impacts on language use, rather than as composed of irrelevant or separate artifacts. Discussing cultural information represented in Chinese written characters is highly relevant for improving students’ recognition of characters as well as their meanings. This idea was enlightened by the discussion about the usefulness of semiotics to ILT. It is stated that semiotics helps teachers develop students’ intercultural communicative competence by advancing skills in interpreting messages communicated by visual data (Corbett, 2003). Due to the pictographic feature of Chinese written characters, skills of interpreting visual data may be applicable to exploring the cultural information communicated by these
characters. Since many Chinese characters are derived from images in real life, they capture people’s view about things around them in their daily life which may be particular to their culture. For example, the Chinese character for pen-“笔”-was created from the image of the traditional Chinese tool for writing and painting. Demonstration of this tool is significant for students to understand and remember the character “笔” (pen). This Chinese character for pen is composed of two parts. The top part “⺅⺅” means ‘bamboo’ in Chinese while the bottom part “⺅” means ‘fur’. The reason why bamboo is at the top and fur at the bottom and together represent ‘pen’ is because the tool traditionally used by Chinese people for writing and painting is a pen brush with the shaft made of bamboo and the tip made of animals’ fur.

Figure 5.12 Association between traditional Chinese pen brush and Chinese character for pen

It is still used now for traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting. Furthermore, since language use and culture are changing and influencing each other, studying newly-created characters enables students to access ever-changing culture and language use.
INAPPROPRIATE PRESENTATION OF CONTENT VS. DEEP KNOWLEDGE

In Action Research Cycle Two, a new category was identified, named INAPPROPRIATE PRESENTATION OF CONTENT VS. DEEP KNOWLEDGE. Deep knowledge in QT means that “knowledge addressed is focused on a small number of key concepts and the relationship between and among concepts”. The achievement of deep knowledge is not only concerned with what to present to students, but also with how to present key concepts to students. Three sub-tensions related to the issue of presentation of knowledge were revealed.

My own teaching experience indicated that the structure of QCA developed in Action Research Cycle One, did not address fluency of teaching properly, which in turn negatively affected realisation of deep knowledge. This issue will be reviewed in the following discussion about two sub-tensions, namely, two-phase structure of QCA VS. fluency of lessons and lack of fluency VS. deep knowledge.

According to this two-phase structure of QCA, multiple concepts may be introduced collectively during the pre-communicative phase, followed by multiple activities during the communicative phase to foster deep understanding about those concepts. This structure may be illustrated as follows:
Table 5.6 Two-phase structure of QCA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-communicative phase</th>
<th>Communicative phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept A</td>
<td>Activity A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept B</td>
<td>Activity B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, it was shown in my teaching that this two-phase structure was not very effective for realising deep knowledge since the logic inherent in the sequence of presentation was too weak to address the relationship between and among concepts and/or activities. This structure worked even less effectively when the introduction of Concept B was dependent on deep knowledge about Concept A. Without being provided with sufficient opportunities to absorb Concept A through application first, it was likely to be illogical and unnatural for Concept B to follow from Concept A. Hence, neither deep knowledge about Concept A nor Concept B can be guaranteed by this structure.

Sometimes even though a lesson realised all the elements of QT with appropriate content and well-designed individual activities by following the QCA framework, it may still be an unsuccessful experience because of inappropriate sequencing or transition between concepts or activities. For example:

I should have introduced the difference between Chinese names and English names first. Without knowing about that surname comes prior to given name in Chinese names, students were confused when I directly introduced the Chinese way to address a teacher. In Chinese, we address a particular teacher by adding his/her surname prior to “老师” which is the professional name of teachers. This is different from calling teachers in English which put teachers’ surnames after the titles. (Reflective journal, 1-Mar-2012)
This situation is just like the ‘accuracy vs. fluency’ debate in language teaching. It is maintained that learners may not be fluent in the target language even if they get all the vocabulary and grammar correct. Likewise, a teacher achieves accuracy in teaching when he/she realises all the elements of QT by selecting appropriate content and designing effective activities, but not fluency in teaching if sequencing and transition between concepts and/or activities is still problematic. In Cycle One, QT elements were integrated into the CLT activities in response to the lack of wholeness of QT in its original form—being a segregated outline of generic characteristics of effective pedagogy with no instruction on organised implementation. This seemed to aim at accuracy in teaching. Nevertheless, since fluency in teaching does not come automatically after all QT elements have been addressed in a lesson, a further step is necessary to address fluency. The reason for the neglect of sequencing and transition between concepts and/or activities at the initial development of QCA may be explained by the lack of explicit attention to appropriate sequencing and transition between concepts and/or activities as an element of high quality teaching in the original QT model. However, it seems that both accuracy and fluency are important for producing high-quality teaching which realises deep knowledge. The view that the teacher’s deliberate planning for fluency was required for producing high-quality teaching was not only grounded in my own teaching experience, but also shared by other teachers and supported by other evidence from the school. The school developed their own colleague-lesson-observation sheet which addressed some elements of QT. In addition to QT elements, there was also a ‘school’s specifics’ section in the colleague-lesson observation which outlined the particular focus of the observation. In this section, “sequential, logical and smooth transitions between concepts and/or activities” was addressed as one of the aspects to be assessed.
To resolve the tensions of *two-phase structure of QCA VS. fluency of lessons* and *lack of fluency VS. deep knowledge*, the two-phase structure of QCA must be altered. The purpose of restructuring QCA was like the practice of language through communication—that is, to achieve fluency in teaching. A possible alternative was to introduce concepts separately. Each concept is closely followed by activities associated with it. In this sense, there was a *Pre-communicative phase* and a *Communicative phase* for each concept. Considering that a lesson may involve multiple concepts, it was expected that the *pre-communicative phase* and *communicative phase* took place alternately in a single lesson unit. In this case, QCA becomes QCA cycles. The previous two-phase structure was changed to a cyclical structure, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QCA Cycle One</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-communicative phase</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicative phase</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity A1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity A2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QCA Cycle Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-communicative phase</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicative phase</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity B1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity B2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.7 Cyclical structure of QCA

The cyclical structure ensures *deep knowledge* by promoting thick elaboration of the individual concepts during the *pre-communicative phase* and providing sufficient opportunities to apply that concept during the *communicative phase*. It is especially
beneficial when concept B is built upon concept A since the *deep knowledge* about concept A creates a solid foundation for students to internalise concept B.

In addition, it is found in Action Research Cycle Two that the implementation of ILT principles had significant implications for the sequence of presentation of content, which distinguishes it from teacher-centred artefact-based approaches for teaching culture. Unlike other culture teaching approaches which merely deliver some information about culture, ILT is a more skills-oriented approach by stressing intercultural awareness development as the major task. As discussed in the literature review, ILT promotes experiential learning and question-led intercultural exploration as the approach to develop intercultural awareness. In this sense, ILT is student-centred and requires training on higher-order thinking skills for analysing intercultural issues. To support the emphasis on experience of culture and student-directed higher-order thinking processes for cultural learning, it seems to be more appropriate to start with a presentation of phenomena and then encourage students to analyse the phenomena to discover intercultural similarities and differences as well as causes associated with them. This is different from teacher-centred artefact-based cultural teaching in which the teacher first states some abstract cultural concepts or rules and then elaborates them with examples. Compared with the former sequence of presentation, this way of presenting cultural information or knowledge to some extent reduces the opportunity for students to engage in high-order thinking processes and to generate their own individualised perception about culture. Consequently, students are merely receiving information, rather than developing intercultural awareness, which goes against the skill orientation of ILT. Hence, in some lessons in which a sequence of presentation incompatible with intercultural
 awareness raising was adopted, a tension between inappropriate sequence of presentation VS. ILT was identified.

To resolve this tension, the teacher’s thoughtful consideration about the sequence of presentation for provoking students’ thinking about a specific intercultural issue is demanded. The impact of the sequence of presentation on learning outcomes is demonstrated in the following example:

In one class, I introduced the vocabulary by asking them to guess what drinks are "可乐" and "咖啡" which sound very similar to their corresponding English words, cola and coffee. They can get the answers quickly. Then, I asked them to think about the reason why the two different languages share similar pronunciation. Finally, they figure out that these pronunciations are borrowed from English language due to the introduction of these western drinks into China. To my surprise, they even extend this type of deeper thinking to "茶(pronounced as chá). " (tea) and told me that the Chinese pronunciation for tea "cha" is still used in their own languages to mean tea basically because tea originally comes from China……

This independent exploration of association between two languages has not been observed in the other class, even though they also know the reason for the sharing of similar sounds of drink names in two languages with my introduction. It may have something to do with the way in which I introduced the vocabulary to them. I introduced them directly to them without allowing them to think about the reasons by themselves. (Reflective journal, 14-Jun-2012)

It can be seen from the example above that one class merely acquired some information about culture with the teacher introducing the language and culture, while the other class’s skill in noticing and analysing intercultural and inter-language similarities was advanced with a different sequence of presentation.

**STUDENT-CENTRED LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AT BEGINNING LEVEL**

In Action Research Cycle Two, the new category **STUDENT-CENTRED LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AT BEGINNING LEVEL** was created to include another group of new tensions—student-centred communication VS. limited linguistic competence, learning while doing VS. reliance
on teacher’s support, teacher offers support VS. teacher holds back support and reliance on teacher’s support VS. validity of formative assessment.

To explain other sub-tensions in this category, the first sub-tension, student-centred communication VS. limited linguistic competence, must be explored. Linguistic competence is not the only component, but is a fundamental component of communicative competence. As described by Littlewood (1981, p. 6) “The learner…must develop skill in manipulating the linguistic system, to the point where he can use it spontaneously and flexibly in order to express his intended message”. Therefore, when students have not been equipped with sufficient linguistic competence in the target language, student-centred communication in the target language cannot be sustained. In this case, what happens most in the foreign language lesson is not independent communication among students, but rather teacher-dominated communication or even non-communicative language practice such as modelling and drill. This was evident in an outsider’s observation of my lesson:

The students were actively involved in the task and discussion but due to the fact that they do not have a solid vocabulary and lack of practice, they in fact didn’t get as much practice as expected. (Classroom Teacher H)

The second tension, which was related to the first, was learning while doing VS. reliance on teacher’s support. The essence of learning via student-centred communication in CLT is summarised as “learners learn to communicate by communicating” (Richards 2005, p. 6). Embedded in this is the philosophy of learning-by-doing. However, without being equipped with sufficient linguistic competence, students failed to engage in communication with each other, but rather rely heavily on the teacher to help them accomplish the task. As a result, there was
almost no independent higher-order thinking involved in the learning process as the students copied the teacher instead of learning to apply the language on their own. This brought the teacher back to a central role in the classroom, which was in conflict with the spirit of CLT—teacher as facilitator of communication to promote learner autonomy in learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). An example is:

They were eager to come to the front to do the information gap activity on Smartboard. This is an activity in which one student has to translate some information given in English into Chinese orally. And another student has to complete a table according to what he/she heard. This activity involves extensive communication and it trains students’ reading, speaking, listening and writing skills together. However, they didn’t really engage in this intended training. The activity didn’t go smoothly, but was being frequently interrupted by questions like “Ms, how do I say this?” “Ms, what does this mean?” It seems that they have difficulty in every step. The student sending the information cannot pronounce correctly, which made it difficult for the other students to understand. In this case, I intervened very often. My increased intervention seems to make them feel that I will always help them with every bit of the activity. As a result, they become more reluctant to try and just wait for me to help. This resulted in no independent thinking and destroyed the original purpose of the activity. This happens in doing the worksheet as well. They relied on me heavily to help them accomplish the worksheet step-by-step. They told me “Ms, it’s too hard. I can’t do it” and just wanted me to do all the worksheet for them. (Reflective journal, 1-Mar-2012)

As a teacher in this situation, I suffered from a tension myself: teacher offers support VS. teacher holds back support. On the one hand, my concern was that students may not want to participate due to lack of support. Therefore, I always offered my help when students faced difficulties in the task and turned to me for help simply because I wanted to make them feel safe to participate. Consequently, students were active to raise their hand even if they did not know the answer because they thought the teacher was always there to help them. Obviously, this went against the spirit of CLT—learning by spontaneous communication. Hence, I was trying to hold back my support as a last resort and limit my intervention to corrective feedback since I wanted to encourage them to think and finish the task independently. However, every time I held back my support to enforce independent working, students just could not
keep going and waited. As class time is precious, I always finally compromised and told them the answer.

Furthermore, when students relied on the teacher and imitated the teacher with no understanding of the substance of the task, it invalidated the task in terms of the function of formative assessment of learning outcomes. This was described as the tension of reliance on teacher’s support VS. validity of formative assessment.

Faced with students’ limited linguistic competence, learning through completely student-centred communication seemed to be unrealistic at an initial stage of language learning. To build up students’ linguistic competence and facilitate student-centred communication to happen later, teacher-centred language input is important when teaching beginners. This is not mean to violate the principle of ‘learn to communicate through communicating’, but to alter the parties involved in communication from student-student to teacher-student by maximising purposeful communication between teacher and students. In other words, the students can learn to communicate mostly through communicating with the teacher instead of only with other students. According to the comprehensible input hypothesis that L2 learning would be more successful when “learners are exposed to input that is slightly beyond their current level of linguistic competence but sufficiently comprehensible for the learner to understand” (Spada, 2007, p. 275), communicating with the teacher seems to be more beneficial in this case. The reason is that by communicating with classmates at the same level of linguistic competence, it is difficult for students to be exposed to language input that is ‘slightly beyond their current level’. In contrast, the
teacher, with knowledge about both the target language and the students’ existing linguistic competence, is more likely to control the language input at a level that is optimal for student learning.

To resolve the tension of teacher offers support VS. teacher holds back support, it is necessary to distinguish the kind of support to be offered from the kind of support to be reserved. To be consistent with learning-by-doing, the kind of support to be offered must engage students in active learning and higher-order thinking. On the contrary, the kind of support to be held back is support such as telling answers that result in rote learning and lower-order thinking. When students are faced with difficulty in accomplishing communicative tasks, the teacher needs to ensure that the support offered benefits students’ learning and higher-order thinking, rather than providing samples for students to imitate merely for the purpose of task completion. To summarise, the teacher needs to offer support selectively, that is, being generous in support that promotes higher-order thinking but cautious about those supports that result in imitation or lower-order thinking. For instance:

I helped them by restating the rule for saying Chinese numbers and the sentence structure instead of telling them the answer directly. This leaves room for their own thinking, rather than simply copying me. Some of them can finally work out the answer themselves. For those who did not work out the answer, I picked other students to explain the rule further to promote social support among students. In this sense, they are learning from each other. (Reflective journal, 3-May-2012)

5.4 Reflecting stage

Having explained the planning stage, the acting stage and the observing stage of Action Research Cycle Two, now I will turn to the last stage—the reflecting stage. This stage tries to address the research question of this action research cycle—How does the integrative application of Quality Communicative Activities (QCA) and ILT
via tension-focused reflective teaching enhance teaching Chinese through a communicative approach?—by reviewing some findings summarised from tension-focused reflective teaching.

### 5.4.1 Findings of Cycle Two

#### 5.4.1.1 Reinterpretation of QT elements

Solutions generated from tension-focused reflective teaching in Action Research Cycle Two have suggested additional interpretations of QT elements as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QT elements</th>
<th>General interpretation</th>
<th>Reinterpretation in Action Research Cycle One</th>
<th>Additional reinterpretation in Action Research Cycle Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep knowledge</td>
<td>The knowledge addressed is focused on a small number of key concepts and the relationship between and among concepts</td>
<td>The knowledge presented focuses on appropriate use of a small number of related vocabulary and utterances according to communicative contexts</td>
<td>The knowledge presented addresses intercultural issues with impact on language use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep understanding</td>
<td>Students are given the opportunity to demonstrate a profound and meaningful understanding of the central ideas and the relationships between and among them</td>
<td>Understanding about appropriate language use is evident in students’ competence in using it for meaningful communication.</td>
<td>Deep understanding is evident in students’ competence to communicate effectively in intercultural situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic knowledge</td>
<td>Students recognise that knowledge is socially constructed and open to question. Students are encouraged to address multiple perspectives or solutions within a discipline</td>
<td>Promote students’ personal knowledge construction for enhancing learning and retention of Chinese characters.</td>
<td>Uncover language as different systems of meaning expression and culture as various ways of living which underlie differentiated language use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher-order thinking</td>
<td>Students are regularly engaged in activities that require them to organise, reorganise, apply, analyse, synthesise and evaluate knowledge and information</td>
<td>Students are involved in independent meaning construction to solve communicative problems</td>
<td>Question-led and experience-initiated intercultural exploration is applied to promote students’ thinking. Students are demanded to independently rationalise language use based on intercultural understanding, rather than imitate the teacher.</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalanguage</td>
<td>Knowledge is explicitly named and analysed as a specialist language</td>
<td>Incidental teaching of grammar with reference to first language learning or previous foreign language learning to support meaning-focused language use</td>
<td>No additional interpretation in Action Research Cycle Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive communication</td>
<td>Allow students many opportunities to engage in sustained conversations (in oral, written or artistic forms) about the ideas and concepts they are encountering</td>
<td>Maximise opportunities for students to engage in using the target language for purposeful communication.</td>
<td>No additional interpretation in Action Research Cycle Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality learning environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit quality criteria</td>
<td>Students are provided with explicit criteria for the quality of work they are expected to produce. These criteria are regularly referred to and students are clear on how they can achieve highly.</td>
<td>Students are provided with holistic demonstration of authentic language use in its communicative context (both verbal and non-verbal)</td>
<td>Holistic demonstration of authentic language use involves intercultural contexts. Corrective feedbacks are applied to reinforce criteria on appropriate language use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Activities are designed to seriously engage students in their own learning. Activities are designed such that students can be</td>
<td>Maximise engagement in communicative learning of the language by making classroom activities meaningful and interesting, as well as</td>
<td>No additional interpretation in Action Research Cycle Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectation</td>
<td>Activities provide challenging work to all students. Students are often encouraged to take conceptual risks.</td>
<td>Activities encourage students to take risks to construct meaning autonomously. The teacher provides scaffolding such as Pinyin to facilitate ‘learning by communicating’ expected in CLT. Expectation of autonomous meaning construction is managed in a programmed manner.</td>
<td>Students are challenged to give full play to the communicative function of the target language, not necessarily to manipulate complex linguistic forms. Strong incentives for achieving high expectations must be used. The connection between Pinyin and sounds in students’ own language needs to be explored for it to be scaffolding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>Promote positive support for learning and mutual respect among teachers and students. Students are given opportunities to support each other in their learning.</td>
<td>Create incentives for students to support each other by using activities in which they work in teams. Students need to be selectively grouped for them to support and be supported by others.</td>
<td>Support from the teacher aims at facilitating students to overcome difficulty with their own thinking, not imitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ self-regulation</td>
<td>Students perceive the learning to be purposeful and interesting with clear goals such that they are able to demonstrate initiative and autonomy in the classroom. Minimal attention needs to be paid to discipline</td>
<td>Design communicative language learning into interesting activities so that students are deeply immersed in learning with little need of external regulation.</td>
<td>No additional interpretation in Action Research Cycle Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student direction</td>
<td>Students exercise direction over the selection of activities related to their learning and the</td>
<td>Allow students to negotiate with the teacher about how to learn to communicate in a specific scenario.</td>
<td>Negotiating of communicative learning process must pay attention to culture as well as</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
means and manner by which these activities are carried out  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Significance</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background knowledge</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural knowledge</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge integration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
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</table>

Table 5.8 Reinterpretation of QT elements in Action Research Cycle Two

It will be noticed from the interpretations outlined above that the inclusion of an intercultural perspective has substantively influenced several QT elements, including deep knowledge, deep understanding, problematic knowledge, higher-order thinking, explicit quality criteria, student direction, background knowledge, cultural knowledge, knowledge integration, inclusivity, connectedness and narrative. Furthermore, it seems that the inclusion of an intercultural perspective has particular impact on the dimension of significance as every element under this dimension has been reinterpreted in an interculturally oriented way. A Quality learning environment was relatively less affected by an intercultural perspective as only two elements
under this dimension have new reinterpretations with an intercultural orientation. Even though interpretations of *high expectation* and *social support* have also been updated in Action Research Cycle Two, an intercultural perspective is not seen in the extra information added. Under the dimension *intellectual quality*, four out of six elements were reinterpreted in the light of intercultural perspective. Then the question is why the inclusion of an intercultural perspective affected *significance* more substantially than *intellectual quality* and a *quality learning environment*. To answer this question, both the characteristics of the three dimensions of QT and the nature of ILT need to be examined. However, before discussing the characteristics of the three dimensions of QT and the nature of ILT, it is necessary to first talk about the difference between *curriculum* and *pedagogy*. *Curriculum* is “the content or subject matter that is taught”, while *pedagogy* is concerned with “techniques used to teach students” (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, p. 71). In this sense, curriculum is basically about what to teach while pedagogy is about how to teach. It has also been pointed out that the separation of *curriculum* and *pedagogy* is often not clear in classrooms (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2002). Even though QT is claimed to be a pedagogy model, it is noticed that some elements of QT are actually more related to what to teach than how to teach. Therefore, implementation of these elements is likely to be more susceptible to changes in *curriculum* than to changes in *pedagogy*. Among all the QT elements, most of those under *significance* are closely related to learning content while elements under *quality learning environment* are more to do with teaching method. The application of ILT principles which appears to be a pedagogical decision actually has a significant impact on the language curriculum, considering that the students’ own culture and language become an integral part of the content of
language lessons. Hence, it is reasonable that ILT affects elements related to curatorium as well as those related to pedagogy. The larger impact of ILT on significance than on quality learning environment and intellectual quality may indicate that ILT is more a curriculum change than a pedagogical innovation.

5.4.1.2 The impact of ILT on resolving tensions

In Action Research Cycle Two, the solutions to previous tensions that occurred in Action Research Cycle One do not necessarily all come from ILT. However, there are some tensions that are particularly addressed by the inclusion of an intercultural perspective. In this sense, the enhancement of ILT to the quality of teaching through a communicative approach is to some extent recognised.

Firstly, ILT offers a new perspective on approaching problematic knowledge in a foreign language class, and thereby, may resolve the tension problematic knowledge VS. language learning. Language and culture are to some extent recognised as problematic knowledge “knowledge is socially constructed and open to question” with the adoption of intercultural comparative analysis as an essential approach to learning (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 1). This is because particular emphasis is given to uncovering language as different systems of meaning expression, and cultures as various ways of living which underlie differentiated language use, while undertaking an intercultural and inter-language comparison. Students are exposed to

- different perspectives while discussing different expression of the same meaning in the two languages
- different implications of the same notion in different cultures
- different meanings of the same language in different contexts
• different language use according to intercultural understanding

• culture and language use changing over time.

Secondly, the effect of ILT can be identified in solutions to a few sub-tensions under MY INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING ABOUT STUDENTS VS. IMPLEMENTATION OF QT ELEMENTS. As a teacher who is teaching my L1 (Chinese) with my L2 (English) to students from different cultural backgrounds, the communication with students is already situated within an intercultural communicative scenario. As mentioned in the discussion about the two tensions, adult VS. children and target culture VS. native culture, in Action Research Cycle One, my insufficient understanding about students is related to a lack of knowledge about how to interact with children as well as the lack of understanding about students’ cultures. The lack of understanding about students may be partially attributed to my weak intercultural communicative competence—the ability to “interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language” (Byram, et al., 2002, pp. 70-71). By developing my intercultural communicative competence, I can improve my understanding about students by raising my awareness of cultural similarities and differences between students and me. With improved intercultural awareness and better understanding about my students, I will become more capable of handling intercultural communication with students, by incorporating students’ cultures and moving between two cultures and languages. In this sense, cultural knowledge “to regularly incorporate the cultural knowledge of diverse social groupings” is improved and the tension target culture VS. native culture will be gradually resolved with development of my intercultural communicative competence (NSW DEC, 2006, p. 1). This can further enable me to improve the realisation of connectedness, inclusivity and problematic knowledge in
my classroom by including students’ own culture/language as an integral part of foreign language learning and exploring its connections to the target culture and language. Furthermore, the development of students’ intercultural communicative competence, the core of ILT, promotes self-directed intercultural exploration, and thereby, improves implementation of connectedness, inclusivity and problematic knowledge in foreign language classrooms. In this way, with a strengthened intercultural communicative competence of both the teacher and the students, the tensions, ILT for problematic knowledge VS. teacher’s insufficient understanding about students, connectedness VS. my insufficient understanding about students and inclusivity VS. my insufficient understanding about students, are to some extent overcome. There are two major differences between solutions to these tensions in Action Research Cycle One and the solutions in Action Research Cycle two. Firstly, previous solutions stress the development of the teacher’s knowledge about students while new solutions enlightened by ILT emphasise the development of the teacher’s competence to acquire that knowledge. The second difference is that previous solutions focus merely on the teacher’s self-development, whereas new solutions influenced by an intercultural perspective address the students’ role in the solution of these tensions as well.

On the other hand, the inclusion of an intercultural perspective also led to new tensions emerging in Action Research Cycle Two, which may represent the challenges ILT poses to foreign language teachers. The tension of intercultural comparison VS. students’ immaturity reflects the challenge of applying ILT to young learners as their immaturity makes it difficult for them to understand comparative analysis of abstract cultural concepts. To adapt ILT for young learners, abundant real
life examples must be used to make abstract cultural concepts comprehensible to students. Moreover, exploring the foreign language teacher as an authentic example of the target culture is important when there is a lack of examples of the target culture in students’ daily lives. This challenges the teacher’s intercultural communicative competence to consciously and deliberately reflect on cultural similarities and differences between students and herself as an outsider, as well as to communicate these cultural similarities and differences effectively to students. In this sense, ILT also poses a challenge to teachers who play the role of a leader or a facilitator in the classroom, as they also have to be a learner, to learn the two cultures and languages and intercultural exploration skills together with the students. This challenge is captured by the tension intercultural communicative competence of the teacher for ILT VS. poor intercultural communicative competence of the teacher. Furthermore, another challenge is revealed by the tension, ILT (use native language for intercultural discussion) VS. CLT (use target language as medium of communication). When ILT and CLT are both applied to beginners, it is a challenge to integrate intercultural discussion and communicative language practice, as different languages must be used for these two aspects of teaching when learners have not yet acquired a significant level of linguistic competence in the target language. In this situation, for intercultural discussion to serve the purpose of communicative competence development, the content of intercultural discussion must be highly relevant to language use, such as explaining the cultural rationale for the construction of written Chinese characters.

5.4.1.3 Extra elements of high-quality teaching

Among all the tensions in Action Research Cycle Two, there are three tensions suggesting issues that have not been explicitly addressed in the original QT model.
However, according to my own teaching experience, in order to generate better student learning outcomes, these issues deserve the teacher’s greater attention. Considering this, I have summarised these issues as three new elements of high-quality teaching to be included in my own implementation of the QT model, namely, flexibility, sustainability and fluency. These ‘new’ elements of QT will be discussed in the following paragraphs, while reviewing corresponding tensions.

The first element is flexibility, derived from the tension of experience of high-quality teaching VS. myself as a beginning teacher. It was observed that with experience in the classroom, teachers were able to predict potential classroom occurrences with particular lesson designs as well as deal with any classroom occurrence promptly and sensibly even if it was unexpected. However, with limited classroom experience, I was less competent in both predicting and responding to unexpected classroom occurrence properly. The competence of the teacher to deal with immediate classroom occurrences promptly and sensibly may be referred to as flexibility in teaching. The importance of flexibility in teaching has also been proposed in another framework of teaching described in Danielson (2007, pp. 3-4):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains, Components, and Elements of the Framework for Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domain 1: Planning and Preparation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Component 1a: Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of content and the structure of the discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of prerequisite relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of content-related pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Component 1b: Demonstrating Knowledge of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of child and adolescent development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domain 2: The Classroom Environment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Component 2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher interaction with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student interactions with other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Component 2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Importance of the content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expectation for learning and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Knowledge of the learning process
- Knowledge of students’ skills, knowledge, and language proficiency
- Knowledge of students’ interests and cultural heritage
- Knowledge of students’ special needs

Component 1c: Setting Instructional Outcomes
- Value, sequences, and alignments
- Clarity
- Balance
- Suitability for diverse learners

Domain 3: Instruction
Component 3a: Communicating with Students
- Expectations for learning
- Directions and procedures
- Explanations of content
- Use of oral and written language

Component 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques
- Quality of questions

Component 2c: Managing Classroom Procedures
- Management of instructional groups
- Management of transition
- Management of materials and supplies
- Performance of noninstructional duties
- Supervision of volunteers and paraprofessionals

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities
Component 4a: Reflecting on Teaching
- Accuracy
- Use in future teaching

Component 4b: Maintaining Accurate Records
- Student completion of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3c: Engaging Students in Learning | • Discussion techniques  
• Student participation  
• Activities and assignments  
• Grouping of students  
• Instructional materials and resources  
• Structure and pacing |
| 4c: Communicating with Families | • Student progress in learning  
• Noninstructional records  
• Information about the instructional program  
• Information about individual students  
• Engagement of families in the instructional program |
| 3d: Using Assessment in Instructions | • Assessment criteria  
• Monitoring of student learning  
• Feedback to students  
• Student self-assessment and monitoring of progress |
| 4d: Participating in a Professional Community | • Relationships with colleagues  
• Involvement in a culture of professional inquiry  
• Service to the school  
• Participation in school and district projects |
| 3e: Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness | • Lesson adjustment  
• Response to students  
• Persistence |
| 4e: Growing and Developing Professionally | • Enhancement of content knowledge and pedagogical skill  
• Receptivity to feedback from colleagues  
• Service to the profession |
| 4f: Showing Professionalism | • Integrity and ethical conduct  
• Service to students  
• Advocacy  
• Decision making  
• Compliance with school and district regulations |

**Figure 5.13 Domains, Components and Elements of the Framework for Teaching**

This framework classified teaching into four domains of teaching responsibility including planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities. Each of these four domains was further explained by a few components. The feature of each component was elaborated by two to five elements. Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness with elements of lesson adjustment, response to students and persistence is defined as an essential component of Domain 3—Instruction. While explaining components of Domain 3—Instruction, it states that:
Teachers who excel in the components of Domain 3 have finely honed instructional skills. Their work in the classroom is fluid and flexible; they can shift easily from one approach to another when the situation demands it. They seamlessly incorporate ideas and concepts from other parts of the curriculum into their explanations, relating, for example, what the students have just learned about World War I to patterns about conflicts they have previously learned in their studies about other wars. Their questions probe student thinking and serve to extend understanding. They are attentive to different students in the class and the degree to which the students are thoughtfully engaged; when they observe inattention, they move to correct it. And above all, they carefully monitor students understanding as they go (through well-designed questions or activities) and make minor midcourse corrections as needed (Danielson, 2007, p. 29).

Furthermore, it is likely that flexibility is considered as especially necessary in a communicative approach in which grammatical instruction is provided incidentally in response to students’ flaws in communication instead of being planned in advance (Basturkmen, et al., 2002). Therefore, the teacher needs to be flexible in generating grammatical instruction based on their immediate assessment of students’ understanding.

The second new element is sustainability derived from the tension, unsustainable language learning VS. communicative competence development. Sustainability means that learning and application of learning content are sustained beyond a single lesson. Confronted with weak external support from parents, classroom teachers and society in general, my students’ learning of Chinese could be said to be generally unsustainable. For communicative competence to be developed, language learning needs to be sustained beyond the language lesson. In this sense, sustainability becomes a major concern in high-quality communicative language teaching.

Strategies for addressing sustainability can include making language practice into interesting leisure activities and teaching sustainably applicable content, as well as applying learning content sustainably in school. More essentially, the emphasis of competence over knowledge under ILT to some extent addresses the sustainability of
language learning; thus, contributing to the solution of the tension, *unsustainable language learning VS. communicative competence development*. By setting the development of intercultural communicative competence as the ultimate goal of language teaching, the substance of ILT is not limited to lecturing about cultural similarities and differences, but more importantly, focuses on training in skills for self-directed intercultural exploration in language class, such as ethnographic techniques. With developed intercultural communicative competence, it is expected that learners will be capable of sustaining the learning of the target language or even learn other languages independently, following an intercultural approach. Communicative competence can be continuously developed with sustainable intercultural language learning.

The third element, *fluency*, arises from the tension, *lack of fluency VS. deep knowledge*. Teachers achieve *fluency* of teaching by purposefully sequencing and transitioning between concepts and/or activities in a manner that promotes deep knowledge of each concept introduced, as well as logical links between these concepts. A good illustration of my own planning for *fluency* of teaching is the amendment of the structure of QCA in Action Research Cycle Two, as discussed earlier in this chapter. With insufficient attention to the *fluency* of teaching (logical sequencing and transition between concepts and/or activities), the two-phase QCA structure developed in Action Research Cycle One does not work efficiently enough for demonstrating deep knowledge. Considering this, a cyclical structure which is more compatible with *fluency* of teaching has been devised in Action Research Cycle Two.
5.4.1.4 Quality Intercultural Communicative Activities (QICA)

*Quality Communicative Activities (QCA)*, established in Action Research Cycle One, has been developed in this action research cycle with the inclusion of an intercultural perspective and further tension-focused reflective teaching. The revised model I have called *Quality Intercultural Communicative Activities (QICA)*. In addition to principles for classroom activities outlined in the previous QCA, further suggestions have been included in QICA. These further suggestions are informed by new elements of high-quality teaching and new teaching strategies generated from tension-focused reflective teaching in Action Research Cycle Two. These additional principles will be explored in the following paragraphs.

**QT elements in the Pre-communicative phase in the Quality Intercultural Communicative Activities model**

*Deep knowledge*

In the context of ILT, *deep knowledge* addresses intercultural issues in communicative language use. Cultural similarities and differences need to be presented as an integral part of *deep knowledge* underlying appropriate language use. This has implications for other QT elements which support realisation of *deep knowledge*, which are outlined in the following paragraphs. Moreover, more content, and even new elements have been added to support the realisation of *deep knowledge* based on the findings of Action Research Cycle Two.

*Explicit quality criteria*

Holistic demonstration of appropriate language use in an intercultural context is necessary. To develop students’ accurate recognition of appropriate language use, critical comments must be used to make the gap between students’ production and
appropriate language use explicit. In particular, training for accurate production of tones requires the teacher to insist on the correct tones and to give corrective feedback whenever improper tones are produced by students.

**Connectedness**

Intercultural comparative analysis needs to be applied to promote the connectedness of the target culture and language to students’ own culture and language. For young learners, intercultural comparison for developing knowledge about the circumstances of language use must be closely connected to what they have experienced in their own community, as well as be supported by real examples representing target cultural elements. In Action Research Cycle One, it was mentioned that connectedness may also be established by tailoring language learning towards students’ communicative needs. In Action Research Cycle Two, strategies for satisfying students’ communicative needs include encouraging learning of the target language while using it as a medium to access information, and by teaching content that can be more frequently applied by learners in various scenarios over an extended period of time.

**Student direction**

This is consistent with the explanation in Action Research Cycle One—students negotiate with the teacher about how to learn. However, with the inclusion of an intercultural perspective, the negotiation must pay attention to culture as well. In this sense, the five questions for leading negotiation may be adapted as:

1. For a given intercultural communicative scenario, what knowledge of language and culture previously learned is useful?
2. What other knowledge of language and culture do we need to know?
3. Are there any resources available in the community for us to use? If not, how will we find out what we need to know?

4. What activities can we use to practise this new content?

5. What can we do to demonstrate our competence in communicating successfully in such a scenario?

**Cultural knowledge**

Delivery of cultural knowledge is different from the previous approach in two aspects. Firstly, students’ own cultural knowledge is included in an intercultural comparison. Students are not only required to know the target culture, but also the similarities and differences between the two cultures. Secondly, cultural input in ILT must be highly relevant to the demonstration of deep knowledge about the target language. For instance, discussing cultural information represented in Chinese written characters is helpful for students to remember these characters.

**Narrative**

Culture, which may include some abstract concepts, can be vividly described with the use of personal life stories. An essential strategy for developing young children’s deep cultural knowledge could be to use episodes from the language teacher’s own life story as a sample of the target culture, to be compared with students’ own life experiences.

**Problematic knowledge**

This is another area that can be enhanced by ILT. While undertaking intercultural and inter-language comparative analysis, problematic knowledge is demonstrated by uncovering language as different systems of meaning expression and cultures as various ways of living which underlie differentiated language use. It is essential to
address different expressions of the same meaning in the two languages, as well as
different implications of the same notion in different cultures, different meanings of
the same language in different contexts, different language use according to
intercultural understanding, and culture and language changing over time.

**Background knowledge**

Action Research Cycle One referred to students’ background knowledge from
individual experience, prior learning, and family and community as a starting point
for learning about new culture and language. ILT, which emphasises intercultural
comparative analysis, is consistent with this, since students’ learning of the target
culture and language is grounded in their own culture and language.

**Metalanguage**

Under ILT, the implementation of *metalanguage* does not change greatly, focuses on
cross-language comparison to explain incidental discussion about linguistic forms.

**Knowledge integration**

By using intercultural comparative analysis as the teaching approach, students’ own
knowledge of their own culture and language is integrated with new knowledge of
the target language and culture.

**Higher-order thinking**

*Higher-order thinking* is promoted when students are trained to notice, be aware and
reflect on cultural similarities and differences. The teacher may not demonstrate new
knowledge about the culture and language by lecturing, but use questions to
stimulate students’ higher-order thinking processes for intercultural and inter-
language exploration. It is better to initiate intercultural and inter-language
exploration by providing opportunities for students to experience cultural similarities and differences. For instance:

Students are engaged in HOT when they are required to do comparison across cultures. When I introduce lucky and unlucky numbers, I didn't tell them directly like before. Instead, I showed to them a cartoon story about house selling and Chinese people's car plate in real life and then ask them to figure out lucky and unlucky numbers in Chinese culture by themselves. (Reflective journal, 15-Mar-2012)

**Inclusivity**

Students’ own language and culture can be significantly included in the intercultural comparisons for the presentation of *deep knowledge* of the foreign language and culture.

**Fluency**

To demonstrate deep knowledge, fluency must be addressed in the sequencing and transition between concepts. To be fluent, strong logical linkage between concepts is essential. While moving from concept to concept, thick elaboration of one concept is required before moving to the next. In this sense, a cyclical structure is recommended for QICA.

**Sustainability**

By training students to notice, understand and interpret cultural and language differences, they will be able to develop deep knowledge about context of language use gradually by themselves while communicating with others. This contributes to more sustainable self-directed communicative competence development.

**Flexibility**

To ensure concentration on the key concepts, the teacher demonstrates flexibility in confronting classroom occurrences which are outside of her expectations. The teacher strongly relates students’ questions back to the key concepts and explores the
potential of those questions for developing deep understanding about key concepts. Incidental *focus-on-form* is provided promptly and sensibly in response to formative assessment of students’ understanding about key concepts.

**QT elements in the Communicative phase in the Quality Intercultural Communicative Activities model**

*Deep understanding*

Under ILT, *deep understanding* is evident in students’ intercultural communicative competence in the target language. To develop intercultural communicative competence, activities must also promote rationalising language use according to intercultural understanding. Additionally, the substance of realisation of *deep understanding* has been extended by the new findings of Action Research Cycle Two, including the new elements identified.

**QT elements for language practice**

*Substantive communication*

This principle is basically the same as that in Action Research Cycle One, namely, maximising opportunities for students to engage in using the target language for purposeful communication.

*Cultural knowledge*

To develop intercultural communicative competence, it is demanded that students adapt forms of language to be used, based on intercultural understanding. Furthermore, cultural similarities and differences may be designed as information being communicated through the target language. In this sense, intercultural
exploration and language comprehension development occur simultaneously in a single activity.

**Connectedness**

As mentioned in Action Research Cycle One, this principle means increasing the meaningfulness of language practice to authentic communication. It is highly recommended that the target language is practised in a scenario which addresses authentic intercultural communication.

**Higher-order thinking**

Students are involved in higher-order thinking while rationalising language use based on intercultural understanding. To stimulate high-order thinking about communicative language use during language practice, it is crucial for the teacher not to offer support that results in students simply imitating.

**Knowledge integration**

Integration of cultural knowledge into language use is evident in adapting language form according to intercultural understanding.

**High expectation**

With communicative competence as the learning outcome, high expectation does not necessarily suggest students are expected to manipulate complex linguistic forms. What is expected more from the students seems to be their independent appropriate use of language, even with simple linguistic forms, to satisfy communicative functions of the target language. While using Pinyin for scaffolding young learners’ pronunciation, it is strongly recommended to demonstrate connections between sounds in learners’ own language and the target language. Moreover, strong
incentives need to be incorporated in activity design to stimulate students to reach high expectation.

**Sustainability**

To enhance retention of key concepts taught and promote sustainable communicative development, it is beneficial if classroom activity is interesting and appropriate for students’ autonomous language practice after class.

**QT elements for the language practice environment**

**Engagement**

Inclusion of an intercultural perspective does not have a significant impact on the substance of engagement. Nevertheless, further suggestions on strategies for maximising engagement have been generated in Action Research Cycle Two. Firstly, merely using games is not enough for maximising engagement. The potential of games for language practice needs to be fully explored to produce more intensive language practice. Secondly, to ensure students’ feelings of freshness and thus sustain engagement in language practice via games, it is better for the time duration of each game cycle to be made shorter. Thirdly, rapping is recommended as an ideal tool for its representation of young culture and lyrics with similar tones as normal speech. Fourthly, physical movement makes rapping more engaging. Fifthly, interesting or humorous but still communicative scenarios for language practice is also powerful for engagement.

**Social support**

When students are still at low level of linguistic competence, it is important to avoid their over reliance on the teacher’s support for communicative practice. Over support
may result in no ‘learning by communicating’, but only imitation, with no deep understanding of communicative language use. Support needs to be offered in a manner that encourages learners’ higher-order thinking.

**Inclusivity**

As stated in Action Research Cycle One, students’ individual participation must be addressed in language practice.

**Students’ self-regulation**

There seems to be no significant change in this principle with the application of ILT. Maximising *engagement* is still regarded as the fundamental strategy for dealing with students’ *self-regulation*.

**Sustainability**

At beginning level, teaching content that can be more sustainably applied by learners over an extended period of time is essential for building up the environment for communicative use and learning of the target language. Sustainably applicable content is selected based on the communicative scenarios which will be encountered by the learners. Moreover, it is important for the teacher to maximize opportunities for students to apply content learnt sustainably, such as by setting up relevant classroom routines.
5.4.2 ILT—画龙点睛（adding eyes to a painted dragon）

The essence of inclusion of intercultural perspective may be described with a Chinese idiom “画龙点睛” (adding eyes to a painted dragon) that originated from the following legend:

金陵安乐寺四白龙不点眼睛，每云：‘点睛即飞去。’人以为妄诞，固请点之。须臾，雷电破壁，两龙乘云腾去上天，二龙未点眼者见在。” (张彦远)

Translation:
In the Southern and Northern Dynasties Period (420-589), there was a painter named Zhāng Sēngyáo (张僧繇). Once he visited a temple and painted on the wall four dragons, but gave none of them eyes. The onlookers felt that was odd, and asked why he hadn't painted the eyes. He answered: "Eyes are crucial for dragons. With the eyes painted on, the dragons would fly away." Nobody believed this, so Zhang Sengyao took up his brush and added eyes to two of the dragons. No sooner had he finished than the two dragons flew into the sky amid a thunderstorm. The two without eyes stayed painted on the wall. (Zhang, 2012)
The idiom is also used to teach that “the whole becomes alive with the addition of a small detail” (Taylor & Taylor, 1995, p. 69). If the development of communicative competence is compared to the painting of a dragon, the inclusion of an intercultural perspective can be considered as adding the eyes to the dragon, which is a tiny, but essential, modification for changing the outcome as a whole. I have never deviated from the ultimate goal of building quality in a communicative approach to language teaching, but rather was building on this. Through being given ‘intercultural eyes’, the communicative approach to language teaching has been equipped with a different view about culture. The distinction between ILT and CLT embodies a distinction between a dynamic view of culture and static view of culture. A dynamic view interprets cultural knowledge as “a general body of knowledge that underlies how language is used and how things are said and done in a cultural context” while a static view treats culture as “either facts or artefacts” (Liddicoat, 2002, pp. 6-8). Hence, adopting an intercultural approach requires viewing culture as essential rather than supplemental in language teaching, since it is alive in language and changing with language. In this sense, culture was given vitality by ‘intercultural eyes’ in my language teaching, just like the dragon was brought to life in the original story.
Chapter 6  Conclusion

This chapter provides answers to the main research question: **How does a beginning Chinese foreign language teacher improve teaching Chinese through a communicative approach via reflection?** by reviewing the research process and major findings generated. Following that, some limitations of this study will be examined. Finally, this chapter will explore some implications of this research for practitioners and researchers in the area of foreign language teaching.

6.1 Answer to the main research question

The whole research process itself demonstrated how I, as a beginning Chinese foreign language teacher, can improve teaching Chinese through a communicative approach via reflection. This involved two action research cycles illustrated below:

![Figure 6.1 The whole research process](image)

**Figure 6.1 The whole research process**
As a beginning foreign language teacher, my process of improving my communicative teaching of Chinese started with my learning of CLT and about QT from the literature, as an introduction to my pedagogical knowledge. Then, with clearer understanding, I taught, following the principles of CLT, and reflected on my teaching, based on QT elements. In Action Research Cycle One, teaching practice was considered as improved by the contextualised implementation of QT and CLT in my situation, including QT-supported tension-focused reflective teaching and Quality Communicative Activities (QCA). While applying CLT and QT in my teaching, I also realised that in-depth exploration of culture is necessary in order to improve the quality of teaching Chinese through a communicative approach. This led to my further learning of a related, but different, foreign/second language pedagogy with a particular emphasis on culture—Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT). Based on this further learning, Action Research Cycle Two aimed at enhancing my teaching with the inclusion of an intercultural perspective, while applying tension-focused reflective teaching. I discovered that an intercultural perspective helped resolve some tensions related to problematic knowledge, cultural knowledge, connectedness and inclusivity. In addition, other elements of high-quality teaching were identified from my tension-focused reflective teaching and used to further enhance my teaching. Moreover, teaching practice was also enhanced by modifying QCA to become QICA, based on further understanding about teaching Chinese as a foreign language as well as the role of culture in foreign language teaching.

Now I will review some other contributory factors to my improvement in the teaching of Chinese through a communicative approach.
Integration of reflective teaching cycles into action research cycles

Firstly, my integration of reflective teaching cycles into action research cycles helped to improve my teaching by strengthening the reflexivity of my action research. Reflective teaching cycles consisting of reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action were incorporated into the ‘acting’ stages of the action research cycles as particular modes of action. In this sense, reflection occurred both during the acting stage and the reflecting stage of the action research cycles. In reflection during the acting stage, I conducted formative assessment of my teaching practice in individual reflective teaching cycles as a teacher, based on the students’ performance, the classroom teachers’ feedback and my own experience in the classroom. In reflection during the reflecting stage, I was involved in summative assessment of my teaching practice as a researcher based on several reflective teaching cycles that happened throughout the whole action research cycle. In this project as a whole, changes in my teaching practice were driven by complementary interaction between the teacher’s perspective and the researcher’s perspective.

Tension-focused reflective teaching

The second driving force for improved teaching practice was tension-focused reflective teaching. The efficiency of reflective teaching based on QT elements can be enhanced when it is focused on revealing and resolving tensions occurring in teaching. Closely related to tension-focused reflective teaching is binary or dichotomous thinking, referring to “framing issues in terms of opposites” (Elbow, 1993, p. 51). Binary thinking has been strongly criticised for its promotion of dominance or hierarchy. However, the value of binary thinking for theory building has been acknowledged by Poole and Van de Ven (1989, p. 563), who argue that one
approach to theory building is “to look for tensions or oppositions and use them to stimulate the development of more encompassing theories”. In this research, while dealing with tensions identified, I believe that I improved my teaching practice, but also added new elements to the original QT model and established QICA.

Tensions recorded in this research were identified using versus coding in my reflective journals. During the original journal writing, as *the teacher*, I wrote about my success and failures on my implementation of QT elements in particular lessons. When I went back to the original reflective journals as *the researcher*, I saw a number of conflicts embedded in the problems recorded by *the teacher*. Hence, as *the researcher*, I extracted the conflicting items from *the teacher’s* problematic situations and conceptualized these as tensions.

In the literature, different approaches to deal with binar ies have been mentioned. There were five approaches more or less evident in my solutions to the tensions identified. The following table illustrates the differences between these five approaches to deal with tensions:
All solutions to the tensions in this research have been classified into these five categories. In the following table, the category each solution belongs to has been highlighted:

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<th>ENGAGEMENT VS. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT</th>
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<td>④ low interest in language repetition VS. deep understanding</td>
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<td>⑧ time limitation VS. deep understanding</td>
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<td>⑩ time limitation VS. substantive communication</td>
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<td></td>
<td>⑫ interest VS. repetitive language practice</td>
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</table>
③ interesting activities VS. communicative activities  
④ engagement VS. communicative tasks  
⑩ CLT VS. appropriate expectation  
⑪ over-high expectation VS. engagement

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<th>Solutions</th>
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<td>Solution to ① ④ ⑮ ⑰ ⑲ ⑳ ㉓ : spread repetitive practice <em>(The Mean)</em></td>
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<td>Solution to ① ④ ⑮ ⑰ ⑲ ⑳ ㉓ : games <em>(Dialectical synthesis)</em></td>
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<td>Solution to ① ④ ⑮ ⑰ ⑲ ⑳ ㉓ : diversity of games <em>(Dialectical synthesis)</em></td>
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<td>Solution to ① ④ ⑮ ⑰ ⑲ ⑳ ㉓ : use of technology <em>(Dialectical synthesis)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Solution to ① ④ ⑮ ⑰ ⑲ ⑳ ㉓ : language learning &amp; practising with cultural elements <em>(Dialectical synthesis)</em></td>
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<td>Solution to ① ④ ⑮ ⑰ ⑲ ⑳ ㉓ : Chinese versions of English nursery rhymes <em>(Dialectical synthesis)</em></td>
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<td>Solution to ① ④ ⑮ ⑰ ⑲ ⑳ ㉓ : role-play with interesting scenario <em>(Dialectical synthesis)</em></td>
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<td>Solution to ⑩ ⑪ : Pinyin for confidence in pronunciation <em>(The Mean)</em></td>
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<td>Solution to ⑩ ⑪ : step-by-step <em>(The Mean)</em></td>
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<td>Solution to ⑩ ⑪ : re-thinking CLT <em>(Deny conflict)</em></td>
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<tr>
<th>Derivative tensions</th>
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<td>⑦ games VS. behaviour management</td>
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<tr>
<td>⑧ games VS. inclusivity</td>
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<td>⑯ nursery rhymes practice VS. proposed content to be learnt</td>
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</table>
### MY INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING ABOUT STUDENTS VS. IMPLEMENTATION OF QT ELEMENTS

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<td>② connectedness VS. my insufficient understanding about students</td>
<td>Solution to ⑩: self-made lyrics (Dialectical synthesis)</td>
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<td>⑦ explicit quality criteria VS my insufficient understanding about students</td>
<td>Solution to ⑨: Pinyin combined with modelling (Aristotelian either/or thinking)</td>
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<td>④ my learning of English VS. my use of English for teaching children</td>
<td>Solution to ⑨: establish association between sounds in English and Chinese (Aristotelian either/or thinking)</td>
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<td>⑥ high expectation VS. my insufficient understanding about students</td>
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<td>Solution to ⑩: shorter time duration for each game cycle (Aristotelian either/or thinking)</td>
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<td>13 inclusivity VS. my insufficient understanding about students</td>
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<td>40 experience for high-quality teaching VS. myself as a beginning teacher</td>
<td>7 14 : instruction in target language (Aristotelian either/or thinking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 ILT for problematic knowledge VS. my insufficient understanding about students</td>
<td>7 14 : student demonstration or feedback (Aristotelian either/or thinking)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Solutions**

Solution to ② ⑥ ⑦ ⑬ ⑭ ⑮ ⑰ : develop understanding about students (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ② : exploring connections between languages (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑦ ⑱ : communicative learning of teacher English (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑦ ⑱ : instruction in target language (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑦ ⑱ : student demonstration or feedback (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑦ ⑱ : use of example (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑦ ⑱ : use of written rules (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑱ : reflection (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ② ⑬ ⑰ ⑱ : develop student’s intercultural communicative competence to realise self-directed intercultural exploration (Dialectical synthesis, yin/yang)

Solution to ② ⑬ ⑰ ⑱ : develop teacher’s intercultural communicative competence to promote understanding about students (Aristotelian either/or thinking, yin/yang)

**Derivative tensions**

⑬ focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. my insufficient understanding about students

**Further solutions**

Solution to ⑳ : refer to syllabus (Aristotelian either/or thinking)
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<td>Solution to ③: knowledge integration approach (Dialectical synthesis)</td>
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<td>① student-directed language learning VS. communicative orientation of activities</td>
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<td>Solution to ②: negotiating learning process (The Mean)</td>
<td>Derivative tensions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Further solutions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STUDENT-CENTRED COMMUNICATION VS. CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE</strong></td>
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<td>Solution to ⑦: make student-centred communication interesting to promote students’ self-regulation (Dialectical synthesis)</td>
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<td>Solution to ⑦: classroom management skills (Dialectical synthesis)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CONNECTEDNESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. LACK OF NEED FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE</strong></td>
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<td>⑤ connectedness VS. lack of target language environment</td>
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<td>⑨ no communicative need VS. meaning of language learning</td>
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<td>⑩ connectedness VS. lack of instrumental or integrative motivation</td>
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<td>⑪ unsustainable language learning VS. communicative competence development</td>
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<td>Solution to ⑤ ⑨ ⑩ : create language environment in classroom (Aristotelian either/or thinking)</td>
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<td>Solution to ⑤ ⑨ ⑩ : maximise purposeful use of target language (Aristotelian either/or thinking)</td>
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<td>Solution to ⑤ ⑨ ⑩ : incidental classroom</td>
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</table>
instruction in target language (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑤ ⑨ ⑫: teaching learning content more readily applicable at beginning level (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑤ ⑨ ⑫: use of authentic materials (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑤ ⑨ ⑫: interest-oriented content-based CLT (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑩ ③: homework (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑩ ③: embed learning in leisure activity (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑩ ③: teach study & thinking skills (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑩ ③: learning content more sustainably applicable (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

Solution to ⑩ ③: maximise opportunities for learning content to be sustainably applicable (Aristotelian either/or thinking)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Derivative tensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>⑤ maximise purposeful use of target language VS. my weak sensitivity to opportunities of purposeful use of target language</td>
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<tr>
<td>⑬ myself as foreign language (Mandarin) teacher VS. myself as foreign language (English) learner</td>
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<td>⑦ homework VS. unserious attitudes towards homework</td>
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<td>⑥ sustainably applicable learning content VS. teaching resources available</td>
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<td>⑦ selecting sustainably applicable learning content VS. exposure to various communicative scenarios</td>
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<td>Solution to ⑩ ⑩: teaching sustainably applicable learning content at beginning stage (Aristotelian either/or thinking)</td>
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<td>PROBLEMATIC KNOWLEDGE VS. LANGUAGE LEARNING</td>
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<tr>
<th>Derivative tensions</th>
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<tr>
<td>④ intercultural comparison VS. students’ immaturity</td>
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<tr>
<td>⑦ intercultural communicative competence of the teacher for ILT VS. poor intercultural communicative competence of the teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>⑩ ILT VS. CLT</td>
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<td>Solution to ⑦: developing intercultural communicative competence of the teacher (Aristotelian either/or thinking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solution to ⑦: developing intercultural communicative competence of students (Dialectical synthesis)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solution to ⑩: intercultural comparison for understanding language use (Deny the conflict)</td>
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<td>Solution to ⑩: cultural information represented in characters (Deny the conflict)</td>
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</table>
### METALANGUAGE VS. MY COMMUNICATIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN PRIMARY CLASSROOM

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<td>9 deep knowledge about language use VS. top-down approach of focus on form</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. students’ limited grammatical foundation</td>
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<td>33 focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. my insufficient understanding about students</td>
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</table>

#### Solutions

- Solution to 3: teaching communicative grammar by focus on form *(Aristotelian either/or thinking)*
- Solution to 9: focus on form with cross-languages comparison *(Aristotelian either/or thinking)*
- Solution to 21 33: knowledge integration approach *(Dialectical synthesis)*
- Solution to 33: refer to syllabus *(Aristotelian either/or thinking)*

#### Derivative tensions

N/A

#### Further solutions

N/A

### INAPPROPRIATE PRESENTATION OF CONTENT VS. DEEP KNOWLEDGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-tensions</th>
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<td>39 lack of fluency VS. deep knowledge</td>
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<td>60 inappropriate sequence of presentation VS. ILT</td>
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#### Solutions

- Solution to 38 39: cyclical structure of QCA *(Aristotelian either/or thinking)*
- Solution to 60: teacher’s thoughtful consideration about sequence of presentation *(Aristotelian either/or thinking)*

#### Derivative tensions

N/A

#### Further solutions

N/A
### Table 6.1 Categorisation of solutions

I will review these five approaches one by one now with examples from this research.

**Aristotelian either/or thinking**

The first approach follows Aristotelian *either/or* thinking. This is to make a choice between the two sides—accepting one side as privileged and disregarding the other (Elbow, 1993). Sometimes choosing one side as right is meaningful. Since improving my teaching practice was defined as the goal of this research, it was reasonable and also necessary to put effective teaching practice as a high priority. The choice between the two sides was not an arbitrary decision, but grounded in my rationalisation of the relative importance of the two sides for generating effective teaching. For instance, in order to deal with the tension *Pinyin distinguishes sounds VS. Pinyin misleads students about pronunciation*, two strategies were used, namely, *Pinyin combined with modelling and establishing association between sounds in...*
English and Chinese. These two strategies belonged to the Aristotelian either/or thinking as they involved choosing one side of the tension, that is, *Pinyin distinguishes sounds* as correct and then striving for strengthening the function of Pinyin in distinguishing sounds as much as possible. Most of the solutions for dealing with tensions under *MY INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING ABOUT STUDENTS VS. IMPLEMENTATION OF QT ELEMENTS* followed either/or thinking by choosing *Implementation of QT elements* as the correct side of the tension for promoting effective teaching. Likewise, all solutions for the sub-tensions under *CONNECTEDNESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING VS. LACK OF NEED FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE* chose *connectedness* and sustainable language learning as more important for communicative competence development and tried to achieve these under a non-target language environment in various ways, such as creating a language environment in classroom, using authentic materials, and adopting interest-oriented content-based CLT. As a solution to *myself as foreign language (Mandarin) teacher VS. myself as foreign language (English) learner, self-identification as a language teacher* accepted my identity as a foreign language teacher as essential for effective teaching, and thus disregarded my identity as foreign language learner. With regard to *student-centred communication VS. limited linguistic competence*, the solution, *teacher-centred language input for beginners*, admitted the limited linguistic competence of beginners and considered student-centred communication as inappropriate for teaching beginners. When dealing with the *two-phase structure of QCA VS. fluency of lessons and lack of fluency VS. deep knowledge*, by adopting the *cyclical structure of QCA*, the two-phase structure of QCA and lack of fluency were disregarded whereas *fluency of lessons* and *deep
knowledge were considered as privileged for effective teaching. Other examples of solutions following the Aristotelian either/or thinking include:

- **teaching communicative grammar by focus on form** which rejected the way metalanguage was represented in general language classes by following the principles of CLT;

- **focus on form with cross-languages comparison**, which strived for deep knowledge about language use, while rejecting the top-down approach of focus on form;

- **teacher's thoughtful consideration about sequence of presentation** which viewed the inappropriate sequence of presentation as wrong and encouraged an appropriate sequence of presentation for ILT.

**Dialectic synthesis**

The second approach is to establish a third standpoint beyond the two sides of a binary, which results in mediation of the oppositions. This approach can be better explained with Hegelian dialectic theory comprising **thesis, antithesis and synthesis**. **Thesis** refers to an idea or theory; **Antithesis** is an opposing idea or theory which negates the thesis; **synthesis** is a means of resolving the tension between thesis and antithesis by “trying to preserve the merits and to avoid the limitations of both” (Popper, 1940, p. 404). The two conflicting stances in each tension can be described in Hegelian dialectic terms as the thesis and antithesis. Aristotelian either/or thinking, discussed previously, resolves the tensions by accepting either thesis or antithesis while rejecting the other. On the contrary, the second approach resolves the tension by working out a synthesis that maintains the value of both sides of a tension (Elbow, 1993). For example, among all the solutions to the tension, **ENGAGEMENT VS.**
COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT, reorienting teaching objectives from developing communicative competence towards inspiring interest about the language was a solution of the first type, while making repetitive language practice interesting using games, technology, cultural elements, nursery rhymes, rap, body movement and interesting role-play might be categorised as dialectical synthesis. For the tension, student-centred communication VS. classroom discipline, the solutions, making student-centred communication interesting to promote students’ self-regulation, as well as classroom management skills, might also be considered as dialectical synthesis. The justification is that both of these strategies intended to keep classroom discipline strong during the implementation of student-centred communication, instead of rejecting either side of the tension. Additionally, synthesis, once reached, may in turn become a new thesis which gives rise to a new antithesis of itself (Popper, 1940). This probably explains why some derivative tensions were generated during my process of tension solution. Again, derivative tensions may be resolved either by accepting a new thesis/antithesis, or by creating a new synthesis. For instance, while the solution, language practice through nursery rhymes, was a synthesis to the tension interesting activities VS. communicative activities, it might be considered as a new thesis in the tension, nursery rhymes practice VS. proposed content to be learnt, which was in conflict with the antithesis—proposed content to be learnt. This new tension was resolved by a new synthesis, that is, the solution of nursery rhymes with self-made lyrics to accommodate proposed content. As the solutions to the tensions, games VS. behaviour management and games VS. inclusivity, derived from the use of games, the strategies give consequence to behaviour in games and designing for individual participation were trying to resolve the tensions by creating a dialectical synthesis. The solution give consequence to
behaviour in games advocated games which not only promoted practising language but also helped with managing behaviour. The solution, designing for individual participation, maintained the competitive nature of games but at the same time realises every student’s participation in the competition. Unlike these, a solution to the derivative tension, board game VS. appropriate expectation, namely, designing for incentive to reach high expectation, resolved the tension by accepting the thesis—high expectation in board game and trying to realise this via incentive. Similarly, when dealing with the derivative tension, time-consuming nature of game VS. sustained interest, the solution—shorter time duration for each game cycle recognised sustained interest as the priority and hence changed the time-consuming feature of a game. The derivative tension, focus on form with cross-languages comparison VS. my insufficient understanding about students, was resolved by both accepting the thesis and creating a synthesis. The strategy referring to syllabus belonged to the former type as it accepted focus on form with cross-languages comparison as appropriate and tries to support it by using the English Syllabus to facilitate the teacher’s understanding about students’ grammatical knowledge. The solution knowledge integration approach—gaining new grammatical knowledge by reviewing previously-learnt content—was regarded as a synthesis, considering that it was a new approach that goes beyond cross-languages comparison and did not necessitate the teacher’s understanding about students’ grammatical knowledge in their first language. The tension, intercultural communicative competence of the teacher for ILT VS. poor intercultural communicative competence of the teacher, which emerged from the use of ILT, was addressed by the item developing intercultural communicative competence of the teacher and students. The strategy developing intercultural communicative competence of the teacher accepted
intercultural communicative competence of the teacher for ILT, while it tried to eliminate the item poor intercultural communicative competence of the teacher. Different from this, the item developing intercultural communicative competence of students created a synthesis by going beyond the focus of intercultural communicative competence of the teacher.

Deny the conflict

The third approach is to deny the conflict between the two sides (Elbow, 1993). For example, the conflict between CLT and appropriate expectation was identified in the data, since asking students to practise two-way communication such as conversation and dialogue at the beginning level was considered by some classroom teachers as an over-high expectation for students. A lesson with appropriate expectation may be criticised for a lack of two-way communication. However, I recognised that there are communicative uses of language such as expressing feelings that do not involve dialogue or conversation. Therefore, learning content without conversation and dialogue would still satisfy the principles of CLT as long as this focuses on the communicative functions of language and meets the communicative needs of learners. This makes it possible for the teacher to choose learning content which satisfies the criteria of both appropriate expectation and communicative-orientation. In this sense, the conflict between CLT and appropriate expectation was denied while rethinking about CLT. For the tension, problematic knowledge VS. language learning, the application of ILT principles denied the conflict between problematic knowledge and language learning, since it demonstrated that problematic knowledge can be realised via intercultural and inter-language comparisons which benefited communicative competence development significantly. Similarly, as solutions, intercultural comparison for understanding language use and cultural information
represented in characters denied the conflict between ILT and CLT by showing that there were ways for cultural discussion to serve the purpose of promoting understanding about communicative use of language. Also, the solution, *intercultural comparison elaborated by real life*, denied the conflict between *intercultural comparison* and *students’ immaturity* by showing that intercultural comparison can be done in a way understood by young children. In these examples, the denying of identified tensions to some extent indicated that tension-focused reflection promoted thinking and re-examination of the problems that emerged.

*The doctrine of the mean*

The fourth approach, *the doctrine of the mean*, is to find a *mean* between the two sides of a binary. Because the aim is a *mean*, what seems to be underlying this approach is the view that the two sides of a tension represent two extremes of a certain continuum. For instance, the item *spread repetitive practice* in several lessons reduced the intensity of repetition in a single lesson and thus tried to achieve a mean on the following continuum:

![Continuum of interest vs. repetition]

As solutions to the tension of *over-high expectation VS. engagement*, the items *Pinyin for confidence in pronunciation* and *step-by-step realisation of expected outcomes* reduced expectation in each lesson and thus intended to reach a *mean* on the following continuum:

![Continuum of engagement vs. expectation]

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In terms of the tension, *student-directed language learning VS. communicative orientation of activities*, the sides of the tension can be viewed as the two extremes in the continuum:

- Activities directed by students
  - No communicative orientation
- Activities directed by the teacher
  - Strong communicative orientation

The solutions to this tension—*negotiating learning process* acknowledged the value of both the students’ and the teacher’s participation in choosing activities and aimed at the mean between the two extremes. The item, *offer support selectively*, tried to resolve the tension *teacher offers support VS. teacher holds back support* by being situated in the middle of the continuum:

- Teacher always offers support
  - No requirement of independent thinking
- Teacher always holds back support
  - Excessive requirement of independent thinking

**Taoist yin/yang**

The fifth approach is to “affirm both sides of a dichotomy as equally true or important, even if they are contradictory” and to even accept the non-resolution of the tensions (Elbow, 1993, p. 54). This is consistent with the Taoist philosophy of *yin/yang* which is often claimed to be a uniquely Chinese form of binary thinking.

Lao Tsu, the founder of Taoism, stated that:

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The Dao produced the One.
The One produced the Two.
The Two produced the Three.
The Three produce All Things.
All Things carry Yin and hold to Yang.
Their blended influence brings Harmony.
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(Lee et al., 2008, p.88)
Dao (or Tao) refers to the natural course; One refers to the entire universe; Two refers to Yin and Yang; Three refers to heaven, earth and humans (Fang, 2011).

Yin/yang is often represented in the following symbol with the black part for yin and the white part for yang. The white in the black and the black in the white means the whole is formed by coexistence and unity of opposites. The curvy line represents the lack of absolute separation between the opposites (Fang, 2011):

![Yin Yang Symbol](Image)

**Figure 6.3 Symbol of yin/yang (Fang, 2011, p. 32)**

Further,

Yang stands for “the creative, developing, dominating, and manifest force and has the male and heaven as its main images; Yin, on the other hand, stands for the receptive, recessive, dominated, hidden, and background force and has the female and earth as its main images” (Cheng, 1987, p. 34)

The yin/yang structure seems to suggest the following:

1. Yin and Yang coexist in everything, and everything embraces Yin and Yang
2. Yin and Yang give rise to, complement, and reinforce each other.
3. Yin and Yang exist within each other and interplay with each other to form a dynamic and paradoxical unity

(Fang, 2011, p. 34)

There are some important differences between the philosophy of yin/yang and the other traditions of binary thinking. Firstly, the opposites are viewed as
interdependent instead of exclusive. The interdependence between yin and yang is explained as:

When yin reaches its extreme, it becomes yang; when yang reaches its extreme, it becomes yin. The pure yin is hidden in yang, and the pure yang is hidden in yin. (Ji. et al. 2001, p. 450)

When the cold goes, the warmth comes, and when the warmth comes, the cold goes…when the sun has reached its meridian, it declines, and when the moon has become full, it wanes (Fung, 1966, p. 19)

Secondly, yin/yang denies true contradiction, but accepts the unity and coexistence of opposites. In contrast to Aristotelian either/or thinking, yin/yang embodies both/and thinking as everything is thought of as “a synthetic unity of yin and yang in various stages of their functioning” (Cheng, 1987, p. 34). For example, in terms of every person, “we are both yin and yang, feminine and masculine, long-term and short-term, individualistic and collectivistic… depending on situations, context and time” (Fang, 2003, p. 363). The Yin Yang perspective does not consider contradiction as a problem that must be solved, but as “a world view, a methodology and a natural way of life” (Fang, 2011, p. 36). An example of the yin/yang approach in my research was to develop the teacher’s intercultural communicative competence in order to deal with the tension target culture VS. native culture. In Action Research Cycle One, it was discovered that I, as a foreign language teacher, came from the target culture, and encountered difficulty in understanding and communicating effectively with my students who grew up in cultural backgrounds different from mine. In Action Research Cycle Two, under the influence of an intercultural perspective, I realised that the key to dealing with this tension was to develop my own intercultural communicative competence to notice cultural similarities and differences between students and then to communicate with students more effectively by moving between the two cultures. By recognising that there are similarities and differences between the two cultures to be explored, this strategy to some extent viewed the target culture
and native culture as relatively contradictory but compatible. While developing intercultural communicative competence through intercultural exploration, my understanding about my own culture enhanced, and was enhanced by, my understanding the students’ culture. In this sense, this strategy acknowledges that the target culture and the native culture reinforce each other. By emphasizing the teacher’s competence to move between the two cultures rather than assimilate into the native culture, this strategy promotes unity and coexistence of the target culture and the native culture in foreign language teaching. Finally, it is important to point out that since a particular strategy may be used to deal with different tensions, the same strategy may be classified into different approaches, depending on which tension it targeted. As explained above, with respect to the tension, target culture VS. native culture, the item, developing teacher’s intercultural communicative competence to promote understanding about students, was a strategy following Taoist yin/yang. However, it might be regarded as a solution that follows Aristotelian either/or thinking regarding the tensions connectedness VS. my insufficient understanding about students, inclusivity VS. my insufficient understanding about students and ILT for problematic knowledge VS. my insufficient understanding about students. The reason is that by promoting understanding about students, connectedness, inclusivity, problematic knowledge are accepted as more important and thus aimed at assisting my insufficient understanding about students via the development of intercultural communicative competence. Another example was the solution, develop students’ intercultural communicative competence to realise self-directed intercultural exploration, mentioned above as another strategy of Taoist yin/yang for dealing with target culture VS native culture. This strategy may be categorised as a dialectical synthesis for the tensions connectedness VS. my
insufficient understanding about students, inclusivity VS. my insufficient understanding about students and ILT for problematic knowledge VS. my insufficient understanding about students. This is because this strategy to some extent went beyond the reliance on the teacher’s understanding about students for realising connectedness, inclusivity and problematic knowledge.

Identification of extra elements of high-quality teaching

Thirdly, improved teaching practice may also be attributed to the identification of extra elements of high-quality teaching, including flexibility, sustainability and fluency. As previously explained in Chapter 5, these extra elements were derived from tension-focused reflective teaching. When I analysed tensions that emerged in my teaching, it was found that some tensions were concerned with issues that have not been sufficiently addressed in the original QT model. By dealing with these tensions, teaching practice was likely to be improved with extension of the focus of my reflection beyond elements of the original QT model. The first additional concern was flexibility of teaching, which means immediate classroom problems are dealt with promptly and sensibly. Flexibility was deemed to improve teaching practice by drawing my attention to the development of my ability to respond to unexpected incidents in real classroom situations and to adapt teaching strategies according to the immediate observation of students’ performance. This in particular improved the incidental provision of grammatical instruction in CLT to promote deep understanding about communicative use of the target language. The second additional concern was sustainability (learning and application of learning content are sustained beyond a single lesson). By addressing sustainability, I endeavoured to improve the efficiency of teaching practice for promoting more sustainable development of communicative competence. This involved designing language
practice as interesting leisure activities, teaching sustainably applicable content, applying learning content sustainably as well as training students’ skills in independent intercultural exploration. The third extra concern was fluency of teaching defined as purposefully sequencing and transitioning between concepts and/or activities in a manner that promotes deep knowledge of each concept introduced, as well as logical links between these concepts. This extra element enhanced the quality of teaching by encouraging me to plan each lesson unit as a whole and pay more attention to the overall effect of each lesson unit, not just focusing on the realisation of individual QT elements separately in every bit of the lesson. It was the extra element of fluency that inspired me to alter the two-phase structure of QCA to be a cyclical structure in the revised model, QICA.

**Quality Communicative Activities (QCA) and Quality Intercultural Communicative Activities (QICA)**

The fourth contributory factor was the establishment of QCA and QICA. At the initial stage of implementing QT in my teaching, QT as a generic pedagogical model described in the literature provided me with general guidance on how to improve the quality of my teaching practice. While implementing QT and resolving the tensions that emerged, QT elements were modelled and reinterpreted more specifically in my context of teaching Chinese through a communicative approach. This process of contextualization of QT gave rise to QCA, in which QT elements were addressed in classroom activities for the purpose of communicative competence development. Teaching practice may be improved with QCA for two reasons. Firstly, it offered principles of high-quality teaching more relevant to my teaching contexts and teaching objectives. Secondly, it not only specified individual principles of effective teaching practice, but also suggested an organised way for implementing these
principles. In Action Research Cycle Two, QT elements were remodelled and reinterpreted in my communicative teaching of Chinese with the inclusion of an intercultural perspective and further tension-focused reflective teaching. Based on updated reinterpretations as well as extra elements of high-quality teaching, QCA was revised to QICA. Compared with QCA, deep knowledge, deep understanding, problematic knowledge, higher-order thinking, explicit quality criteria, high expectation, social support, student direction, background knowledge, cultural knowledge, knowledge integration, inclusivity, connectedness, narrative, flexibility, sustainability and fluency were enhanced by following QICA.

To some extent, the establishment of QICA may be regarded as a restructuring of the original QT elements and new elements of high-quality teaching tailored to my situation. However, what was involved in this restructuring may be much more than a contextualised implementation of the QT model, if we think about it in the light of Thomas Kuhn’s theory of scientific progress. Prior to Kuhn, scholars maintained that science is basically developed by constant or linear or logically smooth accumulation. This means growth of knowledge is basically contributed by continuously adding new findings to the pool of previous results. Even though discontinuities between ways of thinking lead to significant changes in science, the outcome is that previous scientific findings are logically extended further in the same general direction. Kuhn criticized this view of development-by-accumulation by arguing that the advance of science occurred not only through addition of new empirical results, but also via paradigm shift—“a change in the basic assumptions within the ruling theory of science” (Paradigm Shift, n.d.). Paradigm is defined as:
Some accepted examples of actual scientific practice—examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together—provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research. (Kuhn, 1962, p. 11)

Or, simply as “a common theoretical and methodological framework within which meaningful scientific problems can be posed and solved” (Fuller, 2006, p. 222).

Kuhn (1962, pp. 10-11) further clarifies that there are two essential characteristics of a paradigm, namely:

1. It is sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity
2. It is sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve.

A Paradigm is set up by assuming agreement on fundamentals which allow participants in the field to talk about the discipline as unified. A Paradigm provides “a (relatively) standard sense of what an achievement in the field looks like, and a (relatively) coherent body of knowledge articulated, to which the results of appropriately conducted studies count as additions”. These lay down the foundation of development-by-accumulation (Sharrock & Read, 2002, p. 20). The validity of an existing paradigm can be challenged by new results discovered to be incongruent with it. These new results, inconsistent with the existing paradigm, may trigger debate about fundamentals of the discipline. The debating may lead to a new paradigm being created and all previous findings under the old paradigm being rethought and reorganised under the new paradigm (Sharrock & Read, 2002). Kuhn defined the concept of paradigm originally in the context of the natural sciences. He denied the existence of paradigms in social science, considering there is usually a lack of agreement on theories or concepts among social scientists (Paradigm Shift, n.d.). Nevertheless, the notion of paradigm has been applied in the context of social science. The cognitive revolution of the 1950s, which was a change from “behaviourist approaches to the acceptance of cognition as central to studying human
behaviour”, is considered as a paradigm shift in social science (Paradigm Shift, n.d.). To me, the idea of a paradigm itself, if not of paradigm shift, at least provides me with a way of thinking about social science. It encouraged me to review the significance of QICA—whether it is an addition to previous findings about effective pedagogy or constituted a new paradigm in Languages pedagogy. To answer this question, it is necessary to go back to the paradigm followed by the original QT model. As a theoretical framework which defines effective pedagogy by outlining a series of dimensions and elements, the paradigm underlying the QT model seems to be that effective teaching practice can be described through individual elements in a segregated manner. QICA is an addition to the old paradigm underlying QT because it extends the description of effective teaching through extra elements of high-quality teaching, namely, flexibility, sustainability and fluency. It also adds to the empirical results of the QT model in real classrooms, in particular Languages classrooms and more particularly, in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. To some extent, QICA may also be regarded as an effort towards a new paradigm in pedagogy, since effective teaching is no longer merely described through segregated elements, but in the following ways. Firstly, effective teaching is described through activities. As activities are recognised as the medium for realising effective teaching, the elements of high quality pedagogy are to some extent the elements of high quality activities. Secondly, effective teaching is described by elements, as well as relationships between elements in activities. The relationship between elements is mostly managed through time order—different groups of elements come into play at different stages of classroom activities. For example, deep knowledge basically comes at the pre-communicative phase, prior to deep understanding arriving at the communicative phase. Furthermore, even though fluency is specified as a new element, what it
actually emphasises is the appropriate organisation of elements and the overall effect of presentation of element for effective teaching, not just segregated elements.

6.2 Implications of this study

6.2.1 Implications for practitioners

This project, I believe, showed the value of action research as an approach for beginning teachers to improve their teaching practice. It encouraged beginning teachers to identify problems and to learn to deal with problems from literature and from others’ practice as well as from their own teaching experience. Action research, by combining action and research, encourages beginning teachers to contextualise theoretical knowledge to their own teaching contexts, thus, resulting in more localised and creative use of theoretical knowledge. Furthermore, it enables beginning teachers to enrich existing theoretical knowledge about teaching with their own practical experience. My case also provided evidence that a graduate from a non-linguistic and non-education background may develop himself/herself into a Languages teacher through reflective teaching and action research. This to some extent indicates that apart from vocational training for teaching degrees, working in the field with a strong research orientation may provide another opportunity for professional learning.

Secondly, this research revealed that for teachers to benefit from pedagogical models, a process of contextualisation may, in fact, be necessary. It seemed to be more significant to establish the creative implementation of pedagogical models than to merely criticise the infeasibility of theoretical knowledge from a particular context. QICA can be considered as a contextualisation of QT in the context of teaching
Chinese as a foreign language, as well as a contextualisation of CLT according to Australian norms in education, represented by the QT model. QICA was probably the best way to implement QT and CLT in my situation. However, it is by no means the only alternative for all other Languages teachers. Contextualisation of pedagogical models requires deep analysis of the causes of infeasibility and suitable solutions to these in particular contexts. Tension-focused reflective teaching may provide ideas for other teachers in terms of how contextualisation of models of pedagogy can be carried out. It implies that contextualisation may be realised by revealing conflicts between generalised models and local situations and then resolving these conflicts following the five approaches outlined earlier in this chapter.

6.2.2 Implications for researchers

Firstly, the integration of reflective teaching cycles into action research cycle may be used by other researchers to enhance the reflexivity of their teaching. Secondly, this integration also implies that the application of a particular research methodology does not have to be uniform or blindly followed. Sometimes a particular methodology can be adapted to better serve the purpose of research. Thirdly, future researchers in the field of Languages teaching may contribute to the development of this field by establishing their own creative mode of implementation of QT, CLT and ILT, or further testing and developing QICA in their own context. As every language has its own distinctive features, it is necessary for researchers to further enrich understanding about the implementation of language pedagogies such as CLT and ILT in teaching different languages. Moreover, it is valuable to examine the different reinterpretations of QT elements in different language classrooms. This research also demonstrated that there are many extra elements of high-quality teaching that remain to be revealed. Future researchers may continue to evaluate and develop tension-
focused reflective teaching. Another possible direction for future researchers is to address relationships between elements of high-quality teaching to produce more effective pedagogical models. In addition, future researchers will also offer other new perspectives on pedagogy, as well as on how pedagogy is described. New thinking about reflective teaching as well as the relationship between culture and the quality of Languages teaching may also be generated in future research.

6.2.3 Implications for the national curriculum in Australia

In December 2008, all Australian Education Ministers signed off on the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* which committed to “promote equity and excellence, and to support all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens” (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 8). It set out by promoting world-class curriculum and assessment as one of the actions to achieve the goals (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). In response to these, the development of a national curriculum (The Australian Curriculum) which covers all the Learning Areas outlined in the *Melbourne Declaration* has been initiated. Languages have been defined as one of the key learning areas in the Australian Curriculum for all students, based on the belief that learning a language in addition to English engages students with the linguistic and cultural diversity of an increasingly interconnected world (ACARA, 2012). Moreover, particular emphasis has been put on learning Asian languages to become ‘Asia literate’, considering the engagement and strong relationship of Australia with Asia (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008).
The development of the Australian Curriculum undertaken by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) follows four phases, including; a curriculum shaping phase, a curriculum writing phase, preparation of an implementation phase and a monitoring and evaluation phase. At the time of writing, The Australian Curriculum for Chinese has passed the shaping phase and entered the curriculum writing phase. *The draft F-10 Australian Curriculum: Languages* for Chinese was published in December 2012 for consultation (ACARA Curriculum, 2012).

*The draft F-10 Australian Curriculum: Languages* outlined three interrelated aims of learning languages, including:

- To communicate in the target language
- To understand language, culture and learning and their relationship, and thereby develop an intercultural capability in communication
- To understand oneself as a communicator

(ACARA, 2012, p. 6)

It is further stated that language learning is organised through two strands:

- *Communicating*: using language for communicative purposes in interpreting, creating and exchanging meaning
- *Understanding*: analysing language and culture as a resource for interpreting and creating meaning

(ACARA, 2012, p. 7)

These two indicate the following aspects of language learning:

- Performance of communication
- Analysing various aspects of language and culture involved in communication
- Reflection that involves comparative and relational dimensions (for example, the first language in relation to second language, and self in relation to other)

(ACARA, 2012, p. 7)

It can be seen from these, as well as other descriptions in the draft curriculum that learning language to communicate seems to be the major theme in the Australian Curriculum for Languages. Furthermore, as it is written in the draft curriculum, “the
development of intercultural understanding is a central aim of learning languages that emerges from and improves communication in the target language” (ACARA, 2012, p. 14). In this sense, the learning outcome is concerned with two aspects, namely, communicative competence and intercultural capability. Considering this, this research which developed insight into the use of CLT and ILT in a Western Sydney region school may provide significant implications for the actual implementation of the national curriculum.

Firstly, students’ engagement in communicative language learning is essential for the development of intercultural communicative competence. Even though in the draft national curriculum, time for language learning at primary school has been increased to 175 hours for Foundation—Year 4 and a further 175 hours for Years 5-6, engaging in Languages lessons does not necessarily mean engaging in learning which significantly benefits intercultural communicative competence (ACARA, 2012). Therefore, it is important for language teachers to maximise students’ engagement in communicative language learning through lesson design. This research provided rich examples on this.

Secondly, the draft curriculum recognises learning Pinyin and Chinese characters as the nature of Chinese language learning is very different from the experience of learning English (ACARA F-10 Chinese: Context statement, 2012). This research agreed that Pinyin is helpful in developing communicative skills by facilitating recording and distinguishing the sounds of Chinese, as well as speaking tonally. However, it was also highlighted in this research that Pinyin, which represents the
sounds of Chinese in alphabetic form, is likely to be misread by English speakers following orthographic conventions in their first language. In this sense, Pinyin may actually mislead, instead of accurately instructing, learners’ pronunciation of Chinese. Concerning this, this research has provided ideas in terms of how to ensure learners’ accurate mastery of Pinyin. In addition, this research also included suggestions on how to teach Chinese characters effectively to primary school students.

Thirdly, the development of intercultural communicative competence poses significant challenges to Languages teachers. In order to implement ILT, they may need to develop their own intercultural communicative competence. They are teachers but also learners who are learning the target culture (and the students’ culture) together with students. For those teachers coming from a Chinese culture, they not only need to develop sufficient understanding about students and students’ cultures, but also need to reflect on the relationship between Chinese culture and students’ cultures as well as reflect on themselves as ‘authentic’ examples of Chinese culture. It is also important for Languages teachers to move between the target languages/cultures and students’ language/culture to communicate effectively with students. There is also a challenge for them to make cultural concepts as well as the relationship between culture and language understandable to young learners. Compared with the teachers’ own understanding about the two cultures and languages, what seems to be more important for ILT is their ability to train students’ skills in self-directed intercultural exploration.
Fourthly, an important issue related to teaching Chinese in Australia has been raised in this research, that is, the significance of Chinese language learning. This research suggests strategies to improve the significance of Chinese learning in a situation where there is no target language environment. Nevertheless, without a Chinese language environment, the communicative function of Chinese cannot be completely activated. Including Chinese in a national curriculum may to some extent improve students’ instrumental motivation to learn Chinese, but the sustainable development of communicative competence still relies to a large extent on parents and classroom teachers supporting the selection of Chinese as a valuable language and reinforcing Chinese learning outside Chinese lessons. Moreover, if intercultural communicative competence is specified as the ultimate goal of Languages learning, then opportunities for students to interact with a Chinese community are important, to expose them to current Chinese culture and language in real communication. Otherwise, there may be a gap between language learning and language use in reality, which leads to failure in authentic communication.

6.3 Limitations of this study

As this research was intentionally designed to fit with a particular voluntary Chinese teaching program, it has several limitations. There was no random sampling, since participants were predetermined as students and classroom teachers from the school in which I was assigned to teach. This was also a small-scale study with the participation of only twenty students and nine classroom teachers from one school. Moreover, by teaching Chinese once a week in the school, I had limited time to engage at the site and to gain an insight into the situation compared with normal classroom teachers. These limitations result in the findings of this study not being able to be generalised to other settings. The findings were particular to my own
context in which I, as a beginning language teacher, was teaching Chinese as a foreign language through a communicative approach to young English speakers once a week in the Western Sydney Region. It is highly likely that other teachers in different contexts may improve their teaching practice following different approaches and generating different findings. However, being limited by contextual factors seems to be a key feature for all action research since the purpose of action research is to improve the local situation. It is, in fact, precisely the focus on particular cases instead of generalisability that makes action research valuable and distinguishes it from other research methodologies. Essentially, as mentioned in Chapter 3, producing universally applicable results involves an abstraction of reality and a simplification of social behaviour. However, since this research investigated the contextualised use of the generic pedagogies CLT, ILT and QT, tailored to my specific situation, it to some extent advocated exploring the complexity of reality which was in contrast to abstraction and simplification. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the findings of this research are completely invalid for other cases. Basically, the relevance needs to be judged by the readers themselves based on their judgement of the similarity between my context and their own contexts. I have tried my best to provide sufficient information to facilitate comparison between my context and readers’ own contexts through rich and thick elaboration of data. I have also triangulated data from three different perspectives to alleviate the biases due to a small sample size.
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张彦远. 历代名画记. 张僧繇.
Appendix 1 Approval letter from the UWS Human Research Ethics Committee

11 March 2011

Associate Professor Wayne Sawyer,
Centre for Educational Research

Dear Wayne and Zhu,

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal **H8918** “How can the NSW Quality Teaching model be used as a tool to reflect on teaching Chinese through a Communicative approach: An action research project”, until 11 March 2014 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 SERAP approval letter from the NSW DEC

Ms Zhu CHEN
Room K.2. 28
Kingswood Campus
School of Education,
Locked Bag 1797
University Western Sydney
PENRITH NSW 2751

SERAP No: 2011040

Dear Ms CHEN,

I refer to your application to conduct in NSW government schools (Western Sydney Region) a research project entitled How can the NSW Quality Teaching model be used as a tool to reflect on teaching Chinese through a Communicative approach: An action research project.

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

Your approval will remain valid until 31 December 2011.

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,

Janet Chan
R/School Education Director, The Hills
Western Sydney Region Education Research Manager
24 May 2011

NSW Department of Education & Communities – Western Sydney Region
Nirimba Education Precinct, Building 100, Eastern Field, QUAKERS HILL NSW 2763 T: 0208 7811 F: 0208 7835
www.det.nsw.edu.au
Miss Zhu CHEN
Room 2.26, Building K,
School of Education, Kingswood campus,
University of Western Sydney
KINGSWOOD NSW 2751
AUSTRALIA

Dear Miss CHEN
SERAP Number 2011040

I refer to your application for extension of your research project in NSW government schools entitled *How can the NSW Quality Teaching model be used as a tool to reflect on teaching Chinese through a Communicative approach: An action research project*. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved.

This approval will remain valid until 11/03/2014.

The following researchers or research assistants have fulfilled the Working with Children screening requirements to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research for the period indicated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Approval expires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhu CHEN</td>
<td>11-03-2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When your study is completed please forward your report marked to Manager, Schooling Research, Department of Education and Training, Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Dr Robert Stevens
Manager, Schooling Research

February 13

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Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau
NSW Department of Education and Communities
Level 3, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst NSW 2010 — Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst NSW 1300
Telephone: 02 9244 8010 — Fax: 02 9240 8230 — Email: serev@det.nsw.gov.au
Appendix 3 Participant information sheet for teachers

GENERAL INFORMATION SHEET

Research Project: How can the NSW Quality Teaching model be used as a tool to reflect on teaching Chinese through a Communicative approach? An action research project

You are invited to take part in a study that is being conducted by Zhu CHEN. It is part of the degree of Master of Education (Hons), being supervised by Professor Wayne SAWYER and Dr Dacheng ZHAO.

In this project, I am investigating how the NSW Quality Teaching (QT) model can be used by language teachers, especially Mandarin teachers, to reflect on their own teaching practice and thus improve students’ language learning outcomes.

The information from the study will be used to complete a thesis for the Master of Education (Hons) and I will report the results to NSW Department of Education and Training and participating schools as requested.

During the course of normal Chinese lessons, you will be asked to observe my teaching practice once every three weeks based on the NSW Quality Teaching model, as well as provide written feedback by completing a QT evaluation form while you are observing. You will be interviewed to give your opinion about my teaching practice. Interview transcripts and written feedback will be used as data in the study with your permission.

Participation is voluntary. If you do decide not to take part, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher. If you change your mind about taking part, even after the study has started, just let me know and any information already collected from you will be destroyed.

No-one will be able to identify you from the results of the study. Only I and my supervisors will have access to the original data provided by you.

Your written feedback will be on paper and interviews will be on audio-tape. Paper information will be stored in a locked cabinet; computer file containing audio-taped interviews will require a password for access. These raw data will be stored for 5 years, after which they will be shredded. Only my supervisors and I will have the right to access this information in accordance with ethical guidelines. If you would like to check your information from you that will be used in the study, you may contact me or my supervisor as below.

When you have read this information I 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:
Zhu CHEN by calling 0404234275 or via e-mail 16937026@student.uws.edu.au;
Professor Wayne Sawyer by calling 02 47360795 or via e-mail w.sawyer@uws.edu.au;
The UWS Ethics committee by calling 0247360883, fax 0247360013 or via e-mail humanethics@uws.edu.au. The ethics approval number for this project is H8919.
You may retain this information sheet.
Appendix 4 Participant information sheet for parents

PARENT/CAREGIVER INFORMATION SHEET

Research Project: How can the NSW Quality Teaching model be used as a tool to reflect on teaching Chinese through a Communicative approach? An action research project

Your child is invited to take part in a study that is being conducted by Zhu CHEN. It is part of the degree of Master of Education (Hons), being supervised by Professor Wayne SAWYER and Dr. Daicheng ZHAO. I am asking for your permission for your child to take part in this project. In this project, I am investigating how the NSW Quality Teaching (QT) model can be used by language teachers, especially Mandarin teachers, to reflect on their own teaching practice and thus improve students’ language learning outcomes.

The information from the study will be used to complete a thesis for the Master of Education (Hons) and I will report the results to NSW Department of Education and Training and participating schools as requested.

During the course of their normal lessons, students will be required to complete the usual classroom worksheets. Only the worksheets from those students whose parents give permission will be used as data in the study. No worksheets or students will be identified.

Participation is voluntary and your child will only take part if both you and your child agree. If you decide not to take part in it, 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.

No-one will be able to identify you or your child from the results of the study. Only the researchers will have access to this 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.

All information collected will be stored in files in a locked cabinet for 5 years, after which they will be shredded. Only my supervisors and I will have the right to access this information in accordance with ethical guidelines. If you would like to check your child’s worksheets that will be used in the study, you may contact me or my supervisors as below.

When you have read this information I 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: Zhu CHEN by calling 0404234275 or via e-mail 16937026@student.uws.edu.au; Professor Wayne Sawyer by calling 02 47360795 or via e-mail w.sawyer@uws.edu.au; The UWS Ethics Committee by calling 0247360883, fax 0247360013 or via e-mail humanethics@uws.edu.au. The ethics approval number for this project is HS919.

You may retain this information sheet. Your child has also been given information about this project.
Appendix 5 Consent form for teachers

GENERAL CONSENT FORM

Research Project: How can the NSW Quality Teaching model be used as a tool to reflect on teaching Chinese through a Communicative approach: An action research project

I (print name) ………………………………………………………………………… give consent to my participation in the research project described below.

TITLE OF THE PROJECT: How can the NSW Quality Teaching model be used as a tool to reflect on teaching Chinese through a Communicative approach? An action research project

CHIEF RESEARCHER: Zhu CHEN
Phone: 0404234275 E-mail: 16937026@student.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 General Information Sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information with the researchers
3. I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary; a decision not to participate will in no way affect my relationship with the researcher and I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.
4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and that no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity

Signed: …………………………………………………………………………………
Name: …………………………………………………………………………………
Date: …………………………………………………………………………………

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel 02-4736 0883 Fax 02-4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 6 Consent form for parents

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Research Project: How can the NSW Quality Teaching model be used as a tool to reflect on teaching Chinese through a Communicative approach? An action research project

I (print name) ................................................................. give consent to the participation of my child (print name) ....................................................... in the research project described below.

TITLE OF THE PROJECT: How can the NSW Quality Teaching model be used as a tool to reflect on teaching Chinese through a Communicative approach? An action research project

CHIEF RESEARCHER: Zhu CHEN
Phone: 0404234275 E-mail: 16937026@student.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 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 no information about my child will be used in any way that reveals my child’s identity

Signed .................................................................
Name ........................................................................
Date ........................................................................

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the UWS Human Research Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel 02-4736 0883 Fax 02-4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 7 Letter to principal

Dear Principal,

As part of a research project for the degree of Master of Education (Hons), researcher Zhu CHEN – a volunteer-teacher-researcher- would like to conduct interviews with three classroom teachers, as well as invite them to observe and evaluate her teaching practice based on the Quality Teaching model. Students’ worksheet samples from Chinese lessons will also be used in this research.

This project is designed to investigate how the NSW Quality Teaching model can be used by language teachers to reflect on communicative language teaching and thus enhance students’ language learning outcomes. Should you agree, the researcher will schedule interviews and invite classroom teachers to undertake teaching observation. Participation in this research will be totally voluntary. Participants may withdraw from this project at any stage. Should any do so, unprocessed data can also be withdrawn at that stage. If you wish to know more about the research, please contact Zhu CHEN by email: 16937026@student.uws.edu.au

Thank you in anticipation of your valuable contribution to this research project.

Yours sincerely,

Zhu CHEN

Centre for Educational Research, UWS

This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H8918. If you have any complaints or reservation about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel 02-4736 0083 Fax 02-4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 8 Quality Teaching Coding Scale

Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual quality</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deep knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost all of the content knowledge of the lesson is shallow because it does not deal with significant concepts or ideas.</td>
<td>Some key concepts and ideas are mentioned or covered by the teacher or students, but only at a superficial level.</td>
<td>Knowledge is treated unevenly during instruction. A significant idea may be addressed as part of the lesson, but in general the focus on key concepts and ideas is not sustained throughout the lesson.</td>
<td>Most of the content knowledge of the lesson is deep. Sustained focus on central concepts or ideas is occasionally interrupted by superficial or unrelated ideas or concepts.</td>
<td>Knowledge is deep because focus is sustained on key ideas or concepts throughout the lesson.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deep understanding</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students demonstrate only shallow understanding.</td>
<td>For most students, understanding is shallow during most of the lesson, with one or two minor exceptions.</td>
<td>Deep understanding is uneven. Students demonstrate both shallow and deeper understanding at different points in the lesson. A central concept understood by some students may not be understood by other students.</td>
<td>Most students provide information, arguments or reasoning that demonstrates deep understanding for a substantial portion of the lesson.</td>
<td>Almost all students demonstrate deep understanding throughout the lesson.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problematic knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All knowledge is presented only as fact and not open to question.</td>
<td>Some knowledge is treated as open to multiple perspectives.</td>
<td>Knowledge is treated as open to multiple perspectives, seen as socially constructed and therefore open to question.</td>
<td>Knowledge is seen as socially constructed and multiple perspectives are not only presented, but are explored through questioning of their basic assumptions.</td>
<td>Knowledge is seen as socially constructed, with multiple and/or conflicting interpretations presented and explored to an extent that a judgement is made about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher-order thinking</td>
<td>Students demonstrate only lower-order thinking. They either receive or recite pre-specified knowledge or participate in routine practice, and in no activities during the lesson do students go beyond simple reproduction of knowledge.</td>
<td>Students primarily demonstrate lower-order thinking, but at some point, at least some students perform higher-order thinking as a minor diversion within the lesson.</td>
<td>Most students demonstrate higher-order thinking in at least one major activity that occupies a substantial portion of the lesson.</td>
<td>All students, almost all of the time, demonstrate higher-order thinking.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalanguage</td>
<td>No metalanguage. The lesson proceeds without the teacher or students stopping to comment on the language being used.</td>
<td>Low metalanguage. During the lesson terminology is explained or either the teacher or students stop to make value judgements or comment on language. There is, however, no clarification or assistance provided regarding the language.</td>
<td>Some use of metalanguage. At the beginning of the lesson, or at some key juncture, the teacher or students stop and explain or conduct a “mini-lesson” on some aspect of language, e.g. genre, vocabulary, signs or symbols.</td>
<td>Periodic use of metalanguage. The teacher or students provide commentary on aspects of language at several points during the lesson.</td>
<td>High use of metalanguage. The lesson proceeds with frequent commentary on language use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive communication</td>
<td>Almost no substantive communicatio occurs during the lesson.</td>
<td>Substantive communicati on among students and/or between teacher and students</td>
<td>Substantive communicatio n among students and/or between teacher and students</td>
<td>Substantive communicatio n, with sustained interactions, occurs over approximately</td>
<td>Substantive communicati on, with sustained interactions, occurs throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality learning environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explicit quality criteria</strong></td>
<td>No explicit statements regarding the quality of work are made. Only technical and procedural criteria are made explicit.</td>
<td>Only general statements are made regarding the desired quality of the work.</td>
<td>Detailed criteria regarding the quality of work are made explicit or reinforced during the lesson, but there is no evidence that students are using the criteria to examine the quality of their work.</td>
<td>Detailed criteria regarding the quality of work are made explicit or reinforced during the lesson and there is evidence of some students, some of the time, examining the quality of their work in relation to these criteria.</td>
<td>Detailed criteria regarding the quality of work are made explicit or reinforced throughout the lesson and there is consistent evidence of students examining the quality of their work in relation to these criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Low engagement or disengagement. Students are frequently off-task, perhaps disruptive, as evidenced by inattentiveness or serious disruptions by many. This is the central characteristic during much of the lesson.</td>
<td>Sporadic engagement. Most students, most of the time, either appear apathetic and indifferent or are only occasionally active in carrying out assigned activities. Some students might be clearly off-task.</td>
<td>Variable engagement. Most students are seriously engaged in parts of the lesson, but may appear indifferent during other parts and very few students are clearly off-task.</td>
<td>Widespread engagement. Most students, most of the time, are on-task pursuing the substance of the lesson. Most students seem to be taking the work seriously and trying hard.</td>
<td>Serious engagement. All students are deeply involved, almost all of the time, in pursuing the substance of the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High expectations</strong></td>
<td>No students, or only a few, participate in any challenging work.</td>
<td>Some students participate in challenging work during at least some</td>
<td>Many students participate in challenging work during at least half</td>
<td>Most students participate in challenging work during most of the lesson. They are</td>
<td>All students participate in challenging work throughout the lesson.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social support

| Social support is low. Actions or comments by the teacher or students result in “put-downs”, and the classroom atmosphere is negative. | They are encouraged (explicitly or through lesson processes) to try hard and to take risks and are recognised for doing so. | Social support is neutral or mildly positive. While no undermining behaviours are observed, supportive behaviours or comments are directed at those students most engaged in the lesson, rather than those students who are more reluctant. | Social support is clearly positive. Supportive behaviours and comments are directed at most students, including clear attempts at supporting reluctant students. | Social support is strong. Supportive behaviours or comments from students and the teacher are directed at all students, including soliciting and valuing the contributions of all. |

Students' self-regulation

| Few students demonstrate autonomy and initiative in regulating their own behaviour. The teacher devotes more time to disciplining and regulating student behaviour than to teaching and learning. | Some students demonstrate autonomy and initiative in regulating their own behaviour, but there is still substantial interruption to the lesson for disciplinary and/or regulatory matters, as an attempt to avert poor | Many students demonstrate autonomy and initiative in regulating their own behaviour and the lesson proceeds coherently. However the teacher regulates behaviour several times, making statements | Most students, most of the time, demonstrate autonomy and initiative in regulating their own behaviour and there is very little interruption to the lesson. Once or twice during the lesson, the teacher comments on or corrects student behaviour or movement. | All students, almost all of the time, demonstrate autonomy and initiative in regulating their own behaviour and the lesson proceeds without interruption. |
behaviour, correct past behaviour or as an immediate reaction to poor student behaviour.

about behaviour to the whole class, or perhaps focusing on students who are acting inappropriately.

**Student direction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background knowledge</strong></td>
<td>No evidence of student direction. All aspects of the lesson are explicitly designated by the teacher for students.</td>
<td>Low student direction. Although students exercise some control over some aspect of the lesson (choice, time, pace, assessment), their control is minimal or trivial.</td>
<td>Some student direction. Students exercise some control in relation to some significant aspects of the lesson.</td>
<td>Substantial student direction. Some deliberation or negotiation occurs between teacher and students over at least some significant aspects of the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Students’ background knowledge is not mentioned or elicited.</td>
<td>Students’ background knowledge is mentioned or elicited, but is trivial and not connected to the substance of the lesson.</td>
<td>Students’ background knowledge is mentioned or elicited briefly, is connected to the substance of the lesson, and there is at least some connection to out-of-school background knowledge.</td>
<td>Students’ background knowledge is mentioned or elicited several times, is connected to the substance of the lesson, and there is at least some connection to out-of-school background knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students’ background knowledge is not mentioned or elicited.</td>
<td>Students’ background knowledge is mentioned or elicited, but is trivial and not connected to the substance of the lesson.</td>
<td>Students’ background knowledge is mentioned or elicited briefly, is connected to the substance of the lesson, and there is at least some connection to out-of-school background knowledge.</td>
<td>Students’ background knowledge is mentioned or elicited several times, is connected to the substance of the lesson, and there is at least some connection to out-of-school background knowledge.</td>
<td>Students’ background knowledge is consistently incorporated into the lesson, and there is substantial connection to out-of-school background knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Cultural knowledge | No explicit recognition or valuing of other than the knowledge of the dominant culture is evident in the substance of the lesson. | Some cultural knowledge is evident in the lesson, but it is treated in a superficial manner. | Some cultural knowledge is recognised and valued in the lesson, but within the framework of the dominant culture. | Substantial cultural knowledge is recognised and valued in the lesson with some challenge to the framework of the dominant culture. | Substantial cultural knowledge is recognised and valued throughout the lesson and this knowledge is accepted as equal to the dominant knowledge. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Knowledge integration</strong></th>
<th>No meaningful connections. All knowledge is strictly restricted to that explicitly defined within a single topic or subject area.</th>
<th>Some minor or trivial connections are made. Knowledge is mostly restricted to that of a specific topic or subject area.</th>
<th>At least one meaningful connection is made between topics or subject areas by the teacher and/or the students during the lesson.</th>
<th>Several meaningful connections are regularly made between topics or subject areas by the teacher and/or the students during the lesson.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusivity</strong></td>
<td>Some students are excluded, or exclude themselves, from lesson activities throughout the lesson.</td>
<td>Some students are excluded, or exclude themselves, from the majority of lesson activities except for minor forms of inclusion in one or two instances during a lesson.</td>
<td>Students from all groups are included in most aspects of the lesson, but the inclusion of students from some groups may be minor or trivial relative to other groups.</td>
<td>Students from all groups are included in a significant way in most aspects of the lesson, but there still appears to be some unevenness in the inclusion of different social groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connectedness</strong></td>
<td>The lesson has no clear connection to anything beyond itself. Neither the teacher nor the students offer any justification for the lesson beyond the school.</td>
<td>The teacher or students try to connect what is being learned to the world beyond the classroom, but the connection is weak and superficial or trivial.</td>
<td>Students recognise some connection between classroom knowledge and situations outside the classroom, which might include sharing their work with an audience outside the classroom, but they do not explore implications of these connections.</td>
<td>Students recognise and explore connections between classroom knowledge and situations outside the classroom in ways that create personal meaning and highlight the significance of the knowledge. There might be an effort to influence an audience beyond the classroom.</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meaningful connections are regularly made between topics or subject areas by the teacher and/or the students during the lesson.
which remain largely abstract or hypothetical.

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**Narrative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Either narrative is used at no point in the lesson, or the narratives used are disconnected or detract from the substance of the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative is used on occasion as a minor part of the lesson and/or is loosely connected to the substance of the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative is used at several points in the lesson to enhance the significance of the substance of the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative is used for a substantial portion of the lesson to enhance the significance of the substance of the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative is used throughout the lesson to enhance the significance of the substance of the lesson.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>