PLANNING FOR TEACHING/LEARNING MANDARIN CHINESE: IMPROVEMENT THROUGH SELF-REFLECTION AND STUDENT FEEDBACK

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signature

沈杭燕
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Date 31/05/2016
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<tr>
<td>BICS</td>
<td>Basic interpersonal communicative skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First language</td>
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<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second language</td>
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<tr>
<td>NALSAS</td>
<td>National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEAF</td>
<td>National Ethics Application Form</td>
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<td>NSW DE</td>
<td>New South Wales Department of Education</td>
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<td>ROSETE</td>
<td>Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education</td>
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<td>SERAP</td>
<td>State Education Research Applications Process</td>
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<td>SLA</td>
<td>Second language acquisition</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEFL</td>
<td>Teaching English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>VTR</td>
<td>Volunteer teacher-researcher</td>
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<td>WSU</td>
<td>Western Sydney University</td>
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Abstract

This thesis has demonstrated an important capability required of teacher ‘xingzhi’ researchers, namely developing the potential required of researchers to identify, specifying and solve innumerable problems that arise during the research process.

From the standpoint of being a teacher ‘xingzhi’ researcher, the purpose of this research has been to study the development of teaching and learning units of work and lesson plans that have attempted to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for young students who are beginning learners in Australia.

The research data came from the teacher-researcher’s self-reflective journals, units of work and lesson plans and feedback from the students via the student Self-Assessment Sheets. The thesis has provided a detailed analysis of primary data and developed reasoned interpretations of the data accompanied by evidentiary excerpts along with tables and charts.

The findings have been discussed in terms of the research question and the three contributory questions and propose a series of ideas and suggestions to improve a beginning teacher-researcher’s: use of time in planning and teaching; use of students’ feedback to inform future lesson planning, and use of students’ feedback to identify barriers and obstacles to making Mandarin Chinese learnable for beginning learners. These have been summarised and presented in dot point format throughout the evidentiary chapters and in the final chapter.

This research has provided the evidence from one case and purports to make a contribution to the knowledge of Mandarin Chinese teaching in the Australian context.
Chapter One:  
An Introduction to the Problems of Chinese Learning/Teaching  

1.1 Introduction  

This thesis has demonstrated an important capability required of teacher ‘xingzhi’ researchers, namely developing the potential required of researchers to identify, specifying and solve innumerable problems that arise during the research process (Singh, 2013).

From this standpoint the purpose of this research has been to study the development of teaching and learning units of work and lesson plans that have attempted to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for young students who are beginning learners in Australia.

This study has focused on the exploration of thematic planning of units and lessons through an approach which progressed over three terms to incorporate student feedback (interests, confidence, comments on the teaching strategies, and identification of difficulties) into planning.

The teaching/learning reported in this thesis took place between the teacher-researcher and students in a Western Sydney Public School. Throughout the study period of eighteen months, the teacher-researcher developed and extended teaching pedagogies and students’ learning of Mandarin Chinese.
1.2 Research project aims

In this thesis, there are two research project aims developed by the teacher-researcher. This study has been based on exploring useful teaching strategies as possible background or points of debate by beginning teachers, particularly Mandarin Chinese teachers. In this study, it is the strategy of balancing and promoting unit and lesson plans that scaffolded the students’ and teacher-researcher’s learning and teaching that has provided the framework to research how to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for the beginning learners in the Australian context.

This thesis also aimed to provide some insights into educational improvement by its examination of Mandarin Chinese teaching in the primary school context. Mandarin Chinese is recognised as a language that is quite difficult to learn with the debates surrounding this, being cited in books, reports and articles (see Chen et al., 2010; Hu, 2010; Orton, 2008; Wang and Kirkpatrick, 2012). The findings from this thesis therefore purport to make a contribution to the knowledge of Mandarin Chinese teaching in the Australian context.

1.3 Research questions

The research questions were set after the teacher-researcher spent several weeks observing the teaching of Mandarin Chinese lessons in primary schools and high schools. A distinctive feature of the general teaching model observed was the separation of content between lessons. For example, the teacher presented a topic about ‘numbers’ in the first lesson, and ‘body parts’ in the next lesson. This content separation model of teaching gave every lesson a sense of novelty, but does not help students to acquire their basic knowledge in a consistent and systematic way, where new knowledge is based on previously taught topics in real situations.

With these observations in mind, the need for teaching content that matched the curriculum specifications but also took into account students’ interests and incorporated continuity and scaffolding, was of interest. In addition, relevant, recent (2000-2015) research literature on lesson planning, language learning strategies and teaching/learning relationships were reviewed and also contributed to the
formulation of the main and contributory research questions. Based on this, the research questions are as follows:

**How could a beginning teacher of Mandarin Chinese plan thematic units and lessons incorporating continuity and scaffolding of content and children’s interests to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for beginning Australian learners?**

The contributory research questions are as follows:

1. **What significant issue/s impact on the successful teaching of the planned lessons?**
2. **How can a beginning teacher-researcher use student feedback to plan more meaningful and appropriate lessons to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for beginning learners?**
3. **What barriers to learning Mandarin Chinese could impact beginning learners and how can the teacher-researcher use this knowledge to improve teaching practice?**

**1.4 Definition of key terms**

The thesis has provided a study of Mandarin Chinese teaching in the Australian context, including definitions of selected key terms related to Mandarin Chinese, which will be discussed in this section.

**1.4.1 Mandarin Chinese**

In China, multitudes of phrases have been adopted to express spoken and written Mandarin Chinese. These phrases can be clearly defined in Mandarin Chinese though some of them may overlap. Some examples are set out below:

- ‘中文’ (zhōngwén, Mandarin Chinese language), opposite in meaning to ‘外文’ (wàiwén, foreign language);
- ‘中文’ (zhōngwén) refers to both spoken and written Mandarin Chinese;
- the term ‘汉语’ (hànyǔ) is endowed with the emotion of nationalism, the language of the Han, the ethnic majority in China. Hanyu includes a large
number of dialects of southern and northern China, and also includes both spoken and written Mandarin Chinese language;

- the term ‘汉字’ (hànzi) is a derivative phrase of ‘汉语’ (hàn yǔ), and mainly refers solely to Chinese characters.

There are three adopted forms of the spoken language:

- the official language of China is ‘普通话’ (pǔtōnghuà). It establishes the Beijing (China’s capital) accent as standard pronunciation and the northern dialect as the basic dialect. The term ‘普通话’ (pǔtōnghuà) generally refers to the spoken language. It is widely used by the Mainland Chinese. In the Chinese of special administration regions (Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan);
- ‘国语’ (guóyǔ), which means the spoken language of a nation, is widely used.
- Finally, there is ‘华语’ (huáyǔ), the passed-down phrases from ancient China and widely adopted by overseas Chinese (or Singapore).

When making a specific study of a foreign language, and in particular its translation, vague phrases may result from the real meaning lost in the translation. Though Mandarin refers to the standardised version of spoken Chinese, there is too wide a range of implications, which may create misunderstanding. In this study, making both the spoken and written language learnable for Australian beginning learners is the essential aim, with emphasis on the spoken language (considering the students are beginning learners). Interesting aspects of culture will also be featured. In this study, the spoken and written language of China will hence be referred to as Mandarin Chinese.

1.4.2 Bilingual teacher-researcher

The identity of the teacher-researcher as ‘bilingual’ is beneficial for both the students and the teacher-researcher. The term ‘teacher-research’ in bilingual settings is beneficial and powerful because it can encourage teachers to think and act like “transformative intellectuals” (Giroux, 1988, p.451) in their politicised work environments. Through this research the teacher-researcher hopes to transform teaching practice to make Mandarin Chinese more learnable for beginning learners.
1.4.3 NSW Department of Education (NSW DE) - Chinese Language Education Volunteers

The author is a teacher-researcher in the ROSETE (Research Oriented School-Engaged Teacher Education) Program, created in cooperation with the New South Wales Department of Education (NSW DE), the Western Sydney University (WSU) and the People’s Republic of China, Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau. The ROSETE students are beginning teachers with good foundations in Chinese knowledge and native Mandarin Chinese speakers. They arrive in Sydney as NSW DE, Chinese Language Education Volunteers to provide lessons in Mandarin Chinese at local public schools in the Western Sydney Region. At the same time, the NSW DE, Chinese Language Education Volunteers will undertake a research degree (Master of Education, Honours) related to their eighteen months of in-school teaching of Mandarin Chinese.

1.5 Significance of this teacher-researcher project

Mandarin Chinese is a difficult language for native speaking Chinese, to teach to non-Chinese speaking school students. Here, a key reason has been proposed as the NSW DE, Chinese Language Education Volunteers have a very limited background in how to teach in ways to make Chinese learnable for school students whose everyday language of communication and instruction is English. It is a requirement that the NSW DE Volunteers develop a well-rounded professional capability for making Chinese learnable for school students through the university study program and the in-school teaching assignment. As the students are all beginning Mandarin Chinese learners, that is, second language learners (L2), it is important to develop appropriate teaching pedagogies and strategies, aimed at attracting their interest and making their learning easier.

Accordingly, this research focuses on an exploration of curriculum content that the Department’s Volunteers adopt in the beginning stages of their becoming professional teachers of Mandarin Chinese. This means they need to learn effective instructional design to structure, and scope and sequence the chosen content to ensure students’ efficient and effective learning of Chinese.
The significance of this study is in association with the Research Questions (section 1.3 above), by conducting an exploration into how:

1. to identify topics and activities in which beginning Mandarin Chinese students are most interested
2. to construct (by the teacher researcher) and co-construct (with the students) a set of unit and lesson plans using different permutations and combinations of these topics and activities;
3. to develop a series of teaching units and lesson plans based on specific themes taking account of scaffolding and continuity of content.

1.5.1 Chinese language education in Australian schools

In the fierce worldwide competition for talented people, a considerable competitive edge can be gained for people through education. This includes having a comprehensive ability in the fields of language learning. The benefits of speaking a second language position people favourably on the world job market. (Orton, 2008).

China is “the regional neighbour, largest trading partner, major source of immigrant workforce, international students, tourists to Australia and its immigrant settlers, a major destination for Australia tourists, a long and prestigious culture and a home to 1 in 5 human beings on the earth” (Orton, 2008, p. 8). China is also closely linked with Australia in terms of economic trade, workforce, students, and tourism. Each country affects the other’s culture and people. The possibilities for Australia to develop a positive relationship with China are important (Orton, 2008). This suggests that Australians should be proficient in understanding China’s culture and its language, the mastery of which transcends translation.

Australian scholars of Asia have asserted the significance of prioritising Asian languages and studies in the education system (Henderson, 2007). The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commenced a comprehensive Asian languages and cultures program in 1992 (Henderson, 2007). This was an innovative educational experience for Australia. Mandarin Chinese was selected as one of the four priority Asian languages to be studied as a school-based program. National Asian Languages
and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) has been the overseer of this language program since 1995.

Since 2002, NALSAS has faced numerous challenges to its operations and policy, being disbanded by the Rudd government in 2007. This has resulted in a general distrust on the part of school sector administrators toward the learning of Mandarin Chinese, not insignificantly, being the view that it is very difficult to learn (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2010). The reasons for this pessimistic view about learning Mandarin Chinese in Australia have been explained as:

1. Declining value of learning a language among the groups of students, schools, parents and communities;
2. Insufficient time in learning a new language;
3. Lack of ability to continue learning a language;
4. Lack of confidence to compete with native speakers on tertiary entrance scores;
5. Shortage of qualified teachers. (DEEWR, 2010, p. 4)

Chinese language education has not developed in Australian schools as planned, in part because of the inability to find teachers with the capabilities for making Chinese learnable for monolingual English-speaking school students. This makes it necessary to consider a change in teaching approaches and the professional standards of teachers of the Chinese language if this situation is to be improved.

This research has focussed on the exploration of a Departmental Volunteer’s learning to select, sequence and scope teaching/learning content that integrates the learning of Chinese with students’ everyday situational and language practices. The content and setting can benefit from the Departmental Volunteer learning’s effective instructional design directed at improving the students’ abilities to successfully learn the content. The task for the Departmental Volunteers is to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for Australian beginning learners.

In response to the pessimistic views put forward by DEEWR (2010) above, this study elaborates the value of learning Chinese in terms of the students’ interests, and suggests a basis for schools to promote this. This study reports the development of
one Volunteer’s capabilities for creating systematic Chinese learning experiences for Australian school students.

1.5.2 Personal experience

This section focuses on the teacher-researcher’s personal experiences of learning in China and teaching in public schools in New South Wales (Australia). Both these very different experiences as a learner and then as a teacher, have impacted on the approaches taken in this study, and in particular, the teaching assignment in Western Sydney schools.

1.5.2.1 Language learning in China

In China, students learn English as a mandatory course from junior school, and a considerable amount of time would be spent memorising vocabulary, sentences, grammar and text content. Every new lesson would require all students, to retain all the new knowledge presented, from the beginning to the end. Lessons would begin with self-introduction and then might move to a different topic about borrowing/lending stationary, or one’s favourite fruits. The content was categorised in accordance with the grammar points to be learned and would be introduced through various topics. Admittedly, it is useful to study different topics and language points about an unfamiliar language, but it is nonetheless difficult to memorise the content of each and every lesson, regardless of the teaching context or the time devoted to each lesson.

English is not the second language of China, but it has occupied the major share of the worldwide market as a foreign language to be learned. It has also become a mandatory course and part of the college entrance examination in China. This requires learners to give their utmost effort to learning this foreign language and to achieve a good result, regardless of the efficiency or effectiveness of the teaching approaches and context. Accordingly, the basic nature of teaching English in China and teaching Mandarin Chinese in Australia is completely different.
1.5.2.2 Language learning in Australia

Within the Australian education system, attempts have been made to develop a language education policy to achieve bilingualism (DEEWR, 2010). Mandarin Chinese is one of the four Asian languages currently being taught, yet there are two problematic issues concerning Mandarin Chinese (and other Asian languages) learning in Australia. One difficulty is that insufficient time has been allocated to language learning in schools and an inability to study languages continuously and sequentially (DEEWR, 2010). The lack of teaching/learning time for Mandarin Chinese cannot simply be solved through a Volunteer teacher-researcher’s (VTR)’s efforts, for not every Australian student has access to the ROSETE program and a VTR. In most Australian schools Mandarin Chinese has been a selective course and the Australian teachers (as well as the VTRs) can still make a positive contribution to those students who are still learning this language.

The Language Education Policy (DEEWR, 2010) informs the practice implemented in schools. For this teacher-researcher, the teaching-learning context in Australia showed a marked contrast to the language learning experiences in schools in China. For example, at the commencement of the ROSETE school-based teaching component, the VTR had little experience in teaching a language lesson and participated in one term of observations of Chinese instruction in two schools: a Primary school of Fifth grade and a High School of Year 8, 11 and 12 students. During this period, observations were taken of the previous VTRs’ and local teachers’ lessons and these were used as a foundation for the study that was undertaken. Some key observations of the teaching cycle in the language classes were:

- Conveying new knowledge;
- Reading practice;
- Reciting from pictures, and finally,
- Ending in a game.

1.5.2.3 Combining the experiences

The preceding two sections have provided the foundation for the conduct of this study. Firstly, the teaching cycle outlined above revealed an incoherent instruction method. In reflecting on the observations taken in Term 1, the teacher-researcher
proposed that in teaching Mandarin Chinese, action (行 xíng) and knowledge (知 zhī) should be joined. As this study commenced, some important questions about how to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for Australian students came to the forefront:

- ‘Why not convey knowledge of a daily topic through students’ playing and daily routines?’ For example, another VTR was observed applying playground language in the students’ daily lessons, ‘teaching verbs in Chinese’. The verbs chosen, related to sports.
- ‘Why not take the lesson outdoors in the location where sports occur?’
- ‘Why not replace sections of the teaching cycle, reading and recitation from the pictures, with practice outdoors?’

These questions began to inspire the teacher-researcher’s thinking about how to teach using the teacher-researcher’s previous experiences in China and now in Australia.

1.5.2.4 How might this look in practice?

As a VTR Mandarin Chinese teacher the most important consideration was to learn how to make Chinese learnable for the particular classes of students. The challenges were to make Mandarin Chinese interesting, and to structure a program that would scope and sequence students’ learning. This was not a matter of making learning ‘easier.’ It was a matter of making the learning of Chinese possible in ways that were appropriate for the students with whom I was working. There was not an abstract, idealised way in which this could be done.

As a NSW DE Volunteer the urgent need was to become a professional teacher capable of integrating the Mandarin Chinese to be learnt, into locally appropriate content, using locally appropriate pedagogies. This teaching strategy would lead to interconnected and interdependent content between lessons. This was the premise for beginning the teaching assignment and this study.

1.6 Scope and delimitation of this study

In the field of language-teaching research, many studies have focussed on Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) while not many concentrate on teaching
Mandarin Chinese as a second-language in English speaking countries. Further, there has been little educational research relating to the development of units and lesson plans for making Mandarin Chinese learnable.

Many studies have explored the L1/L2 transfer and acquisition (e.g., Gass and Selinker, 1992; Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996; Sprouse, 2006). Language transfer refers to the process of carryover of previous knowledge to subsequent learning (Brown, 2000). It can be divided into two types-positive transfer and negative transfer. Whenever positive transfer occurs, it means that previous knowledge has benefited the current learning tasks (Brown 2000). Odlin (1989) also argues that the notion of language transfer occupies a very important position in the second language acquisition. Therefore, research has been conducted to explore successful methods of applying positive transfer. However, limited studies have focussed on Mandarin Chinese teaching of L1/L2 focussing on unit and lesson planning.

Limited also, are research findings, which focus on students’ perspectives in English, speaking countries, on learning Mandarin Chinese. There are statistics available concerning more accomplished students, at senior secondary and university level (Orton 2008), whereas the scope of this study may also fit into the gap in the literature concerning beginning L2 language learners’ behaviours and psychological performance when learning a particular language, especially Mandarin Chinese.

This study has aimed at exploring the teacher-researcher’s endeavours to plan units of work taking account of the students’ feedback, to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for Australian beginning L2 students.

Therefore the scope of this study is timely, as it fits within an area of limited research. It is also essential to explore and draw critically on evidence from other beginning teachers’ (previous ROSETE students) and hence this study adds to the body of research conducted by the ROSETE students and therefore contributes to the available literature in this field, currently quite scarce.
1.7 Thesis statement

As a transnational teacher-researcher education program between China and Australia, the ROSETE program provides a combination of research training and professional learning in schools in Western Sydney. The ROSETE program includes, for example, weekly University-based instruction comprising a study of language teaching pedagogies for beginning level students in Australia. This research hence weaves through the spaces of weekly instruction and analysis in the ROSETE program, and continues into Chinese language planning, learning, implementation and innovation within the school setting.

The argument advanced in this thesis, is that the planning for appropriate teaching/learning of Mandarin Chinese for students for whom English is their everyday language of instruction and communication, necessarily will be more successful if the students are co-constructors (based on their feedback) of the lessons to be implemented. It is necessary to design and implement lessons that are relevant to the students, based on the teacher-researcher’s knowledge of how to observe and reflect upon students’ responses during the lessons, and to acknowledge and take account of student feedback on their teaching/learning experiences.

1.8 Outline of the thesis

The research project has been reported through the following six chapters.

Chapter Two is a Literature Review, which includes the definition of lesson plans (Causton, Theoharis and Trezek, 2008: Justice, Mashburn, Hamre and Pianta, 2008). Beyond these, Martin (1994) listed three major criteria in lesson plans: continuity, sequencing and integrating (Martin, 1994, cited in Tyler, 1994, p. 84). These have become the key literature in the process of designing the lesson plans for implementation in this study. As for the forms of lesson plans, other useful ideas have been put forward, such as Martin (1994, p. 13), who regarded lesson plans as being composed of “objectives, teaching and learning activities, materials, and methods of evaluation.” In addition, Egan (1985) provided story-making lesson plans, which were considered in this research. In considering the design of unit and lesson plans, this Chapter discusses how to design a plan according to the previous
units of work, and using basic design principles as proposed by Martin (1994), Kliebard (1970) and Egan (1985). The next section in Chapter Two provides the background to scaffolding children’s learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood and Bruner; Ross, 1976) and the learning strategy of L1/L2 transfer (Ringbom, 1992) in the application of Chinese instruction/acquisition.

The final section of Chapter Two addresses the beginning teacher (Gatbonton, 2008; Grossman, et al., 2001; Watzke, 2007), the prior knowledge of beginning teachers (Watzke, 2007) and their practice (Leshem, 2008). This section also includes reference to the students, as beginning learners of Mandarin Chinese. In this section, possible obstacles that beginning learners may come across are highlighted and discussed (Paas, et al., 2004); necessary changes that could be carried out to improve the current learning circumstances for beginning learners of Mandarin Chinese, such as the inner change of learning initiatives (Wen, 1997); and the adoption of designed language courses (Cummins, 1984; Dupuy, 2000). In addition, the possible obstacle, anxiety, (Macintyre, 2007) that beginning learners might experience concludes this chapter.

Chapter Three presents the methodology and methods of this study. It illustrates the application of teacher action/knowledge research, the research design, sites and participants, and data collection strategies. Data collection strategies such as unit and lesson plans; self-reflective journals (Burns, 2009; Pine, 2009; Wallace, 2010; Zhao and Poulson, 2006), and the students’ questionnaires (Brown, 2009; Mills, 2011) are detailed. In addition the specific data analysis methods have been discussed. In Chapter Three, the notions of the teacher-researcher (Atay, 2008; Borg, 2010: Flick, 2009; Stake, 2010) and related applications of teacher action/knowledge research (Griffiths and Tann, 1992; Pine, 2009) are also covered.

Chapters Four to Six, as the evidentiary chapters, focus on data analysis and discussion. Chapter Four focuses on the analysis of the data concerning teaching content and the success of the lesson implementation. These data are reconstructed through the notion of time (Laczko and Berliner, 2003; Wang, 2011) as this was found to be a significant issue impacting on the success of the teacher-researcher’s lessons.
Chapter Five is the second evidentiary chapter focussing on the data analysis of the students’ Self-Assessment Sheets which were devised to seek the students’ feedback on their enjoyment, confidence in speaking, interests in the past unit topics, interests in future topics and their assessments of the teaching strategies. The findings are discussed and the incorporation of these findings into future lesson planning as a method of co-constructing units and lesson plans with students is proposed.

Chapter Six summarises the feedback from the students on the final round of Self-Assessment Sheets after three terms of lessons. The data collected ranged from understanding of the Mandarin Chinese language, enjoyment, confidence, difficulties and obstacles to learning the language and another round of assessment of the teaching strategies. The analysis and implications for designing lessons to assist beginning students to learn Mandarin Chinese are discussed.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis with a summary of each of the evidentiary chapter’s findings Chapters (Four to Six), suggests the key contributions, delimitations and limitations, the recommendations of this research and the final reflections of the teacher-researcher.
Chapter Two:  
Unit and Lesson Planning, Language Learning Strategies and Teacher/learner Relationships:  
A Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Originally, the teacher-researcher was interested in having a thesis focus the teaching of a foreign language to beginning students where the content and language was presented in an integrated learning context (an immersion program). This is a teaching pedagogy where “a foreign language is used as a tool in the learning of a non-language subject in which both language and the subject have a joint role” (Marsh, 2002, p. 58). Considering the status of this novice teacher-researcher, and the students as beginning learners, it was not applicable to introduce a totally new language (Mandarin Chinese) to teaching other subjects (e.g. Mathematics or Art). The main idea of connecting teaching content between lessons so as to make the teaching of new Mandarin Chinese knowledge easier has not changed.

Based on the reasons above, the teacher-researcher was not able to use an immersion approach and therefore the approach was to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for beginning learners in the Australian context, where the teaching was in English and
the subject was Mandarin Chinese. The unit and lesson plans were designed initially with the teacher-only input, but after Term 1, the students’ feedback would be used to improve the lesson plans. To become a professional teacher of Chinese and to make Chinese learnable it is necessary to organise the teaching/learning content so that it is scoped, sequenced and scaffolded in ways appropriate to the needs of school students. In this chapter, the focus is on literature about unit and lesson planning, and its related application to exact knowledge points, such as L1/L2 transfer, scaffolding, and the relationship between beginning teachers and beginning learners.

2.2 Unit and lesson plans

Justice, Mashburn, Hamre and Pianta (2008), write that lesson plans specify:

- a set of language and literacy objectives and corresponding activities, example scripts (and for some, companion websites) illustrating quality implementation of activities, books and other manipulatives needed to implement the curriculum, informal assessments to monitor children’s progress in the curriculum, and implementation checklists to monitor teachers’ fidelity to the curriculum (p.54).

This greatly emphasises the importance of unit and lesson plans for all teaching. Also, Causton, Theoharis and Trezek (2008, p. 383) comment that “teaching lesson planning or lesson design is a pivotal moment in teacher education.” For Chinese language teaching in Australia, it is of great importance for teachers to develop appropriate unit and lesson plans so as to scaffold the students’ learning into meaningful and manageable sections.

It is necessary for NSW DE Volunteers to learn how to plan and design a unit of work and its subsequent lessons prior to engaging students in teaching/learning activities. It is also vital for VTRs to be confident to plan and design units and lessons that are student-centred and learning-focused. This is a challenge for VTRs who come from a system of education which is text-book driven, examination focused and based on direct instruction. Causton, Theoharis, and Trezek (2008, p. 385), agree, stating, “it is essential in student-centred design to begin lesson planning
by considering the larger curricular picture in combination with the essence of the learners”.

The larger curricular picture in the context of this research was the K-6 curriculum document, which proposes, “it is necessary to continue focusing on the needs, interests and abilities of each student when planning a program for secondary schooling” (Chinese K-10 syllabus, p. 6). Therefore in this research, the teacher-researcher considered the students’ interests, their Chinese learning background and their reflection and suggestion after each term’s learning as a beginning point for unit and lesson planning. Considering the students’ needs, interests and abilities is regarded as belonging in a “prominent place” when preparing the units and lessons aligned with the curriculum (Egan, 1985, p. 397).

2.2.1 Lesson plan attributes

Three criteria inform professional teachers’ production of lesson plans, namely continuity, sequencing and integrating.

A formal lesson plan is composed of “objectives, teaching and learning activities, materials, and methods of evaluation” (Martin, 1994, p. 13). Kliebard, (1970, p. 260) emphasises that lessons should be developed in a process from “stating objectives, selecting experiences, organising experiences, and evaluating”

Egan (1985, p. 397) purports that the model of traditional unit and lesson planning is composed of “objectives/content/ evaluation.” The emphasis of this series of steps in lesson planning is beneficial to the beginning teachers’ provision of important and useful skills (Egan, 1985), and subsequently for the students’ successful learning, as lessons planned using this three-step model, may help students master the “appropriate knowledge and skills”, and apply the “requisite concepts” (Egan, 1985, p. 398).

Across the above mentioned studies relating to unit and lesson plans, Egan looks for a new path to make the planning more flexible, which has inspired this research. He criticises ‘normal/traditional’ unit and lesson planning in stating that this basic scheme of teaching preparation emphasises the less important rather than the main aspects of teaching and may in fact, miss necessary lesson components (Egan, 1985).
He holds that traditional unit plans tend to be more ‘episodic’ units (Egan, 1985), and the teacher is often hard-pressed to choose what to include or exclude, for there is so much similar content (Egan, 1985). Therefore, he puts forward the ‘story form’ as a basis for planning units and lessons. Egan’s (1985) idea is that each lesson should tell a story. This departs from the general traditional planning procedures by organising the content and methods in a novel way (Egan, 1985). Five steps are included in his process of developing a unit and lesson plan: “identify importance, find binary opposites and organise content in story form, conclude and evaluate” (Egan, 1985, p. 399).

This lesson format could benefit the students’ learning by clear organisation of events to make the lesson content meaningful. As Egan (1985) proposes, story form affords good access to learners’ understanding of meaning. In the process of organising story form, choosing an appropriate topic is important. Egan prefers topics that are “generally understood” for the whole unit and lesson plans (Egan, 1985, p. 399).

The second important part of story form is to include some binary opposites, which refers to some oppositional or contrasting features that can be centred within the lesson content (Egan, 1985). The selection of the binary opposites in a topic provides the students with examples of what is the opposite idea, situation or concept within the content. The teacher must then make the “selection of relevant content” (Egan, 1985, p. 402). Here, the choices of content may be the same as the traditional model, but the exact focus and organisation may vary, by including binary opposites (Egan, 1985). Egan’s notion of content selection is to ensure topic relevance and to also ensure elements of the content can be tied together and strongly engages with students interests (Egan, 1985).

The last stage of evaluation of Egan’s model is also quite different from the traditional one. The more traditional model might contain a series of principles/facts to evaluate if the teaching has achieved its aim or goal by way of asking questions, recording understood themes, and seeking clues (Egan, 1985). As for the story form, the teacher who designs the story, abides by the rule that “the clearer our teaching, the less complex is the task of evaluation” (Egan, 1985, p. 405).
Based on the above literature, the notion of Egan’s story form has been noted as an innovative model of unit and lesson design although this should not necessarily fully replace the traditional form. It should be kept in mind that the story form model is established on the basis of the traditional unit and lesson planning model. It is an attempt to incorporate the ‘old’ into something ‘new’. For this project the teacher-researcher has absorbed the merits of the two lesson planning models and generated something new in the form of thematic unit and lesson plans.

2.2.2 Planning for language teaching/learning in relation to set guidelines

Unit and lesson plans for foreign language teaching should be related to the National or State, standards-based requirements, when such curriculum outcomes, documents guide the teaching. Causton, Theoharis, and Trezek (2008, p. 386) cite that unit plans need to incorporate the relevant curriculum documents by stating: “it is expected that teachers write goals for a lesson that are connected to national, state, and local standards”. In all the unit and lesson plans this teacher-researcher created, local and national standards were considered and included within the objectives for the lessons.

Regarding to the lesson design in context, one must pay attention to the students’ circumstances. Causton, Theoharis and Trezek (2008, p. 385) declare that “teachers are encouraged to consider students with disabilities, English language learning needs, behavioural challenges, or other unique learning styles or characteristics and choose three students that represent the diversity of the class.”

2.2.3 Planning for learning continuity across lessons

Planning for continuity in language learning is an important professional capability required for all teachers including those teaching Mandarin Chinese. However, this continuity can only be established based on the Departmental Volunteers getting to know at least some of their students, their experiences and understandings, and how they learn. Therefore, the NSW DE Volunteers have to learn to take responsibility for acquiring this knowledge and using it to make Chinese learnable for the students.

Continuity is a key idea for lesson planning, teaching practice and conducting research. In other words lessons cannot be treated as separate, discrete
teaching/learning exercises. Professional teachers of Chinese plan for learning continuity by designing units of lessons that intentionally develop students’ language over time (Bache and Crestani, 2010). A focus on teaching/learning continuity requires content to be constantly reviewed. That is, by asking questions such as: What has been taught in previous lessons? How did students use that learning after the lesson? And how can I relate what is to be learnt in the new lesson to what they have (or have not) learnt from the previous learning.

2.2.4 Planning for students’ language learning

Learning language requires the Department Volunteers to get to know the students and how they learn and to develop pedagogical interventions appropriate for their particular sociolinguistic contexts. However, Ushioda (2011, p. 204) contends that a “focus on language learners as ‘people’ (rather than types of learner) with unique individual personalities, histories, motives, interests and identities, has not been a strong feature” of target language learning theory and research.

Certainly, it never occurred to me that I had to get to know my students so I could understand their histories and interests as being integral to making Chinese learnable. As this thesis shows, knowing the students and how they learn was not a strong feature of my previous theory or practice for teaching Chinese. However, adjusting teaching practice to align with the students’ interests was not a simple task.

There are many studies that have emphasised learners’ interests that can be reflected in the teaching content. For example, Little (2004, p. 106) writes “what they learn becomes part of what they are.” Similarly, Beneke and Ostrosky (2009) say teachers should always take into consideration the learners’ individual interests, skills and abilities while designing the activities within lesson plans. Thus, “it may be beneficial to provide teachers with professional development experiences that sharpen their ability to recognise and capitalise on children’s interests.” (Beneke & Ostrosky 2009, p. 4).
2.2.5 Planning for time management

Time management has been considered an important factor in teaching (Wang, 2011), and in this research was identified as a significant issue impacting on the teacher-researcher’s classroom practice (see Chapter 4).

Researchers have studied the necessity of time flexibility when incorporating different teaching pedagogies. For example, a more traditional teaching method, content driven, would more directly follow a lesson plan, whereas student-centered pedagogies, often result in lessons that tend to be time-consuming and sometimes unpredictable (Kennedy, 2005). Time in lesson planning has been described as a definite skill and as Laczkó and Berliner (2003) contend, sections of lessons need to ensure there is sufficient time for the teacher to motivate students, present them with well arranged lesson content and with sufficient time for effective instruction.

2.3 Language teaching/learning strategies

There are two learning strategies that have influenced the teacher-researcher’s professional learning and which have been incorporated into this research. Through a review of the literature the teacher-researcher became familiar with the strategies of scaffolding, scoping and sequencing Chinese language content and teaching for English-to-Chinese transfer (L1/L2) transfer.

2.3.1 Scaffolding, scoping and sequencing Chinese language content

The scaffolding, scoping and sequencing of Chinese language lesson content requires the knowledge and skills of a professional teacher who is capable of supporting students learning. Inexperienced NSW DE Volunteers require support in learning how to do this, as they generally would have had no prior experience with such teaching strategies. The NSW DE Volunteers face the challenge of recognising that they have to engage in this task, which can be complex and difficult for them as most have experience of learning and teaching based on the use of textbooks and examinations (Collins, 2006; Quintana et al., 2004). The scaffolding, scoping and sequencing of lessons (Brown, Collins, and Newman, 1989; Wood, Bruner, and Ross, 1976), and also including Chinese language lesson content requires the Volunteers to
learn to carefully and thoughtfully structure teaching/learning tasks so as to reduce unnecessary complexity and hence avoid problems for students’ learning of the subject matter.

The scaffolding, scoping and sequencing of Chinese language lesson content requires the Volunteers to learn to focus on what the students need to pay more attention to, in terms of the critical ideas and connections that will help them learn forms of Chinese appropriate to their age and level. Many Volunteers may overlook this. However, this is necessary if they are to make Chinese learnable (Barzilai and Blau 2014). Accordingly, this NSW DE Volunteer had to learn to shift from a textbook-based teaching method to teaching Chinese focussing on the students’ responses to the content, in order to scaffold their learning. This was a major challenge. Integrating the new knowledge with the students’ existing knowledge was an unfamiliar concept. I had to learn, through analysing evidence of my practice, what scaffolding meant in terms of using my knowledge of Mandarin Chinese to support the students learning of this language. The literature also supported an understanding of this new approach. According to Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), there are six characteristics of successful scaffolding:

1. Recruiting the (language learners’) attention,
2. Reducing degrees of freedom in the task in order to make it manageable,
3. Keeping direction in terms of the goals,
4. Marking critical features,
5. Controlling frustration, and
6. Modelling solutions

From the literature the teacher-researcher understood that these strategies are important capabilities used by professional teachers to help the students learn. Professional teachers use these strategies to construct and plan units of work and the subsequent lesson plans.

Within lesson planning and teaching practice, Van de Pol, Volman and Beishuizen (2010) suggest the importance of contingencies. The application of contingency assists in the process of scaffolding lesson content to meet the students’ learning needs, as it allows for adjustments according many issues (such as children’s
attention or their mis/understanding of concepts). This requires that Volunteers undertake accurate evaluation of students’ responses during the classes.

2.3.2 Planning units for teaching English-to-Chinese transfer

Cross-language transfer often occurs as people learn a new language (Cummins, 1983). Cummins (1998) argues that L1 to L2 transfer occurs because students are literate in one language and can use that understanding to help them learn the target language. Here L1 indicates the students’ first language (they were mostly monolingual English speakers), and L2 is the target language, Mandarin Chinese. Cross-language transfer refers to “the influence of L1-based elements and L1-based procedures in understanding and producing L2 text” (Ringbom, 1992, p. 87). In this research project it was decided to plan units for teaching English-to-Chinese transfer in order to make Chinese learnable for my students. Planning units for teaching for English-to-Chinese transfer seems like a practical idea, but how this would look in practice was a new concept for the teacher-researcher. The first consideration was: What Chinese language would be useful for Australian school students to apply in their daily lives? At the beginning stages of this project, my understanding was that this would involve having the students watch videos, or order food in local Chinese restaurants. English-to-Chinese transfer encompasses far more.

Bilingual education not only creates a foundation for learning another language, but also hopes to make the target language understandable and deliverable. At the beginning stage of language learning, teachers and students should not neglect the application of English-applied teaching, and create a foundation for their Mandarin Chinese learning based on bilingual teaching strategies (Cummins, 2008). This teacher-researcher adopted this approach to bilingual teaching. One of the important issues that needed resolving is what and how to teach so that the students could actually learn Chinese—or some useful, relevant aspects of Chinese appropriate for their age and level. Cummins (2008, p. 72) argues that “students in bilingual and second language immersion programs spontaneously focus on similarities and differences in their two languages” and teachers should “systematically encourage and support them in focusing on language and relating their L1 knowledge to L2.” Cummins also put forward some principles about teaching for L1/L2 transfer (Cummins, 2008, p.67). These are: engaging prior understandings, integrating
factual knowledge with conceptual frameworks, and taking active control over the learning process through meta-cognitive strategies. Although this study was not conducted within an immersion language program, these principles had validity for the teacher-researcher’s understanding.

The relationship between transfer and cross-linguistic influence might be explained the following way: there are two kinds of transfer—overt and covert. Overt transfer refers to the transfer of forms, lexical items, phonological and morphological forms, grammatical patterns and even procedures. Covert transfer is a kind of compensation for the knowledge gap, when the L1-based linguistic elements or procedures cannot be transferred to L2 (Ringbom, 1992). Therefore, Ringbom (1992) emphasises that the achievement of cross-linguistic similarities from L1 to L2 can be understood in terms of overt and covert transfer.

2.4 Educational relationship between teachers and students

Based on my previous teaching and learning experiences in China, consideration of the relationship between students and teacher was not a priority. In particular this teacher-researcher had not even considered that as a Departmental Volunteer, that getting to know the students and how they learn might be important for them to learn Chinese and just as important in deciding what Chinese content to teach them or how to actually teach them. However, Chapelle (2009) says that “SLA theory (second language acquisition) needs to encompass the learner, teacher, language, technology, and institution, as well as how power relations intersect with these factors in ways that are beyond the control of the teacher” (Chapelle, 2009, p.747).

In this research, the element of technology did not apply, however the notion that teachers and learners should make up the entire circle of second language learning has been influential. This approach to language learning asks for not only the teachers’ efforts, but also the students’. For the reason, “a study can draw on the perspectives of teachers and researchers, and may employ small numbers of students’ judgments as well” (Chapelle, 2009, p.749). In this research, the teacher-researcher and the learners are novices in regard to second language teaching and learning. This demanded the teacher-researcher to explore further, these two identities.
2.4.1 Volunteers as beginning teachers

Beginning teachers refers to those who are still undertaking training, or have recently completed training or have recently started teaching but have had limited experience (e.g. less than two years). Because of a lack of experience, beginning teachers will face obstacles. Gatbonton (2008) says that beginning teachers’ in the early stages of their teaching practice, will no doubt encounter circumstances such as learners’ low “initiations and deficient responses” (Gatbonton, 2008, p. 163). These beginning teachers may be prone to observe learners’ negative reactions, such as the learners’ moods, lack of learning initiative and challenging behaviour, all of which can be attributed to the reason beginning teachers may feel insecure (Gatbonton, 2008). Thus, it is important for beginning teachers to set a teaching strategy that can mostly eliminate these negative effects.

2.4.1.1 Pedagogy and reflective practice

The pedagogical knowledge teachers need to acquire for successful teaching has been proposed as “any knowledge, theory, and belief about the act of teaching and the process of learning that inform teachers’ behaviour in the classroom” (Gatbonton, 2008, p. 163). Watzke (2007) claims “increased experience engaging with learners, building teacher-learner relationships, and reflecting on teaching helps new teachers sustain development of a pedagogical knowledge base” (Watzke 2007, p. 73). For the beginning teacher, a pedagogy of reflective practice is one of the key approaches for improvement (Grossman, Valencia, Thompson, Martin, Place, and Evans, 2001; Watzke, 2007).

In the process of applying reflective practices, beginning teachers can benefit from interacting with students to ascertain their prior knowledge and experiences, and then reflect on this learning to inform lesson planning (Watzke, 2007). Prior knowledge is a necessity to connect teachers’ and students’ existing knowledge with classroom practice (Leshem, 2008).

This study has drawn on the above mentioned literature to inform this beginning teacher-researcher’s teaching of Mandarin Chinese in Australia.
2.4.1.2 Beginning Chinese language learners

Beginning learners can be literally understood as those who have no experience with the specific knowledge that they are about to learn. In this research, all the students in the Fifth class at Shumiao public school are regarded as beginning learners. As a novice, the teacher-researcher needed to acknowledge and anticipate some of the characteristics of beginning Mandarin Chinese learners in order to provide optimum learning experiences.

One factor that can affect beginning Mandarin Chinese language learners is anxiety. Anxiety is a factor that may not only arise in young children and adolescents as beginning learners but also in mature learners. Primary school children as beginning L2 learners may feel insecure or anxious when facing a new language and these feelings may have a negative effect on L2 learning. Horwitz (2010, p.154) says that anxiety can “inhibit the learning and/or production of a second language (L2)”. Indeed, language anxiety does “capture the worry” and the “negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using an L2” (Macintyre, 2007, p. 565). Anxiety may negatively influence the learning motivation of beginning learners. Therefore, a teaching method which considers students’ suggestions and interests would be a useful approach aimed at reducing the cognitive burden of L2 learning by increasing their motivation to learn. It could, to an extent, avoid or reduce the level of anxiety.

Mandarin Chinese language is a difficult language for native speakers from China to make learnable for monolingual English speaking schools students (Orton, 2008). Wen (1997) emphasises in her study that “the intrinsic interest in Mandarin Chinese culture and the desire to understand one’s own cultural heritage are the initial motivation” for learners (p. 235). Therefore, the responsibility lies with the teacher/teacher-researcher to take account of these strategies with their teaching practice in order to make Chinese learnable for their students.

Compared with adult learners, young children as beginning learners seem to be more easily affected by the cognitive load, associated with L2 learning (Paas, Renkl and Sweller, 2004). Since beginning learners have little prior-knowledge about the new foreign language, the relevant language units and lesson plans should be designed to match the development of the students. Dupuy (2000) has agreed with Cummins’s
(1984, 1992) description that the content of L2 lessons should focus on “social language proficiency that consists of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS)” (p. 206). This notion can be applied to the Primary School setting in this research, as the teacher-researcher realised that the teaching/learning should take place in a “contextualized, informal, and cognitively undemanding environment” (p. 206).

2.5 Conclusion

The teacher-researcher has acknowledged that as beginning learners, the students at Shumiao Primary School were confronted with a certain amount of anxiety and cognitive burden as they began their L2 lessons. Through the literature reviewed and the University-based teacher training workshops, the teacher-researcher became familiar with appropriate teaching/learning strategies for scaffolding, sequencing and scoping lesson content and teaching for English-to-Chinese transfer in order to make Chinese learnable for these students.

It was a steep learning curve, having previously only experienced the educational system in China. In acknowledging the usefulness of scaffolding, the teacher-researcher began to consider ways of constructing the content and teaching processes that responded to students’ interests. As for cross-language transfer, this required thoughtful efforts to know students and their existing everyday language use contexts in English and then planning to align this with their learning of Mandarin Chinese.

The process of planning, designing, enacting, monitoring and revising units of lessons in a self-critical reflective way, as proposed in the above literature review, was a very new approach for this teacher-researcher and has provided the teacher-researcher with the background knowledge and understanding to improve her teaching practice and the students’ learning.
Chapter Three:
Educational Research Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

The methodological basis of this study includes a consideration of standard research principles, including the validity and reliability of the study, generalisability of the topic and the research and, benefits and risks of the research.

3.2 Methodological basis for this study

The methods employed in the investigation reported in this thesis were chosen to accord with the project’s research questions and were applied accordingly. Two main methods are applied in this research; ‘Xingzhi (action/knowledge) research’ and ‘the teacher as researcher’.

3.2.1 Teacher action/knowledge (Xingzhi) research

The Chinese educator, Tao Xingzhi (1891-1946), first devised and developed the concept of teacher Xingzhi research (action/knowledge research) and introduced some innovative theories and practice in education for that time. Zhang (2015) also provides some background to this concept:
it is important to note that the combination of Xing, meaning ‘to do or action’, with Zhi, meaning ‘to be aware of or to know’ was connected with action research processes to link transformative action and theoretical knowledge. This notion was devised or developed by Tao Xingzhi (1891-1946), a former doctoral student of John Dewey (Zhang, et al., 2015, 153).

One theory is that “all true knowledge [is] derived from ‘doing’ or direct experience” (Yao 2010, p. 255). Yao explored the ‘doing’ as a conscientious activity, which involves one’s labour work and mind (Yao, 2010). Tao also emphasises that teaching, learning and practice should be integrated and not separately distinguished (Fang, 2005). He says teaching and learning can be categorised as knowledge and practice in action. Therefore, action/knowledge research needs to be contextualised where education is defined as one integrated activity, not where it is compartmentalised. This requires the application of action and knowledge in both teaching and learning. Just like Tao’s theory, which is ‘先生拿做来教,乃是真教; 学生拿做来学, 方是实学’(Fang, 2005, p. 133) (“the action [knowledge] that teachers teach in practice is true teaching, while the action [knowledge] students learn in practice is true learning”) (xiān shēng ná zuò lái jiāo, nǎi shì zhēn jiāo; xué shēng ná zuò lái xué, fāng shì shí xué). Practice (action) is in the key word or basic principle in both learning and teaching.

This approach struck a meaningful chord, as it provided the NSW DE Volunteer with a reasonable path to explore the possibilities for making Chinese learnable. In the context of this project, action/knowledge research would provide a means to focus on improving the practices of teaching/learning using evidence relating to lesson plans, and the actual teaching/learning in practice, the teacher-researcher’s reflections on these, coupled with feedback from the students. This methodology would provide the framework for the collection and analysis of the data to explore the research questions.

3.2.2 Teacher-as-Xingzhi-researcher

Much educational literature has discussed the role of teachers. Harrison and Killion (2007, pp. 74-77), for example, hold the view that the teacher plays ten roles.
Amongst these roles are educational specialist, curriculum specialist, facilitator, catalyst for change, learner, and data coach. All these can be seen as included in the role of this teacher-researcher. These roles aim at promoting the development of this teacher’s ‘inquisitive attitude’, which will benefit the discovery and verification of teaching problems, through posing questions and hypotheses so as to achieve a “better understanding of the teaching-learning process” (Fareh and Saeed, 2011, p. 155). This means the dual identities as both a teacher and researcher could benefit teaching and learning through the processes of discovering and adjusting the most meaningful pedagogies, to updating and applying new changes. In other words, this teacher as researcher refers to a process of teaching and learning through a systematic and sustainable approach (Souto-Manning, 2012).

Craig (2009) makes a detailed classification of the methodologies that teacher research might include. They are:

1. action research, 2. case study research and 3. reflective practice. Also, 4. narrative inquiry and 5. practitioner inquiry constitutes veins of teacher research. 6. Self-study of teaching and teacher education practices and 7. the scholarship of teaching and learning. Additionally, 8. the practice of research forms a branch of the teacher research tree’ (Craig, 2009, p. 61).

Teacher action/knowledge (行知 Xingzhi) research (Singh 2013), aligns with (1) action research, in this classification.

Action research involves having a “plan, idea, or a theory checked against action and experience, and that, conversely, action be informed and enriched by theory, planning and ideas” (Cheey, 1999, p. xii). The aim of action research is to address “the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually accepted ethical framework” (Rapoport, 1970 p. 499). Characteristically, action research can be summarised as a cyclical practice to create systematic evidence and to make changes informed by critical reflection to benefit students (Wang and Robert, 2010), and in this research, the NSW DE Volunteer’s learning. Action research mainly aims to deepen and extend teachers’ professional capabilities given “the need to extend or
change them” (Cheey 1999, p. xv). Xingzhi research integrates action and also foregrounds teachers as knowledge producers (Singh, 2013). The integration of action and knowledge together helps to better situate this study in terms of its transformative intellectual work through a bilingual approach to teaching and research.

Teacher action/knowledge (Xingzhi) refers to not only teachers’ pedagogies in the process of teaching and learning, but also to the adaptation of their former knowledge and the students’ action in their own learning (Fang, 2005; Singh, 2013). Therefore, Xingzhi research, which combines action and knowledge together, can be argued as slightly different from action research. This has led to the selection of teacher action/knowledge (Xingzhi) research as the methodology in this study. Xingzhi research involves applying the same cyclical process as action research and aims to make a “practical improvement in students’ learning via their action (Xing) of teaching to inform the co-construction theoretic linguistic knowledge (Zhi)” (Zhang et al., 2015, p. 153).
In this study, I played the roles of teacher and researcher (teacher-researcher). As a teacher in the beginning stage, I taught Mandarin Chinese in a local primary school, and as a researcher, I focused on establishing appropriate unit and lesson plans, which were implemented and reflected upon, to gauge where improvement could be made, and finally applying the changes back into the next round of teaching.

3.2.3 Bilingual Volunteers becoming beginning Teacher-researchers

This research was conducted in a Mandarin Chinese language teaching and learning context, by a bilingual Volunteer teacher. According to Pavlenko (2003), there are three main aspects that can be considered when studies are undertaken in contexts where there are bi-or multilingual speakers. They are: a) the interrelationships between languages and their speakers; b) the interactions of language learning and teaching bilingually; and c) the positioning of classroom languages and their
speakers in the dominant educational discourses. Therefore, in the process of researching and teaching for this bilingual teacher, it was considered necessary to first, construct a communicative interrelationship between the target language and the students; second, emphasise the interaction of language teaching and learning bilingually; and third arrange appropriate learning and practice connections between the language and the students.

Becoming a bilingual teacher-researcher is one of the capabilities developed, albeit to a small but nonetheless reasonable degree through the professional teaching/learning made possible through this study and has enabled improvement in teaching practice based on reflection and incorporating change.

Learning to be a teacher-researcher through the conduct of this research in collaboration with other Departmental Volunteers provided an important mechanism for sharing one’s own learning and ideas, and establishing an educationally informative dialogue with a community of colleagues with a shared interest in Chinese language education. For me it proved important to engage in “ongoing reflection that moves them to action” (Nevarez-La, 1999, p. 461).

3.3 Research Principles

This section illustrates the principles that have been implemented to ensure the appropriate conduct of this study. The subsections include: Research ethics, Validity and reliability, Benefits and risks of the study, Data management, Research writing and Triangulation.

3.3.1 Research Ethics

As a research study involving human participants it was necessary to firstly consider and outline the research ethics framework to guarantee the ethical conduct at each stage of this project. Research ethics refers to “how values and moral principles are integrated in the actions and reflections of research” (Stige, Malterud and Midtgarden, 2009, p. 1511).
3.3.1.1 University level approval

All of the above principles related to the ethical conduct of research, have to be outlined and justified by the teacher-researcher before any research can begin. At the University level an in-depth NEAF (National Ethics Application Form) is completed and submitted for review by the University’s HREC (Human Research Ethics Committee). The ethical principles outlined for the conduct of this study gained approval from the HREC committee-approval number H10475 (Appendix 1).

3.3.1.2 State level approval

A second layer of approval for the ethical conduct of this study was needed from the New South Wales Department of Education-SERAP (State Education Research Applications Process). A comprehensive application form outlining all the proposed principles for conducting the study needed to be submitted to the SERAP committee. This project was granted approval with ID 2014129 (Appendix 2).

3.3.1.3 School level approval

Prior to the beginning of the teaching assignment the teacher-researcher contacted the school principal to seek approval to conduct the research at this school. A letter of introduction with background information was forwarded to the principal (Appendix 3). The principal supported the conduct of this research.

3.3.2 Validity and reliability

Validity measures the value and trustworthiness of the research procedure and results when conducting both quantitative and qualitative studies. In this qualitative study, considering the concepts of validity and reliability helped the teacher-researcher to clarify the exact intention of the research focus and the influence of the possible critical factors (Mertler, 2009). In this study, these factors were considered when determining the focus and design of this research (Baxter and Jack, 2008). In order to minimise the influence of my subjectivity or bias (the critical factors), approaches were employed to address the validity and reliability of this study. This was done by triangulating the data collection methods, collecting detailed evidence and sharing data interpretations with other students.
3.3.3 Generalisability

Educational research should be valid, important and applicable. However, if the research needs to be applied in a wide range of settings, the findings need to be verified as generalisable. The idea of generalisability “describes the extent to which research findings can be applied to settings other than that in which they were originally tested” (Altman and Bland, 1998, pp. 409-410; Merriam, 1995). Thus, a key question is, just how credible is the evidence and the findings from this thesis, in terms of their applicability to other similar schools? However, within qualitative research paradigm (of which this research relates), there are often no claims to generalisability of findings. The small sample size and the specific context of this research in one classroom with one teacher-researcher would necessitate that the findings could not be generalised to making claims of truth for all Mandarin Chinese teaching in Australia, Western Sydney or even across the particular school site. However, the key ideas of scaffolding, scoping and sequencing Chinese language education, and teaching for English-to-Chinese transfer are practical ideas worth considering in other settings.

3.3.4 Benefits and risks of this research

This research benefits both the Chinese learning context in Australia and current students. It has been designed based on the Australian education policy to develop Mandarin Chinese. It has focused on constructing unit and lesson plans for Mandarin Chinese learning with the cooperation of both the teacher-researcher and with feedback from the learners. The study aimed at exploring the students’ learning enthusiasm and their interests and preferences in the process of developing unit and lesson plans. The teacher-researcher’s effective guidance in planning was considered a priority. In the wider sphere, the construction of systematic unit and lesson plans contributes to students’ learning and the teachers’ professional learning. Creating effective lesson and unit plans in Chinese language learning benefits subsequent Department Chinese Language Volunteers who are part of the ROSETE program and who will be assigned to teach Chinese in Australia. This research will benefit the students by developing their interest in learning Mandarin Chinese, and has the potential to build a foundation for second language learning.
Since this research was designed for Australian primary students, it is of vital importance to avoid any risks or discomfort to them. As this research was conducted with the students during their ‘normal’ class lessons, no risk or discomfort was identified before or after the research.

During any research it is essential that there be mutual respect between the researcher and the participants to prevent harmful situations for both students and their communities (Stige, Malterud and Midtgarden, 2009). Thus, to the students and their parents, the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, the degree of their involvement and risks they might confront, should all be clearly stated to them.

Since this study aims to explore how to set up effective teaching and learning plans for the students’ Mandarin Chinese lessons, then their involvement is a central part of this research. These students are children. Children in research are regarded as a specific group that are vulnerable to harm or suffering risks. Therefore, researchers have a “responsibility for managing these risks and securing protection” (Carter, 2009, p. 859). In the process, data collection should be approved through the informed consent of both the children and their parents. The Information Sheet concerning this project (Appendix 4) was provided to all children and their parents prior to the commencement of the study. Participation should be in a “voluntary way, free from any coercion” (Carter, 2009, p. 859). The parents and students were asked to sign a Consent Form to indicate their willingness to participate in this study. (Appendix 5). No force or enticement is allowed, as this will ensure the participants are freely volunteering. “The independence of the research” and the relevant “conflicts of interest or partiality” should be explicit (Carter, 2009, p. 859). Furthermore, data collection should be arranged in a situation that does not disturb the normal study time and life of the students.

These principles have guided the conduct of this project. Specifically: all the evidence about the research sites and students remains confidential and the identity of the participants will be kept anonymous once the research was finished, and only the teacher-researcher and the project supervisors have access to the primary data.
3.3.5 Data management

As for the management of data, the required privacy guidelines were applied to ensure data were stored confidentially (on a password protected computer, and in a locked filing cabinet in the teacher-researcher’s office). This process is to ensure the data’s security from misuse, loss or unauthorised access. In addition, all the first-hand evidence was directly collected by way of assessment questionnaires. Students’ responses to the questionnaires reflected their assessments and accomplishments in Mandarin Chinese learning and these needed to be kept confidential. Considering the fact that the students were all Fifth grade primary school students, the questionnaires were designed to be simple and understandable. No requirements regarding writing skills were asked of the students.

The secondary evidence was by way of the teacher-researcher’s reflective diaries. None of the evidence collected is used in, or generated for any other purpose other than this study.

Storage of the evidence after completion of the project will be maintained for five years, after which paper files will be shredded and the computer files (including audio files and word documents) will be deleted. Each of these steps is designed to guarantee the students’ privacy and confidence.

3.3.6 Research-writing

Writing is a necessary step at the end of the research, and a method of discovering and analysing (Richardson, 2010). Through writing one can share various aspects of the research topic and its findings (Richardson, 2010).

The process of research writing is not without its challenges. Research writing is a process of identifying problems and challenging existing theory. Research writing is the practice and the production and exchange of knowledge (Aitchison and Lee, cited in Barthes, 2006). Therefore, research writing has the capacity to make a relationship between “knowledge production and language and learning” (Aitchison, and Lee, 2006, p. 276). The continuous review and rewriting of this thesis ensured the research method, data collection and analysis and the findings generated have
been presented as a true and reliable account (ethically sound) description of the outcomes of this project.

3.3.7 Triangulation

Triangulation is used to “determine core problems” or “reduce the inappropriate certainty” that sometimes happens when “a single evaluation [research] method” may not provide a true account of the situation under study (Wilson 2006, p. 46). Also, Turner and Turner (2009) argue that triangulation “is the means by which an alternate perspective is used to validate, challenge or extend existing findings” (p. 171). This research attempted data triangulation with data obtained from “different sources, times, conditions” (Turner and Turner, 2009, p. 172).

Triangulation asks for various perspectives and evidences to check the validity of the research results (Pine, 2009). Flick (2009) has named four types of triangulation: data source triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. In this study, data source triangulation was implemented. Three sources of data were collected, namely the teacher-researcher’s reflective journal, the developed lesson plans and the students’ feedback on assessment sheets. No data were collected to demonstrate whether the students had improved learning outcomes related to their Mandarin Chinese lessons.

This study was conducted over eighteen months and data were gathered at different time periods. The reflective journal entries were made after every lesson, recording lesson observations every three weeks, and the students’ feedback on assessment sheets were collected three times, at the end of three different school terms. Although only one form of triangulation was implemented, data source triangulation, this was the most appropriate for this study, given the relatively small size of the sample, the time allocation and the teacher-researcher experience.

3.4 Research design

The following section outlines the full scope of the research design. Each of the necessary aspects of the design is subsequently explained. They are: 1) site selection, 2) participant recruitment, 3) data collection and 4) data analysis procedures.
3.4.1 Site selection

The aim of this study was to explore answers to the research question: How to create effective teaching content and an integrated language learning context to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for Australian students.

The teacher-researcher was selected as a Chinese Language Volunteer teacher assigned by the NSW Department of Education to teach Mandarin Chinese in a western Sydney school. The research sites for all the Volunteers concentrated on the schools in the NSW Western Sydney region, where the Volunteers were assigned to teach. These schools were public primary schools and high schools favouring the promotion of Mandarin Chinese teaching in NSW, and had already established Mandarin Chinese lessons as weekly mandatory or selective courses.

The teacher-researcher was assigned to two schools; one was a high school and the other was a primary school. In this study, one school (Shumiao Primary School) was selected as the site for undertaking this research. The final site decision was based on the different aspects that could be seen to benefit the progress of the research. Xingxing (星/星星) High School is an academically comprehensive high school situated in Sydney, NSW. Chinese in Xingxing (星/星星) High School is not a compulsory course, and only Year 11 and 12 students were offered a Mandarin Chinese course. This school generally asked the NSW DE Volunteer Chinese teacher to recruit students for the class by designing a bulletin and posting it, in the language building and on the students’ Internet page. Chinese was run every Tuesday, for an hour, which was a dedicated free hour. Choosing to attend the Chinese class meant the students gave up their free time. For this reason only seven students chose to attend.

This site was therefore not suitable as a research site, as there was not a regular Chinese class operating to provide a cohort of participants over the eighteen months of the teaching assignment. This also meant there was not a dedicated teacher of Mandarin Chinese on staff who would be a mentor for the teacher-researcher’s teaching experience and research assignment. Therefore, Xingxing (星/星星) was not chosen as a research site.
Shumiao (Tree Seeding/树苗) Primary School was selected as the site for this research. It is also situated in Sydney, NSW, and has a long history of providing quality education since it was established in 1861. Shumiao (Tree Seeding/树苗) arranged organised lessons for Chinese teaching and learning. The teacher-researcher was assigned to take Chinese lessons and observations every Tuesday. Each of these sessions lasted 30 to 40 minutes, and included a total of four lessons each day.

The site of the data source was given a Chinese style name for confidentiality, and also endowed the researcher’s metaphor that Chinese language learning would grow stronger and stronger, like a tree seed: Shumiao (Tree Seeding/树苗) primary school. The data collection component of the research was commenced on 1 March 2014, and continued until the end of October 2014.

3.4.2 Students

There were two classes at Shumiao Prmary School that were assigned to learn Chinese, one group was Fifth grade students and the other was Third grade. Considering the age of the Third grade students, the Fifth grade students were chosen as the most suitable participants to take part in this project.

The general characteristics of the group were:

- 11-13 years of age
- Both boys and girls
- Most were beginning Mandarin Chinese learners; some with a knowledge of greetings
- This class was the ‘Opportunity Gifted and Talented Class’

There were 30 Fifth grade students who participated in this research after their parents’ provided their approval for their child to participate. A series of steps were undertaken to ensure participation was voluntary without any pressure or compulsion for the students to join in this project. First, it was through oral contact with the school, including the principal and teachers, and the students were given a detailed explanation of the processes and required tasks. Information sheets and consent forms, which were prepared for the guardians of the students and which contained
the entire project related information were sent home with the children. It was also made clear to the students’ that they had the right to withdraw at any time and that their personal and related evidence would be kept anonymous, and that there would be no harm or discomfort to them.

After the consents were received, approval was in place to research this topic with the students. At this stage the classroom teacher was involved in a supervisory capacity, and took care of the process of collecting data on the students, such as reviewing the appropriateness of the assessment sheets, and participating in the Chinese teaching.

The student participants were those who had started learning Mandarin Chinese as a second language at their local school. This group of students were an indispensable part to this research. The assessment questionnaires were designed specifically for this group of students, with questions designed to gauge their understanding and suggestions about the Chinese lessons.

3.4.3 The teacher-researcher as a participant

Myself as the Volunteer teacher-researcher from the ROSETE program could also be considered a participant in terms of providing data for this research. It was the reflective journal entries and the lesson plans that provided the data source from the teacher-researcher.

3.4.4 Data collection

The data collection sources included: 1) the teacher-researcher’s weekly journals, 2) the teacher-researcher’s lessons plans, and 3) students’ assessment sheets.

The data collection sources were chosen to provide the evidence to answer the research questions. The teacher-researcher began with three contributory questions, which were closely related to the topic of the study but drilled down to further refine what data would need to be collected to answer the research question (Table 3.1).
How could a beginning teacher of Mandarin Chinese plan thematic units so as to incorporate continuity and scaffolding of content and children’s interests to support the learnability of Mandarin Chinese by beginning Australian learners?

Table 3.1 Contributory research questions and relevant data sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributory Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What significant issues impact on the successful teaching of the planned lessons?</td>
<td>Teacher-researcher’s lesson plans and self-reflection journal entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How can a beginning teacher-researcher use student feedback to plan more meaningful and appropriate lessons to make Chinese learnable for beginning learners?</td>
<td>Student Self-Assessment Sheets and Teacher-researcher’s self-reflection journal entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What barriers to learning Chinese could impact beginning learners and how can the teacher-researcher use this knowledge to improve teaching practice?</td>
<td>Student Self-Assessment Sheets and Teacher-researcher’s self-reflection journal entries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.4.1: Introspection: Self-reflective journals

To significantly improve the professionalism of Mandarin Chinese teaching, a double-entry reflective journal was used to record evidence regarding teaching contents and lesson plans.

One of the main reasons to record reflective journals is because it is a process of introspection. Recording in the journal is a kind of action that should be done soon after lessons/events in order to recall the exact process of how the class went, and how the students’ responded. This made it possible to capture ideas, thoughts, reflections, insights, feelings and reactions to the related lessons or events (Burns, 2009).
Recording in a journal is a good way to detect challenges and problematic situations that are confronted in the process of teaching and to also reflect upon their possible solutions. In addition, journal reflections can assist with unit and lesson planning, question generating, and developing insights and assessment strategies. Lastly, they can connect the framework with the actual class situation and that of action and thought (Pine, 2009). They can be superficially regarded as a completely subjective record, as they are composed of personal experiences, feelings, thinking and deciding. However Zhao and Poulson (2006) contend that within reflective journal entries the underlying social and cultural surroundings are recorded along with the related personal accounts and therefore transcend any gap that may be between them. The reflection of one’s teaching about content, results and reasons can well be the precursor to teaching improvement, another aim this thesis attempts to achieve.

All teachers have their own theories of education, teaching and learning. Critical reflection on evidence of their own practices can extend and deepen their professional learning. Through critical self-reflection they can evaluate and question their theories, the ways they teach and what this means for students’ actual learning (Pine, 2009). Therefore, reflective journals are a means to support teachers’ theory making and problem solving. After the classes, the teacher-researcher critically evaluated them by recording in the journals.

In this thesis, the teacher-researcher made reflective journal entries soon after the classes, combined with the plans and thoughts in order to have a detailed and reliable record. Recording of the journals began around the question: How to revise practical lesson plans using evidence as provided by the students?

Journal entries followed a circular pattern, beginning with the way the teacher-researcher put forward a recurring topic, to how the teacher-researcher taught the content in an integrated way, to how the students followed the guidance of the teacher-researcher and put forward their own ideas in order to help generate something new. This process became the framework for the journal entries. The teacher-researcher’s responses to, or interpretations of, particular events or the students’ confusion or achievements, and related inner feelings and assessments are also entered in the journal.
3.4.4.2 Documents: Lesson plans

The question explored in this research concerns how to construct effective lesson plans. Therefore the teacher-researcher’s documented lesson plans are a main data source for analysis. In this study, the teacher-researcher intended to revise the plans for units of lessons based on the evidence collected as to whether and/or how this approach to planning and teaching was making it possible for the students to learn Mandarin Chinese.

The lesson plans collected as a data source were composed of the unit theme, lesson purpose, and language content. Assessments of both the unit and lesson plan may be recorded in the self-reflection journal, however no formal evaluation of the units or lessons is part of the data source. A sample lesson plan appears in Appendix 6.

3.4.4.3 Students’ Self-Assessment sheets

This research not only focuses on developing unit and lesson plans, but also on the students’ learning and reflections. Students were asked to finish the assessment sheets at the end of every term, three times in total. It was essential to collect the students’ work samples from the lessons as a main data source to test the success of the lesson and unit plan and to get their suggestions about studying a new language. (Appendices 7 and 8)

3.4.4.4 Assessment sheets

When designing the questions on the assessment sheets, the teacher-researcher included open-ended and closed questions. Closed questions were to collect numerical data of the differences and similarities of items for comparison (Brown, 2009). The systematic data from closed questions ease the process of categorising them and analysing the data. For example, I focused on setting questions about whether the students are interested in the topic taught, if they considered they had a good mastery of the content being taught and what their preferred tasks are. The open-ended questions allowed the students to make comments.

There were three stages of questioning in the assessment sheets. The first was at the end of Term 1. The feedback sought from the students referred to their attitudes about learning Mandarin Chinese, their Mandarin Chinese level, topics of interest
and their expectations. These were gauged to influence the teacher-researcher’s choices and designs of the unit and lesson plans in the final stage.

The second stage took place in the middle of the study but generally at the conclusion of each topic chapter, and was the students’ feedback about what they had learned in that period. For example, they were asked ‘what do you find most interesting about learning this topic?’ ‘What would you like to learn about next? Please illustrate some related topics’.

The third stage was related to the first stage, attempting for example to evaluate the students’ current attitudes about learning Mandarin Chinese, their current Mandarin Chinese level, current topics of interest and current expectations about learning Mandarin Chinese. In the final assessment, the questions were directed mainly toward the students’ general feelings about learning Mandarin Chinese rather than asking for specific details.

Questionnaires offer the convenience of collecting a great deal of data in a limited short period of time, which can be seen as much more efficient than interviews (Mills, 2011). This data collection method can be valuable when applied at the end of each research cycle to gain accurate feedback and outcomes.

3.4.5 Data Analysis

In this study, the methods of data collection included generating a self-reflective journal, students’ assessment sheets, and the units of lesson plans. The way of coding the qualitative data (journal and lesson plans) was informed by a consideration of three types of coding: open, axial, and selective (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). In this process, the data were firstly sorted to make them clear and meaningful. Then data underwent open coding to identify concepts and categories, after which axial coding was adopted to establish connections between categories and sub-categories. Lastly, selective coding was adopted to integrate all the categories, which were around the research question and topics.

The students’ assessments sheets were analysed using basic tallying. The number of students who gave the same answer was recorded. Comments from the open-ended questions were coded in the same way as the data in the reflection journal.
3.4.5.1 Data cleaning/reduction

A necessary step before coding was the cleaning of the data. Steps were taken to reduce the bulk of the data so as to make it meaningful (see 3.4.4.2 below). It should be noted that in this study, I could not avoid my personal biases and subjectivities, even in the process of revising the data. English is not my first language; therefore it might be that some of the data collected were misunderstood or misinterpreted, as may be the case with some of the literature. I received help from my university research education team, my school mentor and other Department Volunteers. They supported this work by double-checking my interpretations.

3.4.5.2 Analysis of my journals

Raw data by itself has no meaning. A key responsibility of any researcher is to analyse and making meaning of the evidence. Coding is a process of not merely discovering evidence around the topic in the data, but also connecting the specific events with general analytic groups (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995). Therefore, I generated and identified useful evidence by means of open coding. The data from my reflective journals containing observations were analysed using open coding. The data from my reflective journals containing observations were analysed using open coding.

To further explain, in noting several actions and interactions between the students and teacher-researcher concerning ‘Effective teaching content and methods’, various examples of these might be sorted initially under the same category. By focusing specifically within that category, it may become obvious that there are examples of similar data that could be coded further into subcategories. Once these subcategories are labelled, the themes begin to appear (see 3.4.5). For example, ‘Effective teaching content’ could then be divided into several sub-groups. By starting with the overall general categories and then coding into sub-groups, inadvertent errors of misplacement/miscoding might well be avoided (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

Analysis of the reflective journals and observations took place after each school term and followed the process outlined above. Key words were identified from within the gathered data and then each topic within was labelled and divided into sub-categories. Emerson, et al. (1995) emphasises that in the initial stage; the ethnographer should include as many codes as possible to facilitate concepts being linked and content framed.
Second, the category of axial coding is related with the subcategories and their “relationships tested against data” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 11). In this process, the original groups were re-conceptualised into much broader ones. I tried to combine the possible sections to generate further sub-categories by comparing the similarities and dissimilarities. Based on the large-scale categories, the events/actions/interactions are compared to create sub-categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2007).

Third, selective coding, a process whereby all categories can be unified around one main central category, provided the opportunity to fill in some of the branches of each category. Poorly designed categories (or where data does not fit into a category) can be identified in this process. By following this process of analysis for the reflective journal entries, there was consistency in the analysis and therefore attempts to maintain the integrity of the data.

3.4.5.3 Analysis of units of lessons

The documents used as evidence included the units of lessons planned. (see Appendix 6). The lesson plans were developed by the teacher-researcher and were composed of three parts: the general teaching content, the cultural content and the practice activities. After a lesson, the teacher-researcher with the assistance of reflective diaries and students’ feedback or suggestions, made readjustments to the following lessons.

3.4.5.4 Analysis of assessment sheets

Students’ Self-Assessment Sheets were analysed to identify the students learning, to ascertain whether the teacher-researcher had made any progress towards making Chinese learnable, and to inform improvements in future planning of units of lessons. The teacher-researcher gathered these data and created tables and pie charts to display the results of the tallying of repeated answers (Burns, 2009, p. 124). Open-ended questions showed the students’ direct feedback on my efforts to make Chinese learnable. They were firstly analysed by categorising similar answers and distinguishing the different ones. Tables or charts were created to organise these refined answers in a systematic way. Analysis of the table or chart was the final step, which provided the visual explanation of the data.
3.4.6 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis refers to a process for encoding primary evidence. Thus, it is important to identify and label explicit codes that represent “a list of themes, a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). The themes are identified through successful coding of the data collected, into categories and sub-categories, “at the manifest level” or “at the latent level” of the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). Through the systematic and detailed analysis of the data, several themes were identified in this study, that were related to the research questions and the findings have been discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

3.5 Conclusion

This research adopts the methodology of teacher action/knowledge (Xingzhi) research. This methodology is suitable for this research that explored the novice teacher-researcher’s processes and outcomes of developing units of work and lesson plans to make Chinese learnable for beginning learners. For this reason the process of action and knowledge has guided the procedures of planning lessons, teaching the content and assessing the outcomes through student questionnaires and observations. This Chapter has explained the how/where of data collection and analysis, and has explained the principles of research that were followed and has illustrated the possible benefits and risks to the participants.
Chapter Four:
Timing: Time Allocation in Teaching/Learning Content

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four presents the findings from the exploration of the first contributory research question:

1. What significant issues impact on the successful teaching of the planned lessons?

Firstly, this Chapter provides the evidence identifying ‘time’ as a significant issue for the teacher-researcher’s teaching practice and lesson planning. This is followed by some background information on ‘time’ and its importance in teaching and learning. This is followed by a summary of the time element when the lesson is enacted. That is, what is the reality of the anticipated, planned time? Within reflective time on teaching practice; academic time, preventative behaviour management, instructional support and classroom assessment are discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

4.1.1 Identification of ‘time’ as a significant issue

As the teacher-researcher reflected on teaching, particularly in the first term, comments in the reflective journal entries indicated that many lessons were not as successful as the teacher-researcher had planned. Table 4.1 below displays some of these data.
Table 4.1: Reflective Journal Excerpts with Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflective Journal Entry</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Today the lesson didn’t finish on time. Students weren’t able to recall the greetings. I needed to spend more time in the beginning of the lesson or only give one example (Lesson 1, 11th March, 2014)</td>
<td>Time Content selection Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two games were planned for today. With the first game, when giving out the instructions, not all the students had a good command of all the numbers. Reviewing the numbers again before the game took time and some students became noisy and restless. The second game was not played as we ran out of time. (Lesson 2: 18 March, 2014)</td>
<td>Content review Time Classroom management Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Originally I planned to use stickers in a game, but not carried out because of time (Lesson 2 18 March, 2014)</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The inappropriate design of the game caused misunderstanding by the children and the need to re-explain a few times. This reduced the time of the planned teaching content. This was another example of the importance of accurate time prediction for general content instruction – do not limit practice on the whole but focus on the details. Still I did not finish some of the target aims in this lesson.....(Lesson 7, 27 May, 2014)</td>
<td>Time Content review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the coding reveals, ‘time’ became one of the themes that emerged as a significant issue for language teaching. These data have indicated for the teacher-researcher, that this issue needed to be explored in her teaching practice in order to make Mandarin Chinese more learnable.

4.1.2 Background-Time

Time has been considered an important factor in teaching (Wang, 2011), especially for the beginning teacher. Therefore, teachers need to constantly monitor and evaluate the time allocation in their teaching and students’ learning. In this chapter, time is examined in three forms: the planned time allocation, the practical time application (the reality of time spent in a lesson) and the reflective time re-allocation for subsequent lessons.

Each of the three forms are discussed in terms of teaching content (language points), and practice, and cultural content, across the beginning Chinese teacher-researcher’s three terms of teaching. Specifically, the three domains of time have been examined through:
• the teaching content which includes the general language points—words, characters and sentences,
• the practice of knowledge, such as traditional type practice for review and entertaining activities, and
• cultural content, such as related cultural input and additional cultural points

Time has played a significant role in teachers’ decision-making concerning which teaching methods might be adopted. For example adopting a student-centred teaching model is known to be time consuming. Moreover, the application of time in school lesson planning needs to consider how the allocated time to a lesson can provide effective instruction, opportunities to motivate students, and have students presented with content that is well-arranged and consistent (Laczko and Berliner, 2003).

The teacher-researcher as a novice encountered many challenges caused by time constraints (as outlined in Table 4.1). Hence the importance of time management became an important issue for reflection. Wang’s (2011) research confirms the “findings in the literature that [state] time is a crucial factor for teachers’ pedagogical decisions” (Wang, 2011, p. 157).

4.2 Time in Planning and Teaching Content (Language Points)

Teaching content here refers to the time analysis of general Chinese teaching content, and does not include cultural content or activities like games and revision. ‘Time in planning’ in this study refers to the time allocated to the designing of unit and lesson plans; ‘time in practice’ refers to the time application for teaching the lessons.

In this section, the raw data has been drawn from the unit and lesson plans from Units 1 and 2 developed by the teacher-researcher across two terms. The teacher-researcher took account when planning to ensure there was consistency and continuity across the lessons and also across the units.

Time is said to play a vital and significant role in teachers’ decision making and students’ learning efficiency. However, “time is [may be] experienced by these teachers as a dilemma in teaching” (Wang, 2011, p. 158). Teachers are always influenced by time, especially when rushing the lesson, working against time to
complete the teaching content tasks, or dealing with behaviour management. All these issues, may create a context where the teacher may become less student-centred in approach. Admittedly, student-centred teaching is currently in wide use, but it tends to be more time-consuming and more unpredictable, in terms of the time taken in lessons, when compared to the teacher-centred model (Kennedy, 2005). Therefore, balancing and properly using time is of great significance to the teacher in designing unit and lesson plans in thinking about how to anticipate how much time should be needed to achieve the learning outcomes.

4.2.1 Time for Teaching Content-Language points

The part of time for teaching content here refers to the time spent teaching general Chinese content (the language points), which does not contain cultural content or activities such as games and revision.

General teaching content (the language points) was the core content of the lesson plans as it was considered very important for children to learn. The lesson content was designed to be in a continual sequence (i.e. continuity of content). Each lesson could not go beyond the 45-minute allocation (from the School’s set curriculum for L2 learning) (see Table 4.2).

4.2.1.1 Unit 1: Lesson plans

Table 4.2: Unit 1: Lesson plans summarized-new general content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Time in plan’ (Planned general content-Language points)</th>
<th>‘Time in practice’ (Actual time taken in the teaching content and reflection comments)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers: 一, 二, 三, 四, 五, 六, 七, 八, 九, 十 (one-ten) (oral and written requirement) (Lesson 1: 11 March, 2014)</td>
<td>Nothing in teaching content (Students were involved in the learning. The selection of a classroom monitor created a sense of competition, which made them eager to perform better.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Spoken &amp; written: Numbers 一, 二, 三, 四, 五, 六, 七, 八, 九, 十 (one-ten)</td>
<td>● Spoken &amp; written: Numbers 一, 二, 三, 四, 五, 六, 七, 八, 九, 十 (one-ten) (Not learned: When instructing, the teacher found not all of them had a good command of all the numbers. Therefore, she decided to put off this kind of content or may delete this part.) (Lesson 2: 18 March, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Game 1: find who you are; (Game 1: teacher assigned every Student a number from 一 to 十, divided them into two teams. First round: teacher gave a random number in Chinese and students who owned the number raised hands. Second round: teacher spoke numbers in English and students who had the number were to stand up and speak out the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.1.2 Analysis and reflection

Some points learned after concluding the teaching outlined in Table 4.1, are now discussed. First, the content in the ‘time in plan’ column was more diverse than that in the ‘time in practice’ column, which is understandable, as the actual lesson teaching time is sometimes limited depending on how the students’ respond. Usually the major percentage of time in the lesson would be the general teaching content (language points), but often more actual time is given to cultural content and the
review content. For example, in the lesson 2 (18 March 2014), all teaching content except for numbers, was deleted as ‘when instructing, the teacher found not all of the students had a good command of all the numbers. Therefore, I decided to put off this kind of content or maybe delete this part’ (Table 4.2; Lesson 2: 18 March, 2014). In the following lesson, it was hence decided to allow more time for teaching the specific content (language points).

All the major tasks were finished in Lesson 3. However, the teacher-researcher still did not cover all the content planned for, and was still somewhat confused about the amount of time the Fifth class students needed to learn Chinese and to cover all the planned content. One reflection on ‘time in practice’ recorded that there was an underestimation of the difficulty of the sentences for the students to learn, due to the teacher-researcher’s lack of knowledge about the students, what they already knew or didn’t know and how they learned best. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is critical to accurately estimate the time to be spent in each teaching stage, but to also consider the students existing knowledge as this will impact on the time they need to consolidate the general content (language points).

In Lesson 4, the spoken and written elements were covered in the set time, however the sentences relating to birthdays were not completed. The planned lesson did not factor in time appropriately to cover this amount of general teaching content.

4.2.1.3 Unit 2: Lesson plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Time in plan’ (Planned general content-Language points)</th>
<th>‘Time in practice’ (Actual time taken in the teaching content and reflection comments)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Sentence about one’s birthday: 我的生日是 XXXX 年 X 月 X 日。 (My birthday is X, X, XXXX.) (Lesson 2: 20 May, 2014)</td>
<td>● 我的生日是 XXXX 年 X 月 X 日。 (My birthday is X, X, XXXX.) (Lesson 2: 20 May, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Written &amp; spoken: Families members: 爸爸 (dad), 妈妈(mum), 爷爷 (grandpa in father’s side), 奶奶 (grandma in father’s side), 外公 (grandpa in mother’s side), 外婆 (grandma in mother’s side) (Lesson 2: 20 May, 2014)</td>
<td>● Written &amp; spoken: Families members: 爸爸 (dad), 妈妈(mum), 爷爷 (grandpa in father’s side), 奶奶 (grandma in father’s side), 外公 (grandpa in mother’s side), 外婆 (grandma in mother’s side) (Lesson 2: 20 May, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Written &amp; spoken: 你的 (Your); 我的 (mine); 他/她(his/her); (apply these into Students reflected on some of the nouns compared to their own language.)</td>
<td>● Written &amp; spoken: 你的 (Your); 我的 (mine); 他/她(his/her); (apply these into Students reflected on some of the nouns compared to their own language.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extension:</strong> From 我叫...... (my name is); to 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷. ....叫. ....... (My mum’s/daddy’s/grandpa’s name is)</td>
<td><strong>Extension:</strong> From 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷. ....叫. ....... (My mum’s/daddy’s/grandpa’s name is)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>我__岁了 (I’m__ years old); 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷__岁了。 (my mum/daddy/grandpa is __ years old.)</td>
<td>(This sentence formation can apply any of the family members in a sentence format to help build students more complete sentences.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>（我，你他/她）(I, you. He/she)</td>
<td>你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷叫什么？（what’s your mum’s/daddy’s/grandpa’s name?）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written &amp; spoken:</strong> 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷.....叫.... (My mum/daddy/grandpa is __ years old.)</td>
<td>（This was not scheduled, but since there was little difference with the answer sentence, it was not hard to insert a similar format to help students form a conversation. (Lesson 4: 3 June, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷.....叫....</td>
<td>Not learned: Out of time, and the teacher changed her mind because she wanted to individually test the students’ achievement.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flash cards game:</strong> I’m the winner. Game rules: 1st round (20 small rounds): Compete with speed Cards in teacher’s hand Chances are the same</td>
<td><strong>Flash cards game:</strong> I’m the winner. Game rules: 1st round (20 small rounds): Compete with speed Cards in teacher’s hand Chances are the same 2nd round: (20 small rounds): Compete for correctness Cards on the data Competitor has the chance to win. 3rd round : (40 small rounds): Compete using teamwork Cards in students’ hand Final chance to win the game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>（我，你他/她） (I, you, he/she) in the two sentences (Lesson 5: 10 June, 2014)</td>
<td>(The cancelled learning contents) This part wasn’t taught because of limited time. The teacher found a lot of designed contents would be disturbed because of the time limit, which can influence the smoothness and results of a lesson, though sometimes they may be creative. Therefore, the teacher has decided to plan the times for each activity and control time according to the plan, starting with next lesson.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written &amp; spoken:</strong> 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷.....叫....</td>
<td><strong>Written &amp; spoken:</strong> 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷.....叫.... (My mum/daddy/grandpa is __ years old.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷.....叫....</td>
<td>你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷.....叫.... (How old is your mum/daddy/grandpa?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>（我，你他/她） (I, you, he/she) in the two sentences (Lesson 5: 10 June, 2014)</td>
<td>(The extra of question sentence about age was inspired based on last lesson. Role-play shows: ask students (30) to divide into several groups and apply all the knowledge learned before and present it. (Lesson 5: 10 June, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number extension:</strong> teach numbers up to 10 (only 0-10 has been systematically taught before)</td>
<td><strong>Number extension:</strong> teach numbers up to 10 (only 0-10 has been systematically taught before)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinyin tongue explanation: according to the reflection of students and teacher’s own observation: they never or seldom copy the tones of the Pinyin when writing. That part means nothing to them, teacher hasn’t taught before. (Lesson 6: 17 June, 2014)</td>
<td>Pinyin tongue explanation: according to the reflection of students and teacher’s own observation: they never or seldom copy the tones of the Pinyin when writing. That part means nothing to them, teacher hasn’t taught before. (Lesson 6: 17 June, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flash cards game:</strong> I’m the winner. Game rules: 1st round (20 small rounds): Compete with speed Cards in teacher’s hand Chances are the same</td>
<td><strong>Flash cards game:</strong> I’m the winner. Game rules: 1st round (20 small rounds): Compete with speed Cards in teacher’s hand Chances are the same 2nd round: (20 small rounds):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compete for correctness
Cards on the data
Competitor has the chance to win.
3rd round : (40 small rounds):
Compete with teamwork
Cards in students’ hand
Final chance to win the game
(Lesson 6: 17 June, 2014)

4.2.1.4 Analysis and reflection

The main objective with the Unit 2 lesson plans was to consider the ‘relationship between content’ and the additional ideas inspired by previous lesson plans. For example, when designing unit 2 about family members, the teacher-researcher was inspired to combine the teaching of family ‘members’ with the last term’s knowledge, which then became a useful review of prior knowledge, as well as providing a useful scaffold for the new knowledge. This was a good application of the continuity of content and time management in language learning as the practice time was related to the previous knowledge. Similarly, when teaching the upgrading of sentence formation, an example from the lesson reflection in ‘time in practice’ observed: ‘this was not on the schedule, but since there was little difference between the answer sentence [and using other family members’ names in the same format], it was not that hard to continue the format, which can help students form a conversation’ (Table 4.3, Lesson 4: 3, June, 2014). In this lesson a new question sentence was added because of the observation and then reflection on the lesson plans.

In conclusion, in ‘time for teaching content’, as content between lessons and units are interrelated, it could be expanded from vocabulary to sentences, from declarative sentences to interrogative sentences and from topic to topic (e.g. extending the previous knowledge of ‘asking the age of people’ to the third term’s topic of ‘asking the names of animal years’). All these relationships establish a foundation by building upon existing knowledge to produce new knowledge, that is, scaffolding the content and knowledge.

When planning the content for general language point teaching, the teacher-researcher always focused on the centre of continuity, which means designing content that contains co-relationships that scaffold learning cognition.
Subsequently, the teaching content is dispersed over time in small portions, bringing continuity between parts. Continuity planning aims to also extend the time spent on retention of knowledge as this method revises the prior knowledge before moving to the new knowledge, which is in some way connected. “The retention of skill proficiency is apparently different for each level of training and each type of skill. Frequency of use affected the amount of deterioration in both didactic knowledge and skills” (Latman, 1980, p. 187). Reinforcement of learning generally benefits the students’ retention over time.

The planning of teaching content and how the teaching progresses during and after a lesson will depend on the continuity of the content, the time allocation for the learning tasks and the cognitive load placed on the students. All these considerations can contribute to the successful scaffolding of the students’ language acquisition, if they are presented to the students within their capabilities and interests.

4.3 Time for Practice: Practice for review and practice for activities

Time for practice in this section, refers to 1) the weekly review of the previous weeks’ teaching content, and 2) the activities presented to the children as part of the lesson content, such as games, videos watching, or competitions that practice/reinforce the content. This section returns to Unit 1 and 2 lessons but compares whether the time planned for the practice sessions ‘time in plan’, matched the actual practice time during the lessons ‘time in practice’.

4.3.1 Planned content matches ‘time in practice’

Throughout a new unit, it is sometimes very worthwhile to establish the students’ consolidation of the content before continuing. In the Unit 1 plans outlined in Table 4.4 a concerted attempt was made to re-establish prior knowledge, review the previous lessons and decrease the cognitive load. The ‘time in plan’ and ‘time in practice’ are almost identical for these lessons. This indicated that the time planned for reinforcing the new content stayed more or less to time.
4.3.1.1 Unit 1: Lesson plans

[Note: Table 4.3 displays a very reduced format for all the lessons planned. This summary is to illustrate the amount of ‘time in practice (for review and reinforcement)’ that can be planned for, when scaffolding the content in readiness for new knowledge].

Table 4.4: Unit 1: lesson plans summarized-the practice (review) section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Time in plan’ (Planned Content review Time)</th>
<th>‘Time in practice’ (Actual time taken to review content)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number song (Lesson 1: 11 March, 2014)</td>
<td>Number song (Lesson 1: 11 March, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision about last lesson. (Lesson 2: 18 March, 2014)</td>
<td>Revision about last lesson. (Lesson 2: 18 March, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision about last lesson. (Lesson 4: 1, April, 2014)</td>
<td>Revision about last lesson. (Lesson 4: 1, April, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game: Whispering Students stand in two lines and select a leader. The teacher whispers the characters to the leader and the team members pass them along. The first one in line who can be the first to write the answer on the white board correctly and nicely wins for the team. (Lesson 4: 1, April, 2014)</td>
<td>Nothing in practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision about last lesson. (Lesson 5: 8, April, 2014)</td>
<td>Revision about last lesson. (Lesson 5: 8, April, 2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1.2 Analysis and reflection

The activities incorporated in ‘time for practice’ (reinforcing the new content) in Unit 1 contained songs, dialogue performances, or simple practice readings. The designing of this simple content was to consider scaffolding the content for the students. The lessons were designed to be not too challenging so as to build the student’s confidence prior to undertaking the new content. However, after a term’s teaching and reviewing the students’ feedback it was clear that the ‘time in practice’ sections of the Unit 1 lessons did not challenge the students. Their feedback indicated they preferred to focus on actual forms of Chinese they could use locally as part of their everyday lives (this is further discussed in Chapter 5).
4.3.2 Time in practice using Chinese in everyday life

The following table illustrates how the amount of ‘time in practice’ was extended from a basic review of the previous lesson to include practice through games and activities. The reflections show this was successful for some students and not for others.

4.3.2.1 Unit 2: Lesson plans

Table 4.5: Unit 2: lesson plans summarized-the practice (review) section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Time in plan’ (Planned Content review Time)</th>
<th>‘Time in practice’ (Actual time taken to review content)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Review about last term (Lesson 2: 20 May, 2014)</td>
<td>● Review about last term (Lesson 2: 20 May, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Review about last lesson: the new routine; family members (Lesson 3: 27 May, 2014)</td>
<td>● Review about last lesson: the new routine; family members (Lesson 3: 27 May, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Games: Flash cards review of members Design all the family members with the combination of 你的, 我的, 他/她的; Each is with the pictures and PINYIN. Invite one of the students to stand in front of the classroom, turn his/her back to the PowerPoint. When the classmates speak out the Chinese Pronunciation, then she should say out the English ones, vice-versa. (Lesson 3: 27 May, 2014)</td>
<td>● Games: Flash cards review of members (Lesson 3: 27 May, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Review about last lesson: the new routine; family members Sentence application: 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷。。。叫。。。。。 (Lesson 4: 3 June, 2014)</td>
<td>● Review about last lesson: the new routine; family members Sentence application: 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷。。。叫。。。。。 (Lesson 4: 3 June, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Flash cards review of members (Lesson 4: 3 June, 2014)</td>
<td>● Flash cards review of members (Lesson 4: 3 June, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Review about last lesson: 你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷叫什么？（what is your mum/daddy/grandpa’s name?） 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷。。。叫。。。。。 (My mum’s/daddy’s/ grandpa’s name is) (Lesson 5: 10 June, 2014)</td>
<td>● Review about last lesson: 你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷叫什么？（what’s your mum/daddy/grandpa’s name?） 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷。。。叫。。。。。 (My mum’s/daddy’s/ grandpa’s name is) (Lesson 5: 10 June, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Flash cards game: I’m the winner.</td>
<td>● No game has been in practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Review about last lesson: 你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷叫什么？（what’s your</td>
<td>● Review about last lesson: 你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷叫什么？（what’s your</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

| Review about last lesson: the new routine; family members |
| Sentence application: 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷。。。叫。。。。。 (Lesson 4: 3 June, 2014) |
| Flash cards review of members (Lesson 4: 3 June, 2014) |
| Review about last lesson: 你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷叫什么？（what is your mum/daddy/grandpa’s name?） 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷。。。叫。。。。。 (My mum’s/daddy’s/ grandpa’s name is) (Lesson 5: 10 June, 2014) |
| Flash cards game: I’m the winner. |
| Review about last lesson: 你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷叫什么？（what’s your mum/daddy/grandpa’s name?） 我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷。。。叫。。。。。 (My mum’s/daddy’s/ grandpa’s name is) (Lesson 5: 10 June, 2014) |
| No game has been in practice |
mum/daddy/grandpa’s name?

我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷。。。。叫。。。。。(My mum’s/daddy’s/ grandpa’s name is)

我的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷。。。。__岁了。(My mum/daddy/grandpa is __ years old.)

你的妈妈/爸爸/爷爷。。。。__岁了？(How old is your mum/daddy/grandpa?) (Lesson 6: 17 June, 2014)

- Flash cards game: I’m the winner.
  Game rules:
  1st round (20 small rounds):
  - Compete the speed
  - Cards in teacher’s hand
  - Chances are the same
  2nd round: (20 small rounds):
  - Compete the correctness
  - Cards on the data
  - Competitor has the chance to win.
  3rd round: (40 small rounds):
  - Compete your teamwork
  - Cards in students’ hand
  - Final chance to win the game

Role-play shows: ask students (30) to divide into several groups and apply all the knowledge learned before and present it. (Lesson 6: 17 June, 2014)

4.3.2.2 Analysis and reflection

One of the most distinguishing features in the Unit 2 lesson review section (i.e. the reinforcement activities) is that more time was incorporated into practicing through games and activities. This is a marked variation from the plans in Unit 1 and incorporated such activities as the flash card game and role play.

The review/reinforcement and practice section is incorporated into every lesson, every week. However, in Unit 1 (Table 4.4) almost all the review time was taken with content (learning points) review. After the students’ reflection, the teacher-researcher added the second form of practice (active practice) into Unit 2 planning, and included activities such as flash cards review of numbers (Lesson 4: 3, June, 2014) and the role-play in Lesson 6: 17, June, 2014.
The time allocated for review/reinforcement and practice of content is of vital importance to the continuity of unit and lesson plans and to students’ language learning. In lesson 6, the role-play, unlike the games, consumed more than the anticipated time. This was part of the learning process for the teacher-researcher, to allow more ‘time in practice’ if activities such as role-plays are to be used. With more experience, the teacher-researcher began to see practice and review as necessarily taking a significant portion of lesson time, and that practice could also include a review through reading, writing, listening and speaking activities, so as to vary the approach and hold the children’s interests.

4.3.3 The spiral curriculum-

Another concept linked to appropriate lesson plans, general content (language points), cultural content, and review/reinforcement/practice of content, is the idea of the spiral curriculum. A spiral curriculum ensures children’s learning, spirals through many forms of consolidation before spirally upwards into new knowledge. Lessons within a spiral curriculum would include activities in reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing or presenting skills that are linked to the planned subject matter so that consolidation occurs before there is further progress into more advanced knowledge (Johnson and Houia, 2005). In this research, the ‘time in practice’ (review/reinforcement of content) eventually took on a more spiral approach, with practice sessions involving repetition/rote learning (reading), homework (writing), dialogue, story-making and songs (speaking), role-plays and games (listening and following rules).

However, not all studies hold the positive attitudes towards this teaching model. Snider (2004, p. 31) writes, “the spiral design hinders student learning”. Although Snider (2004, p. 31) says the model is responsible for “(a) treating topics superficially, (b) introducing concepts at an inappropriate rate, (c) minimising academic learning time, and (d) providing insufficient cumulative review”; these are not supported by the analysis of the evidence presented here. It is important to note alternative views on lesson planning methods.

As the teacher-researcher continued to monitor the outcomes of the teaching episodes through reflection, more concerted attempts were made to incorporate the
needs of the students. Over time the teacher-researcher realised that some topics were not appropriate to beginner learners. Second, the in-class teaching/learning time was limited under the circumstances of the teaching assignment from the NSW DET. The allocation was that the class was once a week for 45 minutes.

The teacher-researcher also became familiar with scaffolding and the spiral curriculum model where the teacher’s planning shuttles back and forth between the core ‘new’ knowledge and the practice/review and reinforcement sessions, which provides sufficient time and ensures that students would consolidate the knowledge over a period of time.

**4.4 Time for Cultural Content**

In this section, the data analysis of time, refers to the time for teaching/learning cultural content, or cultural knowledge (see Table 4.6).

**4.4.1 Defining cultural content**

Byram and Grundy (2002, p. 193) suggest “‘Culture’ in language teaching and learning is usually defined pragmatically as a/the culture associated with a language being learned”. Thus, the question of how to use culture in language teaching arises for discussion in this section. Cultural knowledge may refer to evidence about “the target culture, its typical patterns of behaviour and its attitudes” (Broady, 2004, p. 68). Broady (2004) claims that cultural knowledge (via language learning classes) is, “passed on to a participant from someone else, rather than arising from the participant’s own experience; it reflects broad generalisations often based on a narrow selection of evidence” (2004, p. 68).

These comments are relevant to the ROSETE NSW DE Volunteers, in considering what cultural content to include in lesson plans as they bring their previous cultural experiences with them to their new teaching contexts. Broady (2004, p. 68) warns, “it is not always easy to define what ‘culture’ is, let alone how we should integrate culture into our teaching”. Broady (2004) further comments that ‘culture’ is not a body of facts about a country or its classical art works, but the way that a group’s members construct and express their lives.
4.4.1.1 Unit 1: lesson plans (cultural content)

Importantly then, for the teacher-researcher, Chinese culture is what she brings to the schools in New South Wales. This makes the person-to-person interactions between the teacher-researcher and the students’ central to intercultural education. Initially then, traditional greetings, signs of the zodiac, festivals and the relationships within families were chosen as the beginning point for some cultural content (Table 4.6). As previously mentioned, varying the teaching mode is important to hold children’s attention and therefore, the teacher-researcher considered various strategies to introduce cultural content, such as: varying the Chinese greeting routine in every class; playing an interesting cartoon video to introduce the Zodiac; using comparisons of Australian and Chinese families, or a PowerPoint introduction about the Dragon Boat Festival.

Table 4.6: Unit 1 and 2: lesson plans summarized (new cultural content)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit 1</th>
<th>‘Time in plan’ (Planned cultural content)</th>
<th>‘Time in practice’ (Actual time taken in the teaching cultural content)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Classroom routine: 起立 (stand up, please), 老师好 (hello, teacher) (oral requirement)</td>
<td>● Classroom routine: 起立 (stand up, please), 老师好 (hello, teacher) (oral requirement)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Culture Understanding: 12 zodiacs. (Lesson 4: 1 April, 2014)</td>
<td>Not done</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Culture Understanding: 12 zodiacs &amp; selective record (Video introduction) (Lesson 5: 8 April, 2014)</td>
<td>Note done</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit 2</th>
<th>‘Time in plan’ (Planned cultural content)</th>
<th>‘Time in practice’ (Actual time taken in the teaching cultural content)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Culture Understanding: 12 zodiacs &amp; selective record (Video introduction)</td>
<td>● Culture Understanding: 12 zodiacs &amp; selective record (Video introduction)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Classroom routine: finish lesson</td>
<td>● Classroom routine: finish lesson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● 老师再见 (see you, teacher) (Lesson 2: 20 May, 2014)</td>
<td>老师再见 (see you, teacher) (Lesson 2: 20 May, 2014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Chinese Family introduction: video</td>
<td>● Chinese Family introduction: video</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Culture introduction: Dragon Boat Festival: PowerPoint and videos about festival’s customs and food and story (Lesson 4: 3 June, 2014)</td>
<td>● Culture introduction: Dragon Boat Festival: PowerPoint and videos about festival’s customs and food and story (Lesson 4: 3 June, 2014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4.1.2 Analysis and reflection

In Units 1 and 2, the cultural content, apart from varying the daily Chinese greeting routines (which were not written formally in the lesson plans), mainly focused on traditional festivals. Planning a special lesson near the date of the festival might likely interest the students and enrich their learning about the culture of China. The format of such a lesson would be to have an introduction of the festival, followed by various images (Powerpoint, pictures, videos or photographs) of the actual festival, incorporating some Mandarin Chinese words, followed by the children’s taking part in an activity relating to the festival (either art, music or story-telling). A class display could be made.

Not all the lessons taught across the two lessons were completed within the planned time. Table 4.6: Unit 1-Lessons 4 and 5, did not successfully cover any of the planned cultural content for these lessons. The teacher-researcher ran out of time. However, this caused the teacher-researcher to consider that for special cultural content, such as the Dragon Boat Festival, a majority of lesson time could be planned to cover this topic. As can be seen in Table 4.6: Unit 2: Lesson 4: 3 June, 2014) the planned cultural content was covered in the planned time.

4.5 Time in Reflection-The teacher-researcher’s time

The planning of units of lesson reflected a great deal about the Departmental Volunteers capabilities for generating professional teaching/learning activities. The use of ‘time in reflection’ means consideration has to be given to how the plans worked for the students’ language learning and what suggestions could be extracted to be applied in future lesson planning. The teacher-researcher focused attention on the adequacy of the time allocation when comparing the estimated time for teaching with the actual teaching in class. Analysis of the raw data from the reflective diary entries guided this section.

4.5.1 Changes to allocated teaching time

Teaching content sometimes changes, with unplanned additions, diversions or cancellations made according to an inspiration, idea or responses from students. A
full unit or individual lesson plans might have something added or cancelled for a variety of reasons. This section explores these ‘changes in time’ influences on the lessons plans and students learning.

Time management is an essential element of effective instruction and hence students’ achievement and acquisition. Vannest, Hagan-Burke, Parker and Soares, (2011, p. 222) proposed ten types of teacher time use as follows:

1. The academic instruction
2. Non-academic instruction
3. Instructional support
4. Preventative behaviour management
5. Responsive behaviour management
6. Special education assessment
7. State-mandated assessment
8. Classroom assessment
9. Special education paperwork
10. General education paperwork

Of these ten proposed uses of teacher’s time, throughout this research, the teacher-researcher used four: academic instruction, instructional support, preventative and responsive behaviour management, and classroom assessment. The other uses of time were not applicable, as the teacher-researcher’s teaching assignment did not include these. They were noted as part of the classroom teacher’s time and included: non-academic instruction; special education assessment; special education paperwork; general education paperwork (referred to as administrative issues undertaken by the class teacher) and State-mandated assessment.

4.5.2 Academic time-classroom instruction time

Academic instruction is about “teaching, presenting, and modelling the essential skills and knowledge assessed by the state standards (e.g., presenting academic material, guiding student learning [academics])” (Vannest, Hagan-Burke, Parker and Soares, 2011, p. 222). This was the major component of the teacher-researcher’s time use. However, there was often an underestimation or overestimation of the time
needed in actual academic instruction (in-class teaching) necessary for the students’ effective language learning.

Academic instruction is one of the cases when extra time can be easily added, without the teacher-researcher being actually conscious of this-on the spot decisions and flexibility in teaching practice. Unexpected issues do disturb/disrupt the ideal planning time. Keeping the lesson time and pace is a skill, and difficult for the beginning teacher-researcher. Lessons might not keep to the planned estimated time for a variety of reasons as the data excerpts below illustrate.

4.5.2.1 Timing changes-adding time

Academic instruction might be influenced by the students’ understanding of the content being taught and evident in their responses to the lesson. In this research, the teacher-researcher’s teaching needed to change on many occasions to respond to the students’ reactions during class.

Children’s enthusiasm

In the following excerpt, the need for extra time arose because of the students’ higher than expected interest and enthusiasm toward Chinese learning. This was exemplified in my reflective journals in Evidentiary Excerpts 1, and 2:

As I planned, I did not set the writing of Chinese characters for greetings as part of my lesson plan, but since I’ve suggested and noticed their good performance before, I decided to include the writing of the greeting as one of the goals. However, one problem appeared at this stage. Some characters were too complex to write, such as ‘谢谢’ (thanks), which contains many strokes. I suggested that the students follow my writing on the whiteboard (this is a general strategy in teaching characters, but this added a great deal of time to what I had anticipated for this activity) (Excerpt 1: 11 March 2014, reflective journals).

In planning the content, the greetings would only be explained as an oral usage, language point. The unexpected reaction and interest from the students and the
suggestion by the teacher-researcher, prompted the inclusion of the writing of the characters for greetings. However, the time this took was underestimated. Accordingly, more academic instruction time was added.

When teaching about grandma and grandpa, I stressed the difference. ‘We need to pay attention to the differences, because in China, a woman marries a man, then, she kind of belongs to the man’s family. Then her children’s relationship to the woman’s mum or daddy will be a kind of outside relation. That’s why grandma and grandpa on the mum’s side will be different from that of the father’s side’ (Excerpt 2: 20 May 2014).

The two excerpts above report circumstances when the teacher-researcher was inspired by some certain teaching content that was not actually planned in the lesson, but which at that point, needed some further explanation or detail. Excerpt 1, resulted in added lesson time by incorporating the writing of the Chinese characters, whilst Excerpt 2, resulted in added lesson time through the telling of a cultural story/explanation.

Additional explanation

Excerpt 3 below outlines a piece of evidence where it was essential to extend the lesson time based on the children’s understanding, or lack thereof, of the teaching point:

I encouraged all the class members to review and then to think about an extension that I wanted to teach in this lesson. The extension was inspired by the last lesson, which is recorded in the diary of 20, May, 2014. Firstly, I wrote down the four characters ‘你，我,他/她’ (you, I, he/she) on the white board. Since we have already learned the character, ‘我’ (I), I was guided to inspire students to have a guess about the other three characters. Unfortunately, it failed. I continued explaining to them, and told them why he/she will be divided into characters like ‘他/她’ in Chinese. After that, I added a ‘的’ behind every of the character,
which created some new phrases: 你的, 我的, 他的/她的 (your, my, his/her). Then, I organised a game ‘quiz’, which was designed to include all the family members with the combination of 你的, 我的, 他/她的; each were accompanied with the pictures and pinyin (Excerpt 3: 27 May 2014)

Again, the additional explanation to support the students’ understanding was not planned for in the original lesson. In this case the content (language point) was central to this research topic, that is, to ensure that all the content would be coherent and related, so as to minimise the learning burden. As the students did not understand, it was inappropriate to continue. Further explanation was needed regardless of the added time.

Changes to the ‘normal’ teaching strategy

Sometimes there may be a disruption to the students’ daily classroom practices, which may then influence the time addition to the language learning class. An example is embodied in Excerpt 4 below.

When I arrived today, the students were seated and the teacher had begun a task with the students. When I entered the room, every one of the students was holding a book printed with Chinese style pictures. She explained to me that they originally planned to surprise me by rehearsing a Chinese play. I showed my support to them and was thinking maybe I can also arrange some plays or role-play for them to perform (Excerpt 4: 10 June 2014, reflective journals).

As a NSW DE Volunteer, it was necessary to observe and adapt to the local teaching/learning culture. As the above excerpt explains, following the example of using a role-play in my Chinese class would take advantage of a strategy the children were used to, and enjoyed. However this type of classroom activity often results in an under-estimation of allocated time and might disturb the pace of academic instruction. Added time might be a disruption, because it was not previously planned
for and would increase the time, so the lesson content was not completed. This is exemplified in the Evidentiary Excerpt 5:

The game that was being played had been revised based on the classroom teacher’s advice. First, the game was a competition of speed between the two teams. Later as the game continued, the two teams became disruptive (one of the most challenging issues when applying games: discipline). Therefore I followed the advice of the teacher and reconsidered the speed element in the game. In addition, in the students’ reflections, they suggested to take turns to play the game, which would include the shy students’ participation and promise fairness. (Excerpt 5: 18 March 2014)

**Responding to the unexpected**

The final circumstance that might influence the planned allocated lesson time involves the reality factor as exemplified in Excerpt 6 below.

The classroom teacher would sometimes do her administrative jobs during times I was teaching. Today she was preparing some new books for students to record Chinese only notes, which were blank-with not even a stroke on the front cover. Accordingly, I came up with an idea of teaching the children ‘writing 汉语’ to be placed on the front cover. (Excerpt 6: 11 March 2014)

Here, the teacher-researcher associated the no-subject-name book with the teaching idea of learning to write ‘汉语’ on the front page. This academic task was added for a practical reason and although not part of the planned content and resulted in extra time, it was a successful and enjoyable activity for the class as they saw it as a meaningful activity.

**4.5.2.2 Timing changes- Cancelled time**

Originally I planned to include a game today, which was not carried out because of time. (Excerpt 7: 18 March 2014)
Due to limited time, an activity was cancelled. Teaching content was often cancelled for reasons such as some content taking too long to teach and going overtime, the realisation of inappropriate time being allocated in the first place, or a failed teaching attempt. In consequence, it was necessary to effectively deal with the allocation of academic time:

Firstly the game aimed at racing the speed between the two teams. Later as the game carried on, the two teams became disorderly (this is the most challenging when applying games: discipline). Therefore I followed the advice of the teacher, not only considering the speed, but also the appearance of the characters. In addition, the students suggested to taking turns to do the game, which can involve the shy students’ participation and promise fairness. Time flew. I originally planned to teach some new content but quit for this reason. That impelled me decide to never design games during a lesson. It was better to have them at the end. (Excerpt 8:18 March 2014)

The inappropriate design of the game caused a challenge for the children’s understanding, which reduced the time available for the planned teaching content. This is another example that testifies to the importance of accurate time prediction for academic instruction time—this does not mean to limit practice on the whole, but to anticipate the parts of the lesson within the whole and estimate their time allocation also. Still, I did not finish some of the target aims in this lesson, which made me see that it is not that necessary to focus on how many students have learned at once. The initial thing is consolidation and practice. The teacher should verify the teaching content not only learned, but also have some activities to enrich the process of learning. (Excerpt 9: 27 May 2014)

Here, the design of the teaching content became too complicated and the lesson was unsuccessful for both teacher and students. It required the teacher-researcher to reallocate the time between learning and practicing. Balancing time was identified as being a vital factor in the planning and teaching of the lessons.
4.5.3 Preventative and responsive behaviour management

Preventative behaviour management has been defined as “a teacher’s strategies to teach and maintain appropriate student behaviour (e.g., teaching social skills, implementing reward systems, explaining classroom rules, pre-correction)” (Vannest, Hagan-Burke, Parker and Soares, 2011, p. 222). As the need for both preventative and responsive behaviour management can rarely be anticipated in advance (as issues and events of challenging behaviour may escalate without notice), adequately allocating time to this is very difficult.

4.5.3.1 Added Time

Preventative behaviour management is much preferred to responsive behaviour as they are specifically implemented and planned for and become part of a classrooms positive environment. The teacher-researcher did implement preventative behaviour management strategies and these included creating a ‘zodiacs reward system’ and establishing classroom routine:

In response to the students’ reflections on the feedback sheets, I added some cultural content, which included the 12 zodias. Accordingly, I devised a reward system, three different types of animal stickers (zodiac), and the winner would get a prize from the teacher at the end of the term. I developed this system as I was impressed by the classroom’ teacher’s method of rewarding the students with points. Also, I decide to add some new items to the normal classroom routine. Students accepted these routines and the lessons began without negative behaviours. (Excerpt 10: 6 May 2014)

The reward system was designed to maintain the students’ learning enthusiasm and promote proactive participation. The system worked well. This classroom routine was intended to encourage students to concentrate during class to learning the Chinese language. I constantly changed teaching style as a result of discovering that some activities needed improvement or correction:
Over the course of this research project the issue of limited time was a constant theme for the teacher-researcher’s reflection and refinement of future lesson plans.

4.5.3.2 Cancelled Time

Today the classroom teacher was away, so a casual teacher has replaced her. As the lessons began I forgot about the class routine. The children reminded me at the end of the class and I took this to mean that they preferred to have the greeting routine as part of their lesson. I was impressed that the children commented that they had missed their weekly Chinese style routine. This also showed that the children were quite positive about the practice and repetition of the greeting. (Excerpt 11: 17, June 2014)

Normally, this same classroom routine was practiced every time there was a Chinese lesson, however due to the disruption of having a casual teacher, the routine was cancelled. However, the students’ reflections about the routine being cancelled, verified that it did work for them and was fostering a positive practice time sequence for them. It could also be considered as a basic preventative behaviour management strategy as it maintained a positive atmosphere within the Chinese classroom.

4.5.4 Instructional Support

The students’ reflections about whether they understood the language they were being taught was important for the teacher-researcher to improve teaching/learning strategies. Instructional support has been defined as “providing support to students during instructional time (academic or non-academic) with minimal or no direct instruction to the student (e.g., monitoring student work, being available to answer questions)” (Vannest, Hagan-Burke, Parker and Soares, 2011, p. 222).

Instructional support refers to the teacher providing support to minimise the students’ learning difficulties, identifying when students are having difficulty and responding and being positive when answering children’s questions when they are doing activities. They might have questions about language learning during the teacher’s instruction. Questions might be a big obstacle if or not solved instantly. The following excerpts (12 and 13) illustrate that the teacher-researcher needed to
allocate time within the lesson, for instructional support. Many times, this could not be anticipated before the lesson.

In the process, one of the students raised his hand, and asked me, ‘what if we already know people’s name and we want to know his age?’ I realised this was a good chance to exploit some related knowledge. I wrote down the answer on the white board and explained to the students, step by step. After the explanation I asked some of the students to answer in this sentence format, as a means of consolidation. (Excerpt 12: 10 June 2014)

When teaching the students how to ask a person’s name and then adding in the additional content of ‘age’, I was inspired to include the related ‘you, I, he/she’ as the extra language points. The student’s learning was enhanced, and this carried over to the whole class, based on one student’s question. Additional time needs to be allowed for, when opportunities arise in class for extending learning. The teacher-researcher needed to learn the strategy of ‘flexible time management’. Sometimes time not planned for, is still time well spent.

Excerpt 13 provides another example:

Today the lesson included number extensions (going beyond 10). For this reason, I only mentioned the numbers over 11. When I finished the topic, only a few students had the ability to verbally recall the numbers above 11, which then creates a missing element when the lesson included the extension of family members. I therefore, decided to extend it into a larger scope. I made a review of 0-10 by simply writing it down and asked students to answer. All of them did it together and loudly. Then I listed 11, told them that ‘11 is equal to 10 plus 1, we already know 10 is 十, and 1 is 一, so how could we pronounce 11?’ They instantly responded to me 十一. I then made an example of 23 in the same way. In that way, I finished all the teaching up to number 99. However, some of them were curious about the number, 100; they started to guess 100 in Chinese, following the pattern that I had demonstrated. This caused
the students to do some creative thinking. However, I had to tell them that 100 in Chinese needed a new character, and showed them this in response to their curiosity. Then, I asked them to open their book and make notes. (Excerpt 13: 17, June 2014)

When practicing the sentence about asking a person’s age, the students continued to ask about numbers over 10. Because the students had not received a detailed explanation when learning numbers above 10, it prompted me to make the decisions to spend more time on ensuring the students understood the number system beyond 10. They were able to follow this, and it was pleasing to see their attempts at going beyond 100.

4.5.5 Classroom Assessment

Teachers also spend considerable time with classroom assessment. Assessment is directed at “the evaluation of student performance over curriculum (e.g., grading papers, administering class tests, grading projects)” (Vannest, Hagan-Burke, Parker and Soares, 2011, p. 222).

Classroom assessment is generally the teachers’ assessment of the students’ academic performance. This research involved participant-centred instruction. Thus, this instruction required their involvement in the language learning and the teacher also asked for their assessments about their learning as well as their suggestions as to what they would be interested to learn. These were shown in Excerpts 14 and 15.

In addition, according to their reflection of the feedback sheets, I added some cultural content, like the 12 zodiacs. Accordingly, I built a reward system, which combined 3 different types of animal paper, and the winner can get a prize from the teacher at the end of the term. (Excerpt 14: 6 May 2014)

Also, part of the student’s assessments on their feedback sheet, suggested that we have a classroom routine for ending a lesson. I was guided by their assessments, and although it added some additional time to the planned lesson, I decided to incorporate this new routine. (Excerpt 15: 6, May 2014)
In this section the evidence has been presented which shows that the teacher-researcher needed to reallocate time in response to the students’ assessment feedback. Being flexible with time in this instance showed the students that the teacher-researcher valued their ideas and suggestions. This helps to create a positive relationship in the Chinese language learning classroom.

4.6 Conclusion

Time invested in planning Mandarin Chinese language learning by the NSW DE Volunteers influences students’ learning achievement. That is, “…allocating insufficient learning time [can] have a direct negative effect on achievement” (Gettinger, 1985, p. 3). Monitoring the pace of lessons and adjusting the time needed in each part of the lesson’s sequence is a very important teaching skill. Being flexible with time management can make Chinese learnable for students and promote the Volunteers’ professional learning.

4.6.1 Balancing time and time management

In the Australian education system, the teacher-researcher needed to acknowledge that the time planned for a lesson may not actually correspond with what is possible on any given day, and there may be many reasons for this. This Chapter has presented many of these possible reasons.

A significant learning for the teacher-researcher is to accept that, the time students’ need for language learning need not be the same as the planned teaching/learning time. If the “quantity of education (total amount of learning time) determines degree of learning” (Gettinger, 1985, p. 3) then the Department Volunteers have to respond to expected and unexpected time in-class lessons during which they teach students forms of Chinese they can actually learn. Lesson plans have to be flexible with time.

4.6.2 Time for everyday language experiences

Informally, in this research, time has been defined as the arrangement and application of instructional content and revision, and the ideal allocation of time for the students’ acquisition and practice of new knowledge. The teacher-researcher has concentrated on the time balance and the notion of flexible time management for
teaching and learning which allows for students’ use of the Chinese they learn in class in their everyday life, for instance in other subjects, in playing games in the schoolyard, or in reviewing the food they are eating for lunch. Laczko-kerr and Berliner (2003, p. 36) comment that “time use in school settings is a well-documented element of effective instruction and the most consistent predictor of student achievement”. In other words, Departmental Volunteers have to give greater attention to ‘time use in various school settings outside the classroom’ by becoming more effective in teaching forms of Chinese students that are more informal, conversational language that can be used in everyday life situations in school and in the community.

4.6.3 A time framework

Time is significant for the teaching/learning of Chinese. Volunteers can be supported by having a framework whereby they can classify different categories of time for which they need to plan (Gettinger, 1985, p. 3). In this research, the Volunteer planned for time in specific ways under the three forms of time proposed for lesson planning: planned time allocation, practice time application and cultural content planning. The fourth form discussed was the teacher-researcher’s own reflective time.

Within this framework the teacher-researcher endeavoured to incorporate these five categories of time into the planning, delivery and reflections on the lessons presented to the Fifth class students:

1. Time invested in the engaged learning of Chinese
2. Time allowed learning Chinese in class
3. Time allocated for learning outside class
4. Review of time actually needed for learning Chinese
5. Time for Volunteer reflections and analysis of evidence of students’ language learning

4.6.4 Benefits of and problems with, managing time

In addition to the actual application of time in designing teaching/learning plans, there are some other characteristics of time that assisted the teacher-researcher to
better manage time. Time can be seen as a problem and also as a benefit to continuity.

This chapter has outlined the problems of time management for the beginning teacher-researcher. Keeping to the allocated time schedule for lessons can be difficult as the evidence illustrated that planned time was adjusted due to:

- Children’s enthusiasm,
- Additional explanations being needed,
- Changes to the ‘normal’ teaching strategy/routine,
- Responding to the unexpected

4.6.5 Final comment

The ‘time is a burden’ problem can be alleviated if the Volunteer adopts effective measures. Time is a double-edged sword, which makes the planning of time important, but the plans need not be so rigid as they cannot be adjusted. This suggests that time definitely needs prior consideration by the Volunteer ahead of each lesson and flexibility during the lesson becomes equally important.

Managing time can also be a benefit to lesson continuity. Planning for continuity of content knowledge as it is sequenced in lessons can be assisted by the careful planning of time. Time allocated to practice, as in the spiral lesson consolidates learning. Spiralling and scaffolding the lesson content often might need the adjustment of time. This can be done without fear that lesson goals have not been reached.

The analysis of the evidence of the teacher-researcher’s practice through the self-reflection journal entries and reflections on the lesson plans has been presented in this Chapter. Time management has been a critical learning point for the teacher-researcher over the eighteen months of the research and the findings in this Chapter have contributed to her professional learning regarding developing appropriate and meaningful lesson plans.
Chapter Five:  
Exploring Students’ Feedback to Incorporate into Teaching and Learning Plans

5.1 Introduction

Many factors influence the students’ achievements in an educational setting. External or internal variables may affect how children learn, and similarly affect how the teacher-researcher planned and taught the lessons. Variables such as socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, educational experiences, “…age, aptitude and certain affective variables such as attitude and empathy” (Schumann, 1975, p. 209) can affect the performance of teaching and learning in the classroom. Most of these are outside the control of teachers, however, taking account of what has occurred in the classroom (the impact of the teaching and learning on the children), can provide the evidence for teacher-researcher to improve practice.

In this chapter data were drawn from the student Self-Assessment Sheets to explore the second contributory research question:

How can a beginning teacher-researcher use student feedback to plan more meaningful and appropriate lessons to make Chinese learnable for beginning learners?

The children’s enjoyment, appreciation or not of the teaching strategies, their confidence, interest in the set thematic units and lesson content, and their
Suggestions for topics in the next unit, as well as overall suggestions were gauged by their responses on the student assessment forms. Each is discussed in turn in Table 5.1

5.2 Factors affecting students learning/gauged through their feedback

5.2.1 Overview-Students’ Self-Assessment Sheets

One of the crucial data sources used in this research is the Student Assessment Sheets (Appendix 7 and 8). At the conclusion of the first two terms the same form was distributed to the students, whilst in the third term an amended form was used, which included an additional question relating to the students intention for further Chinese language study (results discussed in Chapter 6).

The following table provides an overview of the questions on the Self-Assessment Sheets (Terms 1 and 2) and how the discussion of the evidence has been arranged in this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant Questions</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 1: Did you enjoy learning the greetings and numbers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2.1 Students’ assessment-Enjoyment</td>
<td>Greetings and numbers</td>
<td>Family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 6: Do you like learning Chinese in this way?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2.3 Student assessment of the teaching strategy-Appreciation</td>
<td>Table 5.4</td>
<td>Table 5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 2: Do you feel confident speaking about the topic?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.4 Building students’ confidence</td>
<td>Table 5.6</td>
<td>Table 5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 3: What did you find most interesting about this topic?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1 Gauging students’ interests</td>
<td>Table 5.8</td>
<td>Table 5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 4: What would you like to learn about next?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2 Students’ nominated topics</td>
<td>Figure 5.1</td>
<td>Figure 5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 5: Any other suggestions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Students’ suggestions</td>
<td>Figure 5.3</td>
<td>Low response rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.2 Students’ assessment—Enjoyment

5.2.2.1 Question 1: Unit 1

The first question on the assessment sheet for Unit 1 (at the end of Term 1) stated: ‘Did you enjoy learning the greetings and numbers?’ The key word here is ‘enjoyment’ to help the teacher-researcher assess the students’ feelings and thinking about the lessons planned. Along with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, the students were encouraged to list examples of what they enjoyed about any particular lesson or the unit as a whole. Table 5.2 presents the students’ responses analysed into two categories. These are objective and subjective answers. The subjective column refers to the direct feelings, or judgement factors that indicated students’ enjoyment of learning the greeting and numbers, and the objective column refers to indirect factors, which were content related, or other than internal/emotional responses.

Table 5.2: Unit 1: Term 1—Students’ Responses—Enjoyment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1: Did you enjoy learning the greetings and numbers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective Column/Content</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Numbers (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Greetings(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Homework(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Great teacher(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Interesting (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Challenging(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) Speak To Relatives(1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students’ responses indicate that they enjoyed these topics because of the subjective appeal of the learning content. For example, some students (3) commented that they enjoyed learning Chinese as it was a brand new area knowledge, and for others (8) this created a sense of ‘fun and interest’. A few students thought it could create a chance for their presentation of a new language skill, where they could ‘speak to relatives’ (1) or ‘greet people’ (1) in Mandarin instead of English. Fewer students responded with objective answers. Relating to the
unit topic of numbers themselves, three students enjoyed this content. Less students found ‘homework’ (1), ‘great teacher’ (1) or the actual ‘greetings’ (1) the most enjoyable elements of the first term Mandarin Chinese lessons.

**Analysis and reflection**

Initially, the teaching of greetings and numbers was included to create an easy introduction to Mandarin Chinese. All the lesson plans were constructed based on these two topics. Greetings were used in daily language, 你好 nihao (hello), 谢谢 xiexie (thanks), 再见 zaijian (bye-bye) and 老师好 laoshihao (hello teacher) and practiced at each lesson. Second, all lessons about numbers were designed so there was a connection between learning numbers related to the days of the week, and months in a year, and finally generating more complex sentences relating to numbers. Each lesson was connected and scaffolded to more complex content.

5.2.2.2 Question 1: Term 2

After the second term’s teaching which focussed on the theme ‘Family Members’, the students were again asked to fill in the Students Assessment Sheet. The students were asked to reflect on the teaching content and the teaching strategies from Term 2.

When answering Question 1 (Term 2) ‘Did you enjoy learning about family members?’ All 28 students answered positively ‘yes’. Their additional comments are recorded in Table 5.3. Most frequent responses were that they enjoyed the classes because they were: ‘interesting and fun and nice’(5), and provided a way for them to be ‘able to speak to family members and relatives’(6). It is noteworthy that six students enjoyed learning Chinese because they saw it as a means to show their language ability, to greet people, to speak to relatives.
Table 5.3: Unit 2: Term 2-Students’ Responses- Enjoyment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1: Did you enjoy learning about Family Members?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective Column/Content</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) Family Members (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) Greetings (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17) The Difference Of Family Members Attracts (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) Great Teacher (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19) Dragon Boat Festival (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20) Family Influence (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis and Reflection

The data analysis in the above sections suggests that students’ learning of Chinese might be understood in the following way. From the students’ responses to Question 1 Terms 1 (Table 5.2) and Term 2 (Table 5.3) within the subjective column, the teacher-researcher could focus on more practical language points to enable students’ after-class practice; and from their responses in the objective column, it is apparent that emphasis on the teaching content that would impact on students’ real life contexts could be incorporated along with more in-depth cultural activities.

One might assume that the students gained a sense of achievement from learning Chinese in this way, as it was enjoyable. The implication for further unit and lesson design is to note the importance of including content that builds on the students’ enjoyment of speaking some Mandarin at home with family and relatives, That is, lessons that teach the students some practical applications for the language in their daily lives.

To build on the elements that children enjoyed about their language learning classes, the teacher-researcher would enact the following in future lesson plans:

- Continue with content/stories about how life in families is different for Chinese and Australian people (8 students enjoyed this topic)
- Use greetings and easy conversation phrases in practice and review lessons related to family members (6 students enjoyed this activity + 2 enjoyed general greeting content)
• Continue with planning of activities to be ‘fun and interesting’ (games, interesting resources)

5.2.3 Student’s assessment of the teaching strategy—‘appreciation’-like or dislike

Question 6 on the Students’ Assessment Sheet for Term 1 and 2 was ‘Do you like learning Chinese in this way?’ A key implication here is suggested as ‘appreciation’ of the type of teaching strategies that were employed. The answers to this question in both Terms 1 and 2 were analysed into two categories: Liked the teaching OR Did not like the teaching.

5.2.3.1 Appreciation of the teaching strategies-Term 1

All the students indicated that they liked learning Mandarin Chinese in the way they were taught throughout Term 1.

In thinking about the appropriateness of the units and lesson plans developed by the teacher-researcher, the children’s responses to this question could be seen as providing valuable evidence for reflection on how to improve future units and lesson plans. Table 5.4 presents the students general attitude and opinions about the teaching strategies in Term 1.
Table 5.4: Unit 1: Term 1-Student Responses-Appreciation [Liked or Did Not Like] the Teaching Strategies

### Questions 6: Did you like (appreciate) the teaching strategies?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liked the teaching (30)</th>
<th>Did not like the teaching (0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Than Learning By Oneself (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Symbols And Strokes (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Influence (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s Reason (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grasp New Language (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Learning Legends (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun And Interesting (8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good For Kids (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused With Numbers (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Continue Learning (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something Hard (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 5.4 shows that the teacher’s instruction methods were appreciated (liked) by all the students (30), however some students did acknowledge some negative feedback. These two students indicated they were ‘confused with numbers’ (1) and the language lessons were ‘something hard’ (1). In this case, the teacher-researcher would make an attempt to include different activities that reviewed ‘numbers’ but in a different way, and would try to ascertain which children were having difficulty in each lesson and try to provide more support for this/these students.

### 5.2.3.2 Appreciation of the teaching strategies-Term 2

At the conclusion of Term 2 students were again asked to complete the Student Assessment Sheet. Compared to the comments recorded on the Term 1 Assessment Sheet, fewer students recorded fewer comments in this second round of data collection. Overall, only five comments were recorded. However all 28 students who completed the questionnaire, indicated that they ‘liked’ learning Chinese in the way
the teacher-researcher presented the lessons. Table 5.5 below indicates the children’s responses to Term 2’s teaching methods.

Although only five comments were recorded, the comment that the teaching strategies were ‘fun’(2) and ‘fun with games(1) ranked comparatively higher. The reason for the limited comments to this question might be because students regarded the questions as similar; or that they had already answered it in detail in an earlier question (e.g. Question 1 in the Term 2 questionnaire-results in Table 5.3 specified what they enjoyed, so perhaps the students thought they had already answered this question). Therefore, the teacher-researcher noted that this question would need to be reworded in the final Student Assessment Sheet that would be distributed after Term 3.

Table 5.5: Unit2: Term 2-Student Responses-Appreciation [Liked or Did Not Like] the Teaching Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions 6: Did students like (appreciate) the teaching strategies?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liked the teaching (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not like the teaching (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire not answered (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier To Understand (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Influence (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun With Game (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NO COMMENTS

Analysis and reflection

The children’s ‘enjoyment’ of the lessons and appreciation ‘liking’ the teaching strategies are positive findings. The teacher-researcher would hence continue with planning in Term 3 that included:

- Content and activities that related to real life experiences (revision with greetings as children enjoyed using greetings with their family; revision with family member differences in names)
- Include activities that are fun and interesting (games and songs)
- Reduce homework (only one students enjoyed homework)
• Continue to draw children’s attention to their success as this is a new language and new experience for them

5.2.4 Students’ assessment- confidence

Confidence in language learning is the another important issue for beginning learners of Mandarin Chinese (and other languages). Bensoussan (2014) regards self-confidence as a capability that reflects students’ progress in learning. Therefore, after a series of lessons designed to ensure success and enjoyment, self-confidence will increase.

Although, the students’ confidence in this study is not highly advanced, confidence does come from “the enjoyment of an activity or a feeling of competence in doing a task” (Bensoussan, pp.3-4). Self-confidence is beneficial to “promote persistence despite difficulty, while negative feelings reduce the effectiveness of most learning activities” (Bensoussan, p. 4). Confidence, success and then motivation are interconnected. Students endowed with high motivation and confidence would have positive attitudes towards learning. In this study, data about their confidence levels was sought through Question 2 on the Self-Assessment Sheet at the end of each Term of teaching.

5.2.4.1 Student confidence levels-Term 1

After the first term’s language teaching the students were asked: ‘Do you feel confident in speaking about the topic?’ In this question, the keyword is ‘confident’. The aim is to gauge if students have achieved sufficient success with the lessons to feel confident as a result. In this way, it has implications for the teacher-researcher to review the teaching methods and content. In analysing the student responses, four categories were identified. Table 5.6 shows the results for the number of students who were ‘confident’, those who provided tentative answers, ‘less confident’, those who were ‘not confident’ by way of their negative comments, and ‘blank’, which were two students who gave no answer.

The data in Table 5.6 shows that 7 of the 30 students felt confident about speaking Mandarin Chinese. That is slightly less than one quarter of the class. Conversely, nearly half the students (12) were not feeling confident at the end of the Term 1
lessons. This was of concern to the teacher-researcher. Some of the students chose to say they were ‘not confident’ for subjective reasons, such as, they ‘cannot memorize’ Chinese, they were feeling ‘shy’, ‘afraid to mess up’ or ‘forgetful’. Four students did not give any comment as to why they were not confident.

Table 5.6: Unit 1: Term 1-Students’ Confidence towards Topic ‘Greetings and Numbers’

| Question 2. Do you feel confident speaking about ‘greetings and numbers’? |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Confident (7) | Less Confident (9) | Not Confident (12) | Blank (2) |
| Fun/Interesting (2) | Sort Of (3) | Need More Practice (1) | |
| Mom Teaches (1) | A Bit/ A Little Bit (2) | Cannot Memorize (1) | |
| Know How To Speak Before (1) | Need To Pronounce More (1) | Need to Learn More (1) | |
| Good Information (1) | No Comments (2) | Difficult/Hard (2) | 2 |
| Know What To Say (1) | Do Not Speak All The Time (1) | Afraid to Mess Up (1) | |
| Learn A Lot/So Much (2) | | Forgetful (1) | |
| | | Shy (2) | |
| | | No Comments (4) | |

Analysis and reflection

The teacher-researcher was concerned about the high number of students feeling ‘not confident’ at the end of Term 1. An implication for Term 2 teaching would be to pay more attention to the less active students or introduce a reward system to attract their attention, provide opportunities for success so as to build their confidence. As for the group that attributed its responses to objective reasons, thinking that Chinese is ‘hard/difficult (2)’, they ‘need more practice’ or ‘need to learn more’, the implication is that the Term 1 lessons lacked of adequate scaffolding. In addition, lack of practice could be part of the reason. Therefore, creating more scaffolding lesson and unit plans and arranging for more practice of each language point could provide possible solutions towards this teaching issue. The number of students who felt they
were ‘confident’ inspired the teacher-researcher to address the issue of lack of confidence in Term 2.

5.2.4.2 Student confidence levels-Term 2

At the end of Term 2 the students again completed the Self-Assessment Sheet with Question 2 asking, ‘Do you feel confident speaking about Family Members?’ The results were better than at the end of Term 1. On this questionnaire 10 students indicated they were confident in speaking about Family Members, which is just over one third of the class, which could be regarded as progress.

Table 5.7: Unit 2: Term 2-Students’ Confidence towards Topic ‘Family Members

| Question 2. Do you feel confident speaking about ‘family members?’ |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|------|----------|
| Confident (10)  | Less Confident (7) | Not Confident (10) | Blank 1 |
| Still Have Some Problem (5) | Depends On Different Content (3) | Not All Content (3) |
| Not That Hard/A Bit Easy (3) | Scared of Getting Wrong Answer (1) | Bad Memory (2) |
| Games (1) | Need Longer Time (1) | Shy (1) | 1 |
| Simple ‘Yes’ (1) | Not The Best (1) | Need Book’s Assistance (2) |
| No Reason (1) | Hard To Speak And Remember (1) |
| Simple ‘No’ (1) |

The students’ comments have provided some significant data for the teacher-researcher. Of the ten students who nominated ‘yes’, they were confident, five felt satisfied about what they had learned and the remaining five felt they still had some problems, even though they felt confident. This was an interesting result as it meant that the students were not ‘giving up’, even if some of the language lessons or parts of the lessons were difficult.
Those students who were gave neither ‘yes’ nor ‘no’ answers in term of their confidence (7) with speaking Mandarin, shared their reasons as ‘depends on different content’(3), ‘needing longer time’(1) and being ‘scared of getting the wrong answer’.

**Analysis and reflection**

As with the Term 1 comments, the students provided very pertinent data on the Term 2 questionnaire for the teacher-researcher to adjust further lesson planning, in order to take account of the number of students who still were feeling either ‘less confident’ (7) or ‘not confident’ (10).

The implications for Term 3 planning and teaching to build children’s confidence were:

- Ensure sufficient time for students to think about their speaking in front of the class
- Reward good attempts and do not expect perfect answers (children concerned about giving the wrong answers; feeling shy)
- Provide students with prompts or clues to the answers (helps students with bad memories; those who are not confident with all the content
- Let children look up answers in their books before they speak (children indicating they need help from their books to respond)
- Continue with the reward system from Term 1, and include those that performed well and also those that have made good progress (encourage all children to attempt to speak Mandarin if only simple words, so they achieve some success to build their confidence)

**5.2.5 Students’ assessment-what has interested them?**

Language learning is supported by the activities teachers design for students that are scaffolded (for students to build their knowledge) and engage students’ interests (through a variety of games and other resources) (Reinholt, 2006). Likewise, the teacher-researcher tried to plan units of lessons that would contain activities that would probably link to the students’ everyday sociolinguistic activities undertaken in English (hence, greetings and numbers was chosen as the Term 1 theme, with Family Members, chosen in Term 2, assuming the students would all have had positive
experiences in these language contexts). This required the teacher-researcher to specifically try to get to know the students’ interests and how these could be used in future or ongoing classroom language lesson plans.

The Student Assessment Sheet was the method the teacher-researcher used to gauge students’ interests about what sections or parts of the topics covered in Terms 1 and 2 interested the students.

5.2.5.1 Interest in Term 1 topics-numbers and greetings

The evidence about what parts of the themes the students found interesting was collected through two terms of assessment sheets where Question 3 asked: ‘What did you find most interesting about this topic?’ The key phrase was ‘interesting parts of this topic’, which hopefully would give the teacher-researcher some evidence related to the effectiveness of the lessons’ content. The students reflected upon what sections of the themes and lessons appealed to them and wrote short responses on the Assessment Sheets. The results are displayed in Table 5.8 below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic Content (20)</th>
<th>Cultural Content (5)</th>
<th>Activities (3)</th>
<th>Other (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers (11)</td>
<td>Greeting (3)</td>
<td>Songs (2)</td>
<td>Everything (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write Characters (5)</td>
<td>Different From English (2)</td>
<td>Videos (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinyin (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.8: Unit 1: Term 1-Students’ Interest in ‘Greetings and Numbers’

Table 5.8 summarizes the comments recorded by all 30 students about what they found most interesting in the content taught in Term 1.

Students found learning ‘numbers’ (11) was useful as they could relate it to their everyday life experiences, such as the months of the year, the days of the week, dates and their date of birth. In the teacher-researcher’s reflection, the number topic
occupied all the term’s teaching content, from the simplest numbers in Chinese writing and pronunciation (numbers 1-10) to more complex content such as numbers over 10, the number of days in a week, months in a year and specific dates.

Other students responded that ‘writing characters’(5) interested them, whilst another four were interested in speaking Mandarin-‘pronunciation’(2) and pinyin(2).

The ‘differences’ between Chinese and Australian culture interested two students, whilst the cultural rituals for ‘greetings’ appealed to three others. The songs interested two students whilst one student was attracted to the videos. Two students indicated they were interested in ‘everything’.

**Analysis and reflection**

These data were not consistent with the teacher-researcher’s subjective observations of the children’s reactions in class and their written work. Because of the complex writing system and different pronunciation of Chinese, the teacher-researcher was concerned that some poor writing attempts and some children being timid and not participating in the role plays, indicated they were not interested in these topics. As a consequence, character writing was simplified. However, the data strengthened the teacher-researcher’s confidence in continuing teaching Chinese characters, by emphasising both writing and pronunciation. For the remaining nine students who did not clearly express an interest in writing or reading characters, the teacher-researcher would attempt to come up with more active and interesting ways to engage them.

Based on these data the teacher-researcher was concerned to make the following adjustments to the lesson plans in Term 2:

- Most importantly, continue with language activities that link to students’ everyday life (numbers that are relevant to lives, as one third of the students are interested in this)
- Allow lots of opportunities for students to write Chinese characters with associated pinyin for pronunciation
- Video and music (songs) have at all times been regarded as useful tools in teaching and will continue to be applied in future planning
5.2.5.2 Interest in Term 2 topic-family members

At the end of the second term of language teaching, the students completed the Self-Assessment Sheet. In this section, the students’ responses to Question 3 relating ‘most interesting’ elements in the topics’ content were analysed.

Similar to Term 1, the data have been analysed and presented under the four themes of Linguistic Content, Cultural Content (including Cultural Differences), Activities and Other. Table 5.9 below shows the range of children’s interests within the topic ‘family members’.

Equal numbers of responses (12), show that almost half the students, were interested in both the linguistic and cultural content of the lessons taught in Term 2. Slightly more (when compared to Term 1) students indicated they were interested in the class ‘activities’ (4). Two students indicated they were interested in everything.

Table 5.9: Unit 2: Term 2-Students’ Interest in ‘Family Members’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3. What did you find most interesting about ‘family members?’</th>
<th>Linguistic Content (12)</th>
<th>Cultural Content/Difference (12)</th>
<th>Activities (4)</th>
<th>Other (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing and Speaking (1)</td>
<td>The Understanding Of Chinese Marriage To Women (1)</td>
<td>Zodics (1)</td>
<td>Blank (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Member Pronunciation (2)</td>
<td>Chinese Family’s Living Together (1)</td>
<td>Quizzes And Group Work (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder Brother Pronunciation (1)</td>
<td>Chinese Beliefs And Festivals (1)</td>
<td>The Games (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn Family Members (4)</td>
<td>Dragon Boat Festival (1)</td>
<td>Some Are Same As Cantonese (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers And Sisters (1)</td>
<td>Different Names For Grandparents In Both Dad And Mum’s Sides (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question Sentence for Asking People (3)</td>
<td>Different Names For Different Family Members (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Difference Of ‘He/She’ In Writing (Not The Same) And Saying (The Same) (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis and reflection

Based on the students’ feedback after Term 2, the teacher-researcher made decisions about how to reflect the children’s interests in the next round of lesson planning. These included:

- Continue to point out to students, the cultural differences (or similarities) between Chinese and Australian culture and include special cultural days in planning (children were particularly interested in knowing the story about the different names on maternal and paternal sides of families in Chinese families)
- Concentrate on questioning sequences (children were interested in how to ask questions to people about their family members); provide practical activities to role play asking questions
- Incorporate activities to support learning. The reward system\(^1\), group work and quizzes were introduced as new interests for the children in this term. These would be extended next term with songs and videos to continue.

5.2.6 Students’ assessment-what topics were nominated

The question on the students’ Self-Assessment Sheet that was set to gauge the students’ interests from their own perspective was Question 4. ‘What would you like to learn next?’

The key words were ‘what’ and ‘next’. Here the teacher-researcher was looking for the information for topics or content that interested the students and that could be incorporated into future planning.

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\(^1\) Reward system: A zodiac reward system was established to boost the students’ interest in learning Chinese. Those students who performed well by giving a correct answer, or bravely attempting to pronounce Chinese words, or showed improvements in their Chinese learning were awarded with a sticker. At the end of each term, the three children with the most number of stickers were a prize (e.g. sachet or pendant). Those students, who did not win an overall prize, still did receive stickers and they were encouraged to continuing practicing and learning their Chinese so that they might a prize at the end of the following term.
5.2.6.1 Suggested topics-Term 1

The students’ ideas on what they would like to learn in the next Unit have been displayed in Figure 5.1 below.

![Figure 5.1: Unit 1: Term 1-What Would You Like to Learn about Next?](image)

**Analysis and reflection**

The students’ interests were noted (30) and most significantly attention was given to the interest topics containing most responses (animals(6), Colours(6), Names(5) and Daily language (2). Not every response could be factored into the next round of unit planning as the lessons are not one-to-one Chinese instruction, but a one-to-thirty teaching model. Even if the students’ reflections did provide a good reference for planning the following units of lessons, there was a curriculum constraint in that the topic suggested by the classroom teacher for Unit 2 was Family Members. However, at every possible example, or activity the teacher-researcher would be mindful of the students’ suggested interests as follows:

- Animals(6), Colours(6) and Names(5) were the most popular interests proposed by the students. Along with Chinese life, songs and daily language, these could all be incorporated as much as possible into the next set unit
“Family Members”. For example, animal as part of a Family; colours associated with Family and daily life,

- The Zodiac reward system was based on animals-eleven Chinese style animals/one legendary animal in Chinese history and culture (animals was suggested as an interesting topic by the highest number of students (6)

5.2.6.2 Suggested topics-Term 2

After Term 2 the Self-Assessment Sheet was again distributed and in this round of data collection a wider range of suggestions were proposed by the students as shown in Figure 5.2.

The teacher-researcher noted that Animals(7), Colours(5) were the most frequently recorded suggestions, with Culture & Traditions(4), History(3), Fantasy and Myths(3) and Food(3) being suggested as interesting topics to learn about.

![Figure 5.2: Unit 2: Term 2-What Would You Like to Learn about Next?](image)

Analysis and reflection

As with the data collected in Term 1, the teacher-researcher’s approach was to note the ideas suggested by the students and to keep these in mind when planning Term 3 activities. As lesson continuity is an important factor in planning the lessons over the
three terms, the following topics were considered very favourably by the teacher-researcher in the next planning round:

- Animals, food, fantasy and myths, zodiacs, family members could be used when the language lessons are focused on sentence formats.
- The other topics with fewer children suggesting them, could be incorporated into the cultural content in Term 3 (e.g., Architecture, Cities, Staying Healthy in China, Dynasties)

As a final point, the value of incorporating students’ interests into lesson planning is a key aim of this thesis. Tomlinson (2006) strongly suggests lesson designs should be based on students’ interest, as this results in higher and greater motivation, engagement, productivity, autonomy, achievement and competence. Ushioda (2011, p. 204) comments that it is of great necessity to “engage their own identities and interests in our lessons and promote a sense of continuity between what they learn and do in the classroom, and who they are and what they are interested in doing in their lives outside the classroom, now and in the future”.

5.2.7 Students’ further suggestions

The final open-ended question on the Self-Assessment sheet in both Terms 1 and 2 was Question 5. ‘Any Other Suggestions?’

The original aim of this question was to gain advice from the students to enrich the upcoming content for the lessons in the following term.

5.2.7.1 Any other suggestions-Term 1

The students responded to this question with very similar answers to Questions 3 and 4 which related to what they were interested in. Figure 5.3 below indicates this information. This question therefore did not contribute much new data to inform the teacher-researcher’s unit planning. It also indicated that the teacher-researcher needed to reword this question on the next Assessment Sheet.
The students who suggested ‘Bring books for the class’ and the one who suggested ‘Games’ were ideas picked up by the teacher-researcher. Possibilities for the next unit plan, based on these data (Figure 5.3) included:

- Add ‘games’ every time new content is taught,
- ‘bring books for the class’-use books from the library to base activities on (e.g. make up a play based on these stories)
- Encourage students to practice after class (e.g. using ‘Chinese names’, ‘animals’ and ‘asking directions’). Use some of these suggestions in homework sheets.
5.2.7.2 Any other suggestions-Term 2

![Pie chart](image)

Figure 5.4: Unit 2: Term 2-Other Suggestions for the Lessons

Students’ suggestions focused on the teaching topics, such as culture (1), animals (1), foods (1), nouns & verbs (1), history & math & sciences (1), location & climate & cities (1), weapons & fish (1), and myths (1). None of these suggestions was proposed by more than two students. There were no common suggestions that could be incorporated into lesson planning that would represent what a majority of the students would like. This information was not captured through these data. Three students mentioned the teaching methods in their suggestions: one refers to the video, which asks for not only the simple teaching presentation, but also the vivid presentation of video-style. The second one refers to teacher’s teaching style. The students favored teacher’s teaching and thought that it could be continued this way. The last one talked about the song (1).

Students’ responses were analyzed with two themes emerging: teaching content and teaching methods. The teacher-researcher would then consider rewording this final question on the Self-Assessment Sheet to include some prompts, for example, ‘Can you suggest a way you would like to be taught Mandarin Chinese?’

5.3 Conclusion

Chapter 5 has explored the children’s feedback after each Unit of teaching in Term 1 and Term 2. Data were collected via the Student Assessment Sheet (the same sheet
was distributed to the students at the conclusion of Unit 1 and again at the conclusion of Unit 2.

The Assessment Sheet for Term 1 and 2 was designed to gauge the students:

- ‘Enjoyment’ of the lessons/Unit
- ‘Appreciation’- whether or not they ‘liked’ the teaching methods
- ‘Confidence’ with speaking
- ‘Interest’ in parts of the Unit just taught
- ‘Interest’ in what could be taught in the next Term
- ‘Any other suggestions’

The data were analysed by listing all the responses and then coding these into categories (under a key term or phrase). The number of times the responses were recorded by the students were tallied and the numerical scores were listed within the tables.

5.3.1 Implications of the findings

Three of the questions in the Assessment Sheet began with ‘Did’ or ‘Do’. These related to ‘enjoyment’ ‘liking the teaching method’ and ‘confidence’. For ‘enjoyment’ and ‘liking the teaching method’ children responded at the end of both terms with ‘yes’. This inspired the teacher-researcher to use the additional comments made by the students and incorporate these into future planning. The feedback from the children relating to their ‘confidence’ was of concern to the teacher-researcher. At the end of Term 1 seven students were ‘confident’, nine students were ‘less confident’ and twelve were ‘not confident’. This was taken into account in the next round of planning and the strategies, summarized below (5.5.4) were incorporated. By the end of Term 2 a slight improvement in confidence level was shown through the students’ feedback: ten ‘confident’, seven-‘less confident’ and still ten students felt ‘not confident’.

The remaining three questions required the students to write a word or phrase to indicate ‘what’ was interesting, not interesting, or suggestions for ‘what’ they would like to learn next. The question that asked the students for ‘Any other suggestions’, did not produce additional data. Students’ responses were limited to repeats of what
was recorded for ‘enjoyment’ and ‘interests’. The teacher-researcher realised this was not a good question, and it was modified for Term 2 with still limited responses. This question was deleted from the Term 3 questionnaire.

The sections below provide a summary of how the evidence analysed from the student Self-Assessment Sheets impacted on the teacher-researcher’s planning for future teaching.

5.3.2 Enjoyment

- Continue with content/stories about how life in families is different for Chinese and Australian people (8 students enjoyed this topic)
- Use greetings and easy conversation phrases in practice and review lessons related to family members (6 students enjoyed this activity+ 2 enjoyed general greeting content)
- Continue with planning of activities to be ‘fun and interesting’ (games, interesting resources)

5.3.3 Appreciation-Like or dislike the teaching of Chinese this way-Strategies

- Content and activities that related to real life experiences (revision with greetings as children enjoyed using greetings with their family; revision with family member differences in names )
- Include activities that are fun and interesting (games and songs)
- Reduce homework (only one students enjoyed homework)
- Continue to draw children’s attention to their success as this is a new language and new experience for them

5.3.4 Confidence

- Ensure sufficient time for students to think about their speaking in front of the class
- Reward good attempts and do not expect perfect answers (children concerned about giving the wrong answers; feeling shy)
• Provide students with prompts or clues to the answers (helps students with bad memories; those who are not confident with all the content
• Let children look up answers in their books before they speak (children indicating they need help from their books to respond)
• Continue with the reward system from Term 1, and include those that performed well and also those that have made good progress (encourage all children to attempt to speak Mandarin if only simple words, so they achieve some success to build their confidence)

5.3.5 Students interests

• Animals, food, fantasy and myths, zodiacs, family members could be used when the language lessons are focused on sentence formats.
• The other topics with fewer children suggesting them, could be incorporated into the cultural content in Term 3 (e.g., Architecture, Cities, Staying Healthy in China, Dynasties)

5.3.6 Other suggestions

• Add ‘games’ every time new content is taught,
• ‘bring books for the class’-use books from the library to base activities on (e.g. make up a play based on these stories)
• Encourage students to practice after class (e.g. using ‘Chinese names’, ‘animals’ and ‘asking directions’). Use some of these suggestions in homework sheets.

5.3.7 Impact on the teacher-researcher

The teacher-researcher reflected on the findings from the Self-Assessment Sheet with most concern being for building the student’s self-confidence. Thinking about motivation, external and internal (Reinholt, 2006), was a consideration the teacher-researcher began to reflect upon in relation to incorporating the students’ interests. As Tomlinson (2006, p. 155) suggests “modifying instruction to draw on student interests is likely to result in greater student engagement, higher levels of
intrinsic motivation, higher student productivity, greater student autonomy, increased achievement, and an increased sense of self-competence”.

The teacher-researcher then commenced the planning and teaching the Mandarin Chinese language lessons in Term 3. Chapter 6 reports these findings.
Chapter Six:
Barriers and Obstacles for Teaching/Learning Mandarin Chinese

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six is organised around the data collected from the final Self-Assessment Sheet completed by the students, after three terms of Chinese language lessons. It seeks to learn about the students’ basic understandings of the Chinese language; observe how they see their confidence, identify what has been difficult for them, seek their reflections on the teaching style and provide evidence of the students’ intentions to continue Chinese language learning in the future. From within the data obtained for each question, the teacher-researcher was concerned to identify the barriers and obstacles the students’ reported with the intention to address these in future lesson planning.

In analysing the data collected on the Self-Assessment Sheet-Term 3-the third contributory research question was explored:

3. What barriers to learning Chinese could impact beginning learners and how can the teacher-researcher use this knowledge to improve teaching practice?
6.2 The General understanding of Chinese

At the end of their third term of learning Mandarin Chinese, the Fifth grade students (n=30) completed their final Self-Assessment Sheet. Question 1 (Table 6.1 below) presents the data related to their understanding of the Chinese language at that point. They had not previously been taught systematically at school.

Table 6.1: General Understanding about Chinese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learned Basic Knowledge (2)</th>
<th>Learned What Teacher Taught (6)</th>
<th>Learned Before (2)</th>
<th>Understand Better Now (1)</th>
<th>Learning Frequency (1)</th>
<th>Learned about China (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speak General Words And Write Common Words (1)</td>
<td>Families And Animals, Chinese Zodiacs (1)</td>
<td>Learned Before &amp; Reminded Me (1)</td>
<td>Learn It Every Week (1)</td>
<td>Understand the Way China Works (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned Simple Words Which Are Important (1)</td>
<td>Different Sentences, Numbers, Zodiacs And Animals (1)</td>
<td>Learned Chinese Before</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zodiacs (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zodiacs, Family, Numbers (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned Everything You Taught Me (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Yes for Having a General Understanding of Chinese (27)
2. Not Sure For Having a General Understanding of Chinese (3)
I don't understand what people say in Mandarin but I only know the basics.
3. No for Having a General Understanding of Chinese (0)

Question 1 asked: ‘Do you have a general understanding about Chinese language?’
For the teacher-researcher the data might reveal about the students in terms of, ‘what impresses you most after your three terms of Chinese learning?’ and/or ‘what is Chinese to you after three terms?’ The answers also could be taken as a reflection of the teacher-researchers capability to teach these students successfully. The range of answers were: ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘not sure’.
The survey results reveal that twenty-seven of the thirty Fifth grade students think they had a general understanding about Chinese, and thirteen provided some examples of their understanding. Six of these thirteen students fell into the sub-category of ‘learned what teacher taught’. This category had the highest number of responses. The content mentioned, animals, zodiacs, numbers, families, and everything, covered the whole range of learning opportunities provided to the students over the three terms. The scaffolding of the content\textsuperscript{2} may have had an impact on these answers.

Fewer students recorded responses in the other categories, but it was an interesting point to note that two students attributed to their understanding of basic Chinese language to having learned before. As this group of students had not been formally taught Chinese at school before, it could be assumed that they learned at home, or at a weekend school. In either case these students recorded they had gained a basic understanding. The other responses listed the content of the basic knowledge they did understand, and that the frequency of the lessons, and having had a practical introduction to China, had assisted their understanding.

As for the ‘not sure’ option, there were three students who were noncommittal about the level of their understanding. No reasons were given by these students.

There was not one participant who recorded ‘no’, which suggests that the teacher-researcher supported the majority of the class to understand some basic Mandarin Chinese. (However, the other possibility is that, in recording a ‘no’ response this could be seen as students being too shy to admit their confusion, or their feelings of wanting to please the teacher-researcher and the classroom teacher).

\textbf{Analysis and reflection}

The students’ positive reflections may indicate that they have established a base as beginning learners. Those who responded that they were ‘not sure’ of their understanding of Chinese, indicated that my efforts to teach them Chinese had

\textsuperscript{2} In planning the teaching content, the teacher-researcher endeavoured to scaffold learning by combining the former learning with the new, such as integrating numbers with family members when asking age (creating a sentence); or animals and zodiacs when introducing culture.
produced very little understanding. As the NSW DE Volunteer I needed to take responsibility and learn to take more appropriate measures for all the students.

Critical self-reflection occupies the important position in the professional learning required of the teacher-researcher, and has been used as a tool to evaluate a teacher’s capabilities for making Chinese learnable (Yang 2010, p. 1202). For the teacher-researcher this meant asking questions about my practices and foreseeing possibilities for changes that would further my professional learning. This required ‘think[ing] back to [my own professional] learning process and identify[ing] what was done well and what could have been done better’ (Yang 2010, p. 1202). The feedback from students indicated that whilst most gained an understanding there were still some students who were unsure, and these students would need to be supported further in the next round of teaching.

6.3 Obstacles during Chinese learning

The students’ responses to: Question 2. ‘Do you feel confident about learning Chinese now?’ and Question 3. ‘What is the most difficult thing while learning Chinese?’ were analysed to help the teacher-researcher identify the obstacles that the beginning learners faced during their three terms of language learning.

Some researchers have proposed that analysis of data can lend itself to thinking about ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ categories (Dekeyser, 2003; Ellis, 2006). For the teacher-researcher to reflect upon the students’ responses to the two questions outlined above, ‘objective’ difficulties would be those such as the grammatical obstacles that influenced students’ language learning and would be related to Question 3: ‘most difficult thing’ (6.3.2 below). Student responses that could be identified as ‘subjective’ or dealing with the internal person such as their emotions, would more likely align to the students’ responses to Question 2: ‘confidence’. The students’ responses to these two questions are discussed below.

6.3.1 Lack of confidence

Confidence in learning a foreign language has at all times been central to investigating the efficiency of acquisition. When answering the Self-Assessment
questions, some of the students said ‘not sure’ or similar words/phrases to express their opinions, an expression of non-confidence. Students’ degree of confidence influences their satisfaction, for when they feel confident, they feel satisfied with what they have achieved (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Confidence in Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2. Do you feel confident about learning Chinese now?</th>
<th>Confident (26)</th>
<th>Not Confident (3)</th>
<th>Not Sure (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can answer Questions (1)</td>
<td>Forget a Lot (1).</td>
<td>Learning New Things and Forgetting Old Things (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Easier (1)</td>
<td>Don’t Like To Answer Questions As Don’t Want to Get Answer Wrong (1)</td>
<td>When I Say It Out Loud (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun Learning &amp; Speak Quite A Bit (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Better (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No comment (22)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the ‘not confident’ column of Table 6.2, it can be seen two of the students indicated they ‘don’t like to answer questions’, and ‘I don’t want to get answer wrong when I say it out loud’; or ‘I forget a lot’.

**Analysis and reflection**

The teacher-researcher needed to take heed of these responses, and not assume that when students were reluctant to answer, they were being difficult by refusing. It could indicate their lack of confidence in the way the teacher-researcher has set up the teaching/learning environment. Across the three terms, lack of confidence has been a significant obstacle for these Fifth grade beginning learners. Therefore, the teacher-researcher did try to instigate measures or methods to try to build confidence for students. These were the introduction of the reward system and combining teaching and learning through games. These two methods provided a good result across the terms, as indicated by the evidence from the confidence test assessment across three terms-Not confident: Term 1(12); Term 2(10) and Term 3(3). However, still not every student was confident and further attention needed to be given to this issue.
6.3.2 What was most difficult for these beginning learners

The final Self-Assessment Sheet included a question aimed at finding out the obstacles to students’ learning after three terms of lessons. Question 3 stated: ‘What is the most difficult thing while learning Chinese?’

Continuing the theme of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ difficulties, this section elaborates on the mostly ‘objective’ difficulties for the Fifth grade monolingual English speaking school students. The highest ranking response (22) for difficulty in learning Chinese was for: Chinese Characters and Sentences. Specifically, the students stated their difficulty was with ‘writing, reading and remembering’. Fewer students (5) indicated that some ‘specific content’ caused difficulty. ‘Answering questions’ was rated as difficult for one student, while two students felt there was ‘nothing hard’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3. What is the most difficult thing while learning Chinese?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Characters &amp; Sentences (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis and reflection**

The significant number of students recording ‘Chinese Characters and Sentences’ as the most difficult part of learning Chinese, gave the teacher-researcher cause for reflection. Learning Hanzi the way I had presented the lessons, was an arduous task for the students.

Within the lessons delivered to the students across the three terms, Chinese characters were not the main teaching content, but they were included. The teacher-researcher had chosen the method of teaching Chinese characters through
pronunciation supplemented by character writing, which meant only simple words or some related vocabulary was taught in written form. However, the findings from this research would suggest that it may be wise to postpone the teaching of Chinese Characters and Sentences until students had progressed further with their basic understanding (using pinyin as it matched the roman script and would assist with pronunciation in the beginning phases). Alternatively if it was decided to continue teaching Chinese Characters and Sentences to beginning students, it might be necessary to adapt lesson plans to include further reinforcement of only a few examples, and increase the practice through games, fun worksheets with quizzes and puzzles.

Apart from the Chinese Character writing problem, some of the students reflected that they had a problem with some specific learning themes, such as family members (1), names (1), numbers (1), and animals of the zodiac (3). Again for this smaller number of students, teaching strategies would need to address this by scaffolding future lessons to include reinforcement of this content, prior to introducing new content, or by including this previous content as practice examples combined within the new content.

6.3.3 Feedback on the teaching method over three terms

Question 4 on the Term 3 student Self-Assessment Sheet was changed from the related question on the Term 1 and 2 sheet: ‘Do you like learning Chinese in this way?’ and was reframed in the hopes of generating more responses from the students. Question 4 was then designed as ‘Do you love learning Chinese in the way that Ms Shen showed you?’

Table 6.4: Student Feedback on Teaching Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 4. Do you love learning Chinese in the way that Ms Shen showed you?</th>
<th>Yes (30)</th>
<th>No Comment (18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shows Us How To Learn (1)</td>
<td>Fun And Entertaining (5)</td>
<td>Easy to Learn and Understand (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Quizzes (1)</td>
<td>Liked How She Would Go Slowly Till We Remember it (1)</td>
<td>Like The Way (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All thirty students indicated ‘yes’ on their Assessment Sheet, that they loved learning Chinese this way. The reasons ranged from this method ‘shows us how to learn’ (1), ‘fun and entertaining’ (5), ‘easy to learn and understand’ (2), have ‘quizzes’ (1), ‘liked how she would go slowly till we remember it’ (1) to the very general statement by two students, ‘like the way’ (see Table 6.3). However eighteen students did not make a comment and therefore the discussion is based on the data from slightly less than half the students.

**Analysis and reflection**

Although only one student recorded, ‘liked how she would go slowly till we remember it’, this struck a chord with the teacher-researcher. Pacing of the lesson is very important to ensure all the students are engaged and understand the topic. As noted in the previous data analysis (Tables 6.2 and 6.3) some students indicated that not being able to memorize, or forgetting was an obstacle for them. The teacher-researcher would note this comment and consider slowing down some sections of the lesson to help students understand and remember the lesson content.

**6.4 Possibility of Further Chinese Learning**

The final question on the Term 3 student Self-Assessment Sheet asked the students to consider whether or not they would continue with their study. It asked: ‘**Will you continue learning Chinese in the future? If not, why?**

The teacher-researcher was very interested to analyse these data as it may well be an indication of the students’ responses overall to the three terms of Mandarin Chinese language teaching. Has the Chinese instruction influenced the Fifth grade (Shumiao (树苗) Primary School) students with positive attitudes towards further language learning—or not?

In the first level analysis, half the students indicated an intention to continue their Chinese language learning. Of the remaining half that were not definite at this stage, thirteen were ‘not sure’ and two students were quite sure that ‘no’ they would not continue further study (see Table 6.5).
Table 6.5: Possibility of Learning Chinese in the Future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 5. Will you continue learning Chinese in the future? If not, why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes (15)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun &amp; Interesting (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Easier (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Been Learning Chinese Since Kindergarten (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brought My Memories Back (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need To Speak To Someone In Chinese (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Want A Job I Must Know How To Speak Chinese (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No comments other than ‘yes’ (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up To The Future (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis and reflection**

In Table 6.5, those students who indicated they would continue to learn Chinese-(15) provide a contrast to those who were not interest- (2). However, those students who were ‘not sure’, indicate to the teacher-researcher that there is still work to be done, to make Chinese learnable, interesting and a goal for further study, for at least half the class. However, it was pleasing to see that from the students who responded with a ‘yes’, that they were finding, after three terms, that Mandarin Chinese was ‘getting easier’, or they would continue to study because of the Chinese learning experience being ‘fun and interesting’, or as one child wrote “I want a job, I must know how to speak Chinese”.

**6.5 Discussion**

Ellis (2006) says that a professional language teacher who can readily identify what is appropriate for students to learn can predict objective difficulties associated with the target language learning. The assessment of the students’ Chinese language
learning benefited the Volunteer in learning how to better plan their teaching/learning, providing critical information about the terms teaching related to the children’s general understanding of Chinese, their self-rated confidence levels, the difficulties they identified, their perception of whether they liked or disliked the teaching method and whether they were inclined to continue their study.

The most significant learning points for the teacher-researcher from the data analysis in this chapter are what the findings mean in terms of 1) the content and 2) the teaching method, for future lesson planning.

1) Content: As the students’ responses clearly indicated that Chinese Characters and Sentences were a source of difficulty, the teacher-researcher would recommend that: this content is delayed for beginning learners; or that very easy Characters with few stroke combinations, or simple sentence patterns are introduced, and then also fully supported by practice and review

2) Teaching Method: Student responses further indicated that they liked a teaching pedagogy that:
   
a. Was paced so they could understand and remember (not rushed to keep to time limits)

b. Was fun and entertaining-thereby having implications for a variety of:
   
   • activities: role play, games, quizzes, lessons outside the classroom,
   • supported by a variety of resources: IT, pictures, videos, and
   • lesson organisation: whole class, group work, pairs and individual
Chapter Seven:
Findings and Implications

This thesis has demonstrated an important capability required of teacher ‘xingzhi’ researchers, namely developing the potential required of researchers to identify, specifying and solve innumerable problems that arise during the research process. In this chapter the findings and implications have been presented as examples of how some of the problems identified during this research were overcome.

7.1 Introduction

Chapter seven provides a summary of the findings from this research and covers the introduction, literature, methodology, data collection and analysis (the evidentiary Chapters 4, 5 and 6). The limitations of this research along with recommendations for further study are also addressed. The conclusion rounds off the researcher’s final self-assessment and reflections from conducting this study.

7.2 Summary of Chapters

This beginning teacher-researcher aimed to improve Mandarin Chinese teaching practice through improving unit and lesson planning based on the feedback from the students and self-reflection. Xingzhi (action/knowledge) research was applied to experience the dual identities of both teacher and researcher, across the cycles of teaching, collecting student feedback on the teaching, and self-reflection, to then inform subsequent lesson plans.
Chapter 1 provided the introduction to this project. The research questions, including the main question and three contributory questions, were provided to show the direction that this research would proceed. These were:

How could a beginning teacher of Mandarin Chinese plan thematic units and lessons incorporating continuity and scaffolding of content and children’s interests to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for beginning Australian learners?

The contributory research questions are as follows:

1. What significant issue/s impact on the successful teaching of the planned lessons?
2. How can a beginning teacher-researcher use student feedback to plan more meaningful and appropriate lessons to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for beginning learners?
3. What barriers to learning Mandarin Chinese could impact beginning learners and how can the teacher-researcher use this knowledge to improve teaching practice?

Key terms were also explained, namely ‘Mandarin Chinese’, ‘bilingual teacher-researcher’, ROSETE program and NSW DE Volunteer. In addition, the significance of this research was highlighted.

These could benefit other researchers who are exploring Chinese teaching/learning in other English speaking countries. In addition to the possible international significance of this research, there could be a more local significance as this research has focused on a single case of an educational context in Australia (Western Sydney) and could be of use to other teachers in the field.

Finally the teacher-researcher’s personal history/experiences in both teaching and learning were explained to alert the reader that in growing up in China and having been exposed to a traditional, direct teaching educational system, sets the scene for a huge learning curve for the teacher-researcher in taking on the teaching assignment in an Australian educational context.

Chapter Two reviewed research studies and literature related to:
Unit and lesson plans

- Lesson plan attributes
- Planning for language teaching
- Planning for continuity across lesson plans
- Planning for students

Language teaching strategies

- Scaffolding, scoping and sequencing content
- Planning units for teaching English to Chinese transfer

Educational relationships

- Volunteers as beginning teachers

The literature review under these categories helped the teacher-researcher to begin the research and teaching with a skill set to attempt to plan appropriate units and lessons for her beginning status. As Chapter One attested, the teacher-researcher, previous to coming to Australia, had experienced a teacher-centred, traditional educational system. The literature review enabled her to view the world of education through a new lens.

Specifically the findings from the literature review encouraged the teacher-researcher to:

- Consider planning lessons with the students in mind rather than only the content (plan lessons with a combination of learning and practicing, full of activities and fun)
- Investigate students’ interests, backgrounds, motives, or personalities as a useful tool to help with lesson planning so to keep them engaged
- Scaffold students’ learning through building on prior knowledge and arranging lessons step-by-step

Chapter Three introduced the research methodology, methods and the research design. By implementing a ‘Xingzhi’ (action/knowledge) research methodology the stages of planning, teaching and practice, reflection and replanning were outlined as
the most suitable methodology for this project. Becoming a teacher-researcher under this methodology is also explained.

The **research principles** proposed and discussed in Chapter Three relate to:

- Validity and reliability of data collection
- Generalisability issues
- Research ethics
- Benefits and risks
- Data management
- Research writing
- Triangulation

Within the outlined **research design** section, the teacher-researcher has proposed and discussed the procedures for:

- Site selection (Pre-selected as per the ROSETE program and DET agreements)
- Student (participant) selection (Strict principles for gaining the consent of students were followed and ethical requirements were met. Student participants were allocated as per the ROSETE program and DET agreements)
- The teacher-researcher as a participant
- Data collection strategies (The data sets consisted of a self-reflective journal, lesson plans, and student Self-Assessment sheets)
- Data analysis strategies (included open coding (refinement of data), axial coding (connection construction), and selective coding (integration of all categories).
- Thematic analysis (based on the codes allocated above, the themes were identified)

Chapter Four is the first evidentiary chapter. It focused on teaching preparation in accord with the key word ‘time’. It is an attempt to analyse the plans and divide them into different sections: the time in planning and the time in reflection. The time in planning consisted of general teaching content (language points), practice activities,
and cultural transmission, and the time in reflection (relating to the teacher-researcher’s practice) was divided into academic time, preventative behaviour management time, instructional support time and classroom assessment time. The issue of ‘time’ played a key role throughout all three Terms of the teaching component of the study, as planning and managing time proved to be a major challenge.

Chapter Five was based on evidence collected from the refined data of students’ Self-Assessment Sheets after Term 1 and again after Term 2 of teaching. ‘Extrinsic/objective and intrinsic/subjective factors’ were kept in mind as the data were analysed. The evidence provided by the analysis from the students’ Self-Assessment Sheets provided insights for the teacher-researcher into the students’ and their learning with respect to:

- Enjoyment
- Appreciation-like or dislike the teaching methods
- Confidence in speaking Mandarin Chinese
- Interests in what was previously taught
- Interests in what they would like to learn next
- Any other suggestions

Chapter Six has focussed on the evidence from the analysis of the students’ Self-Assessment Sheet collected at the end of Term 3. This chapter has taken the obstacles and difficulties for beginning Mandarin Chinese learners as a serious point. The students’ responses were gauged on:

- Understanding of Chinese
- Confidence in speaking Mandarin Chinese language after three terms
- Difficulties and obstacles in learning Mandarin Chinese
- Opinions relating to the teaching methods
- Students’ intentions to continue studying Mandarin Chinese.
7.3 Key research findings

Insights from this study can assist bilingual teachers of Chinese create appropriate lesson plans in the beginning stages of teaching. Scaffolding, continuity and identifying students’ interests were key ideas in the teacher-researcher’s lesson designs and self-reflection on teaching practice and acknowledging student feedback after each term’s teaching guided the process of improving lesson plans and professional development. In order to achieve this the teacher-researcher adopted the method of Xingzhi (action/knowledge) research for collecting data and conducting the analysis.

The research findings from this thesis have been set out with exposition in terms of answers to the research questions. These are discussed below.

7.3.1 The research questions

This research sought to investigate the following research and contributory research questions:

How could a beginning teacher of Mandarin Chinese plan thematic units incorporating continuity and scaffolding of content and children’s interests to make Mandarin Chinese learnable for beginning Australian learners?

The contributory research questions are as follows:

1. What significant issues impact on the successful teaching of the planned lessons?
2. How can a beginning teacher-researcher use student feedback to plan more meaningful and appropriate lessons to make Chinese learnable for beginning learners?
3. What barriers to learning Chinese could impact beginning learners and how can the teacher-researcher use this knowledge to improve teaching practice?

All contributory research questions have provided evidence to address the overall research question.
Chapter Four addressed the first contributory research question.

1. **What significant issues impact on the successful teaching of the planned lessons?**

From a range of issues that were identified which impacted on successful teaching practice, time management was the most important issue for the teacher-researcher. That is, keeping to the planned time during the Mandarin Chinese lessons was difficult, causing the teacher-researcher to feel the lesson objectives were not met.

After examining the notions of time, and an indepth analysis of the actual lesson plans and reflection journal entries related to time, the following findings became part of the teacher-researcher’s professional learning.

Keeping to the allocated time schedule for lessons can be difficult and during teaching practice, many times, planned time needed to be adjusted in relation to:

- Children’s enthusiasm,
- Additional explanations being needed,
- Changes to the ‘normal’ teaching strategy/routine,
- Responding to the unexpected

Planning for time, and flexibility within the plan became the teacher-researcher’s prime finding in relation to this contributory research question.

The adjustment to allocated time without fear that the lesson objectives have not been reached was another key finding. (This was quite a different sentiment for the teacher-researcher as teaching in a Chinese educational setting, is controlled by time controls the lesson, not the students’ needs).

Chapter Five explored the second contributory research question:

2. **How can a beginning teacher-researcher use student feedback to plan more meaningful and appropriate lessons to make Chinese learnable for beginning learners?**
The full summary of the findings appears within the conclusion to Chapter Five. The teacher-researcher has been able to identify key learnings about how to incorporate students’ feedback into further lesson plans as follows:

- By surveying the students, the teacher-researcher was able to identify the topics that interested the students, and those which they enjoyed. The students were also asked to record what topics of interest they would like to study in the future. This information was used in the planning of the next series of lessons. Children also provided feedback as to whether they liked the teaching method. Based on the analysis of these data the following is the summary of how the teacher-researcher used these findings to improve lesson plans to make Chinese more learnable for beginning students:
  - Continue with content/stories about how life in families is different for Chinese and Australian people (8 students enjoyed this topic)
  - Content and activities that related to real life experiences (revision with greetings as children enjoyed using greetings with their family; revision with family member differences in names); encourage children to practice speaking out of class with family and friends.
  - Continue with planning of activities to be ‘fun and interesting’ (games, interesting resources)
  - Reduce homework (only one students enjoyed homework)
  - Continue to draw children’s attention to their success as this is a new language and new experience for them
  - Ensure sufficient time for students to think about their speaking in front of the class
  - Reward good attempts and do not expect perfect answers (children concerned about giving the wrong answers; feeling shy)
  - Provide students with prompts or clues to the answers (helps students with bad memories; those who are not confident with all the content
  - Let children look up answers in their books before they speak (children indicating they need help from their books to respond)
  - Use children’s interests of animals, food, fantasy and myths, zodiacs, family members as examples for practice and weave into as many lessons as possible.
Some interest areas could be incorporated into the cultural content in Term 3 (e.g., Architecture, Cities, Staying Healthy in China, Dynasties)

‘bring books for the class’ - use books from the library to base activities on (e.g. make up a play based on these stories)

Chapter Six investigated the third contributory research question:

3. What barriers to learning Chinese could impact beginning learners and how can the teacher-researcher use this knowledge to improve teaching practice?

The most significant learning points for the teacher-researcher from the data analysis in this chapter were what the findings mean in terms of 1) the content and 2) the teaching method, for future lesson planning.

1) Content: As the students’ responses clearly indicated that Chinese Characters and Sentences were a source of difficulty, the teacher-researcher would recommend that: this content is delayed for beginning learners; or that very easy Characters with few stroke combinations, or simple sentence patterns are introduced, and then also fully supported by practice and review

2) Teaching Method: Student responses further indicated that they liked a teaching pedagogy that:
   a. Was paced so they could understand and remember (not rushed to keep to time limits)
   b. Was fun and entertaining - thereby having implications for a variety of:
      • activities: role play, games, quizzes, lessons outside the classroom,
      • supported by a variety of resources: IT, pictures, videos, and
      • lesson organisation: whole class, group work, pairs and individual

The findings from Chapters Four, Five and Six have provided important aspects for the teacher-researcher’s professional learning. However, there were identifiable
problems with some of the data collection and these issues are discussed in the following section.

7.4 Limitations and delimitations of this study

As previously mentioned, as a novice teacher-researcher coming from a Chinese educational background, throughout this research I have self-reflectted on my role as a teacher and a researcher and the subsequent limitations are acknowledged as impacting on this research:

- lack of understanding how to identify or to teach forms of Chinese the beginning students could use to replace some of their everyday English language activities
- inability to use the limited time allocated for making Chinese learnable for beginning learners (45 minutes per week)
- lack of research experience to make full use of the 3 terms for rigorous data collection
- data collected from the Self-Assessment Sheets could be regarded as imprecise as:
  - the actual form was not created with lines and spaces to allow students to record more comments
  - some students only provided positive or negative statements without making any comments, which may have influenced the analysis and subsequent findings
  - some questions were leading, as the results show very few students did not agree positively to the questions as they were worded.

In hindsight there should have been additional data collection undertaken to add credibility to the data collected on the Self-Assessment Sheets, for example, interviews with the students or the classroom teacher.
7.5 Implications for Teaching and Learning Chinese

This study has explored the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese as a second language for Australian school students. The implications of this research for making Chinese learnable are briefly restated here:

7.5.1 Focus on students

This research focused on the exploration of lesson planning. It is of necessity to make an in-depth survey of the students’ language learning background as a starting point for planning. This could include their general impressions about the target language, their language level in the target language, and their perceived purposes in learning it. Understanding the students’ backgrounds could benefit the Chinese language teacher to better engage with them. Monitoring students’ responses to the lesson may mean a change in pace or time commitment in order to keep their attention and keep them motivated (rewards and games may be implemented).

7.5.2 Lesson content

In developing appropriate Mandarin Chinese lessons for students in local schools in Australia, begin with the lesson’s purpose (objective or goal), the general language teaching points, practice activities and include some content on cultural transmission. Lessons build up or the content can be scaffolded to ensure students have links to prior knowledge-practice and review supports this approach in subsequent lessons.

7.5.3 The ROSETE program

The last implication is for the Volunteers’, Chinese language education capabilities. Volunteers start as outright novice, knowing nothing about education, teaching or learning, and even less about how to make Chinese learnable. Serious-minded Volunteers with the appropriate disposition and commitment benefit from developing their professional capabilities, knowledge and skills through a research-oriented, school engaged process of teacher-researcher education.

All of the implications mentioned above could benefit the development of teaching/learning Chinese as a second language in local Australian schools.
7.6 Recommendations for further research

This study is about how a beginning bilingual Chinese teacher could make lesson and unit plans that are consistent and scaffolded so as to make it possible for students to learn Chinese. However, there was a tendency to naively fixate on these simplistically. As this study explores the process of developing appropriate lesson plans for Fifth grade Australian students, the following have been identified by the teacher-researcher as recommendations for further research.

7.6.1 Student data

In this study, little detailed evidence was collected relating to the students as a unique group of participants in this research. It would have been beneficial to include data about the students, such as: gender, language acquisition level, identification of special needs or learning difficulties, and even family influence so that a teacher-researcher could adjust to the differences to increase the individual appropriateness. This additional data collection is recommended for further research in this area.

7.6.2 Expanding this research

In future research it would not be necessary to follow exactly what has been illustrated in the examples given in Chapter Four, as lesson plans. Other different and interesting topics could be developed through further research. Teaching content should be produced by the teacher and students. Therefore the kind of planning process using student feedback, outlined in Chapters Five and Six, could be applied. Finally, it would be recommended for future projects that the elements of lesson planning, such as teaching content, cultural content and practice content could be redesigned or enriched, to include more innovative ideas that could make the learning content more interactive.

This thesis has provided a perspective for further exploring Mandarin Chinese teaching in non-Chinese contexts.
7.6.3 A possible literature source

This research project reports on a Mandarin Chinese teaching and learning experience for Fifth grade students in an Australian educational setting, where a Volunteer, bilingual teacher-researcher, taught the beginning students over three school terms.

If further research was undertaken with another group of students within a similar context, this study could be an ideal starting point for contrast or for some initial background information. Chapter Two of this thesis has pointed to the limited literature in this specific field.

7.7 Reflections on becoming a teacher-researcher

Previous to becoming a university student within the ROSETE program and a NSW DE Volunteer, this teacher-researcher was a native Chinese speaker with an English (Major) background and with no experience in teaching using English as the language of instruction.

However, the opportunity of studying in Australia as a teacher-researcher has provided an amazing and unexpected teaching and learning experience. It would be normal for a ‘new arrival’ to encounter some cultural shock or awkward moments, and this has been the case adapting to a different study and teaching context in Australia. In hindsight, the experience has provided me with the dual identities of a bilingual teacher and researcher. As a NSW DE Volunteer, the teacher-researcher was provided with opportunities to learn and practice ways of making Chinese learnable, to review my teaching/learning strategies, and to improve these through interaction with students.

The initial difficulty in becoming a professional teacher of Chinese was learning to plan and design units of lessons that would be appropriate for Australian students. This meant learning to vary teaching/learning content, activities and homework. Due to my limited understanding of the Australian educational system, this educational work was misunderstood as merely to trying to entertain students. This was because there were no textbooks for instructing students in Chinese, in the manner this
teacher-researcher was accustomed. Quickly learning and adapting to the Australian context was hence the reason why it was essential for the teacher-researcher to learn to plan lessons to take account of teaching/learning activities and resources, set appropriate achievement targets, and to improve the ability to monitor students’ learning, while building rapport with them. Performing the dual identities of both teacher and researcher made this possible.

In reflection, another difficulty concerned management. Although time management was the most challenging issue (and consequently Chapter Four has highlighted this), classroom management was also a challenge (although not part of this thesis). The issue of time management was a challenge in planning for teaching content, in that it was difficult to estimate the time needed for language instruction for specific tasks. Not all lesson plans were successful for every participant. It is a challenge to balance the individual and diversified needs of all the students in a class. Students’ class performances and the reflections from their assessment sheets signalled that not everyone is interested in one topic or even this language. This difficulty was encountered at the start of the teacher-researcher’s program of professional learning and progress has been slow.

Conducting this research has greatly contributed to developing this NSW DE Volunteer’s capabilities as a beginning teacher-researcher. The skills developed include those associated with scheduling time arrangements (some improvement), lesson design, and enhancing students’ interaction in the Mandarin Chinese classes by incorporating elements from their feedback.

However, my professional learning requires further development so that it better connects with Australia’s educational culture and is more focused on making Chinese learnable for school students. While classroom management was generally the responsibility of the class teachers, I would like to learn more about this. I also need further systematic, rigorous study/practice as a teacher-researcher in order to make Chinese learnable for young beginning students.
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91(1), 63-82.


Appendix 1: Human Ethics Approval

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751 Australia
Office of Research Services
ORS Reference: H10475 13/019560

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

24 June 2014

Professor Michael Singh
Centre for Educational Research

Dear Michael,

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal H10475 “The application of Mind Map in teaching/learning Mandarin Chinese: An integrated approach to unity planning”, until 31 December 2014 with the provision of a progress report annually if over 12 months and a final report on completion.

Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of your approval date.

2. A final report will be due at the expiration of your approval period as detailed in the approval letter.

3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to the project continuing. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form: http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/491130/HREC_Amendment_Request_Form.pdf

4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Ethics Committee as a matter of priority.

5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority

6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to the email address humanethics@uws.edu.au.

This protocol covers the following researchers:
Michael Singh, Jinghe Han, Hangyan Shen

Yours sincerely

Professor Elizabeth Deane
Presiding Member,
Human Researcher Ethics Committee
SERAP (No. 2014128)

Indemnification by Researcher

Name of Principal Researcher: Miss Hangyan Shen
Institution/Organisation: University of Western Sydney
Title of Research: The application of Mind Map in teaching/learning Mandarin Chinese: An integrated approach to unit planning

University of Western Sydney and principal researcher indemnify the State of New South Wales by its Department of Education and Communities (including its officers, employees, agents and contractors) against all losses, liabilities, damages, costs and expenses of any kind arising from any claim it incurs that relates to:

- personal injury, death, or property loss or damage: the personal injury or death or property loss or damage caused or contributed to by the principal researcher and or researchers;
- the Project: the principal researcher’s conduct of the Project including its materials and publications;
- Project Materials: Project Materials created by the principal researcher and or researchers infringing anyone’s intellectual property rights; and
- negligent, unlawful or wilful act or omission: the principal researchers and or researchers negligent, unlawful or wilful acts or omissions.

To be signed by Principal Researcher and authorised signatory of researcher’s employing organisation:

| Authorised signatory: | Mr Gar Jones  
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<tr>
<td>Position:</td>
<td>Director - Research Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature:</td>
<td>[Signature]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>26/6/2014</td>
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</tbody>
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I declare that the above information is correct. I declare that as Principal Researcher I have read the Criteria for Approving Applications in the Department’s Research Guidelines and agree to abide by them in the conduct of this study. I undertake to ensure that I, and any assistants working with me and/or on my behalf, will maintain the confidentiality of all information collected from participants under confidentiality agreements.

Principal Researcher Name
Miss Hangyan Shen

Signature: [Signature]
Date: 26/6/2014
Appendix 3: Letters to the Principal

Dear Sir:

I am Hangyan Shen, I am a volunteer teacher of Chinese from Ningbo, working in Western Sydney school of NSW Department of Education & Community Services. As part of my volunteer work, I am undertaking a Master of Education (Honours) research degree through the Centre for Educational Research of UWS, as part of my contribution to improving the teaching and learning of Chinese in Sydney schools. Professor Michael Singh is my principal supervisor, and Dr. Jinghe Han is my associate supervisor. I would like to invite you as a student of this school to participate in my teacher-research project.

My teacher-research project focuses on exploring the use of mind maps for planning Chinese language units and lessons and to engage the reflections of the school students regarding their feelings and opinions about learning Chinese.

I need to collect evidences to help me become a better teacher of Chinese for Australian school students. I would like to invite you to participate in some interviews (1-2) with me and to complete some feedback sheets (3). Each interview will take around 20 minutes, if you can spare the time. I will arrange the interview at the time that is suitable for you. I will ask you to fill in the feedback sheets three times, once a term; each will take about 5 minutes of your time to complete.

All the information you give me will only be used for research purposes. Your real name will not be used in any of my research work. I can provide you with any material relating to your interview or feedback sheet, should you require this. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Further, you can withdraw from it at any time. The consent you provide is solely for the purpose of gaining information.

My email address is 17851871@student.uws.edu.au. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information about the research project and its progress.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely

Hangyan Shen
Centre for Educational Research (Penrith Campus)
University of Western Sydney
Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet
(parent/care-givers)

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>The application of Mind Map in teaching/learning Mandarin Chinese: An integrated approach to unit planning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is carrying out the study?</td>
<td>Miss Hangyan Shen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your child is invited to participate in a study conducted by Mandarin teacher Miss Hangyan Shen, the student who is having her master degree in University of Western Sydney(UWS). This research will form basis of the Master degree (Honours) at UWS under the supervision of Professor Michael Singh and Dr. Jinghe Han.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the study about?</td>
<td>The study is to explore a teaching approach and to assist primary students' Mandarin Chinese learning through application of mind map. Mind map is a kind of associative thinking way related with the prior knowledge which can benefit the later knowledge construction. In this study, it’s mainly for the construction of students’ learning unit and lesson plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does the study involve?</td>
<td>Your child will be interviewed in groups and share his/her opinion on the teacher’s teaching approach with his/her classmates. The interview will be audio recorded. It will take about 1-2 times, 20 minutes once. Some feedback sheets will be provided to the students. It will take about 3 times, once a term; Students can give advice about the lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much time will the study take?</td>
<td>Recordings will be: Collected from 1/2/2014 during Mandarin Chinese lessons. The interview will takes about 20 minutes each time. Two times in total. Feedback sheets will be once a term, generally in the last lesson of a term, which takes 10 minutes. Three times in total. All the data and information will be stored in University of Western Sydney for five years, after which they will be destroyed. Accessed by the researcher and related supervisors. Used in the following ways : research analysis. Children not participating in the study will not been influenced during the time the research is being carried out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the study benefit me?</td>
<td>Yes, participants may improve their ability of learning knowledge in a coherent teaching way and the</td>
</tr>
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</table>
interest of learning Mandarin Chinese in a better way.

Will the study have any discomforts?
There is no risk of harm or discomfort to all participants. Because classroom teacher will be the person who supervise the research when staying with students.

How is this study being paid for?
The research is sponsored through UWS $2000 per year as scholarship.

Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?
No one will be able to identify you from the results of the study. Only the researcher and her supervisors have access to the original data provided by you with the ethical permission. Interviews with you will be on audio-tape which will require a password for access and be stored for 5 years before being completely deleted. Thesis to be submitted for the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Honours).

Can I withdraw my child from the study?
Your child's participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Your child may withdraw from the study at any time - or you may withdraw all written and audio records of your child's participation if you change your mind.

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

What if I require further information?
When you have read this information, Miss Hangyan Shen will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Miss Hangyan Shen, contact details are: 17851671@student.wu.edu.au. Professor Michael Singh by calling 0451068539 or via E-mail by m.j.singh@uws.edu.au. Dr. Jinghe HAN by calling 0422652972 or via E-mail by j.han@uws.edu.au;

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

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 +61 2 4736 0229 Fax +61 2 4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au.

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

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form: parents and caregivers

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

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

Project Title: The application of Mind Map in teaching/learning Mandarin Chinese: An integrated approach to unit planning

I, [print name]............................, give consent for my child [print name]............................ to participate in the research project titled [ The application of Mind Map in teaching/learning Mandarin Chinese: An integrated approach to unit planning].

I acknowledge that:

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

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

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

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

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

I consent to the research reflection activities, which includes self-assessment sheets, audio and video recording of the interviews. Please cross out any activity that you do not wish your child to participate in.

Signed (Parent/caregiver):

Signed (child):

Name:

Name:

Date:

Date:

Where projects involve young people capable of consenting, a separate consent form should be developed. A parental consent form is still required.

Return Address: 1.21-School of Education, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith NSW 2751
This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.
The Approval number is: [enter approval number]

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 Fax +61 2 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: Sample Lesson Plan (with reflections)

| Review content | Review about last lesson:  
Numbers (一，二。。。1,2,..)  
Number-related sentences  
Class-room routine: start lesson:老师你好（how are you, miss） |
|---|---|
| Target | Sentence about introduce one’s birthday: 我的生日是XXXX年X月X日。（My birthday is X, X, XXXX.）  
Culture Understanding: 12 zodiacs & selective record (Video introduction)  
Classroom routine: finish lesson 老师再见（see you, teacher） |
| What students find easy to learn, why? | **Easy to learn:** The routines  
They found the routines. They really impressed the teacher, though all the contents have been taught before and only need combination. They still performed it goodly when I finished my lesson. |
| What they found hard, why? | **Hard to learn:** the sentence 我的生日是XXXX年X月X日。（My birthday is X, X, XXXX.）  
Although the ones that teacher picked to answer did it out, the teacher still thought they made it in a hard process, because every one of them read their notes, some of them only read the samples on the boards, others even read the PINYIN. |
| Conclusion  
What students have learned, why? | **Have learned**  
Sentence about introduce one’s birthday: 我的生日是XXXX年X月X日。（My birthday is X, X, XXXX.）  
Culture Understanding: 12 zodiacs & selective record (Video introduction)  
Classroom routine: finish lesson 老师再见（see you, teacher） |
| What haven’t, Why? | **Haven’t learned**  
All the contents have been taught as scheduled. |
| Conclusion  
What inspired students and the teacher; Why | Apply the question sentence to make a dialogue: 你的生日是什么时候？（when is your birthday）  
Apply sentences about somebody else introduce their birthday: 他/她的生日是。。。。（His/her birthday is X, X, XXXX） |
Appendix 7: Student Self-Assessment Sheet-Terms 1 and 2

1. Did you enjoy learning the greetings and numbers?

2. Do you feel confident speaking about the topic?

3. What did you find most interesting about this topic?

4. What would you like to learn about next?

5. Any other suggestions?

6. Do you like learning Chinese in this way?
1. By learning Chinese three terms, do you now have a general understanding about Chinese? What’s that?

2. Do you feel confident about learning Chinese now?

3. What is the most difficult thing while learning Chinese?

4. Do you love learning Chinese in the way that Ms. Shen showed you?

5. Will you continue learning Chinese in the future? If not, why?