AN EXPLORATION OF STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACHES TO MAKING CHINESE LEARNABLE FOR BEGINNING LEARNERS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS: A BILINGUAL TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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Acknowledgements

Arriving in Australia on the 4th July, 2014, the Independence Day of America, will always be memorable as it was the start of a new life in Australia as an independent young man. Since then I have received a great deal of support from supervisors, colleagues and family members.

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Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest love for my parents. Their understanding and encouragement give me the strength to believe in myself and to never give up when facing difficulties.
Statement of Authentication

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of a Master of Education (Honours) degree at Western Sydney University, School of Education. The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not previously submitted this material, either in whole or part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signature:  

(Keren Li)

Date:  29th March, 2016
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## Abbreviations

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<thead>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>British Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEC</td>
<td>Department of Education and Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT</td>
<td>Chinese Learning and Teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLL</td>
<td>Chinese Language Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSL</td>
<td>Chinese as a Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFL</td>
<td>Chinese as a Foreign Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSBC</td>
<td>Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NALSAS</td>
<td>National Asian Language and Studies in Australian Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMEB</td>
<td>Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTCFL</td>
<td>National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSETET</td>
<td>Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERAP</td>
<td>State Education Research Applications Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCL</td>
<td>Student-centred Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCLL</td>
<td>Student-centred Language Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSAT</td>
<td>Special School and Academy Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWFC</td>
<td>Shanghai World Financial Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCSL</td>
<td>Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLA</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWS/WSU</td>
<td>University of Western Sydney/Western Sydney University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWCC</td>
<td>Working With Children Check</td>
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<td>WSR</td>
<td>Western Sydney Region</td>
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Abstract

This thesis reports an exploration into student-centred approaches to making Chinese learnable for beginning learners in Australian schools, specifically in the Western Sydney Region (WSR). The teacher-researcher was a bilingual volunteer teacher from mainland China who was a participant in the Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) program whereby the students study their own teaching practice as the basis for their thesis.

The research question devised to study the teaching assignment was:

How can a bilingual volunteer teacher-researcher use action research to develop a student-centred teaching framework to make Chinese learnable to beginning learners in western Sydney schools?

The three contributory questions were:

1. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/ teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred content, learning materials and resources to support the design of the lessons?
2. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/ teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred teaching strategies?
3. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/ teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred classroom management practices?

The methodology chosen for this research was mixed methods, although the majority of the data collected was qualitative.

The findings drawn from the data collected have provided a database of successful student-centred methods related to choosing lesson content, materials and resources, teaching pedagogies and behaviour management for implementation in a student-centred Chinese language classroom.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction-Teaching Chinese through a student-centred language teaching approach

This research has explored how to develop a student-centred Chinese language teaching framework to make Chinese learnable for beginning learners in western Sydney Region (WSR) schools. This Chapter begins by stating the research questions that have guided this exploratory research. Secondly Chapter 1 has explained the background contexts to this research; that of the research project itself as part of the ROSETE program; the background of the teacher-researcher himself; and the background educational context within which Chinese language teaching is placed. Next the significance of the research has been presented and finally an overview of the structure of this thesis has been outlined.

1.1 The research questions

The research question under exploration in this research project was: How can a bilingual volunteer teacher-researcher use action research to develop a student-centred teaching framework to make Chinese learnable to beginning learners in western Sydney schools?

The three contributory questions were:

1. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred content, learning materials and resources to support the design of the lessons?
2. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred teaching strategies?
3. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred classroom management practices?

1.2 Background

There are three layers to this section on Background to the research undertaken by the teacher-researcher. The section begins from a personal level with a self-introduction of the teacher-researcher, followed by the background to the ROSETE program and finally the larger picture of the background conditions of teaching Chinese in Australia.

1.2.1 The teacher-researcher

The teacher-researcher’s educational background in mainland China has impacted on this research and contributed to the development of the research questions.

As a means of self-introduction the teacher-researcher received an education, including primary, secondary and tertiary, in the northern region of mainland China, where teacher-centred approaches are the dominant method of all teaching. After graduating from the College of Science and Technology Ningbo University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2014, the teacher-researcher was engaged in some teaching and tutoring jobs. For example, one part-time job as a teacher for primary school students in Ningbo, mainland China (subjects including Chinese, Mathematics, and English) and another one as a Mandarin tutor to a native English speaker (an American English teacher in Ningbo University) and a Korean exchange student (a foreign student in Ningbo University). Teaching Chinese to Australian primary and secondary students was something very unfamiliar to the teacher-researcher. Therefore, this research has been conducted by a novice Chinese teacher and researcher.

From this background student-centred approaches were unfamiliar and as this was the teaching context in WSR schools the teacher-researcher needed to study the effectiveness of this teaching method and develop successful and effective teaching skills in this area.
This occurred through participation in the ROSETE program which combined Chinese teaching in local schools with a study program.

1.2.2 The ROSETE Program

This research was situated in and was part of an international partnership program (ROSETE). This program is an Australia/mainland China partnership established by Western Sydney University (WSU) in conjunction with the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC), and the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau (NMEB). The ROSETE program combines a University research post-graduate degree with a teaching program in DEC schools. The degree framework is that the students study their own teaching practice as the basis for their thesis.

The ROSETE Program is a longitudinal program (2008–2017) for the education of Chinese language teacher-researchers (Han and Singh, 2016; Singh and Ballantyne, 2014). That is to say, “the ROSETE Program is a long-term process in which teacher-researchers through their daily Chinese teaching experience can carry on educational changes by making Chinese learnable to monolingual English-speaking students in western Sydney schools” (Singh, 2013, p.566). The ROSETE program conducted in 2014 was called ROSETE-7, for it was the seventh year of this program’s operation. The teacher-researcher undertaking this research project was honored to be enrolled as one of the eight Ningbo volunteer teacher-researchers of the ROSETE-7 Program.

The ROSETE Program integrates the Ningbo volunteers’ postgraduate education into their internship as Chinese teacher-researchers. This internship involves ten hours Chinese teaching per week over three semesters (approximate 120 days) in WSR schools. As part of their research education, the Ningbo volunteers also undertake workshops, tutorials, and seminars on evidence-driven approaches to making Chinese learnable to beginning learners. This includes higher degree research units on post-monolingual language learning, multilingual teacher-research, and the learning/teaching of Chinese as a local/global language.
As Singh (2013, p.549) points out “the design and designing of policies, programs and pedagogies for the education of teacher-researchers is important” (Singh, 2013, p.549).

1.2.3 Chinese teaching and learning in Australia

This research has been located in a complex context of competing ideas across communities, the education system and the wider political system. Some of these complexities have been highlighted in this section.

1.2.3.1 Defining teaching and learning “Chinese”

“Chinese” is a polysemous word, (multiple meanings), so it has been necessary to define the meaning of it in this research. In this thesis, teaching and learning “Chinese” not only refers to the “mandarin language”, which is the official language used in mainland China, but it also includes the teaching about Chinese culture and the Chinese people.

1.2.3.2 Foreign languages learning in Australia

This research was also situated within a broader policy context. Specifically “Australia in the Asian Century: White Paper” (Australian Government, 2012) has had an impact on the teaching of Asian languages in schools. This paper pointed to the emergence of mainland China as a globally significant nation and even more so due to its proximity to Australia. Even earlier, since 1994, the National Asian Language and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) project was conducted by the Australia Government to inspire Australian school students to learn Asian languages.

For some twenty-two years then, the Australia Government has not suspended its efforts to promote learning Asian languages in schools. “All Australian students will have the opportunity, and be encouraged, to undertake a continuous course of study in an Asian language throughout their years of schooling”(Australian Government, 2012, p. 2). The reason can be gathered from the following citation:

…Australian Government plays a leading role in strengthening and building relationships with partners in the region—with more intensive
diplomacy across Asia—others across a broad spectrum spanning business, unions, community groups and educational and cultural institutions also play an important role. Stronger relationships will lead to more Australians having a deeper understanding of what is happening in Asia and being able to access the benefits of growth in our region (Australian Government, 2012, p.6).

Chinese has been noted in this policy document as one of the priority Asian languages as follows: “All students will have access to at least one priority Asian language; these will be Chinese (Mandarin), Hindi, Indonesian and Japanese” (Australian Government, 2012, p.22). As a consequence of this policy, more and more WSR Australian students have the opportunity to learn Chinese from primary school or even at a younger age in kindergarten.

1.2.3.3 Shortage of students learning Chinese

Although at the Government policy level the importance of learning an Asian language has been promoted Orton (2008) has raised concerns that the number of school students learning Chinese is less than expected.

Firstly Orton (2008) points out that data concerning the actual number of students learning Chinese is problematic as the methods of calculating can be misleading (e.g. double counting of students attending classes on the weekend or in community schools as well as public school classes). However, Orton (2008) does refer to an estimate which has been made that 84,000 students were learning Chinese in 319 Australian schools compared with approximately 300,000 students learning Japanese and Italian; 200,000 learning Indonesian and French, and 130,000 learning German. From these statistics, the popularity of learning Chinese as a foreign language is not great. This has been another influence on this research.

1.2.3.4 Continuing to learn Chinese after primary school

In general primary schools offer a range of foreign languages teaching as part of all students’ education. Schools that specialize in Chinese language teaching would provide the students an opportunity to learn Chinese from Kindergarten to Year 6. The students would not have a choice. It would be part of their curriculum. However
once students reach secondary school, the continuation of their Chinese study has been noted by Orton (2008) as problematic. Although the number of Year 7 students studying Chinese increased at a rate of 3% during the three years prior to 2008, the worrying statistic presented was that 94% of the students learning Chinese at Australian schools give up immediately when the Chinese class is no longer a compulsory lesson on their syllabus. Further Orton (2008) contends that most of the students who do continue studying Chinese into the senior secondary school are mostly Australian Born Chinese or Chinese immigrants. This further leads to a questioning of how learnable is Chinese to Australian students.

1.2.3.5 Addressing these challenges

Orton (2008) has proposed some strategies to overcome the obstacles in promoting Chinese learning in Australia and in Australian schools. Firstly, the Australian Government and business communities (both Australian and Chinese) need to be involved and support Chinese teaching in schools. Secondly, some very effective new approaches need to be applied by the teachers of Chinese to make Chinese learnable and successful for students. Further, drawing on the large pool of Chinese people and resources in Australia could make a significant difference to how Chinese is taught in schools. Finally, Hanban (Chinese National Office of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language-NOTCFL) and the Asia Education Foundation are both noted resources that could be used to support the teaching and learning of Chinese in schools.

1.3 Significance of the study

The background issues raised above point to the significance of this research study as being a timely exploration into making Chinese learnable for beginning learners in Australian schools.

1.3.1 Significance to the ROSETE program

The ROSETE program has been defined as “an innovative, flexible and intellectually challenging program that has Chinese graduates researching the teaching of Chinese to non-background speakers” (Centre for Educational Research, UWS, 2011).
It was first conducted in 2007, and this is the seventh year of this program. The teacher-researcher’s research findings will contribute to the ongoing results and outcomes from this program. In this program, all the teacher-researchers explored approaches from different perspectives to make Chinese learnable. This particular research study has focused on using student-centred methods to make Chinese learnable to Australian students. The ROSETE program is the only one of its kind in Australia and has been building a bank of findings from across all the students’ research studies. This database of students’ theses will hopefully give inspiration to other teachers of Chinese to English-speaking background students.

1.3.2 Significance to Chinese learners worldwide

All around the world, the number of people who are learning Chinese is growing. Not only are more and more universities across the world operating Chinese as elective courses but also more primary and secondary schools are including Chinese in their curricula. According to the statistics by the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOTCFL) in September 2010, there are more than 80 Confucius Institutes (classes) in more than 90 countries all over the world, since the first Confucius Institute was established in Seoul, South Korea in 2004 (Gao, 2011). According to Gao (2011), learning Chinese has become a fashion that people have pursued and ‘mandarin fever’ has been referred to as a global issue.

This research has explored ways to develop a student-centred teaching and learning framework that can be an effective way to encourage and enhance Chinese learnability. Although a localised study in WSR this study has been part of the worldwide push to find better ways to make Chinese learnable to beginning learners.

1.3.3 Significance to teaching and learning methods to make Chinese learnable

A common Western stereotype is that the Asian teacher is an authoritarian purveyor of information, one who expects students to listen and memorise correct answers and procedures rather than to construct knowledge themselves. (Stigler and Stevenson cited in John Biggs, 1998, p. 727)
Although the teaching situation has been changing in Asia, still in mainland China, teachers would generally use a teacher-centred strategy to teach Mandarin, English and other subjects.

In a purely teacher-centred classroom, the students would be viewed as passively receiving knowledge and teacher’s role would be akin to information giver or evaluator to monitor learners to get the right answer. One criticism of this method is that it seldom lets students use or show their potential as the main focus would be to have the learners perform well on state-mandated tests. Catering to the students’ needs would not be a priority. This teaching method has been argued as unsuccessful because the knowledge of students is judged by their performance in the final exam scores (Lynch, 2010 cited in Zohrabi, Ali Torabi and Baybourdiani, 2012).

This kind of teaching method has been outdated in Australia particularly in the early years (primary and early secondary school). Native Chinese speaking teachers need to be aware that coming from a teacher-centred education system may undermine students’ interest of Chinese learning in Australia. Most Australian students are more active than mainland Chinese students. They could have the opportunity to create original ideas about Chinese knowledge when their teachers teach using a student-centred pedagogy. This research project has explored this issue over the eighteen-month study and teaching by the teacher-researcher in the ROSETE program.

1.3.4 Significance for students’ future careers

As the second largest economy in the word, there are so many opportunities of jobs in mainland China. However less than 20% of Australians working in mainland China can communicate with Chinese people by speaking Chinese, and only 10% of Australians have learned one subject about mainland China or Chinese during their school years (Orton, 2008). The opportunities for students to have career opportunities in mainland China would be increased if they could speak fluent Mandarin and have a good understanding of Chinese culture as well. Nowadays, second language skills are important when applying for a position in any firm, but particularly in a multinational/off-shore company. It could be expected that the
bilingual job seeker would overtake many monolingual competitors in the future jobs market.

With the labour market opening up in mainland China exploring ways to make Chinese learnable for beginning learners in Australian schools becomes even more significant. If the students can be encouraged to continue learning Chinese into the secondary school, because their primary experiences have been enjoyable and successful, their career opportunities may be extended. If the teaching and learning of Chinese in Australian schools can be based on the student-centred approach and Chinese becomes more easily learnable then this research could make a significant contribution to these issues and the discussions around these.

1.4 Thesis outline

The preceding issues relating to the background contexts of this research and also its significance have set up the groundwork for the remaining chapters. The overall structure of this thesis has been organised as follows:

Chapter 1 has expounded the background of the study from both the Australian context and from the perspective of the teacher-researcher. The research questions have been defined and the significance of this research has been explained.

Chapter 2 has reviewed the literature on student-centred teaching and learning in general and has then explored the literature about language teaching approaches and the application of student-centred approaches in Chinese language teaching. In order to have some knowledge about how to develop a series of student-centred lessons further literature around lesson planning (content and materials selection and teaching strategies) has been sought and discussed. Finally, a brief review on behaviour management has been included to assist the teacher-researcher in the teaching component of this research.

Chapter 3 has focused on the methods and methodology of the research. It has illustrated the application of the mixed-method chosen in this research along with the action research study design. An in-depth discussion of the ethical approaches and procedures has been included and has covered data collection and analysis, data
storage and has concluded with the comment that no claims to generalizability can be made in the research findings.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have provided the data and evidence to answer the three contributory research questions.

Chapter 4 has provided the evidence from this research related to the question: How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred content, learning materials and resources from which to design the lessons? The constraints of the syllabus, considering the students’ prior general and cultural knowledge, cognitive ability, gauging children’s interests and relating the content selection to a real-life upcoming excursion have all been discussed as being useful ways to influence the selection of lesson content and supporting materials.

Chapter 5 has explored the second research question: How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred teaching strategies? Evidence from lesson plans and the teacher-researcher’s self-reflections has been presented and the strategies of scaffolding, huiyi (linking to prior knowledge), building on the similarities of Chinese and English whenever possible, peer mentoring and student-centred games have been highlighted as useful strategies to assist the learnability of Chinese with beginning learners.

Chapter 6 has addressed the question: How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred classroom management practices? Creating an interesting classroom environment, initially setting classroom routines and rules, and timing and pacing lessons in response to children’s engagement have been discussed as important findings. Further, classroom management practices can be developed to try to avoid bad behaviour in the first place. Having different strategies depending on the age of the children, listening to students’ feedback and developing student-centred positive relationships have been the findings from the evidence presented in this chapter.

Chapter 7 has provided a summary of the findings and has included a section on the teacher-researcher’s improvement throughout the whole research. Identifiable limitations of this study and a section on implications and recommendations complete Chapter 7.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This literature review is presented in four parts.

- Firstly, a review of literature related to student-centred learning (SCL) has been presented (2.1). This section has included a review of the origin and definition of SCL, some characteristics of SCL and the limitations from the teacher-researcher’s point of view. Included also is a brief review of the literature about Student-Centred Language Learning (SCLL).

- The second section outlines the concept of ‘student-centred’ as it relates to this research (2.2); drilling down what can be thought of as a very broad concept.

- The third, fourth and fifth sections recount literature related to the three research questions. Therefore, these three sections have considered:
  - Student-centred content selection (2.3)
  - Student-centred teaching strategies (2.4)
  - Behaviour management as a background for the teacher-researcher to implement in the CLT classroom (2.5)

2.1 Overview - student-centred learning (SCL) and teaching

Firstly, the teacher-researcher reviewed literature that has referred to the origin and development of the concept of “student-centred” teaching and learning, followed by research to make a clear definition of “student-centred” in this study. Some
characteristics of a successful model of SCL have been presented along with some limitations of this model.

A comparison with a similar pedagogy proposed by Confucius in ancient mainland China has been posed to compare with the western student-centred theory. This has been presented as it aligned with the teacher-researcher’s only previous experience with a kind of student-centred approach.

The final two sub-sections drill down to looking for student-centred literature in language teaching and then more specifically to Chinese language teaching (CLT). The literature in these areas was noted to be light, and hence a discussion of CLT in the UK has been presented as the final comment of this overview section (2.1).

### 2.1.1 Origin

The term student-centred learning (SCL) appeared around 1950s derived from client-centred therapy, which was proposed by Rogers Carl in 1951.

According to his theory, students might not only have the right to choose what they would like to study, but also can decide how and why that topic might be an interesting one to study (Rogers, 1951). His definition especially emphasised the idea that students should have ‘choice’ in their learning, just like the customers have the right to decide on their purchases.

There is more than one understanding of the term “student-centred learning” after constructivist theorists became popular in the 1970s, such as Piaget (cited in Atherton, 2013). Based on the notions of child development at critical stages in life, these ideas expanded to include the basis of SCL in that learning should be interactive.

### 2.1.2 Definition

The terms “student-centred”, “student-centredness”, and “student-centred learning or classrooms” are high frequency words that have a general meaning across education including the field of language teaching. However, there may also be discrepancies in these understandings.
In considering a definition, “student-centred” has been described as a general term for methods about teaching and learning, which regards students’ responsibility and activity as the core. It puts the teachers’ role and learning content at a secondary position. Cannon and Newble (2000, pp. 16-17) have defined SCL as:

Essentially, student-centred learning has student responsibility and activity at its heart, in contrast to a strong emphasis on teacher-control and coverage of academic content found in much conventional, didactic teaching.

Similarly, Attard, et al. (2010) emphasised student-centred learning as a method of higher level learning or teaching that puts the learner at the centre:

With the application of an SCL approach in higher education, there is necessarily a shift in focus from academic teaching staff to the learner.

(Attard, et al., 2010, p.6)

Whether in primary, secondary, or even tertiary education, student-centred learning is different from a conventional approach, which considers students as passive receivers of knowledge.

2.1.3 Some characteristics of the SCL model

In the western world, teachers tend to think highly of student’s significant position in their learning process, as Shuell (1986, p. 429) expressed: “Without taking away from the important role played by the teacher, it is helpful to remember that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does”. Similarly, according to Crumly (2014), students are the central participants in the student-centred model of education where they would learn at their own speed and in their best way. She further contends that in SCL the students’ responsibilities and activities contribute to the learning environment, in contrast to the emphasis on teacher’s control and coverage of academic content found in conventional, didactic teaching.

Given this shift in teaching and learning theory it is not surprising that teacher-centred pedagogy has come under critique. Particularly as nowadays students gather knowledge not only from the teachers in their classroom but also by searching the
Internet, reading articles and books in libraries and exchanging ideas with their friends and family members. Actually, all knowledge gained and remembered in different kinds of ways by individual students is part of their full experiential world. (Maclellan et al, 2004, p.254)

However, generally in mainland China, there has been no critique of the teacher-centred teaching approach. It has remained the dominant method continuing to be based on the teaching methods from a teacher’s own experiences over time. Chinese teachers seldom have carried out their teaching processes or schedules from their students’ perspective. In contrast in western countries, teachers tend to place the student’s position in the learning process as central, enabling them to create their own knowledge systems and encouraging them to learn deeply.

This has been a very steep learning curve for the teacher-researcher coming from traditional classrooms in mainland China as both a student and a teacher.

Research has also been conducted to compare learning outcomes for students who have been taught by these two different methods. For example, data analyzed from national and international assessments indicated that student-centred pedagogies lead to greater gains in student learning than teacher-centred approaches (Polly, 2008; Culpepper, 2007).

2.1.4 Limitations

In considering the literature outlined above the teacher-researcher has identified that these general definitions have limitations in some areas; that is, the notion that SCL should focus on students’ ‘activeness’ in class and the teacher’s ‘facilitator’ role. This kind of understanding of SCL ignores the fact that there are many moments when the teacher needs to be in control in the class. In some lessons the teacher might need to talk for most of the lesson and although according to the definition this might be perceived as the students being ‘passive’ recipients of the knowledge, if the teacher has designed the lessons based on the students’ interests and learning needs, then this to some degree is SCL. In this situation, it is not reasonable to criticize the lesson as teacher-centred. In addition, if a teacher organises his/her classes using lesson plans and instructions with consideration to students’ ages and cognitive levels, this could also be argued as a kind of student-centred classroom. Further,
some teachers may think that classroom management may be regarded as irrelevant to the SCL approach. However, the purpose of classroom management is to assist the students to focus on the content and avoid improper behaviour so as to improve learning effectiveness and therefore in the teacher-researcher’s view should not be disregarded. A traditional understanding of a student-centred approach is therefore questionable at these levels.

In this study, the teacher-researcher has focused on exploring how students can be considered as central when designing and teaching Chinese language lessons but also taking account of the challenges for the classroom teacher.

2.1.5 A related ancient Chinese student-centred pedagogy: 因材施教

The Chinese pedagogy named “因材施教” (yīn cái shī jiào), means teach a particular student by using a certain set of methods in accordance with his/her abilities and characteristics. This theory was first proposed by Confucius in the book 《论语》 (The Analects of Confucius) about 2000 years ago. Following is an interesting story to illustrate how this pedagogy can be used

Classical Chinese Version (Taken from the Analects of Confucius):
子路问：“闻斯行诸？”子曰：“有父兄在，如之何其闻斯行之？”
冉有问：“闻斯行诸?”
子曰：“闻斯行之。”
公西华曰：“由也问，‘闻斯行诸？’子曰，‘有父兄在’；求也问‘闻斯行诸？’，子曰‘闻斯行之’。赤也惑，敢问。”
子曰：“求也退，故进之; 由也兼人，故退之。”

——《论语・先进篇第十一》

Modern Chinese Translation:
有一次，孔子讲完课，回到自己的书房，学生公西华给他端上一杯水。这时，子路匆匆走进来，大声向老师讨教：“先生，如果我听到一种正确的主张，可以立刻去做么？”孔子看了子路一眼，慢条斯理
Once upon a time, Confucius finished his class and returned to his own study. Gong Xihua (one of his students) served him a cup of water. At that time, Zi Lu (a student) hurriedly came and shouted for advice: “Sir, if I heard correct advice, can I take it at once?” Confucius looked at Zi Lu, and said slowly: “You had better ask your father and elder brothers’ opinions, about whether you should apply any advice as soon as you heard it?” Just after Zi Lu went out, Ran You (another student) quietly walked in front of Confucius, and respectfully asked: “Sir, if I heard advocates giving advice that I thought was correct, should I follow it immediately?” Confucius replied: “Yes, it should be implemented immediately.” After Ran You had left, Gong Xihua was confused, and asked: “Sir, why would you give opposite answers to the same question?” Confucius smiled and said: “Ran You has a humble personality, and always works hesitantly, so I encouraged him to handle the affair in a decisive manner. While, Zi Lu desires to excel above others all the time, and is a rather careless fellow, so I advised him to listen to the opinions of others - to think twice before acting.” (English Translation by the researcher)

From this piece of historical work, it can be easily seen that when facing the same question, Confucius gave his students different replies according to their distinct characteristics. In this story of expressing Confucius’s “因材施教” pedagogy, one student was impetuous. Confucius’s advice was to, “Look before you leap”, which suited that student’s characteristics. The other student received the opposed advice as he had the characteristic of being cautious and thoughtful. This demonstrated that
Confucius organised the instructions according to his knowledge of the students and adapted his teaching in relation to that.

In the process of teaching Chinese using a student-centred approach, the teacher-researcher often compared this story and the method used by Confucius with western student-centred pedagogy. That is, to consider the most special characteristics of each of the students and to be aware that they are all individual learners.

The idea that the success of education depends on adapting teaching to individual learners appears in writings from the ancient Chinese, Hebrews and Romans (Randi and Corno, 2000).

2.1.6 The advantages of student-centred teaching

Teacher-centred educators considered the most important part of learning is acquiring information, while student-centred teachers believe that the learning process is more significant (Borg, 2003).

In relating this to language teaching, the debate continues. Language is an important device for people to communicate with each other. Learning Chinese as a second language (CSL) or a foreign language (CFL) in addition to their mother tongue, sometimes can be an unfamiliar and uncertain experience for students if only teacher-centred methods are used (Moradkhan and Sohrabiyan, 2009). For example, if the teacher-centred approach mainly focused on teaching the usage of different sentence types, word orders, compound sentences, and word classes, that is, using the grammar translation method through textbooks, young students may be turned off. This might be a suitable method for adults to start learning Chinese, but young children may not respond eagerly. The teacher-centred pedagogy (textbook based) would not be suitable to engage young students in Chinese lessons.

The literature directly relating to student-centred approaches to Chinese language teaching with school students is sparse, but the work of Zhang and Li (2010) is an exception. However, parallels can be drawn to the student-centred approaches taken in other subject areas. For example, Smith and Smith (2006) found that the use of student-centred pedagogies in a standards-based curriculum led to better
mathematical comprehension in 3rd-grade students than their 4th-grade schoolmates in a teacher-centred classroom (based on a multiplication assessment).

Overall, the literature reviewed recommends student-centred teaching approaches as superior for children’s learning compared to teacher-centred approaches.

2.1.7 Student-centred Chinese language teaching

Although some literature on the use of SCLL in English as Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classes was reviewed (Lu, et al., 2010; Preus and Cohen, 2011; Zohrabi et al., 2012), no literature was located in a search specific to student-centred approaches to Teaching Chinese as a Second Language (TCSL) in Australian schools.

Nowadays, more and more countries in the western world are providing opportunities for students to learn Chinese language at primary schools or even earlier. However, Orton (2008) refers to the difficulty of learning Chinese (for example the drop-out rates of high school students learning Chinese in Australia is quite high) suggesting the urgency to make Chinese learnable. The significance of CLT in Australia has been previously discussed in Chapter 1 (1.3) and through reviewing the literature, the calls for developing Chinese language teaching around the world has been noted.

2.2 The concept of student-centredness in this research

Student-centredness is a broad concept involving understanding the learners’ characteristics, prior knowledge and interests (Attard, Di Ioio, Geven and Santa, 2010). However, in this thesis, the teacher-researcher focuses on three particular aspects of student-centredness: firstly, how to choose teaching materials that suit students’ interests, secondly, how to develop teaching strategies and methods that are appropriate for the learners (Lu, Hou and Huang, 2010) and thirdly, how to manage the class to ensure students are fully engaged in the learning process (Kerdikoshvili, 2013). This research has investigated how Chinese language teaching can be successfully implemented by placing students in the priority position when choosing content, developing various teaching methods and managing the students. Other
issues related to student-centred teaching and learning have not been explored in this research.

2.3 Student-centred teaching (content selection)

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2 (at point 2.1.3), there have been specific studies conducted over the last decade and a half that have reported findings that student-centred approaches have many advantages compared to the traditional teacher-centred approach (Entwistle, 2003, Van Hout-Wolters, et al, 2000; Çubukçu, 2012).

These methods help students develop a deeper understanding of the learning content, while tempering their critical thinking skills. It has also been claimed that this pedagogy makes students more confident in the learning process therefore engenders their interest in learning. But few, if any, articles could be found directly on teaching Chinese through a student-centred method (Yue, 2014).

2.3.1 Learning meaningful Chinese content

The content should be ‘useful’ in every Chinese class. The content, including resources and materials, should relate to the students’ daily lives and comprehension abilities. In this way lessons would be more meaningful and more easily learned.

2.3.1.1 Time change (keeping learning materials up to date)

Languages are changing all the time. Chinese is no exception. The Chinese knowledge reported in some textbooks used in more traditional classroom teaching methods may not be useful in the modern western world. For example, a commonly used textbook named: Success with Chinese: A Communicative Approach for Beginners (Level 1, Listening and Speaking) (Swihart and Meng, 2005) contains content already outdated for Australian students. For example, “分[fēn]” (one cent) has disappeared in daily shopping situations in Australia, and the textbook also features the smallest unit in the Chinese currency system as a dime “角[jiǎo]/毛[máo]” (pp.48-49). This content is therefore irrelevant and should not be chosen just because there are lessons already prepared in the textbook. Selecting content and resources for lessons must be reviewed for relevance for the students.
A similar point from Dale (cited in Davies and Summers, 2015) contends that teachers should organize instructional activities that build upon more real-life experiences. Dale’s theory helped the teacher-researcher to make decisions about resources and activities by being conscious of relating the activities to students’ real life.

2.3.1.2 Change of location

Although not featured in any literature, the location in which Chinese is taught has an impact on selecting useful content for lessons. For example, quite a lot of shop signs and menus in Chinatown, Sydney are written using traditional Chinese characters. Even for native Chinese speakers, like the teacher-researcher, learning simplified Chinese characters has been their previous education. Therefore, the teacher-researcher would choose content and resources featuring the simplified Chinese characters (easier to write and recognise), yet the students would see the traditional characters in the real-life contexts of Chinatown. In this case, the ease of the learning outweighs the real-life application in choosing the content. However, the teacher-researcher would compare the differences of these two forms of Chinese if the students asked.

2.3.1.3 Summary

To sum up, student-centred content selection meets the demand of teaching modern Chinese, the characteristics of which are “collaborative, supportive opportunities for … well-planned activities …” (Chen and Yang, 2013)

The student-centred way of content selection met the demands of Chinese learning in Australia, which is the aim of Chinese teaching development. By choosing the suitable content for Chinese study, students’ interest in learning Chinese was evoked, their effective and efficient learning of Chinese also improved. No matter what kind of content was selected, the core is: students are the owner of the Chinese class while teacher should offer essential assistance only.

2.3.2 Adapting available content and resources

Although there were plenty of published textbooks for learning Chinese which could constitute the materials that the teacher-researcher could use as the basis for content
and materials selection, it is an essential skill that the Chinese teacher-researcher should be able to adjust the published materials to meet the students’ specific needs. (Graves and Garton, 2015; Harwood, 2010; Tomlinson, 2012; Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2010).

Generally, the textbooks available as resources have been written by native Chinese scholars and for the classroom situations in mainland China (teacher-centred). Those materials and resources have been reviewed as being complicated and some even inappropriate for the Australian students as beginner Chinese learners.

As Tomlinson and Masuhara (2010) have suggested, teachers should be capable of evaluating materials based on prior lessons’ effectiveness and subsequently consider necessary adaptations of upcoming material to meet students’ needs. From the students’ perspective, selected materials that are based on students’ needs and interests will facilitate the setting of appropriate and achievable learning goals.

The teacher-researcher then had a clear idea that the content and resources can be adapted and changed without concern for the original texts (textbooks). This principle was then applied to the resources chosen and made for CLT lessons including selection of suitable sections of the published Chinese textbooks, and the development of pictures for PowerPoint presentations, videos and games that could be played on the classroom desktop computer or on the smart board in the classrooms.

2.4 Student-centred teaching-strategies in CLT

In a student-centred Chinese teaching classroom, new Chinese information would be based on the students’ previous knowledge. CLT would be more effective if, as the literature suggests (Taylor, 2014; Attard, et al. 2010) the student’s own experiences and concerns, communication capacities, and cultural differences are taken into account when designing the most appropriate teaching strategies. In addition, if the students in the Australian classrooms were already familiar with the student-centred pedagogy in other subjects such as English, this would generally transfer into successful CLT. The following literature alerted the teacher-researcher to consider these features when designing CLT lessons in the context of Australian schools.
2.4.1 Students need to be active and learn together

According to a previous Ningbo volunteer’s graduation thesis (Yuan, 2011), there are various language teaching strategies that could be used by the teacher-researcher to conduct student-centred Chinese classes. Generally, they involve the students in the lessons so they are actively involved in the learning. Suggestions were: cultural activities, games and language activities, rewards system, artistic activities, and audio-visual videos from the Internet (Yuan, 2011). In addition, the teacher-researcher also reflected to include such activities as role-play, word puzzles, and story making. Keeping students active was considered a way for them to subconsciously learn and use Chinese knowledge during these practical activities.

Thus, student-centred learning emphasises the learning process through hands-on activities by which students are able to develop their positive interactions and individual languages skills through working in pairs and groups. Every students’ needs to learn and work in an environment where their individual strengths are recognised and individual needs are addressed. They need to learn within a supportive community in order to feel safe enough to take part in the selected activities (Li and Lam, 2013).

When students are active there can be opportunities for them to work together to build their understanding. Teamwork is also an important ability that the students should acquire from the student-centred language learning classroom. Hence, the teacher-researcher would take account of this literature and incorporate: group work; real-life usage and provide a range of different activities in addition to the strategies discussed above.

2.4.2. Scaffolding

In any western English speaking country, teaching CSL or CFL has challenges. One of the problems that teachers encounter is how to make Chinese learnable by scaffolding the learners’ previous sociolinguistic knowledge (Zhang and Li, 2010). To solve this problem, the teacher-researcher needs to be familiar the students’ current understandings of Chinese and be able to create a suitable language learning environment. Singh (2013) refers to this as contextualizing the learning of Chinese.
Therefore, the bilingual teacher-researcher was challenged to use a strategy that built on the student’s existing knowledge and then proceeded with a step by step framework of gradually introducing the new Chinese lessons. Scaffolding the lessons ensures consistency of approach to ensure the learning is in small connected steps that build on previous learning. (Senior, 2011; Gibbons, 2015; Lowien, 2016).

The implication for the Chinese teacher-researcher was to inspire the students to find out the new Chinese knowledge by relating it to what they had already learned and to also scaffold the questioning to lead the children’s thinking towards the learning goals.

2.4.3 Lesson Plans

In this section, the teacher-researcher has reviewed literature on general lesson planning (Causton-Theoharis, et al., 2008; Liyanage and Bartlett, 2010; Walker, 2008; Fautley, 2013) and has reflected on how these could be adapted to planning language lessons.

2.4.3.1 Metacognition in lesson planning

One method of proposing a general guide to lesson planning that could be adapted within any subject area is the idea of a template. One template has been proposed by Liyanage and Bartlett (2010) having been adapted from Chamot and his colleagues (1987) from a metacognitive language-learning perspective (see Table 2.1).
Table 2.1: Metacognitive language-learning strategies  
(adapted from Liyanage and Bartlett, 2010, p.1365 )

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metacognitive strategies</th>
<th>Adapted definition as applied to lesson planning</th>
<th>Planning instance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Meta-view</td>
<td>Recognising the elements involved in the planning</td>
<td>Throughout planning the lesson content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Advance organisation</td>
<td>Previewing students’ needs, and available resources, and outlining overall learning aim/s.</td>
<td>Planning the content and writing the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self-management</td>
<td>Understanding the teacher’s own teaching style, knowledge of content in the planned lesson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organisational planning</td>
<td>Planning the teaching steps, outlining teaching objectives for each step, and choosing teaching and learning activities (TLAs)</td>
<td>Teaching the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Directed attention</td>
<td>Pacing the time to be spent on particular steps/TLAs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Selective attention</td>
<td>Deciding on key concepts, morpho-syntactic structure, or word - within a step, and relating this to teaching objectives and overall aim/s.</td>
<td>Planning the lesson evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Self-monitoring</td>
<td>Checking and measuring the used TLAs and students’ engagement through observation or questioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Self-evaluation</td>
<td>Reflection on the teaching including pedagogical achievement and the achieving on the objectives and overall teaching and learning aims.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specifically, Liyanage and Bartlett (2010) proposed eight steps in lesson planning. The first step is meta-viewing. In this step, the teacher needs to recognise the key elements to be involved in the planning task. The second step is advancing organisation during which the teacher previews students’ needs then tries to make the lesson plan meet the students’ needs and learning syllabus and includes the available
resources (aligns with the student-centred pedagogy). The third step is self-management during which the teacher re-examines his/her teaching style and whether the knowledge is suitable for effectively teaching the chosen content. The fourth stage is organisational planning, which is scaffolding the content and deciding on the strategies to be used. The fifth and sixth stages are to monitor the lesson being prepared to note time limitation and appropriateness of the subject goal as the lesson proceeds. The last two steps are in relation to the teachers’ self-reflection on the lesson and overall evaluation of the delivered lesson. On the one hand this is to assure the students are effectively involved in the TLAs; on the other hand, to evaluate the teaching plan coincide with the final syllabus.

The steps outlined in this lesson planning template align with both the student-centred approach and action research. The above planning template follows the similar steps to one action research cycle. For these two reasons the teacher-researcher has been influenced by this lesson planning template.

2.4.3.2 Elements

As an inexperienced teacher-researcher, the author previously had little experience with planning Chinese lessons for young students. Further to becoming familiar with the lesson template (Table 2.1), the elements of good lesson planning offered by Nunan and Lamb cited in Liyanage and Bartlett (2010) have also been helpful for planning language learning lessons. They contend the following elements of good lesson planning:

- Student-centred lesson planning should first consider the students’ knowledge and their interests,
- Striving to reach an overall goal or aims after teaching the class supported by a series of interactional activities.
- Finally, this should also include a teacher’s understanding and perceptions of the nature of language and learning. (Nunan and Lamb, 1996, cited in Liyanage and Bartlett, 2010)

The design of lesson plans, from creation to implementation and evaluation, can be a cognitively demanding process for a novice teacher. Lesson planning must effectively bring together all the elements involved in the material, content, and
pedagogy selection and implementation that optimize learners of all abilities and backgrounds so that they can fully engage in the learning process (Bartlett and Elliott, 2008).

Generally, these synergies involve the contents and processes to be included; boundaries to be set for the time and space of a lesson; students’ needs for purpose, structure and direction in learning; various styles and strategies that might be activated in the teaching-learning context; resources to help frame and manage engagement; thought and action as the lesson progresses; and evaluation appropriate to monitor the effectiveness and efficiencies of the lesson e a tall order.” (Liyanage and Bartlett, 2010, p. 1363)

A final review of the elements of lesson planning comes from the work of Causton-Theoharis, et al., (2008) who proposed a model of lesson design with seven elements. These were “objectives; standards; anticipatory set; teaching (input, modeling, and check for understanding); guided practice; closure; and independent practice” (p. 383). These seven components can be used as another layer of information for novice or pre-service teachers to guide effective lesson planning, teaching and post-planning reflections (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2008, p. 385).

For this research the review of lesson planning literature has been particularly useful, because the teacher-researcher was not experienced in both teaching and research.

2.4.4 Teacher qualities and role

The role of the teacher is a very important part of student-centred CTL. This has been especially significant to the teacher-researcher who has come from a fully teacher-centred educational system in mainland China. The literature reviewed in this section has helped to confirm some principles to keep in mind from the teacher’s perspective when teaching students in Australian schools.

2.3.4.1 Patience

The difficulties of learning Chinese for beginning learners has been documented (Dockrell, et al., 2009; Scott, 2002), this difficulty being compounded as learning Chinese characters is part of the advised curriculum for NSW schools (Board of
Studies, 2003). The CLT teacher must be patient with all of the Australian students when teaching new Chinese words and characters, because of the huge language gap between Chinese and English.

For example, beginner Chinese learners with smaller vocabularies and limited grammar knowledge would need support when learning some complicated Chinese characters. In addition, students in Australia usually see the traditional style Chinese characters on Chinese restaurant menus or signboards, which are more complicated than the simplified Chinese characters that are part of school curriculum. This was further complicated by the stereotype that Chinese is a very difficult language to learn and that for local Australian students they could never learn Chinese as good as their Australian Born Chinese friends. Understanding this context has made the teacher-researcher be aware that as a teaching strategy, patience must be considered and enacted.

2.4.4.2 Teacher as a facilitator

In a student-centred classroom, teachers would not conduct their lessons through constant talking to the students all the time, as in a lecture. On the contrary the teacher’s role should be as facilitator who organises student-centred learning activities to occupy a large percentage of the lesson. Students, especially primary school students, have a nature of curiosity about learning about their world. The teacher’s role is to build on this nature to guide the students and in language learning classes help them to find subtle cultural differences to compare and contrast with English, and to facilitate their engagement in their learning (Srivastava, 2014; Pruitt, 2013).

In mainland China, the role of a Chinese teacher is usually the leader, which often does not inspire the students’ curiosity to learn knowledge from their perspectives. In Western Sydney schools, Australian students are often keen to ask questions and to do some practical study to solve the problems by themselves. The teacher as facilitator in the CLT classroom would assist students when they met some difficulties during their set tasks or their own problem solving.
2.4.4.3 Being a flexible teacher

Student-centred pedagogy allows students to have more choice of activities to enjoy the learning process and to solve problems and answer their own questions. This means that sometimes the planned lessons cannot be strictly adhered to and may need to change, and/or the timing or pacing of a lesson might need to be altered midstream. Teacher flexibility needs to be considered so that the teaching is aligned to the students’ responses (Christenbury, 2011). Thus, teachers should always keep in mind that they can be comparatively flexible, as long as students try their best to be involved in all the different and varied activities during the lesson.

2.5 Behaviour management and student-centredness

Managing the problem behaviour of some students can prove difficult even for experienced teachers. Books like “What if it happens in my classroom?” (Sida-Nicholls, 2012) provide a tool kit of ideas based on scenarios and different suggestions to handle the situation. The chapters in this book address key lesson stages and provide examples of the unacceptable behaviour and how to handle them. These include managing the behaviour of students:

- At the start of the lesson
- During the main phase of the lesson
- As the lesson draws to a close
- As students leave your classroom
- In the corridor

Beadle (2013) has offered a different approach by asking teachers to consider their own behaviour in parallel with the students. De-escalation techniques and using humour to create relationships are management strategies proposed in this book. Both can be used to avoid the inappropriate behaviour before it starts.

In relation to younger children’s behaviour management (Jarman, 2015) has produced a text to support parents in resolving bad behaviour. Teachers could also apply these techniques as these are appropriate to the age of the young child and their development. Praise and rewards (varying the rewards), ignoring low-priority
behaviours and providing consequences (timeout, countdowns to cease bad behaviour) (Jarman, 2015, p. 897) have been discussed in this article.

In relation to Australian primary schools De Nobile, London and El Baba (2015) have conducted a mixed method research in 31 government and non-government schools to explore the hypothesis that whole of school approaches are more successful than the individual practices of teachers. This research asked 51 teachers about their perceived behaviour problems and the handling of these at a whole school level. These researchers showed concern for teachers’ stress levels and job satisfaction as a result of students’ behaviour.

Payne (2015) has conducted a pilot research in the UK which related to teachers classroom language in relation to children’s social behaviour and then focused on the use of rewards and sanctions in the classroom. The findings were that incentives like a school trip encouraged good behaviour whereas ideas children saw as punishment such as staying in class during break time created negative reactions to both class tasks and social behaviour. However,

The single most successful strategy across behaviour and work and across pupils in Year 7 and Year 11 is contacting home with positive feedback. Not only does it promote good behaviour and hard work, but it is also beneficial to the teacher-pupil relationship. (Payne, 2015, p. 500)

The teacher-researcher found these studies and texts as useful beginnings for classroom management. These were used in addition to others adapted from observations of the classroom teacher’s management styles (see Chapter 6).

2.6 Conclusion

This literature review has covered the areas of student-centred teaching and learning itself from a theoretical point of view and then proceeded to discuss the literature reviewed that connected to the three research questions. That is the literature around 1) selecting content, materials and resources, 2) student-centred teaching strategies, in general and in language teaching and finally 3) a short overview on some literature related to behaviour management in the classroom.
As the teacher-researcher was new to the Australian (western English speaking) educational context and with teaching younger children, this literature review has provided some essential understandings to help this research. Combined with the study of the research around research methodology (Chapter 3), the teacher-researcher was able to go forward with the project relying on this background.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology and the ethical procedures used to conduct this study. Firstly, the teacher-researcher searched the literature and reflected on the types of methodology used to conduct research in educational settings. The two main methods, qualitative and quantitative were considered and their strengths and limitations considered in relation to answering the research questions. A mixed method approach has been selected to conduct this research.

Action research as the specific design of this study was then chosen and has been explained at length, including its definition, characteristics and issues of validity. Following the research design were the research principles. Finally, data collection and analysis were introduced comprehensively.

3.1 Qualitative and quantitative methodologies

Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies have been the two dominant approaches to research in all fields, each having its own strengths and limitations. The appeal of qualitative research is that it enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth research to understand what is happening in a social context rather than gathering numerical data.

According to Yin (2016) there are five features of qualitative research, which make it different from the quantitative research methodology:
• It involves studying the meaning of people’s lives, under real-world conditions instead of being inhibited by the confines of a laboratory or any laboratory-like settings.
• It represents the views and perspectives of the participants in a research instead of the values, preconceptions, or meanings held by researcher.
• It contains contextual conditions—the social, institutional, and environmental conditions, where participants’ lives take place. These contextual conditions may strongly influence many aspects of the participants’ lives. However, the quantitative methods have difficulty in addressing these conditions.
• It is not just a routine or mundane chronicle of everyday life. On the contrary, qualitative research is driven by a desire to explain or improve these events, through existing or rising concepts.
• Qualitative research endeavors to gather, consolidate, and analyze data from a variety of channels. The researcher’s conclusions are seemly on account of triangulating the data from different sources. This tendency will increase the study’s credibility and reliability (Yin, 2016)

For these reasons qualitative research has become a popular methodology for many different academics and professionals across disciplines such as education, sociology, anthropology, and political science.

3.2 Mixed methods

Mixed method research refers to a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches in the one project. The strength is to have the subjectivity of observations, interviews and self-reflection as well as gathering objective data. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) suggests that in large research a mixed method approach allows the strengths of quantitative methods (which are deductive) to combine with the inductive approach of qualitative methods to result in a very strong methodology to answer research questions.

The teacher-researcher then considered the appropriateness of the three possible methodologies to answer the research questions. Considering the following:

• the teacher-researcher would be communicating with and teaching the students in a social context;
• the teacher-researcher was a novice at conducting research;
• the research would have a small participant group;
• the research questions could not be answered by numerical statistics totally, however the teacher-researcher wanted to conduct a survey to gauge children’s interests;

a mixed method approach was most suitable for this research.

The teacher-researcher was a beginner Chinese teacher who had little knowledge of the Australian educational situation when arriving in Sydney as an overseas student. In this research, the improvement of the teacher-researcher himself has been much more significant than looking for a universal educational truth about the teaching of Chinese.

3.3 Action research

From within a range of qualitative methodologies, action research was chosen as the design from within which to undertake this research. This was based on the teacher-researcher looking to improve teaching practice over two terms.

3.3.1 Definition of action research

As one of the most popular methods in educational research, action research has been widely used by researchers in the last few decades. The term “action research is usually defined as an inquiry conducted by educators in their own settings in order to advance their practice and improve their student’s learning” (Efron and Ravid, 2013, p.2).

Richard Sagor (1993) gave another definition of action research from the researcher’s perspective:

As action researchers, you don’t need to worry about the generalizability of your data because you are not seeking to define the ultimate truth of learning theory. Your goal is to understand what is happening in your school or classroom and to determine what might improve things in that context (Sagor, p.8 cited in Tomal, 2010).
As Tomal (2010) points out in his book, action research is an approach that a researcher can apply within any structured organisation where continuous improvement and adjustment is the aim. This aligns neatly with educational research where teachers in schools are concerned to improve their teaching practice (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2014; Stringer, 2013).

3.3.2 The basis of selecting action research

Compared with quantitative research, action research does not demand producing a hypothesis but quite the opposite paying attention to practical activities such as identifying and clarifying problems, and trying to solve these through action (Tomal, 2010). This suited the proposed research in this study as it would provide the framework for the teacher-researcher to focus on the practical problems raised across all aspects of Chinese teaching with the intention to improve every day teaching practice.

Of significance was that the teacher-researcher was trained to be an English teacher in mainland China, quite the reverse of teaching Chinese in Australia. The teaching strategies that the teacher-researcher learned in the past which benefited Chinese students, might be unsuitable to Australian students. For example, when teaching in mainland China students will listen to their teachers and remember as much knowledge as possible. This may not be as same as Australian students’ learning method. This does not mean that Chinese students are passive learners because when they try to memorize the learning content, they are involved in active thinking. By using evidence-driven action research, it would be possible for the teacher-researcher to study each Chinese teaching experience weekly after finishing each Chinese lesson.

3.3.3 The action research cycle

In order to use an action research design becoming familiar with the process is necessary. Action research is conducted through steps that are followed to complete a cycle. A new cycle then proceeds based on the outcomes from the first cycle, with the intention that the second cycle will be an improvement on the first. The steps and cycles can be represented diagrammatically as follows:
Figure 3.1: One ideal action research cycle  
(Source: State of NSW Department of Education and Training, 2010, p.3)

As the teacher-researcher would be working in NSW schools taking heed of the policy on the use of action research in local schools was a useful starting point. From the diagram above the teacher-researcher then developed a diagram specific to the upcoming teaching assignment and research.

Figure 3.2: Representation of action research cycles developed by the teacher-researcher
3.3.3.1 Implementing action research in this study

From Figure 3.2 it can be easily seen that the target is “student-centred Chinese learning”, which is the core of all the other cycles. Each cycle (with four main steps) is one round of evidence-driven teacher action research (Kemmis et al., 2014).

The teacher-researcher as a member of the ROSETE program would be allocated a teaching assignment from the NSW DET, and would also undertake a parallel research study through the University of Western Sydney.

The teaching assignment involved being a volunteer teacher for Chinese language instruction at three public schools-two primary and one secondary school in the western Sydney region. To link this situation to the action research cycle/s was not difficult. The action research was designed to cover two terms (one full cycle would be approximately one term) and would focus on exploring a student-centred Chinese teaching approach in order to improve teaching practice. Each term/cycle will follow the steps:

1. class planning (preparation for lessons)
2. class teaching (Action)
3. evidence gathering (Research-Observation)
4. reflections and data analysis

The new cycle of planning and teaching would be based on and informed by the previous cycle’s analysis and findings from the data (Refer again, Figure 3.2). Each cycle would consist of ten lessons. There could be some micro-adjustment on each lesson’s planning and teaching according to the particular classroom situation and informed by a previous lesson.

The implementation of the action research is summarised below.

1. Lesson Planning: this kind of preparation work was extremely important for an effective and successful Chinese lesson as the teacher-researcher was new to the Australian education system and a novice researcher
2. During the class teaching process, the teacher-researcher would monitor the lesson and observe student responses
3. Evidence gathering: Students’ learning and responses to the teacher-researcher’s student-centred approach would be recorded descriptively in a journal after the lesson and would include the issues and concerns related to the student-centred approach to teaching.

4. Reflections and data analysis: The self-reflections would also be noted in the journal and would include the researcher’s critical thinking about his teaching. Throughout each of the first two steps the teacher-researcher would receive some feedback from the Chinese teachers, including oral and email feedback and these would also provide data for the reflection step.

As a consequence of the teaching assignment allocated to the teacher-researcher the first term of the assignment was not to teach but to be a participant observer (Kemmis et al., 2014). During this first term the teacher-researcher would take on a role similar to a teacher’s aide to assist wherever possible (for example pronunciation of some Chinese phrases and participating in games with small groups of children), come to know the students and the general classroom routines. At the same time as these activities, the teacher-researcher would continue to observe and record these insights into the students soon to be taught.

3.4 Research principles and procedures

Three main principles guided the teacher-researcher in designing and conducting this research. They were:

1. The need to follow general ethical principles
2. Being mindful of the consent processes as part of the ethics process
3. Protecting the privacy/confidentiality of all the participants

3.4.1 Ethics principles

When researching with human participants it is essential that guidelines are followed to safeguard the participants, the researcher and the affiliated organisations within which the research is conducted (Hammersley, 2015, Wright, 2014).

For this research three layers of external ethics approvals were successfully granted.
3.4.1.1 University of Western Sydney

Confirmation of Candidature: Before the teacher-researcher began the Master of Education (Honours) research program, a successful application for permission to commence was made to the University of Western Sydney. Within the School of Education a panel of professors interviewed the teacher-researcher to discuss the details of the proposed research and volunteer teaching program. This document, the Confirmation of Candidature, outlined in detail what and how the teacher-researcher intended to undertake the research and teaching.

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC): The next formal approval process was to make a detailed submission to the University’s HREC which contained very specific details of all the ethical considerations for each part of the research. The committee approved the ethics submission on the 9th May 2015 and allocated an approval identification H10923 (See Appendix 1).

3.4.1.2 NSW State Government – Department of Education and Communities (DEC)

State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP): The NSW DEC requires a formal application for ethics approval to be submitted prior to permission being given to enter any public school for the purpose of research. This indepth ethics application is necessary to safeguard school personnel, students, parents and the DEC themselves. The teacher-researcher submitted a successful SERAP application being allocated an ID 2015195 (See Appendix 2).

3.4.1.3 NSW State Government – Office of the Children’s Guardian

Working with Children Check: The NSW Government will not allow any member of the public to work with children or enter a public educational facility where children are present until the person has had clearance to do so. As this research was conducted in public schools, a Working With Children Check was submitted. This check is to ensure the applicant has no criminal record, and that there are no court orders pending relating to children. The teacher-researcher passed the WWCC and was allocated approval WWC021846682E (See also Appendix 2).
3.4.1.4 Local school approval

As a matter of courtesy and as part of the formal ethics procedures submitted to UWS and DEC, a final layer of approval was successful at the school level.

The teacher-researcher initially contacted the school principals by letter (Appendix 3) and later organised a meeting with them. The principals welcomed the teacher-researcher to work as a weekly Ningbo Volunteer Chinese teacher to help the Chinese teaching programs in their schools.

3.4.2 Consent processes

Protecting the study participants involves having them fully informed about all aspects of the research in order that they can make an informed decision on whether to participate. (Traynor, 2013).

In this research the student participants would be involved with the Chinese lessons conducted by the teacher-researcher as these were part of the ‘normal’ day to day curriculum. However, the ethics guidelines meant that Information Sheets and Consent Forms needed to be distributed to parents/caregivers and students for the classroom lessons and the interviews.

3.4.2.1 Information Sheets

Classroom Lessons: The Information Sheet for participation in the classroom lessons was sent home to parents/caregivers. This information was written in plain language and covered what the research was about and what the participation would involve (See Appendix 4). The information provided ensured the following were clearly understood by the parents/caregivers and students:

- All participants had been informed in advance that this research was not evaluative and their participation would not affect their academic performance or assessment.
- All participants knew that all their personal information would be kept anonymous and would be only accessed by the teacher-researcher.
- All participants knew the purpose of the research and what data would be collected from the students.
• All participants had been advised that UWS Complaints Procedures were also in place for those who believed their rights had not been respected.

Semi-Structured Interview: The teacher-researcher decided that only the secondary students would be involved in the interviews as it was considered they would be more responsible and reliable and therefore when asked questions about the Chinese lessons their more mature comments seemed to be more what the teacher-researcher would like to gather as data. In addition the teacher-researcher planned to conduct the interviews with caution and consider the students’ perspectives to ensure no emotional or stressful outcomes were possible from the interview experience (Rousseau et al, 2011).

The Information Sheet for the interviews with secondary students was in the form of an Information – Dialogue Sheet (Appendix 5). The specifics were:

• The student participants were informed through dialogue with the teacher-researcher (see again Appendix 5)
• All participants were provided with a copy of the interview questions (See Appendix 6) prior to the interview.
• All participants were advised of the voluntary nature of their participation before the semi-structured interview.
• All the participants could withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable about the interview.
• All the participants were informed in advance that their real names and other personal information would be known only to the teacher-researcher.
• The teacher-researcher would store all the participants’ personal information safely on a password-protected computer and paper documents would be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

3.4.2.2 Consent Forms

The consent process was conducted in parallel with the distribution of the Information Sheets as both forms were handed out together. Once parents/caregivers had read the Information Sheet they were asked on that form, to sign the Consent Form if they agreed to participate. The Consent Form for students (See Appendix 7)
and the Consent Form for Parents/Caregivers (See Appendix 8) needed to be signed and returned to the teacher-researcher prior to commencing the research.

The Consent Forms were to be treated confidentially and were safely stored in the locked filing cabinet in the teacher-researcher’s office.

### 3.4.3 Privacy/confidentiality and safety

All researchers, no matter what kind of research they are conducting, should take the responsibility of maintaining the confidentiality of their participants (American Psychological Association, 1992 cited in Tomal, 2010).

While planning and conducting the research, the teacher-researcher had an ethical obligation to protect all participants’ personal identities in the research. The research was carefully organised to ensure the privacy and safety of all participants. The teacher-researcher and the two University supervisors had authority to use and access the information collected for this study. However, the collected information was only to be used as research data and be analyzed for the purpose of this research. Participants’ personal information and data were to be kept confidential and anonymised.

The teacher-researcher followed the care and safety guidelines included in the HREC and SERAP approvals. The research commenced only after informed consent was received; any foreseeable stresses for the participants were eliminated (physically and emotionally); interruptions for the participants to their ‘normal’ classroom routines were minimal and withdrawal from the research (interview) was guaranteed if necessary.

### 3.5 Site and participant selection

Both site selection and the selection of the participating students were beyond the control of the teacher-researcher. These were allocated as part of the teacher-researcher’s participation in the ROSETE Program.
3.5.1 Site selection

The teacher-researcher was one of eight Ningbo Volunteers ROSETE program in 2014. The NSW Department of Education and Communities, the Ningbo Educational Bureau, as well as University of Western Sydney, co-operate to run this program whereby native Chinese speakers study a Master of Education (Hons) and volunteer as Chinese teachers in local Public Schools.

In this process, all the ROSETE volunteer Chinese teachers are allocated schools and classes. In this instance the teacher-researcher was allocated three schools (one high school and two primary schools) in the western Sydney region. The choice of sites was beyond the teacher-researcher’s control.

The teacher-researcher has anonymised their names and referred to them as Kuaile High School, Xiwang Primary School, and Youhao Primary School. As each of these three schools are collaborators in the ROSETE program this demonstrates that these schools are interested in having a successful Chinese language program. In this research, due to the time limitation, the teacher-researcher has focused on two classes, one in Kuaile High School and the other in Youhao Primary School. The teacher-researcher was scheduled to conduct an 80-minute lesson in both schools weekly.

3.5.2 Participants

Although the classes were allocated to the teacher-researcher, the participants were: 1) all beginning Chinese learners, and 2) native English speakers who were learning Chinese as a foreign language.

There were two groups of participants in this research with a total participant number of 43.

Group 1 included a class of twenty, Year 4 students in the Youhao Primary School, most of them were nine years old. They were all native English speakers and some had already learned a little basic Chinese in the form of greetings and numbers when they were in kindergarten.
Group 2 was a class of twenty-three Year 7 secondary school students at Kuaile High School. The class consisted of both boys and girls with ages 12 and 13 years. The Chinese classes were compulsory for them as a foreign language to learn. The teacher-researcher observed that most of them did not have much interest in learning Chinese at the beginning of the term.

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 Triangulation

Triangulation is a strategy to collect data to make qualitative research more reliable and valid, by gathering data from different sources in the one project (Morrell and Carroll, 2010). Therefore there are many possibilities to achieve the goal of triangulation. In this study, the data collected to achieve triangulation were:

- Observations
- Semi-structured interview with the secondary school students
- The teacher-researcher’s self-reflection journal
- Survey of children’s interests

Even though the four sources of data to be collected were clear as they would provide the data needed to answer the research questions, the novice researcher needs to be aware that: “In coming to a decision, it is important to remember that no data collection procedure is perfect. Since each has its own strengths and deficiencies, the trick is to maximize the strengths and minimize the deficiencies of the most relevant technique for your particular purposes” (Simpson and Tuson, 2003, p.3).

3.6.2 Observation

Observation as a means to collect data needs to be more than “just looking”. Listening and writing simultaneously are also important skills for a researcher. Of importance is to note that the more careful the observation carried out, the easier it is to later analyze the data. The processes and results of any observations should therefore be carefully recorded.
The type of observations relevant to this study would be direct, that is, “when you watch interactions, processes, or behaviours as they occur; for example, observing a teacher teaching a lesson from a written curriculum to determine whether they are delivering it with precision” (Clement, 2012, p.80). Indirect observations usually involve an assumption about the cause and effect; “for example, measuring the amount of plate waste left by students in a school cafeteria to determine whether a new food is acceptable to them” (Clement, 2012, p.80).

There are some strengths of observation as a data collection method as Simpson and Tuson, 2003, pp.16-18 propose:

1. Observation can give direct access to social interactions.
2. Observation can give permanent and systematic records of social interactions.
3. Observation can enrich and supplement data gathered by other techniques.

However they also contend that, “Undeniably, it also has two main weaknesses: its high demand on time, effort and resources; and its susceptibility to observer bias.” (Simpson and Tuson, 2003, p.18).

There is no perfect strategy to gather data, as said before, what the teacher-researcher did was to 扬长避短[yáng cháng bì duǎn] (Chinese idiom: make best use of the advantages and bypass the disadvantages.) The teacher-researcher conducted participant observation. This was hard given that the teacher-researcher was a novice and needed to teach and observe his own teaching practice and the students’ responses at the same time. To solve this problem, the teacher-researcher generated a detailed form including all the observation points related to his research questions so that he only needed to recall and fill in the form after each lesson (See Appendix 9).

3.6.3 Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview is one of the three ways to conduct an interview in research. In addition to semi-structured there are times when a fully structured interview would be conducted (when direct and specific answers are required without further elaboration) and an unstructured interview (where no guidelines are set to direct any data collection) (Wilson, 2013, p.23).
In this research, a semi-structured interview was selected as one of the four sources of data collection for the following reasons:

- It may uncover previously unknown issues (in contrast to a structured interview).
- It allows the researcher to probe and seek for clarification.
- It allows participants or/and interviewer to raise additional concerns and issues.
- It provides a mechanism for redirecting conversations that digress too far from the main topic.
- It provides the flexibility for interviewers when comparing the data across interviews.
- It is easy to conduct compared to unstructured interviews because the interviewer has a set of specific questions available as a starting point.” (Wilson, 2013, p.23)

Twelve secondary school students agreed to take part in the interview. As this was a large number two interviews were conducted with six students in each. The interviews lasted around 40 minutes and were conducted in a quiet room adjacent to the Chinese classroom. The semi-structured interview questions were mainly focused on: 1) students’ opinions on the content and materials and whether these met their interests about Chinese language and culture; 2) whether they felt that they were fully engaged in the activities during the Chinese lessons; and 3) their expectations and advice to the teacher-researcher to improve the lessons in the next term (See again Appendix 6).

The interviewees were encouraged to be honest and express their authentic opinions about the teacher-researcher’s student-centred Chinese lessons. They did offer some useful ideas that the teacher-researcher had never thought about before.

3.6.4 Self-reflection journal – including sections of lesson plans

Keeping a self-reflection journal was a very important source of data in this research. It provides the data for the fourth step in the action research cycle. It provided the teacher-researcher’s indepth thinking about the lessons in order to improve the teaching skills in the next lesson. Taylor (2014) suggests a self-reflection journal is
similar to a diary where the story of a teacher’s daily experiences can be recorded. The teacher-researcher’s journal reflections in relation to the lesson plans and the conduct of the lessons have been the main data source in this research.

Throughout the two teaching terms the teacher-researcher kept writing journal entries after each class to record direct information, examples from the lesson plans under reflection, and overall feelings about the student-centred Chinese lessons. As the teacher-researcher set up the journal as an e-document, copying sections of the relevant lesson plans enabled a useful way to refer the self-reflections back to the specific lesson section.

Keeping self-reflection journal was an important method for the novice teacher-researcher’s professional growth. By writing self-reflection journal entries after each class, the teacher-researcher could focus on the strong points and achievements and avoid repeating any shortcomings in the following classes.

The process the teacher-researcher followed to create his self-reflection journal was:
1) Before a Chinese class was taught, the teacher-researcher had already made a detailed lesson plan about the process and content, the activities and instructions that would be used during the class. Relevant sections of these could be copied into the e-self-reflection journal. 2) After each class concluded the teacher-researcher set about recalling the way the lesson actually went. This was then contrasted to what was initially planned. 3) After realizing all the differences, the teacher-researcher tried to reflect on and record what might be the reasons for causing the differences between the lesson plan and reality, and what would be the strategies to improve in the future.

All these kinds of thinking were written in the self-reflection journals and formed the main source of the research data.

3.6.5 Survey of children’s interests

The fourth data source in this research was to survey the children to gauge their interests in what they would like to learn in the Chinese classes. This method was chosen as an attempt to plan student-centred activities to make Chinese more interesting and hopefully more easily learned.
The survey was in paper form (See Appendix 10) and was given out in all classes. The survey invited the students to help the teacher-researcher plan more interesting lessons in the following term. The children were asked to think up their own topics or tick any suggested by the teacher-researcher which were outlined in a table at the end of the survey form.

The students at both Youhao Primary School and Kuaile High filled out the survey in class. Only the students present on the day were involved and the teacher-researcher collected 39 surveys in total. However, only the 18 surveys from the primary school were used as data.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

Themes and issues from all the data were generated by the teacher-researcher. To be specific, the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, self-reflection journals and observation notes and the surveys were arranged into categories (using an initial coding process). These were then further organised into the three evidentiary chapters each answering one of the three research questions (i.e. Chapters, 4, 5 and 6).

#### 3.7.1 Initial Coding

In this project, initial coding was used to identify pieces of data that in some way were the same. Either by an issue or a key word the teacher-researcher was able to sort the data according to its relevance to one of the research questions.

This data analysis method made sense to the teacher-researcher and this point is further confirmed by Saldaña (2012, p.101):

> Initial Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, ethnographies, and studies with a wide variety of data forms (e.g., interview transcripts, field notes, journals, documents, diaries, correspondence, artifacts, video).

The teacher-researcher is a novice Chinese teacher and with four sources of data, this method to initially sort and code the data was useful.
3.7.2 Thematic analysis

As the coding continued the themes began to appear as the same idea or key words began to be repeated. The teacher-researcher was influenced by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify and clarify the themes that answered the three research questions from across the data. These were:

1. Firstly, the teacher-researcher became familiar with the data by reading and rereading it and making some notes about similarities and differences as they were observed.
2. Secondly, the teacher-researcher applied initial coding to make sense of the data and to note the themes.
3. Thirdly, the teacher-researcher gathered similar themes from different data sources to align with the three different research questions
4. After that, the teacher-researcher double-checked the coded data, considered whether all relevant data had been coded and included.
5. Fifthly, explicit statements were derived for each theme.
6. This last step comprised of selecting relevant examples and relating these back to the research questions and the literature.

3.7.3 Survey analysis

The analysis of the survey of children’s interests involved tallying the number of times the same response reappeared and then presenting the results as percentage numbers of the whole participants group.

The teacher-researcher conducted the same survey twice at the end of term one, once with the younger students at Youhao Primary School and again with the middle school students at Kuaile High School. The intention was to gauge any differences between the interests of the students in the two age groups. After gathering all the surveys and calculating the percentage results, these were presented in a table (See Table 4.1). These data have been used in the discussion relating to designing Chinese lesson content using a student-centred approach (Chapter 4).
3.8 Data Storage

The method for storing all data in this research has also followed the principles outlined in the HREC and SERAP applications.

Data collected from the participants were either hard copies (observation notes on the template form and student survey forms) or electronic (self-reflection journal entries, the transcription of the semi-structured interviews).

During the project, the measures taken to ensure the security of information from misuse, loss, or unauthorised access were as follows: paper documents were stored in a lockable cabinet in the teacher-researcher’s office. Computer files and emails were stored on the teacher-researcher’s office computer, which was only accessible via a password known only by the teacher-researcher.

After the project, the paper documents and computer files were protected by the teacher-researcher and the University supervisors for secure and long-term storage where they will have the same security provisions.

All project data would be stored at least for five years after the completion of the project, after which all files will be destroyed or deleted. This was the mandatory period for storing data as per the HREC application.

3.9 Generalizability

The concept of generalizability means the findings from research can be applied to other contexts and situations (Morrell and Carroll, 2010). It is usually agreed that there cannot be any generalizability of the results of qualitative research. Further it is suggested that as action research is a study of a local context with the group under study, it cannot be assumed that this particular group is representative of any sub-group from a larger population (Kemmis, et al., 2014). Generalizability of results becomes even less able to be applied.

This research aimed to develop student-centred lesson content, teaching strategies and behaviour management in Chinese learning in two Australian public schools. The findings are relevant to the two participating groups but will not necessarily represent other students’ Chinese learning conditions even in other western Sydney
areas. The teacher-researcher is fully aware that the findings from this research will not have universal application and does not make this claim. This in-depth study has played a role in one case but the findings may be used to contribute to the debates around teaching Chinese to beginner learners in western English speaking cultures, especially Australia.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology chosen to conduct this research to answer the three research questions, namely:

When using an action research approach to devise a student-centred teaching framework to make Chinese learnable to beginning learners in Australian schools:

1. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred content, learning materials and resources to design the lessons?
2. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred teaching strategies?
3. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred classroom management practices?

Firstly, considering the type of research to be undertaken, that is educational research in a social setting, qualitative methodologies were most applicable. However, the teacher-researcher wanted to conduct a survey of children’s interests and therefore the research had a quantitative component. Therefore, the teacher-researcher proposed to use a mixed method approach.

The chapter then continued to explore how action research as a study design would suit the research as the teacher-researcher was concerned to improve teaching practice while exploring elements of student-centred teaching and learning.

A comprehensive account has been given of the ethical procedures and principles that have guided this research. Four levels of ethics approvals were gained by the teacher-researcher prior to starting so the research process was very clear.
Following the HREC and SERAP ethical guidelines for research with human participants, the chapter then provided information relating to:

- the consent processes followed with the participants.
- The privacy/confidentiality and safety issues needing to be addressed
- How the sites and participants were selected
- How the data would be collected using the concept of triangulation
- How the data would be analyzed so that relevant data could be spread across the following three evidentiary chapters to answer the three research questions

Finally the issue of generalizability of research findings has been discussed and the teacher-researcher makes no claims that the findings discussed in the next three chapters are relevant beyond this project, other than to contribute to current debates on Chinese language teaching to beginning learners in Australian schools.
CHAPTER 4

SELECTION AND PREPARATION OF STUDENT-CENTRED CONTENT, MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

4.0 Introduction

As the first of the three evidentiary chapters, Chapter 4 addresses the first contributory research question proposed in this study. That is, “How did the teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred content, materials and resources?” when using an action research approach to devise a student-centred teaching framework to make Chinese learnable to beginning learners in Australian schools?

There are many teaching resource/textbooks (Taranov, 2013; Hsueh, 2014) and resource packages as proposed by Board of Studies NSW (2003) that are currently available to support the teaching of Chinese to beginning learners. However, the teacher-researcher chose not to follow a single text (as is normally the case in mainland China) but collected his own teaching materials from the Internet and various books. After thoughtful consideration and comparison, the content and teaching resources were chosen according to the students’ family life, background knowledge of traditional and popular culture, prior knowledge and cognitive ability, the students’ interests gauged through a survey and linking to a real life opportunity of going on an excursion to mainland China. Each section that follows discusses each of these issues and how the teacher-researcher tried to improve his teaching practice by reflection on the lessons presented to the students.
As the content and resources chosen were different for the secondary and primary students, each group of participants will be discussed in turn.

4.1. Content and resource selection-secondary school

When considering the age of the students (Year 7, 11-12 years old), the teacher-researcher needed to place the students at the centre of the lesson planning. The content and accompanying resources needed to be selected according to the secondary school students’:

- Family life
- Prior knowledge, including cultural differences, popular culture and children’s cognitive ability
- Interests
- Future real life possibilities for Chinese

4.1.1 Content theme-syllabus-based “My Family”

4.1.1.1 “My Family” (Greetings)

The main theme of the first semester, chosen by the Chinese teacher in the high school, was “My Family”. Although this theme was chosen to link to the Board of Studies (2003) curriculum, the teacher-researcher felt that it had possibilities as the students could all relate to this topic. The lesson series was planned to extend the basic greeting of “Nihao”, which most students already knew, to consider the person the student might be greeting.

Example 1-Extending the basic greeting Nihao to include acknowledging the person

As a start to my first class, I wanted to teach the students “greeting people in different ways”, besides the most commonly used form “你好!” [Nǐ hǎo!] (Hello!).

I asked them “Do you want to learn a special phrase to greet your teachers, including me?” The students responded positively, so I taught them “老师好!” [Lǎo shī hǎo!] (Hello teacher!). They were very
interested in this greeting phrase and learned it quickly by repeating the phrase on their own. I said, “We can practice this phrase at the start of every Chinese lesson as a routine from now on. The greeting ritual was explained, “Every time after I greet you with ‘你好!’ [Nǐ hǎo!] (Hello!), you can reply me back with ‘老师好!’ [Lǎoshī hǎo!] (Hello teacher!), which is more specific for a teacher to show your respect.” (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 1, Term 4; 7 Oct. 2014)

Analysis/further reflection: The students wanted to practice as it related to Family Life.

After the initial session, the lessons extended to the names of people the students might greet. By introducing the greeting for “Hello Mother”, “Hello Father” as well as other members of their families, the students orally reported that they did practice this vocabulary at home. They felt very proud of themselves by using their Chinese knowledge in front of their family members.

Example 2: Building on the success of the initial lessons

As the children discussed with the teacher-researcher their success at home with various greetings, it was decided to continue and extend this theme.

As a revision and development of the greetings, I focused on writing the characters “你好” after the daily first greeting routine. This was followed by the introduction of three other ways of saying “Hello!” in Chinese depending on different situations. Continuing the theme “My Family” as a way to select further content was a useful method. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 2, Term 4; 14 Oct. 2014)

Analysis/future reflection: Meaningful content selection aided practice out of class

Student-centred teaching is the arrangement of the teaching experience focusing on the students’ in the learning process and takes into account their interests, demands and needs (Zuhal, 2012, p.1). In the first example, the students showed an interest in learning new Chinese greetings, so the teacher-researcher continued to plan the
subsequent content of the lessons to extend and consolidate their learning. As the students were particularly interested in this lesson content, they were able to practice successfully by themselves at home.

These lessons were also selected as they fulfilled the requirements of the curriculum for students in Year 7 as outlined in the syllabus document: “Students learn to: participate in social exchanges with teacher and peers, e.g. greetings, introducing self and others, 老师好！Lǎo shī hǎo! (Hello teacher!) 再见！Zài jiàn! (Goodbye!)” (Board of Studies, NSW, 2003, p.26).

The lesson content chosen that was based on the Chinese K–10 language syllabus in NSW and everyday situations that the students would possibly encounter with their families a final lesson completed the series. In this lesson an additional three examples of greetings were introduced by the teacher-researcher. They were: “您好 ![Nǐn hǎo!] (Formal way of ‘Hello!’)”, “你们好 ![Nǐ mén hǎo!] (Hello you guys! {not including the speaker})”, “大家好! [Dà jiā hǎo] (Hello everybody! {including the speaker})”. The differences were in respect, plural form and whether including the speaker or not.

4.1.1.2 “My Family”(Pets)

Most families have a pet or would know a family with a pet. In this way part of family life is interaction with small animals. This lesson content continued the theme of “My Family” but extended the lessons in a new direction. Resources to accompany the lessons were picture cards showing the pet, the name of which was to be learned. The following excerpt from the teacher-researchers journal documents the teaching phase.

Example 3: My Family: Pets in the Household

The next sub-topic chosen to relate to the children’s families was ‘Pets and animals’. Firstly I chose “狗” [gǒu](dog) and “猫” [māo](cat) as they are the most commonly seen pets by students in Australia. In addition, the animal vocabulary list included other common animals such as bird,
horse, mouse and rabbit. Panda and kangaroo, as significant (symbolic) animals of mainland China and Australia respectively, were also introduced to the students.

During the lesson, one of the students asked me how to say “lizard” in Chinese, because he had one as a pet at home. Before the class, I did not prepare to teach this kind of unusual pet. Instead of discouraging the interest of that student in leaning Chinese, I wrote down “xī yì” on the whiteboard immediately for him to copy down, and read the word twice for him to imitate. However, I did not write down the very complicated Chinese characters “蜥蜴”, as they have many stokes to write. In one of my classes after I wrote down this word, most of the students thought Chinese was very difficult and complicated after seeing these two characters. Some students were even getting frustrated and started complaining that “Chinese is so hard!” I did not want to take the risk again. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 3, Term 1; 10 Feb. 2015)

Analysis/further reflection: Follow children’s questions but ensure information provided to answer these is not too difficult

The teacher-researcher chose the word list for pets and animals not only according to the pet’s popularity and the students’ family life, but also extended this to include the important symbolic animals in Australia and mainland China. When the students asked the teacher-researcher about some animals that were beyond the recommended Chinese K-10 syllabus in NSW word lists or were not planned as part of the lesson, the teacher-researcher decided to encourage the students’ interest in learning new words by providing the basic Chinese pinyin only. The students were interested in this unusual pet, the lizard, and practiced the new word several times. The teacher-researcher’s decision to use the pinyin style instead of the Chinese writing characters kept the learning to an easy level. The students were able to successfully learn the word in this way without being inattentive if the Chinese characters became too difficult.
4.1.2 Selecting lesson content and resources (background knowledge)

4.1.2.1 Cultural knowledge, including popular culture

Students in western, English speaking cultures are sometimes not familiar with or even realize there is a cultural difference between their own and Chinese culture. Recognising and respecting cultural difference is an essential start to the language learning journey.

The teacher-researcher proposed to extend the student’s cultural knowledge by developing lesson content that focused on the structural differences in the way surnames and first names are spoken in mainland China and in Australia. Initially, the teacher-researcher asked the students to consider what they knew about the way people say their names in English. This format was then compared to the Chinese structure.

Example 1: The structure of names in Chinese and English are reversed

The aim of today’s lesson was to ask and answer the question, “What is your name?” With the students we decided on a ‘fake’ Chinese name (王小明 Wáng Xiǎo míng). The task was to ask the name in two different ways. Most of the students seemed to have some problems with using the correct tones and giving the correct answer to these questions. Some of them replied to “您贵姓?” [Nín guì xìng?] (What is your honourable surname?) with the given name “小明” [Xiǎo míng]. They had confused expressions on their faces and uncertain voices when they were speaking the Chinese sentences. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journal, week 2, Term 4; 14 Oct. 2014)

Analysis/further reflection: Being aware of the cultural difference eased the difficulty

Extending the students’ cultural knowledge can assist their Chinese learning. In English, the first name is the given name and the last name is a surname. In Chinese, the order is the opposite. “In mainland China family names precede personal names. Personal names usually consist of two characters, although one character personal
names are becoming more common” (Lu and Milward cited in Rachel Edwards, 2006, p.91).

The teacher-researcher had not realised that his students lacked this piece of cultural knowledge, which caused the confusion in their answers. In the following lesson, the teacher explained the differences between Chinese naming culture and Western naming culture with regard to the opposite name order.

**Example 2: Draw on students’ knowledge of popular culture to select content**

I provided the students with this explanation of how names are spoken in mainland China. “In Chinese culture, people put their surnames ahead to show respect to their ancestors. While in the western culture, people use given names ahead of their family names with more self-confidence and personal unique value.” After my detailed explanation, the students were asked again to practice using some Chinese celebrities’ surnames and given names [such as, Bruce Lee (李小龙 Lǐ Xiǎolóng), Jackie Chan (成龙 Chéng Lóng) and so on]. More students got the correct order after this explanation. (From the teacher-researcher’s lesson plan, week 3, Term 4; 21 Oct. 2014)

In example 2, based on his students’ expression and behaviour, the teacher-researcher realised that most of them still misunderstood the concept after the first explanation. As the students were not familiar with the fake name, they did not know which part should be the surname or the given name. That was why he adjusted his lesson plan to explain the cultural differences in detail so as to let the students fully understand and use this knowledge in real life. Then, by practicing the idea using famous Chinese Kung Fu movie stars that the teenagers were familiar with, their fear of learning new things was dramatically reduced or even disappeared. With the help of their English names, the students found it easier to get the correct surnames or given names of these famous people. To help the teaching of this lesson the teacher-researcher chose a two-minute video clip of some action, Kung Fu fighting as the teaching resource. This grabbed the children’s interest straight away.
Further evidence of drawing on the students’ interests was provided in the semi-structured interview held with the secondary school students.

At the end of the first term of the observation stage, I organised a semi-structured interview with some of the students in Mrs. K’s Chinese class. When I interviewed them, they said that: “We know Mrs. K loves us and makes her lessons with lots of time and effort, but actually it doesn’t match with what we want to learn about mainland China.” (From interview notes, Week 9, Term 2; 16 Jun. 2015)

The students spoke about wanting to learn something more about teenager life, such as Chinese pop music, Kong Fu and sports in mainland China. Choosing content that interests the students would hold their interest and concentration and help their learning.

4.1.2.2 Prior knowledge and cognitive level

Prior knowledge

Based on what the students have already learned in Chinese, the teacher-researcher has tried to make the new Chinese knowledge as close to (and to follow on from) their previous knowledge. In other cases the lesson content had, at least, some relationship with their previous knowledge. In this way it was hoped to make the students feel at ease and relaxed while learning new Chinese knowledge. The strategies of scaffolding and easing the students stress about learning Chinese are related to the choice of content and are discussed in Chapter 5.

Example 1: Scaffold the content of the lesson sequence

In choosing the content of a follow up lesson, I found talking to a colleague confirmed my idea to scaffold the content in the lesson series. The sub-topic relates to My Family but not greetings, this lesson was the family members’ title words for grandparents (on mother’s side). The colleague asked “Should we teach the students 外婆、外公 (wài pó / wài gōng) or 姥姥、姥爷 (lǎo lāo/ lǎo ye)?”
I think “外婆、外公（wài pó / wài gōng）” are mostly used by people who live in southern or northern mainland China. As my students have already learned 爷爷、奶奶 （yé ye / nǎi nai[grandpa/grandma (on father side)], I thought to choose “姥姥、姥爷 （lǎo lao/ lǎo ye)” as it had at least one character (爷 ye) in common with “爷爷、奶奶 （yé ye / nǎi nai）”. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journal, week 5, Term 4; 4 Nov. 2014)

Analysis/further reflection: Discussing the lesson content choice with a colleague helped the teacher-researcher to confirm the best content to link to students’ prior knowledge

The teacher-researcher’s choice of lesson content was related to the students’ prior knowledge gained through previous Chinese lessons. Discussing the issue of content choice with a colleague helped to consolidate the teacher-researcher’s reasons for selecting the lesson content. The justification was that although both of these titles would be understandable to most Chinese people, there are no significant differences between these two Chinese family titles. Delaying the teaching of “姥姥、姥爷 （lǎo lao/ lǎo ye)” would make for a better content selection when considering the learners prior knowledge and learning, especially as they were beginning learners.

Cognitive ability

The students’ cognitive ability was also an important aspect to take into consideration before deciding on the best content. If the student could not understand an idea or logic in English, it might be impossible for the teacher-researcher to educate them with the Chinese idea.

Example 2: Numerals 1-100 for counting and people’s ages

The number and age sub-topic followed this process: the most frequently used numbers (from 1 to 100) were taught and two different ways of asking people’s ages were introduced. As they already had the knowledge of numbers in English (e.g. 1-100), I asked them whether they
could count from one to one hundred; they said that it was a piece of cake. So I was confident enough that they were ready to understand the similarly logical way of counting in Chinese. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journal, week 5, Term 4; 6 Nov. 2014)

Analysis/further reflection: The children’s age and cognitive level needs to be considered when selecting lesson content

The students’ cognitive level was taken into consideration when selecting the content of the lesson. The Chinese numbers are easy for beginner learners to study because of their similarly logical link with English. It was easy for them to link the new Chinese words to their prior, familiar English numbers background. The counter argument is that if the teaching content is very unfamiliar or even not known to the students, similar successful teaching results could be hard to achieve.

The teaching resource used with this lesson was selected as it enabled the students to be active in the learning and fun as well. Bingo cards were drawn by the children on paper the teacher-researcher gave to them and they selected their own numbers for their cards. After the teacher-researcher called the numbers in Chinese as an example, children put up their hands to have a turn to be the number caller. (This strategy is further discussed in Chapter 5).

4.2 Content and resource selection-primary school

After the first term of teaching Chinese with both secondary and primary school students, the teacher-researcher decided that the selection of lesson content should include the children’s interests. It was decided that a survey could be given to the students to truly show their individual and overall interests. The teacher-researcher could then use the statistical results to clearly see some common interests amongst the students and then design his lesson plan in response to this.

The teacher-researcher handed out a questionnaire (Appendix 10) to each student (both secondary and primary) whose parents had given their consent for their child to take part in the research. After gathering and analyzing the questionnaires (see Table 4.1 below), the teacher-researcher found out some common points of interest amongst the students and started to plan the next Chinese lessons accordingly.
Table 4.1: Topics that students want to learn in term 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The topic/s I would like to learn in the next Chinese lessons are?</th>
<th>Primary School Students</th>
<th>Secondary School Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foods and Drinks</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>Clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Daily Greetings</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Chinese New Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Animals/ Pets</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>More Daily Greetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Nature</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Chinese Traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Live</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12 Chinese Zodiacs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following section relates to how the teacher-researcher used the survey results for the primary school children to influence the selection of lesson content. (The survey results were also used by the teacher-researcher to plan lessons with the secondary students, however these are not reported in this thesis).

Once the teacher-researcher looked at the survey results and considered how to use this information about what the children were interested in, the following vocabulary lists were developed.

Table 4.2: Word lists chosen in response to student survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foods Words List</th>
<th>Drinks Words List</th>
<th>Fruits Words List</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Character</td>
<td>Pinyin</td>
<td>English Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>吃</td>
<td>喝</td>
<td>水果</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chī</td>
<td>hē</td>
<td>shuǐ guǒ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eat</td>
<td>drink</td>
<td>fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>年糕</td>
<td>水</td>
<td>苹果</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nián gāo</td>
<td>shuǐ water</td>
<td>píng guǒ apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rice cake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>饺子</td>
<td>汤</td>
<td>橙子</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jiǎo zi</td>
<td>tāng soup</td>
<td>chéng zi orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dumplings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>汤圆</td>
<td>可乐</td>
<td>西瓜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tāng yuán</td>
<td>kè lè cola</td>
<td>xī guā watermelon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boiled, sweet glutinous rice ball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>鱼</td>
<td>咖啡</td>
<td>草莓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yú fish</td>
<td>kā fēi coffee</td>
<td>cāo méi strawberry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>点心</td>
<td>茶</td>
<td>葡萄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diǎn xīn</td>
<td>chá tea</td>
<td>pú tao grape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dim sum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>馄饨</td>
<td>果汁</td>
<td>香蕉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hún tun</td>
<td>guǒ zhī juice</td>
<td>xiāng jiāo banana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>won ton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>巧克力</td>
<td>芒果汁</td>
<td>芒果</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qiào kē li</td>
<td>máng guǒ zhī mango juice</td>
<td>máng guǒ mango</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As 24% of the primary students answered that they were interested in “Food and Drinks”, this was chosen as the sub-topic for the lesson content. The teacher-researcher then separated the general topic into three detailed sub-topics (things to eat, drink, and fruits) and prepared the word lists.

4.2.1 Selection of food words

A sample of the “Food” words (things to eat) from the above table is discussed in this section with an explanation of how the content and the teaching resources were adapted by the teacher-researcher.

The verb to “eat” was selected as an important word as it would be used frequently by the students and also as it had some historical importance in Chinese culture. The lesson was as follows:

In the first lesson related to “Food and Drink” I taught the students the pinyin for “Eat” [吃 (chī)]. I explained the importance of this word to Chinese people two decades ago when they would usually ask each other “吃了吗?” [Chī le ma?] (Did you eat?) as a greeting instead of “你好!” [Nǐ hǎo!] (Hello!). Even nowadays, you can still occasionally hear this phrase for greeting among Chinese people.

The teaching resource chosen to support this lesson was a cartoon picture downloaded from the Internet. It shows a little boy eating an ice-block with a wide-open mouth.
Figure 4.1: Graph to accompany “eat”

The explanation below shows how a meaningful picture as the teaching resource aided the children’s learning of the Chinese character for “eat”.

The mouth radical (囗) in the left was drawn as the rectangle shaped ice-block, the right part (乞) means “beg” on its own. It would be hard for the students to combine the meanings of “mouth” and “beg” to the meaning “eat” of the whole character. The original drawer of this graphic gave the children another clue by creating the shape of the right part of the Chinese character into the side face of a little boy as he was “eating”. This picture showed the students the meaning of “吃” in a very interesting and vivid way and I was able to explain the Chinese character in a very easy, meaningful way by using this graphic shown on a PowerPoint. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journal, week 1 Term 1; 29 Jan. 2015)

Fish, dim sim, won ton, chocolate, hamburger and pizza are other samples of the teaching of relevant “Food” words as recorded by the teacher-researcher, including the reasons for this content selection:

Fish [鱼(yú)] is a favored dish to be served on Chinese feast tables. The shape of the character also looks like a picture of a fish when it was just created. As time goes by, the fonts of this character are changing. In the simplified character font, it is more like fish on a plate ready to be served.
The reason for choosing dim sim “点心 (diǎn xīn)” and won ton “馄饨 (hún tun)” is the same. They are commonly seen in Chinese restaurants in Sydney and both originated from the Cantonese pronunciation. The Mandarin pronunciation is a little bit similar to the English version, which makes both words easy to learn for primary students.

Chocolate “巧克力(qiǎo kè lì)”, hamburg(er) “汉堡(包) hàn bāo (bāo)”, pizza “披萨(pī.sa)” were some typical western style snacks and foods. They were chosen because their pronunciations are very close to the Chinese pinyin. I hoped these Chinese words would be easy to remember because of their popularity as tasty snack foods and their similarity with the English pronunciation. (From the teacher-researcher’s lesson plan, week 2 Term 1; 4 Feb. 2015.)

Analysis/further reflection: Discussion with the principal about the visiting students from mainland China confirms the content selection

After I taught these materials with activities and games in my Chinese lessons, the principal told me that a group of Chinese primary school students would be coming for a short visit to Australia. The students were this school’s sister school in Ningbo. Later in class when we discussed the upcoming visit some of the students still remembered “汤圆” (tāng yuán) and even “宁波汤圆” (Níng bō tāng yuán). Later after the Chinese pupils arrived, they asked their Chinese counterparts more details about the procedures and flavors of Ningbo rice ball. My students told me that some of the Ningbo students were very surprised at being asked these questions. Some of my students were even showing off their
knowledge of “汤圆” (tāng yuán) in front of the local Chinese students.

(From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journal, week 2, Term 2; 29 Apr. 2015)

The explanations above of the thinking behind the choice of specific vocabulary for the “Food” sub-topic have confirmed that the children’s interest in Food and Drinks assisted their learning of the Chinese. The lessons were supported by the teaching resources of graphics shown on PowerPoints, games and activities (discussed more fully in Chapter 5), and the practical experience of speaking with the Chinese students from Ningbo when they visited the primary school. Part of the sister school project was that the students in the Australian primary school would visit Ningbo later in the school year. The lessons devised to draw on this interest have been discussed in section 4.2.4.

4.2.2 Selection of words in the “Drinks”

As with the selection of the teaching content for “Food” words outlined above, the teacher-researcher tried to carefully consider the reasons for choosing the individual words in the “Drinks” list. A sample of the words chosen is given below. The full list appears in Table 4.2.

Drink “喝” (hē) is the most useful verb to describe the action of drinking liquid food or beverages. After they learned this word, the students could make lots phrases by themselves just by putting it ahead of the other drinks as these were learned.

Water “水” (shuǐ) is essential for human beings. The character is easy to recognise and write because it comes from the picture of a river. The following graphic was shown on the PowerPoint to explain the connection between a river and the Chinese character for ‘water’. 

Tea “茶” (chá) was chosen as a key word in the “Drinks” list as many Australians drink tea and Chinese tea is always on the menu at a Chinese restaurant. The teaching explanation is described below:

Tea originated in mainland China, possibly as a medicinal drink. Now it is widely known and drunk by people all around the world. The Chinese pronunciation and character is not complicated. “Cha” is even an English word that has a meaning of “tea” as used by some British people. The character could be considered as formed by different numbers in Chinese characters. The total number adds up to 118, which is an age Chinese people think tea drinkers can live to. The graphic below was downloaded from the internet and was used to explain the Chinese character.

Each section of the explanation is below. The children found this explanation useful.

- The upper part looks like two “十” joined together side by side which adds up to 20;

- The two strokes “人” are similar to “八” (eight)

- The two strokes “丄” is similar to “十”, which could be regard as “ten”
The two points at each side of “＋” formed another “八”，
gathered “八十八” means “88”. 【20 + 10 + 88 = 118】

Other words explained below from the “Drinks” word list are juice, mango juice and lemonade.

Juice “果汁” (guǒ zhī) was chosen as another category of drinks as it can be combined with the names of particular fruits to make many more words such as “apple juice” and “mango juice”. Once the students saw the pattern in creating the different fruit juices, they became quite interested in trying new ones.

Mango juice “芒果汁” (máng guǒ zhī) and lemon juice/lemonade “柠檬汁 (níng méng zhī)” were chosen as two examples as their pinyin are close to their English names. This reduced the difficulty of learning these words. They are also good examples of learning the pattern of naming Chinese fruit juices. In future classes, the students could learn names of other fruits in Chinese and they could work out their juice name by themselves. (From the teacher-researcher’s lesson plan, week 4 Term 1; 17 Feb. 2015)

**Analysis/further reflection: Student-centred lessons could also inspire the teacher**

The teacher-researcher realised that the teaching and learning in a classroom can go both ways. It was a learning experience for the teacher-researcher personally when one student offered an interesting comment after the teaching of the Chinese “Drink” word for ‘coffee’. This was a good teaching point the teacher-researcher had not thought of and would use this in future lessons. The incident was as follows:

During the lesson, one student found the word “咖啡” (kā fēi) was not very close to ‘coffee’, but heard it more like ‘car fee’ in English. ” I had not noticed this before. As the student pointed out, the pronunciation was like an American accent. This student’s creative idea inspired me to
consider this idea of pronunciation comparisons in future classes. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journal, week 5 Term 1; 24 Feb. 2015)

4.2.3 Selecting the words for the “Fruits” list

The overall word for “Fruit” was a necessary first word selected to teach the students as it had the possibility of wide usage. The teacher-researcher did this as follows:

I searched the internet and found the following cartoon picture of a tree (Figure 4.5). Taking the explanation from Hsueh (2014, p 32) “The building block for ‘tree’ represents a tree trunk with hanging branches.”

![Figure 4.5: Graphic to accompany “Fruit”](image)

Inspired by this creative idea, I added a picture of four apples on the top of the tree to represent the four little boxes at the top of the Chinese character “果” meaning fruit. In the following picture and meaning of “果” (fruit) becomes more obvious for the beginning learners.

![Figure 4.6: Edited graphic to further explain the Chinese character for “Fruit”](image)

The teacher-researcher then considered which common Australian fruits would be best to include in the “Fruit” word list. Below is a sample from Table 4.2 to explain
how the teacher-researcher followed up on the children’s interest in learning the Chinese words for “Food and Drink”.

The word for apple “苹果 (píng guǒ)” was the first fruit name to be introduced as the students only needed to change the first character of “水果” (shuǐ guǒ) into “苹（píng）” to name “apples”. The cultural meaning of apples can be seen from “苹 (píng)”, which has a meaning of peaceful and balance from the underneath “平”. The pinyin was not hard for the students to pronounce. Some of the students could repeat this word after the teacher-researcher taught them once. Compared with the next word “orange” “橙子 (chéng zi), “apple” took less time for them to remember.

Orange “橙子(chéng zi)” is another fruit name chosen because of its popularity for most Australians and can be seen most of the year in supermarkets. It is made up of the main meaning Chinese character “橙 (chéng)” plus a suffix “子 (zi)” which forms a two-character word.

Watermelon “西瓜” (xī guā) is a general term that represents a certain type of fruits, which are melons. “瓜 (guā)” means “melon” in Chinese, but the first character “西” (xī) does not mean “water”, it means “west”. This was more difficult to explain and for the children to understand.

Banana [香蕉 (xiāng jiāo)] was chosen because of its popularity and its special difference from other fruits. It is not as juicy or watery as the other fruits taught above. But here the first character [香(xiāng)] was introduced as a useful adjective to the students as a word for describing
something fragrant. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journal, week 7, Term 2; 10 Mar. 2015).

Analysis/further reflection: Finding out the students’ interests in what they would like to learn was a useful approach to selecting the lesson content for the primary students.

The survey conducted with the primary school students guided the teacher-researcher in choosing some lesson content based on the students’ interests. The overall category was chosen by the students but then the teacher deliberately chose the words that would be part of the students’ daily usage and also planned words that could be used when the overseas Chinese students were communicating with them. In addition to the words selected by the teacher-researcher the students were encouraged to create some new words of their own that related to the “Food” topic as a way to make the students feel success.

4.2.4 Selecting content for future real life usage

The students from one of the primary schools where the teacher-researcher conducted this study, were being offered the chance to visit their sister school in Ningbo in the next school year. The plan for this overseas excursion was for the students to visit Ningbo, Zhejiang Province and then continue on a two-week tour around three other major cities in mainland China (Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi’an).

The knowledge that this real life opportunity to use their learning of Chinese provided the teacher-researcher with a very good reason to select lesson content directly related to this upcoming excursion. The decision was to plan lesson content that would give the students some background knowledge before the students’ travel next year and to continue the explain to the students that this was an important reason to learn more Chinese, so they could converse with the Chinese people in various towns in mainland China.

The teacher-researcher then researched the famous tour sights that the students would very likely visit as well as drawing back to the children’s interest in “Food and Drinks” and made the decision to select some new Chinese words. These would include famous places and other words that could have some indication of the special
regional food they might eat during their time in mainland China (see Tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6). For those who would not take part in the trip, the teacher-researcher tried to include them by making the lessons a good opportunity for all the students to explore different parts of mainland China and to include some comparisons with Australia. For example, after introducing the word for Beijing there would be a discussion with the students about which city in Australia had a similar function.

The teacher-researcher then set about developing a series of lessons to cover two week’s work. Word lists were developed for each of the four cities to be visited. This theme of travel and important sights and food in mainland China provided an excellent opportunity for the teacher-researcher to select inspiring teaching resources. You-Tube videos (like tour guides) were used in each of the lessons to give the students some background information and to motivate them to want to learn the new word lists.

In the following sections the content selected relating to the overseas tour will be discussed.

4.2.4.1 Selecting the Beijing word list

The teacher-researcher decided to introduce the capital city of mainland China, Beijing, as the first introduction to this series of lessons. The resource selection and content created a focus for Beijing in terms of the city’s symbolic architecture and the special food that originated in Beijing and which is now famous around the world. The word list designed is below in Table 4.3.
Table 4.3: Tours in Mainland China – Beijing Word List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Character</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>English Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>北京</td>
<td>Běi jīng</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>中国</td>
<td>Zhōng guó</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>天安门</td>
<td>Tiān ān mén</td>
<td>Tian’anmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>长城</td>
<td>cháng chéng</td>
<td>the Great Wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>天坛</td>
<td>Tiān tán</td>
<td>the Temple of Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>故宫</td>
<td>gù gōng</td>
<td>The Imperial Palace (the Forbidden City)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>烤鸭</td>
<td>kǎo yā</td>
<td>roast duck</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another famous place the children would be sure to visit would be Tian’anmen Square. This word was taught with the following resource and the lesson plan outlined below.
The teacher-researcher chose this word because the Chinese characters are very easy to recognize and write for beginner Chinese learners and because in previous lessons the students had already learned a similar shaped Chinese character “大” (meaning big).

Some background information was provided to the students.

This is a huge ancient style building in the centre of Beijing and the political symbol of People’s Republic of mainland China. Chairman Mao announced the independence of mainland China on October 1st, 1949 at the second floor of 天安门 (Tian’anmen). The characters and pronunciations were clearly shown to the students by using different colours to make the same Chinese characters, Pinyin and English meanings matched with each other in the same colour. In this way, the students’ learning burdens were also released a little bit. The teacher-researcher also used a personal photograph with an image from internet that showed the importance of this building.

Another word, that the teacher-researcher focused on, was an exotic historical ancient building, the Temple of Heaven and often referred to as the “Logo of Beijing”. Its importance is easily seen throughout mainland China and even around the world. The following image from the internet was used to raise the students’ interest as the word for this famous sight was taught.

Figure 4.7: PowerPoint slide to accompany “天安门（Tian’anmen）”
The lesson outline included the following explanation:

After the students learned 天安门 (Tian’anmen), the learning progress was much easier than other words, such as 故宫 （Forbidden City）and 长城 (The Great Wall). The reason might be that it had the same first character as 天安门 (Tian’anmen), and that the students’ were quite familiar with the character 天 (Heaven). I observed that their learning speed was quicker than with other words without any background knowledge. This appeared to be a reliable example that scaffolding pedagogy worked well in Chinese language teaching. This is further discussed in Chapter 5. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journal, week 1 Term 2; 22 Apr. 2015.)

4.2.4.2 Selecting the Shanghai word list

The second word list created by the teacher-researcher was designed to interest the students in the super-city Shanghai. The table below helped the teacher-researcher to organize the lesson content. Again you-tube, tour guide type videos were used to create discussion, excitement and a reason for the students to learn the Chinese words and characters.
### Table 4.4: Tours in Mainland China – Shanghai Word List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Character</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>上海</td>
<td>Shàng hǎi</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>东方明珠塔</td>
<td>Dōng fāng míng zhū tǎ</td>
<td>Oriental Pearl Tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>上海环球金融中心</td>
<td>Shàng hǎi huán qiú jīn róng zhōng xīn</td>
<td>Shanghai World Financial Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>上海中心大厦</td>
<td>Shàng hǎi zhōng xīn dà shà</td>
<td>Shanghai Tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>外滩</td>
<td>Wài tān</td>
<td>The Bund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>小笼包</td>
<td>Xiǎo lóng bāo</td>
<td>a type of steamed bun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The children were provided with a contrast as an introduction to the lesson:

Compared with Beijing, Shanghai is a very modern metropolis with a lot of skyscrapers. The meaning of the city name “上海” (Shàng hǎi) was introduced to the students. “上” (Shàng) originally means “up”. This character itself looks like an arrow point to the sky. “海” (hǎi) means “sea” or “ocean”. The following picture indicates its meaning vividly:
The explanation continued as the original meaning of Shanghai was “to the sea” which referred to the geographical location of Shanghai in that it was close to the East mainland China Sea. Nowadays, the buildings in Shanghai are higher and higher and Shanghai Port is the world’s busiest container port.

The teacher-researcher continued the teaching of the word list with the following explanations.

A famous site in Shanghai is the Oriental Pearl Tower “东方明珠塔” (Dōng fāng míng zhū tǎ) and is often thought of as the symbol of Shanghai with a height of 468 meters. It was the tallest building in mainland China from 1995–2007 for twelve years until it was exceeded by the Shanghai World Financial Centre. The students were asked to draw a sketch of this symbol structure of Shanghai according to the following picture:

The next famous building to be introduced to the students was “上海 环球 金融 中心” (Shàng hǎi huán qiú jīn róng zhōng xīn) [Shanghai World Financial Centre (SWFC)] which was completed in September 2007. The skyscraper is 492 meters
high and is the 8th tallest building in the world and the fourth tallest structure in mainland China at that time. The SWFC opened to the public with its observation deck in August 2008. The observation deck offers views from 474 meters above ground level.

“上海中心大厦”(Shànghǎi zhōngxīn dà shà) [Shanghai Tower], with the height of 632 meters and 128 stories, is currently the tallest structure in mainland China and the second tallest building around the world.

“外滩” (Wàitān) [The Bund], which literally means “outer bank”, is a riverfront area in central Shanghai. It usually refers to the foreign banks and docks on the section of Huangpu River, as well as some adjoining areas. It is one of the most famous tourist destinations in Shanghai especially famous for its gorgeous night scene.

“小笼包” (Xiǎolóng bāo) is a type of steamed bun from the southern region of mainland China, especially associated with Shanghai. It is traditionally prepared in 小笼” (Xiǎolóng), little bamboo steamers, which give them their name. Xiaolongbao are often referred to as a kind of "dumplings", but are different from western style dumplings or with the Chinese “饺子” (jiǎo zi). Similarly, they are considered as a kind of "soup dumpling" but should not be confused with other larger varieties of “汤包” (tāng bāo).

Analysis/further reflection

Some of the pinyin was difficult for the children. The teacher-researcher did not require the students to memorize these word lists. They were more interest-based for the children’s upcoming tour to mainland China.

4.2.4.3 Selecting the Xi’an word list

Xi’an is a symbolic historical city in the middle of mainland China. It was the first capital city of mainland China as a unified kingdom and since then, the capital city of thirteen dynasties in ancient mainland China for 1200 years. In mainland China there is a famous saying: “If you want to see mainland China from 100 years ago till now,
visit Shanghai; mainland China since 500 years ago, Beijing; mainland China of 5000 years ago, Xi’an.” (Chinese original version: “上下五千年看西安，一千年看北京，一百年看上海”)

**Table 4.5: Tours in Mainland China – Xi’an Word List**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Xi’an Words List</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Character</td>
<td>Pinyin</td>
<td>English Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>西 安</td>
<td>Xī ān</td>
<td>Xi’an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>钟 楼</td>
<td>Zhōng lóu</td>
<td>The bell tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>鼓 楼</td>
<td>Gǔ lóu</td>
<td>The drum tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>晨 钟</td>
<td>Chén zhōng</td>
<td>Morning bell and drum: reminders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>暮 鼓</td>
<td>mù gǔ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>大 雁 塔</td>
<td>Dà yàn tǎ</td>
<td>Giant Wild Goose Pagoda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>兵马俑</td>
<td>Bīng mǎ yǒng</td>
<td>Terracotta warriors and horses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>羊肉泡馍</td>
<td>yáng ròu pào mó</td>
<td>Crumbs in mutton broth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The name of the city 西安 (Xi’an) was taught in detail as the first word in the list, because it has a character the same that the students already learned in 天安门 (Tian’anmen) 西 (xī) means west, because this city is in the western region of
mainland China and 安 (ān) means peaceful. The name of this city has the two meanings for the people who wish to live a peaceful life in the western part of mainland China.

4.2.4.4 Selecting the Ningbo word list

The words to learn about Ningbo were quite easy, and the teacher-researcher already taught most of them in his previous lessons, so this lesson was actually a revise lesson. For example, 鼓楼 (drum tower) was already taught during the introducing 西安 (Xi’an) to the students. The reason to learn this word again is because the architecture of the same function of building might looks a little different. The purpose of comparison is training the students’ observation skills to find out the drum tower in Ningbo was a western style and traditional Chinese architecture combination. There is a clock tower on the Ningbo drum tower, because Ningbo is an international seaport like Sydney for quite a long time.

Table 4.6: Tours in Mainland China- Ningbo words list

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ningbo Words List</th>
<th>Chinese Character</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>English Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>宁波</td>
<td>Níng bō</td>
<td>Ningbo (A city name in mainland China)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>鼓楼</td>
<td>Gǔ lóu</td>
<td>drum tower</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>宁波</td>
<td>Níng bō tāng yuán</td>
<td>Rice balls in Ningbo style of flavour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the first contributory research question, “How did the teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred learning content and materials?” when using an action research approach to devise a student-centred teaching framework to make Chinese learnable to beginning learners in Australian schools?

This chapter relates to the action research cycle (Chapter 3, section 3.3.3) in the second step of the planning and teaching, and has also included many discussion points from the teacher-researcher’s self-reflection journal. For example, on page 55 after a lesson (in the first action research cycle) had been taught, the teacher-researcher did not realise his students’ Chinese abilities. The students were introduced to complicated Chinese characters which reduced their confidence to learn Chinese in the future. But fortunately, the decision was made to change the teaching method by only writing down the pinyin of complicated Chinese characters in the second cycle.

Initially the teacher-researcher observed the classroom teachers and got a feel for what content and resources those two teachers used successfully. The teacher-researcher had to make a big effort to move away from the teacher-centred approaches used in previous teaching and learning in mainland China, and decide how to change the lessons to be student-centred. Chapter 4 has included the reasons for choosing particular lesson content, and has provided the details of the lesson explanations with reference to the resources chosen to accompany the lessons.
The teacher-researcher tried to develop the series of lessons with student-centred content/materials and resources by considering the following characteristics of the students and the Australian school context:

For the secondary students, the following proved successful when developing student-centred lessons:

- Content themes may be syllabus based, for example “My Family” was the set topic but the teacher-researcher was able to choose “greetings” and “pets” as topics that all children could relate to;
- The background knowledge of the secondary students was also considered in content selection, including traditional and popular cultural knowledge. The lessons which used popular culture themes, with modern video resources were successful with the secondary students;
- The prior knowledge and cognitive abilities of the students and how these can contribute to lesson planning were also discussed in this chapter with examples where the content was scaffolded, e.g. where the previous knowledge of counting to 100 could be used as a starting point to link to people’s ages.

For the primary school students approaching lessons that were student-centred involved:

- Surveying the students to gauge their interests and using the most popular interest to plan a series of lessons;
- An upcoming real life opportunity as a motivator for lessons. As the primary student participants in this study were planning a visit to mainland China, this was an excellent opportunity to devise lessons around the towns that would be visited, the most famous sights and foods of the region.
CHAPTER 5
THE EXPLORATION OF STUDENT-CENTRED
TEACHING STRATEGIES

5.0 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of how the second contributory research question was addressed. That is, “How can a bilingual volunteer teacher/teacher-researcher develop a series of student-centred teaching strategies when using an action research approach to devise a student-centred teaching framework to make Chinese learnable to beginning learner in Australian schools?

Throughout the chapter examples are provided to illustrate how the action research steps assisted the teacher-researcher to develop a series of student-centred teaching strategies. The chapter begins with the teacher-researcher recalling personal experiences of second language learning and how these experiences have provided a backdrop to understanding how beginning learners of Chinese might begin with mixed emotions and some anxiety as to their possible success. Next, the chapter discusses the “huiyi’ strategy and relates this to the development of student-centred strategies that link to the students’ prior general, visual and auditory knowledge. Actively engaging the students as a successful teaching strategy is discussed with examples of how games were developed and how asking the children to demonstrate their learning was approached. The conclusion summarises the teacher-researcher’s learning and how in the final steps of the action research process, future teaching strategies would be based on these learnings.
5.1 Acknowledging students’ possible apprehension

Positive emotions such as confidence, motivation, entertainment and enjoyment can attract beginner learners towards optimum engagement for language learning and benefit the language learning process. On the contrary, negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, stress, and anger can compromise beginner learners’ learning potential and reduce their language learning capacity.

The teacher-researcher personally recalled:

As I was teaching the students Chinese, it reminded me of my own experience of learning English as a beginner learner in primary school. I was worried and nervous when required to speak with my English teacher. I felt extremely embarrassed when my wrong pronunciation or strange accent of English caused some misunderstandings. When I started teaching the students basic greetings in Chinese, some of them were grudging to practice new words although I already pronounced for them to imitate several times. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journal, week 4, Term 4; 31 Oct. 2014)

5.1.1 Scaffold the teaching to reduce anxiety and ensure success

The following extracts from the teacher-researcher’s journal, documents the importance of considering the students’ anxiety at learning very challenging language learning tasks. The teacher-researcher concluded that breaking the learning task into smaller more manageable steps (scaffolding) was a student-centred strategy to reduce this anxiety and help students to be successful.

In the first cycle of teaching with 4T, I was trying to teach them some new greeting words in specific period of a day, for example “早上好![Zǎoshàng hǎo] (Good morning!)”. I assumed this was not hard to pronounce because they are already very familiar with the most frequently used greeting word “你好！[Nǐ hǎo] (Hello!)”. I used
flashcards (characters with pinyin underneath) to teach them this new phrase to greet in Chinese.

However, when I asked some students to pronounce the greeting individually, some of them just replied with awkward smiles. They were not intending to try until I set an example, slowly character by character for them to imitate. Few of them tried to say the phrase independently at a normal speed. I felt that they were nervous about pronouncing the greeting at the normal speed without my example. When trying to speak the phrase quickly, they had unsure expressions in their eyes and seemed to require my positive evaluation of their pronunciation. It is obvious that they were nervous and uncertain about what they had just learned.

Then in the second cycle class, I used three steps to teach the pronunciation - first one character then another: 早上 [Zǎoshàng] ... 好 [hǎo] ... When they were following my pronunciation together, they all did fantastic jobs. Secondly I pronounced the words: 早上 [Zǎoshàng] (morning) ... 好 [hǎo] (good). This time, only a few students had a little problem with the first word, 早上 [Zǎoshàng] (morning). The third time, I pronounced this phrase with the normal speed that a native Chinese would say. Most students were willing to give it a go this time. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 5, Term 1; 24 Feb. 2015)

“If learners are emotionally unwilling, language acquisition will be impeded. It is the responsibility of the teacher to discern what is best for students” (Ariza, 2002, p.726). Initially, in the first cycle, the teacher-researcher was not aware of the students’ emotional feelings as the initial strategy to teach the phrase was very difficult. The teacher-researcher compared the students against a native Chinese learners’ language standard, which caused the beginner learners’ anxiety in pronouncing the Chinese phrase. In the second cycle, the teacher-researcher became aware of the negative responses from the students. A method to break the task into
smaller steps was introduced, i.e. breaking down the whole phrase into words and single characters. This is like cutting an apple into small pieces for eating.

This teaching experience sparked a realisation that the teacher should always consider reducing students’ anxiety by using different teaching strategies so as to make the Chinese learning process less stressful and with small steps of success along the way. According to Hurd (2007), some strategies could be used by the teacher to reduce students’ anxiety. Chinese teachers can encourage beginner students to use strategies including:

1. actively challenging yourselves to take risks in Chinese learning, such as guessing meanings of Chinese characters or trying to speak with Pinyin, even though some mistakes could be made,
2. giving the students rewards or treats when they did well, and
3. being aware of students’ physical signs of stress that might affect their language learning.

5.1.2 Changing the lesson plan based on children’s stress responses

Another teaching episode related to the third point raised by Hurd (2007), caused the teacher-researcher to learn that a successful student-centred strategy is to change the planned lesson in response to how the children are reacting.

I had just taught the new greeting “早上好! [Zǎo shāng hǎo!] (Good morning!)” which showed little relationship with “你好! [Nǐ hǎo!] (Hello!)”. If he could try to encourage the students find the similarity between these two greeting phrases (both have 好 [hǎo] (good}) and explain that 你好! [Nǐ hǎo!] literally means “You good!” (Wish you good!), the students might have fewer troubles when they are learning the pronoun “you” in Chinese in the future. If the teacher noticed a large number of his students’ attention were not actually focused on him due to the fatigue of sitting and listening for a long time, he could encourage all the students stand up and put a finger in the air to practice writing the
character: 好 [hǎo] (good) and follow his movement stroke by stroke.

They could stretch themselves to refresh their body and at the same time deepen their memory of the useful and frequently seen character. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 5, Term 1; 24 Feb. 2015)

This strategy means that the teacher at times may need to change the teaching plan in order for the students to continue learning without physical stress.

5.2 Student-centred “会意法” strategy-link to prior knowledge

In 2010, Pei and Sun suggested a novel pedagogy called “会意法” (Huìyì Fǎ) to build connections in different parts of a character to help students study Chinese characters. They indicated:

“运用 “会意法”, 虽然有些已经偏离了文字学的原则, 不管造字本意, 机械地把合体字分解成几个部分, 设想出一些事理加以重新会意, 从而把这些部分有机地联系起来, 但其效果显而易见, 所以我们认为教无定法, 殊途同归。” (Pei and Sun, 2010, p. 158)

Translation: “会意法” (Huìyì Fǎ) is a teaching strategy that needs not to fully obey the axioms of Chinese characters. By ignoring the origin and removing a compound character into different components, and endowing new connections or meanings to give apparently clues, so as to let students easily link to their background knowledge. Because different roads may lead to the same destination, teaching characters should not be confined into just one particular method. (Pei and Sun, 2010, p. 158)
To be clear, the definition of “会意法” (Huiyi Fǎ) here is a little bit different from “会意” (Huiyi) as one of the “Six Ways” (六书 (liù shū): The translation of specific mechanisms of meaning constitution in the Chinese characters. (Tze-wan Kwan, 2011, p. 411) to produce Chinese characters. It might not always follow certain rules of the Chinese characters from a native Chinese speaker’s perspective.

In general, “会意” (huiyi) is a traditional way of compounding meaningful Chinese characters or partials into new characters so as to make new Chinese characters based on previous knowledge. Here, “compounding” can refer to the general tendency of creating new Chinese characters, by using imagination, combining or conjoining the meanings of various script components to produce more abstract characters. (Tze-wan Kwan, 2011, p. 433) If the students already learned some Chinese characters, this method would be very helpful to enlarge the amount of recognisable Chinese characters. But as the beginner Chinese who just learned few Chinese simplest characters, this method was not as workable as let the students to make their own stories to remember the new characters based on their previous knowledge.

5.2.1 Link to students’ prior knowledge and cognitive level

The following episodes from the teacher-researcher’s journal provide an account of how being familiar with the prior knowledge and the cognitive level of the students’ needs to be taken fully into account if a teacher is using student-centred strategies.

*Example 1: Teaching the names of family members*

After the teaching of family member names in Chinese, the teacher-researcher reflected on the responses given to a question raised during the lesson:

Some students asked why grandparents’ titles on the mothers’ side were different from the fathers’ side in Chinese. I explained this phenomenon by explaining “ancient Chinese people like to make a distinction between relatives on the paternal side and maternal side family members”. From their confused expressions, my explanation was too difficult for them to understand. I should have told them that it was to make the titles clearer
and ascertain the persons’ position in the family. (From the teacher-
researcher’s reflection journals, week 6, Term 1; 3 Mar. 2015)

Analysis/further reflection: Explanations need to be simple and clear i.e. age
appropriate to consider prior knowledge and cognitive level of the students

After careful reflection the teacher-researcher realised that this explanation, although
not difficult for an adult to accept this idea, did cause the primary students quite a
deal of confusion – maybe they were not familiar with ‘paternal’ and ‘maternal’
concepts. Their prior knowledge was not there to draw on. That is why there is a
need to teach the students in a way, that is easier for them to link this and other
Chinese characters to their own knowledge. To summarise, the teacher-researcher
explained the knowledge point without considering students’ cognitive level which
then caused a problem for the success of the lesson.

Example 2: Teaching the Chinese characters for “home” — Using questions

In my lesson plan, I was going to teach the characters for “home”. The
two Chinese characters are “家” and “有”. I explained in my teaching: “
家” has two parts, the upper part is a radical of “roof”, the under part (豕)
is radical of a pig. Why does a pig under a roof mean home or family?
Actually, this word has a long history. In the ancient, the Chinese
ancestors raised pigs in their houses to get pork as meat to eat. It looks
like a sleeping pig. It also has a capital letter “J” hides in the middle of
this radical for you linking it to its initial pinyin. I explained “有” as
following: Who remembers the character 月 (yue)? A couple of students
raised their hand and one was picked and answered: it means “month”
and “moon” (They learned these meanings previously). I explained:
“Yes. It also has another meaning. It means “meat” when it appears as a
radical in characters. Look! “有” looks like a pair of chopsticks to grip a
piece of meat. When you grabbed the meat, it is yours. It means you
“have” it. So “有” means “have”. (From teacher-researcher’s reflection
journals, week 6, Term 1; 3 Mar. 2015)
Analysis/further reflection: In addition to considering prior knowledge and cognitive level of the students, using good questions can gauge their understanding

Although the very next week in the teaching component of this action research project, the teacher-researcher was again given to reflect that explanations of the characters can become difficult for beginning learners when given from the teacher-researcher’s perspective. The two Chinese characters “家” and “有” are high frequency words that primary and secondary students would use in their everyday conversation, however the explanation was given from the teacher-researcher’s perspective and ignored the students’ background.

To change the teacher-centred explanation into a student-centred strategy, the teacher-researcher reflected on the possibility of asking questions to pin point when the students have not understood the explanation. Questions such as “Do you understand?” “What do you think?” and “Any other good ideas?” after finishing his explanation would have helped to make a successful lesson.

In hindsight the teacher-researcher should have asked questions early in the lesson to gauge the students’ perspective. This lesson was not successful as the teacher-researcher gave all the explanation from an adult previous Chinese’s point of view. Questioning at the end of the lesson to gauge the students’ understanding was also lacking in this teaching experience and something that can assist with making the teaching more student-centred.

5.2.2 Make meaning of Chinese characters based on students’ visual knowledge

“会意法” (Huiyi) can more effectively explore and enhance the interest in learning Chinese characters. At the same time, it strengthens the learners’ memory by using imagination to relate stories to the characters. The unique structure of Chinese characters allows the use of visual extension to help beginning learners understand and remember the Chinese characters. The following examples showcase the teacher-researchers planning, evaluation and reflections of student-centred strategies to teach some Chinese characters.
Example 1: Link the Chinese character to students’ existing visual knowledge (the Numeral 100)

The following episode from the reflective journals record showed the development of strategies that I used in my Chinese lessons.

The shape of Chinese character means hundred (百) looks like an Arabic number “100”, especially when you watching from the upside direction to the downside. I wrote a “百” on a piece of A4 paper before the lesson and showed them by turning the paper anticlockwise by 90 degree in the front of them. Just like this “百”. Most of the students are amazed by this description and presentation. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 2, Term 2; 28 Apr. 2015)

Analysis and further reflection: Decision making when developing the lesson plan to take account of a student-centred approach.

The character “百” (hundred) can also be explained in another way. For example, it can be deposed to two meaningful Chinese characters “一” (one) and “白” (white). But this kind of explanation may not be very helpful to explain the meaning of it, because the students had not yet learned the character “白” (white). They also might be confused by the similar pronunciation of “百” [bǎi] and “白” [bái]. So for these two reasons, the teacher-researcher came up with an easier way for them to recognise the meaning of this character.

Example 2: Link the Chinese character to existing knowledge—the world map and the character for ‘mainland China’

Another example is related to an English vocabulary and Chinese character in artistic style.
The original picture is below, the teacher-researcher edited it to make it more suitable and interesting for the students have a taste of Chinese characters and calligraphy.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 5.1: Example 2 graphic-linking the Chinese character for ‘mainland China’ to the world map**

It is easily seen that this picture can be divided into two parts from the middle. The left half of this picture is “中国” (writing in a vertical order with a calligraphy style in black ink), the right half of the picture is the same pattern that rotated clockwise by 90 degree.

During the lesson, the teacher-researcher first showed the students the edited left part by using PowerPoint.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 5.2: Result of partial editing of the Chinese character**

Actually “中” means “middle” or “centre”, as can be easily seen that the long vertical stroke is just cross through the middle of the rectangle. Then I handed out paper to all the students to let them practice this character with a game named “60-second dash of “中”. (Game rule: Write the character “中” as much as possible in a minute, the one who wrote the most recognisable “中” will be the winner and get a little prize. ) The students were all excited about the writing match and they all started writing as soon as they heard “Start!”.
Then, I showed them a map of the world, in which mainland China is not exactly in the middle of the world map.

![Figure 5.3: Map of the world](image)

I asked them, “Have a guess which country ‘Zhōng guó’ might refer to?”

Some students guessed Australia, some thought Fiji, and some conjectured that it would be mainland China.

Then I showed them the correct answer by showing the right half part of the first picture. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 6, Term 1; 4 Mar 2015)

![Figure 5.4: Reinforcing the Chinese character’s relationship to the World Map](image)

I congratulated them and then explained to all the students that ancient Chinese ancestors thought they were in the middle of the world, even the centre of the universe. They were very arrogant and narrow-minded at that time so that they named mainland China “中国” : “the Middle Kingdom”.
Country or kingdom in Chinese is “国” (guó). Although this character looks very complicated, it is not hard to write and remember according to the meaning. The outside square means the walls of a kingdom to protect the king inside. The king (王) has a jade (丶) in his hand to show he has fortune and power. Nowadays, the single character “中(Zhōng)” still has a meaning of the abbreviation of mainland China. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 6, Term 1; 4 Mar 2015)

**Example 3: Link the Chinese character for noodle to students’ existing knowledge**

![Chinese Character for Noodle]

**Figure 5.5: Pictorial representation of the Chinese character for noodles**

In today’s lesson when teaching about the green character in this interesting picture, I asked the students “What does it mean by the underneath picture?” Some of them answered “eating noodles”, some said “chopsticks”, some said “bowl”. I told them this character has a meaning of “noodles”. Chinese usually call noodles “面条 (Miàn tiáo)”. They told me that this character looked like a noodle box. I did not know what a noodle box looked like, maybe because it more commonly used in Australia rather than in mainland China. I searched pictures of “Noodle box” on the internet after I finished the days’ Chinese class and found a picture as below with “面条 (Miàn tiáo)” printed on the side:
Figure 5.6: Modifying the picture cue for the Chinese character using a student-centred approach

Analysis and further reflection: Acknowledge and use the students' responses for future lessons.

The teacher-researcher could use this picture to show the students in the next class, and thank them for inspiring a better idea of teaching this Chinese character. The teacher-researcher could also tell them of the cultural differences between shapes of containers used for serving noodles in mainland China and Australia. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 4, Term 1; 17 Feb. 2015)

Example 4: Link the Chinese character to students’ existing knowledge of popular culture

Figure 5.7: Picture cue for teaching the Chinese character/s for family members


Based on a knowledge of the students, and with the help of an Australian Chinese teacher K, the teacher-researcher designed some ways to explain the following characters of family members:

When writing the character “妈”, the right part is a “7” like stroke first.

Then the second is a large stroke looks like the lighting sign of Harry
Potter. Some of the students were suddenly excited as soon as I said “Harry Potter”, who is a popular character in western culture who has magical powers.

I also explained the right part of “妈(mā)”, which is “马(mǎ)” means “horse” also indicates the similar pronunciation of “妈(mā)”.

“哥(gē)[Older brother]” is combined with two “可(kě)” joined together.

It is definitely higher and bigger than just one “可(kě)”, just like an older brother is often taller and stronger than his younger brother.

The right part of “姐”(older sister) looks like a mirror with which a fashionable older sister is looking into.

The right part of “妹”(younger sister) looks like a 二(two) years little girl in a dress.

“弟” looks a little bit like a naughty boy with messy hair stretching his leg. (From the teacher-researcher’s lesson plans, week 3, Term 1; 10 Feb 2015)

The following excerpt from the teacher-researcher’s journal provides a starting point for improvement in the next round of lesson planning, i.e. completing the first full cycle of the action research process.

The students seemed very interested in these ways of making interesting stories to remember meanings of Chinese characters. I taught these characters mostly according to the lesson plan that was prepared before class, and just did some minimum changes based on the students’ responses I observed. Half of the students seemed interested in the characters, the other half were just talking with their classmates nearby. I conducted a match quiz with the characters and English meanings after
my explanation, but the effect was not as good as I expected. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 4, Term 1; 17 Feb 2015)

Analysis and further reflection: Holding the children’s interest can be challenging.

Chinese characters are made up of different shapes of strokes and radicals. The problem is how to inspire students to recognise them by their shape and the meaning of radicals and link it to the pinyin and English meaning. The teacher-researcher used some imagination by linking a story to explain part of the character to popular culture “Harry Potter”. However, this story related to only one part of the character and through further explanation of other parts of the character, the children’s interests faded. Continuing the Harry Potter theme to explain the other parts of the Chinese characters for family may have been more successful.

5.2.3 Chinese words with similar pronunciation to English words

Another example of the huiyi strategy for teaching vocabulary is to draw on the students’ English speaking background knowledge of everyday pronunciation of some words, which happen to have some similarity with a Chinese word. The following episodes are examples of using this strategy.

In my teaching experience the students were often confused between “yi shi” and “shi yi”. So I decided to introduce English word “she” to assist them memorize “Shi yi”. First, I asked them: Is “一十” (yi shi) how you say eleven? Then, I explained “十一” sounds like a pause between “sh” and “e”. It is “shi yi”. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 6, Term 1; 6 Mar. 2015)

The students were more enthusiastic about learning Chinese family names than I expected. When I taught the word “爸爸(bà ba)” , a girl in the front of me said “Chinese is fantastic.” Because she thought the pronunciation was very similar to “Papa” in English. She asked me why the second “ba” has a different tone from the first one, while the Chinese character did not change. I tried to explain this from the reason of variation of tone in pinyin. But she seemed more confused after my
There is no obvious tone in the English language, let alone tone variations, so it is hard to explain the tone variation to the students who had no prior knowledge of a tonal language such as Chinese. In this instance the mentoring teacher assisted the teacher-researcher’s learning:

With the help of Chinese Teacher K, she reminded me that I should not teach Chinese from a native Chinese speaker’s perspective, but to try to approach it from an Australian kids’ perspective.

So I explained “In Chinese, when it comes that a word that is repeating its first character, the second sound is usually lighter and shorter. Not as clear as the first sound”. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 6, Term 1; 6 Mar. 2015)

*Analysis/further reflection: Choose words that link to children’s existing auditory knowledge*

From this particular teaching episode, it becomes clear that whenever possible when teaching Chinese to beginner learners, draw on examples where there is a similarity between Chinese and English in terms of the pronunciation. Words where there is only a subtle difference should also be chosen to link to children’s existing auditory knowledge.

The next example of using the huiyi strategy reports how the teacher-researcher observed the children’s interest in learning new vocabulary when the Chinese and English words had some similarity in pronunciation.

The lesson plan was to teach new vocabulary for the names of several countries around the world. It began:

澳大利亚 (Ào dà lì yà) are the four characters for the word “Australia” that happen to have similarities with the pronunciation in Chinese and in English. This country’s name was explained in detail for the students to memorise and recognise these four Chinese characters which meant their
“motherland”. The Chinese character “澳” could be decomposed into three parts to make this character interesting and more easily recognised by the Australian students. The left three points look like three drops of water that are dripping from a tap. It is the water radical. The upper part of the right half looks like a Union Jack flag, showing the traditional relationship between Australia and the United Kingdom. The under part of the right half looks like a person stretching his/her arms as wide as possible to make a room as big as possible. It is the radical for big. So with these hints, the students were able to relate the Chinese characters to their knowledge of Australia as a continent and part of its history. In addition, the pronunciation (Ào dà lì yà) linked to their auditory knowledge. After my explanation one student even made his own story to explain the different parts of this character. He said: “Australia is a continent surrounded by ocean and water. It had a relationship with the United Kingdom before, and Australia is a bigger country compared to the United Kingdom.”

The lesson continued with the teaching of England and America as follows:

英国(Yīng guó) means England. It is an abstraction of the first half pronunciation of England, which is “Eng”.

美国(Měi guó) means America. 美 (Měi) comes from the sound “me” in America. (From teacher-researcher’s reflection journals/lesson plans; week 8, Term 1; 17 Mar. 2015)

**Analysis/further reflection:** *A successful lesson drew on similarities in pronunciation between the Chinese and English word.*

The teacher-researcher managed to hold the students’ attention when teaching the pronunciation and character meanings of “Australia” [澳大利亚 (Ào dà lì yà)] when using a detailed explanation. This was not the case when teaching “England” and “America”. Most of the students showed less interest in learning the pronunciation and character meaning for England and America as there was no obvious link to the
English equivalent. The students paid more attention to the teacher-researcher during his explanation of “Australia”, even though it was quite detailed. Some children even tried to make a story for themselves to recognise the characters more easily. Future lessons will appeal to the students if there are tonal similarities between the English and the Chinese pronunciations. This strategy should be used whenever possible.

5.3 English Linguistic knowledge (Grammar) – How much do students need to know?

When teaching Chinese to beginning learners a traditional strategy of using grammatical explanations for Chinese characters may need to be reconsidered if the teacher wants to use student-centred strategies.

Example 1: How many people are in your family?

To review and practice numbers that I taught them before, I chose a sentence with a standard grammatical structure “你家有几个人？ [Nǐ jiā yǒu jǐ gè rén?]” to let students ask their classmates “How many family members are there in your family?"

In my lesson plan, I explained the two Chinese characters as: “个” looks like number “1” under a “人”. In this way, it’s easy to link “个” as a general measure word for people. You can make up a story by a single person. “口” is a specific measure word for people in a family. The original meaning of “口” is mouth. Open your mouth widely then you can get a similar shape of “口”.

Difference between them: you can say “这里有六个人。” (Here are six people) but “这里有六口人。” is a wrong sentence, Why? Because “口” is a specific measure word for people in a family. Maybe the reason is that the head of a household needed to feed the mouths of the whole family. These six people are definitely not from the one family. The
classroom teacher gave me some feedback on my lesson plan. She said: “It’s too difficult for the students to grasp the grammar. Just teach them that they can count people in a family using either or “口”. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 4, Term 1; 17 Feb 2015)

First level reflection: The teacher-researcher’s grammatical knowledge was lacking

In response to the mentoring teacher’s feedback the teacher-researcher realised the students had difficulty in understanding as was recorded below in the journal:

I lack the Chinese grammatical knowledge myself. I only know the phenomenon: the difference between “个” and “口” and they should be used in specific situations, but the explanation of this grammatical language point make it very complicated to the students.

So I changed my explanation to: There are a lot of measure words in Chinese, just like “glass” in “a glass of water”, “piece” in “a piece of paper” and so on in English. Chinese use different measure words to describe different subjects. Here, both “个” and “口” can describe the number of people in your family. (From teacher-researcher’s reflection journals; week 4, Term 1; 17 Feb 2015)

Example 2: Rather than formal grammar a successful explanation linked to the idea of ‘slang’

Following the teaching episode outlined above, a change to the subsequent lesson was made. From a linguistic point of view, the teacher-researcher was planning to explain the two Chinese measure words “个” and “口”. However, the classroom teacher/mentoring teacher believed that it was too difficult for Chinese beginner learners to digest. The recommendation was to use the students’ understanding of measure words in English to assist them to grasp the learning of the two Chinese measure words. This is based on the students’ prior knowledge to assist their learning and reduce their learning load. The outcome was recorded as follows:
Have a look of the meaning of 两 (liǎng), which number does it replace?

Chinese use “两” instead of “二” means “a couple of …” as in “a couple of days”, “a couple of people” and so on. “两” is the spoken way of saying number two in counting; it is a more orthodox way in real Chinese conversation. “两” seems like a slang word in Chinese. From the students’ expression, most of them liked this explanation. (From teacher-researcher’s reflection journals; week 4, Term 1; 17 Feb 2015)

Analysis/further reflection: Grammar and slang – the appeal to children’s interest

Here, the teacher-researcher explained a grammar point in Chinese by making a comparison with the knowledge of ‘slang’ words in English. This appealed to the students and provided a link that made this particular explanation a much easier way for the students to understand this Chinese numbering expression. In much the same way as the students became interested once “Harry Potter” was mentioned. The idea of ‘slang’ created an interest point. Using examples from popular culture would be a very useful student-centred strategy.

5.4 Peer mentoring (engaging the students)

Another strategy for student-centred is to actively and physically engage the students in their own learning. In the following example of a teaching episode the teacher-researcher had planned to give the students an opportunity to demonstrate some of their Chinese competencies to the others in the class.

I asked the students to firstly write the numbers on the whiteboard before I taught them the right order of the characters. Because some of them had already learnt these characters before, they seemed interested in writing in front of their classmates to show their knowledge. This is a good way to get the students involved in the teaching process. But it took more time than I expected. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 2, Term 1, 3 Feb. 2015)
Analysis/further reflection: Using student-centred strategies that involve the students physically, the teacher needs to be flexible to adjust the lesson accordingly.

Having the students feel the confidence to share their learning of Chinese to their classmates worked well in this teaching instance. The students took on the role of the teacher as they shared their learning by writing on the whiteboard. This peer mentoring (at a very basic level) engaged the students and this aim for the lesson was achieved. However, there were also observed shortcomings; some of the students demonstrated mistakes and this might cause them to lose confidence to take the teacher’s role again. As the students were young their thinking time whilst standing at the whiteboard was beyond the teacher-researcher’s previous expectation and this made it harder to control the pace of the lesson. For the teacher-researcher the learning was that there needs to be flexibility in the set lesson plan if student-centred strategies are to be used. If more time is needed to have the students actively engaged, then the teacher might need to adapt quickly and not rush through the remainder of the initial teaching plan.

5.5 Student-centred games

Students need to practice reading and speaking in Chinese as often as possible. Actively engaging the students using games and activities offers them opportunities to utilize their knowledge in a student-centred way. The following example came from a student in Youhao primary school.

I don’t like sitting quietly in class and just listening to the teachers. I hope the teacher would give the class more opportunity to use Chinese. Then he will correct our pronunciation and I think our Chinese lessons will be interesting if we can play more games. Also, my friends and me can share our ideas and learn some skills from each other. The teacher’s role is instruction and explanation. We need more activities to take part in the class. I don’t like anything in teacher-centred. The class is ours and we want to have our own leaders. Teacher teaching all the time makes us feel bored.

Taking account of the students’ opinions and ideas will help to ensure that lessons planned are student-centred. As the interview with the student above indicated that
games were a preferred means of practicing Chinese, the teacher-researcher decided to use this as a strategy to engage the students.

5.5.1 Grab a spot

This game was to match the written Chinese character to the spoken word. The rules and teaching sequence are recorded below:

First, get one student to stand in the centre of the circle. The rest of the students stand in a circle and each of them is given a card containing 4 different Chinese words (4 different words, each have 7 identical cards totally 28 cards each student had got one card by chance. After the teacher calls the word out, the students who have the same word should leave their spot and move to each other’s position (to the position of a child with the same word). The student in the centre of the circle will have a chance to grab a spot during the chaos. The one who lost his/her position will come to the centre of the circle after giving his/her card to that previous student in the centre. Then the teacher will call out another word to continue another round. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 8, Term 1, 17 Mar. 2015)

During the process of this game, I found that the students were very confused as to whether they had grabbed the position successfully or not. The spot is big enough to contain two people at the same time no matter how close the students are beside each other. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 8, Term 1, 17 Mar. 2015)

So later, I changed this game to “Grab a chair”.

The rules were also revised. I set up 6 chairs in the front of the classroom. I called out one of the four words, the 7 students were to walk fast to grab a seat. Unfortunately, every round there was one student who did not sit on the chair and had been knocked out of the game. Before the second round I removed a chair, so that the chairs were always one less than the players. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 8, Term 1, 17 Mar. 2015)
During one of the rounds, a girl was running instead of walking to the chairs and almost fell down. I warned all the students immediately of the importance of their safety while playing.

The students were keen to practice the Chinese words by playing this game. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 8, Term 1, 17 Mar. 2015)

*Analysis/further reflection: The importance of having children physically active engages their interest*

Learning by playing games is a good strategy to inspire the interest of young students, especially when they are at a beginning status. This game combined reaction speed and Chinese listening ability together. It is also includes the element of a competition with speed of response being the key. The teacher-researcher became aware that children’s safety can be an issue when this type of ‘who gets there first’ activity is planned. This might imply that more space is needed and therefore the game may need to be played out of the classroom.

**5.5.2 Bingo Game**

Another game to practice/match vocabulary is bingo. Children are not physically required to race each other to a spot/chair in this game, so the safety element of having children push or fall (as in Grab a Chair), is not an issue.

As a conclusion to a lesson I gave a piece of blank paper to each student. I instructed them to draw a table with three rows and three columns on their paper. The rules of my Bingo game were: Firstly, fill in the blanks of the table with nine out of the twelve Chinese zodiac animals’ pinyin we learnt in this class. Secondly, I called out one of the 12 animal pinyin randomly and asked the students to name the animal in English. Thirdly, if they had the animal in their table, they needed to circle it. If they got three circles in a horizontal line, vertical line or diagonal line, they should call out “Bingo” as soon as possible. I repeated step two and step three until the first three students called out “Bingo” and I gave them some candy as a prize after class.
I played the Bingo game for two rounds. In the second round, the only difference was that I chose the animals by calling out their English names. The students had to figure out the correct pinyin by themselves. The result was that some students called out “Bingo” with the wrong pinyin circled, which did not count to win.

It seemed that most of the students were highly engaged in this Bingo game and they asked me to play another round after the second round. But the time was limited, so I could not hold another round. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 5, Term 2, 19 May. 2015)

Analysis/further reflection: Involve the students in creating their own game card and using reinforcements

How can a Bingo game link to student-centred strategy? The students were given the opportunity to choose the nine animals from the total 12 that interested them; and they were able to locate them within the table they drew in the order they wished. This game gave them a lot of freedom and responsibility for their choice. The fact that the Chinese knowledge they had learned could help them gain some little prizes, also encouraged them to study Chinese in future classes.

5.5.3 Guess the Number Card Game

The following game can be used to practice the Chinese vocabulary for numbers from 1 to 100. The following discussion of the game is taken from the teacher-researcher’s journal.

First, the teacher separated the students into two groups, Group A and Group B. Second, the teacher picked up a number card from one to 100, for example 64, and let the students guess the number in Chinese. If the number was less than the correct number, the teacher would write an “X” after the student’s answer on the whiteboard, for example “25 X”. If the number was larger than the correct number, the teacher would write an “X” before the students’ answer on the whiteboard, for example “X 76”. Third, after a student representative from Group A gave an answer, the
next guess is given to Group B. The guessing continues until the right answer has been guessed.

The first student whose answer is the hidden number wins a little prize. If the group members are noisy or out of order, the guess will be passed to the other group. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 6, Term 2, 26 May 2015)

Analysis/further reflection: Student-centred activities can be noisy activities

This game required the students to problem solve possibilities for the missing number. They chatted and became excited with the responses from classmates as they narrowed the possibilities for the missing number. While it is important for the teacher-researcher to keep the classroom management optimal, it is impossible for students to be fully engaged and to be silent. In this way the teacher-researcher needed to let the students have fun but also think about the noise level. It is up to the teacher to make the judgement on when to have the students reduce the noise. Passing the guess to the alternative group was a way to have the students realise their noise level was getting too high. Alternatively it may be possible that the class plays the games outside of the classroom where the noise level would not cause an issue.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the efforts of the teacher-researcher to develop a series of student-centred strategies to better involve the children in their learning of Chinese. The teacher-researcher has been mentored by the classroom teacher to develop lesson plans based on student-centredness and examples of these have been included in this Chapter along with the teacher-researcher’s analysis and reflections on the data generated. Each of the analyses has recorded the teacher-researcher’s learning and ideas for future planning and teaching (i.e. the steps of the action research cycle).

By reflection on lesson planning and outcomes the teacher-researcher then mainly used the final step of the action research cycle to propose the following guidelines for the development of future student-centred teaching strategies.

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1. Reduce the possible anxiety for beginning learners. By more carefully considering the steps involved in a lesson or task, the teacher-researcher would propose scaffolding tasks into small steps and practice these before proceeding to the next step. Secondly, being flexible with the lesson plan was shown to assist the beginning learners to become less stressed. Whilst it is important to stick to the lesson plan, sometimes this is not possible and depending on how the students are reacting/understanding, the plan may need to slow down or change. This should not be a cause of great concern for the teacher-researcher when working with beginning learners.

2. Use the “Huiyi” student-centred strategy to explain Chinese characters. The teacher-researcher learnt that providing what seemed to be an acceptable explanation to beginning learners was often not the case when their prior knowledge and cognitive levels were not taken into account. Questioning throughout the lesson became important for the teacher-researcher to gauge the understanding of the children. Through evaluating and reflection on lessons that specifically tried to link content to the children’s general knowledge and cognitive level and their existing visual and auditory knowledge the teacher-researcher would improve future teaching strategies by incorporating children’s answers into future lessons and also to use characters and language from popular culture whenever possible.

3. Using a more teacher-centred approach by using grammar to teach young beginning learners needed to be deleted. The teacher-researcher realised this difficulty and would propose not to use this strategy in the future. The children responded to explanations that related to popular culture more readily than formal, more traditional teaching methods.

4. Peer mentoring was used to help the children by having them take on the role of the teacher and share their learning to the rest of the class. This strategy would be used in future with some attention being given to the possibility that children give the wrong answer and how this is handled to ensure there is no loss of confidence for the child. The teacher-researcher also became aware that student-centred activities can be more time consuming than teacher-centred methods and this needs to be factored into future planning.

5. The teacher-researcher promoted the use of games as a very successful student-centred strategy. Competitive games that involve students’ physically
moving, can be especially dangerous if the students push or rush. Other student-centred activities can be very noisy, and hence this should be carefully considered during the lesson planning phase. The location for these games and activities needs to be well chosen and an option might be that they could be conducted in the playground.
CHAPTER 6
THE EXPLORATION OF STUDENT-CENTRED
CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

6.0 Introduction

This chapter is the final evidentiary chapter and has addressed the third contributory research question: How can a bilingual volunteer teacher develop a series of student-centred classroom management practices, when using action research to develop a student-centred teaching framework to make Chinese learnable for beginning learner in western Sydney schools?

The chapter begins with a discussion of the first step in the action research cycle where the teacher-researcher observed the classroom teachers’ daily classroom management strategies and then modelled these as Chinese teaching began.

Strategies that the teacher-researcher developed during this study are listed below and these are discussed at length throughout Chapter 6.

- Creating a classroom environment which highlighted Chinese learning
- Developing classroom rules and routines
- Considering the timing and pacing of lessons to avoid inappropriate behaviour
- Ensuring the behaviour management is student-centred by reflection on inappropriate behaviour and devising ways to overcome these
- Listening to the students feedback to avoid misbehaviour
6.1 Observation

The first step in the action research cycle is to observe. The teacher-researcher was allocated six months of observation in both the secondary and primary schools prior to planning and conducting the lessons.

It was a brand new experience for the teacher-researcher to observe the teaching and learning style in Australian schools. The teacher-researcher has been educated in a teacher-centred education environment for more than 20 years in mainland China. As an inexperienced English teacher in mainland China, the teacher-researcher also applied teacher-centred approaches as his main teaching method. After observing some Chinese lessons taught by the two native Australian teachers, the teacher-researcher moved on to the second step of the action research cycle, which is to thoughtfully develop a series of classroom management strategies that placed students at the centre of the Mandarin learning process.

In this way, the teacher-researcher not only developed some strategies that would hopefully avoid common misbehaviour, but also conducted a series of strategies to handle unexpected situations.

6.2 Connect to the students by creating a classroom environment with Chinese elements

In an effort to make a positive impression on the students the first thing the teacher-researcher did was to set up an atmosphere in the classroom that valued the learning of Chinese language and culture. This was also inspired by the fact that Western Sydney students have limited connection with Chinese in their daily life compared to those living near Chinese immigrant communities (e.g. Burwood and Chinatown). Therefore, to create a new and interesting presence in the class the teacher-researcher wanted to involve the students in decorating a space as the Chinese learning display centre. The age and interest differences between secondary school students and primary pupils while setting up the Chinese classroom environments was considered. Each is discussed below in a separate section.
6.2.1 The Chinese elements in the secondary school classroom

To attract the interest of the secondary students, with the assistance of an experienced local Chinese teacher, the teacher-researcher organised the decorating of the high school Chinese classroom with a large amounts of Chinese cultural elements, such as red paper-cuttings, maps of mainland China, Chinese food art works made by the students, posters of local Chinese snacks, and English-Chinese translations.

Notably, the classroom was decorated with some red paper cuttings of the Chinese character “春”[spring] made by the students to celebrate the Chinese Spring Festival, as shown in the following picture:

![Figure 6.1: Red paper cuttings of Chinese character “春” (spring)](image)

The Chinese ‘corner’ was created over several weeks and all the elements were attached to the walls or were displayed on a couple of tables. A photograph of the learning corner is below.

![Figure 6.2: A corner of the Secondary School Chinese Classroom](image)
There were also some aesthetic art works of Chinese food (Figure 6.3) and Chinese characters made by the students. Using these art works made by the students helped to construct a comfortable and interesting learning atmosphere. This also included student-created pictures of elements they knew about Chinese culture, their thank-you letters to their Chinese teacher Mrs. K for her effort to hold a Chinese Fair activity, and pictographic Chinese characters calligraphy.

**Figure 6.3: Four typical types of Chinese foods art work by the students**

(Description: The dragon represents mainland China, and the four different colours of air breathing out of its mouth represents the four typical Chinese cuisines from Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern mainland China, with the standard ingredients from each of the local regions.

### 6.2.2 The Chinese elements in the primary school classroom

The teacher-researcher found that the difference between the primary and secondary classrooms was that in the secondary school the Chinese teacher had a classroom especially for teaching Chinese. The primary school students had a classroom that was for all their lessons, not just Chinese. So there was not so much room in the primary classroom to set up a Chinese display. They only had limited to display some posters related to Chinese language or Chinese culture, such as numbers from one to twenty written in Chinese characters, different colours in Chinese pinyin, teaching different stokes by using the character “永” to list most of the existing
display. From my observation, the problem was that the students seldom looked at these printed pictures. The teacher-researcher then used this observation to make a decoration that was made by the students, in the hope they would be more positive to the Chinese display.

During the recess time, a lot of students brought out their between-meal nibbles, including some fruits. During a lesson I observed the children had learned the names of some fruits. I thought it was a good opportunity to test their memory.

I asked a boy with an apple “Do you remember how to say ‘apple’ in Chinese?” He thought for a while, and answered me with an uncertain sound “pan go?” I corrected him with the right pronunciation “Píng guǒ.” Then I asked him and some students around him whether it would be a good idea to put up a poster of apple with its Chinese name, but I needed each of them take part in the procedure of making this artwork. Some of them drew the outline, then some students coloured in the apple with red pencil. Finally I asked the boy to write down “Píng guǒ” under the red apple and then I wrote down the Chinese characters “苹果” below the Pinyin as shown in the following picture. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 3, Term 1; 17 Feb. 2015)

![Figure 6.4: Student-centred poster artwork: “Apple”](image)

I said, “let’s sign our poster together!” They were very happy to be authors of the artwork. Then I pasted the handmade poster on the wall with other previous printed Chinese posters. The other students were gathering around it to have a look as soon as I pasted it on. They seemed
more interested in this special poster than the other posters that were not related to them. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 3, Term 1; 17 Feb. 2015)

Analysis/further reflection: Using the students to help create the artwork for display created interest and hopefully helped to make a positive relationship with the students and the teacher-researcher

Actively involving the students in the procedures of making Chinese decorations was more effective than expecting them to passively accept the ready-made Chinese posters especially when the posters had been on display for quite a while. In a student-centred classroom situation, the placement of Chinese decorations has two roles. Firstly it has the purpose of helping the students remember some Chinese words as they see the words every day. Secondly if the students help with the decorations and these are changed a lot of the time, it can build a good relationship between the teacher/teacher-researcher and the students. This might hopefully mean the students feel some connection to the teacher-researcher and it could affect classroom management in a better way.

The following photograph shows a display in the primary school which was teacher-centred (very orderly and beautiful) but no longer of interest to the children. The teacher-researcher did not observe any children looking at this. It had been prepared for the Spring Festival. The “apple” decoration that was made by the students was at their level and was not too tidy, with some scribble in the coloured section. However it caused a lot of interest when it was pasted on the board.

Figure 6.5: Teacher-centred decorations
Once the students also took part in the decorations, they paid more attention to the posters. A poster cannot really perform a useful function until the students really carefully looked at it and understand it.

6.3 Developing Chinese classroom rules/routines

Once a classroom had some elements of Chinese language and culture, the teacher-researcher focused on developing students’ positive Chinese learning motivation and behaviour in class. The next step was to draw up routines, norms and progressions, so that the Chinese lessons could run as smoothly and efficiently as possible. These routines were not only created to demonstrate how the students should behave, but also to encourage the students to take part in these routines as positive participants in the Chinese lessons. Although creating a positive routine sounds simple, it was much more challenging than just being nice to students. These routines made the students feel welcome and confident with the teachers’ respect and fairness.

6.3.1 Secondary students-Greeting routine

At the beginning of a Chinese lesson in the secondary school, the most important thing was to calm the students down as soon as possible after they entered the classroom. Usually, the high school students were very active before their Chinese class began and the most commonly seen behaviours included chatting with their friends loudly, listening to music with their earphones, eating some snacks and chewing gum. Once the students arrived at the classroom the teacher-researcher drew on the observations of how the classroom teacher quietened the students before they entered the classroom and then how to keep their attention. The teacher-researcher tried to continue this approach with the students for consistency of classroom management rather than to do things totally different.

Today I observed a local Chinese teacher’s class. At the beginning the students were asked to line up quietly into two lines and wait outside the Chinese classroom for Mrs. K’s (their Chinese teacher) instruction. Mrs. K used a traditional daily routine to start her Chinese lesson. The students then went more quietly into the classroom. She stood in front of the class after all the students were standing behind their chairs. She then
bowed to her students with the typical Chinese greeting to students “同学们好！ (Tóng xué men hǎo!)”. After she finished, most students bowed back with the official greeting to teacher, “老师好! (Lǎo shī hǎo!)” Mrs. K then asked her students to sit down quietly and marked the roll using their Chinese names. All these names were carefully made based on the students’ English names with a similar Chinese pronunciation. The students were asked to answer “到 (dào)” after they heard their Chinese name had been called.

What does this mean to me? At first, I disliked this kind of routine because I thought it was teacher-centred and it reminded me of my old middle school days in mainland China. Teachers used this kind of routine to start most classes in each of the different subjects. In mainland China, the students usually showed their respect to their teachers by greeting them with the title “老师” (Lǎo shī). It literally means “old master”, which is a very respectful title to name someone who is older than you. In English, the students usually use “Mr. or Mrs.” to refer to their teacher. I did not feel as much respect being called “Mr” rather than being called “老师” (Lǎo shī) by the students. However, I realised that this was a teacher-centred view I was bringing a certain view with me from mainland China to Australia. I then thought about this issue from the Australian students’ perspective and the fact that they seldom had contact with Chinese culture. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 1, Term 4; 10 Oct. 2014)

Analysis/further reflection: The daily routines often had two purposes.

While observing the existing routine used by Mrs K it could be seen that most had several purposes. Mainly they were for safety, to quieten the children’s behaviour but each had an additional purpose. The bowing custom caught the children’s attention and allowed them to be physically active to respond but it also was teaching the students a basic Chinese cultural process and respect for others.
Calling the roll was an administration task for Mrs. K as she needed to record who was in class each day. However rather than use their English name, using a Chinese name meant the students needed to listen very carefully and therefore they tended not to talk in case they missed their name. This was a good way to calm the class and have then already listening so the lesson could then start.

6.3.2 Secondary students-Routine designed to end a lesson

At the end of a Chinese lesson in secondary school, the students usually fidgeted and started chatting with each other. Sometimes they even started packing up their backpacks without following their teachers' instructions. Before finishing the Chinese class, the Chinese teacher used some routines to have a quick check of the effectiveness of lesson. After observing Mrs K’s approach to ending her lessons the teacher-researcher devised to continue her style for consistency in behaviour management. Below is an excerpt from the teacher-researcher’s journal recording how the end of the lesson wind up can distract the students from their inattentive behaviour.

When the lesson was to finish in five minutes, I invited every student to tell three knowledge points that they learned in this lesson. I walked around the classroom rather than standing at the front to ask whether they had some questions about today’s class. When all the questions were discussed and answered I stood in the front of the classroom again to get everyone’s attention.

After a while, the students’ voices/talking gradually faded down. I then reviewed the most important three points of the lesson. “1. Four styles of regional cooking in mainland China. 2. The specialties of each one. 3. The differences between Chinese foods in Australia and mainland China.” By asking the students randomly for their answers, they were able to share their learning about Chinese foods before the class and after today’s class. As I followed Mrs K’s routine to end the lesson I asked the students to stand up behind their chairs and bowed to them saying in Chinese “同学们再见! (Tóng xué men zài jiàn!) [Goodbye students!]."
After I finished, most students bowed back with “老师再见!(Lǎo shī zài jiàn!)” [Goodbye teacher.]” (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 1, Term 4; 10 Oct. 2014)

Analysis/further reflection: Mimicking the classroom routines and management practices of the classroom teacher was a useful starting point

For the teacher-researcher (a beginning teacher in the Australian context) it was a useful strategy to mimic Mrs K’s classroom routine so that the children were not shocked by a different approach, and it also gave the teacher-researcher confidence to be able to use these approaches to keep the students’ attention which has more chance to avoid the students’ inattention that can result in misbehaviour.

Apart from the beginning and the end of the lessons there were some observed strategies to gain the children’s attention that the teacher-researcher picked up and continued to use. These were:

- walking around the students/classroom to be ‘with’ the students (more student-centred) rather than always at the front of the class
- rather than stopping the students’ discussion promptly, or raising a loud voice a more appropriate strategy to gain the effect was to have both hands placed in front and drop them up and down
- waiting for children to stop talking by standing at the front of the classroom and look at the clock occasionally until the noise fades away.

6.3.3 Primary students-Greeting routine

Compared with the secondary school teenagers, it was easier to gain the primary school children’s attention. Most of them were willing to follow the teacher’s instructions and participated well in the Chinese lessons. The strategy of observing the classroom teacher’s routines and strategies for behaviour management was again used by the teacher-researcher in the primary school. The following excerpt outlines the routine used by the teacher Mrs P and adapted by the teacher-researcher.

In today’s observation class, the primary students were asked to follow their Chinese teacher (Mrs. P) to their classroom. Mrs. P walked into the
classroom with her students and stood in the front of the classroom. She asked all the students to sit on the ground. Then she greeted her students with the Chinese greeting “你们好！（Nǐ men hǎo!）[Hello, you guys!]”. All the students replied with “老师好！（Lǎo shī hǎo!）[Hello teacher!]” Mrs. P then asked her students “你好吗？（Nǐ hǎo ma?）[How are you?]” The students all answered with “我很好。（Wǒ hěn hǎo.）[I’m fine.]”. Some of the boys replied with very excited and loud voices. After this routine, the Chinese lesson began. The students were cheered up after this routine and they started wondering what Mrs. P would do next. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 1, Term 4; 8 Oct. 2014)

Compared with the routine in secondary school, the primary school Chinese teacher, Mrs. P, did not enforce a very strict routine for the students to follow. She practiced daily an informal greeting with her pupils at the start of her Chinese lessons to gather the students’ attention. Through these greetings, she showed her care for her students, allowing the students to have some simple interactions with their teacher during the start routine.

After the teacher-researcher started teaching the Chinese lessons, the same pattern of routine as Mrs. P used in her Chinese classes was applied. The students’ behaviours were usually as good as anticipated.

6.3.4 Difference of the rules/behaviour management design for primary and secondary schools

To suit the different age groups of the secondary and primary students, the starting routines were designed differently. The secondary school students were more mature than the primary students. Their Chinese abilities were capable of a higher level of formal Chinese greetings and could be introduced to a more formal way to show the teacher their respect. As the secondary students are going to be adults in the near future, they needed to practice their polite manners in society. By adopting this
routine, the students could be reminded of the importance and normality of respecting their teacher and older persons.

The primary school students were not mature enough to understand the cultural meaning embedded in the high school routines. What they needed was more opportunities to practice their spoken Chinese and the encouragement to say the common greetings to Chinese people and teachers. The primary school routine was therefore focused on the practical daily usage and clear pronunciation.

6.4 Timing and Pacing

After the initial observation phase the teacher-researcher planned and taught a series of lessons with both the primary and secondary students. The teacher-researcher appreciated feedback from the classroom teacher. In relation to timing and pacing of lessons the feedback created some concerns.

The advice given was that the teacher-researcher needed to push the pace to keep to the planned lesson. This made the teacher-researcher consider the following questions: What does this mean in terms of student-centred management? Should the teacher adjust the pace to the students’ responses during the lesson? Is it against student-centred teaching if the teacher pushed the pace of the students’ learning to cover all the planned content? Are the students the key factor that decide the teaching and learning pace? There are no definitive answers for these questions. However, the teacher-researcher questioned rigidly keeping to a lesson plan if the students could not understand as quickly as some other students. If the students cannot understand what is being taught, they often ‘turn off’. Those students that do understand have to wait until all the students are ready to proceed. This was a dilemma.

Although students are the centre of the class, the teacher should be gauging the timing and pacing of the lesson while considering the needs of the slower learners. An important element of a successful Chinese class would be the appropriate pace, particularly with groups of low-achieving students who are less able to cope with the Chinese communication skills compared with their Chinese counterparts in mainland China.
Pacing is important to keep the children’s attention, so as to avoid challenging behaviours. If the pacing of the class is lagging, then the students easily become bored and resort to undesirable behaviours such as eating snacks, drinking water, leaving to go to the toilet without permission, playing computer games, chewing gum, chatting with their desk mates and so on.

A student-centred approach to teaching Chinese in Australian schools tries to give the students lots of fun activities, such as playing games and watching videos. They also need the chance to continue with their questions when they are very interested in a topic and spend more time developing and extending new ideas or concepts about Chinese. This is sometimes a reason why the pace of the lesson slows down in comparison to what is planned.

On the opposite side of this argument, the very able students finish their work quickly and if they are constantly waiting for the teacher to continue. Again this can cause boredom and possibly misbehaviour. The following excerpt recorded the teacher-researcher’s reflections on this issue.

At the start of my Chinese lessons in term one, I was usually waiting on every student so as to help them follow up the Chinese lesson. But later on, I found that it was impossible to engage every student in the limited lesson time. Some students were quicker learners than the others. If the waiting time was too long, they would not concentrate anymore and would start chatting or playing with their laptops. So I paid attention to the majority of the students and continued my class as long as about 60% of the students understood. This strategy posed a little pressure to those slower learners and encouraged them to keep up. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 9, Term 1; 24 Mar. 2015)

Analysis/further reflection: Keep adjusting the pace

The teacher-researcher’s beginning understandings of “student-centred” led to an approach that considered every child needed to be considered at every teaching point. This resulted in a long waiting time for the quicker learners who became bored and distracted.
Another reason that caused the pacing of the Chinese classes to lag was the teacher-researcher’s spoken English ability. The spoken English of the teacher-researcher was not very good when first arriving in Australia. He paused a lot of times during his Chinese classes as he needed extra time to organize the next instruction as the thinking was in Chinese and needed to be translated into English. Although the teacher-researcher always made a detailed lesson plan before each Chinese lesson and practiced the lesson beforehand there was still a feeling of nervousness about making too many mistakes when standing in the real classroom. By the second term, the coherence and fluency of instructions and answers to the students’ questions had improved. He was more confident to handle his Chinese lessons and the situation of lagging pace and misunderstandings by the students was also reduced. The students’ misbehaviour also decreased after they could understand most of the teacher-researcher’s instructions and managements.

\section*{6.5 Student-centred behaviour management}

Different students have different characteristics. As a result, many reasons could lead to the students’ misbehaviour, such as some personal special needs or exhibiting low respect to the teacher or just seeking attention from the teacher and classmates. Even worse, these unacceptable behaviours could lead them to become more problematic as they lagged behind other students relative to Chinese achievement.

Certain grade levels (i.e., middle school students and primary school students) were the participants in this study because the teacher-researcher taught Chinese as a volunteer in one high school and one primary school. Based on the observations of the two classroom teachers using different misbehaviour management styles to deal with students in different situations the following sections discuss some of the strategies the teacher-researcher has adapted in his own practice.

\subsection*{6.5.1 Secondary school students’ behaviour management}

Students come from different home environments where they may not be receiving sufficient support to develop the social skills to cooperate with the teachers and other students in school. In addition, exposed to an increasingly violent and unpredictable society, the students’ stress level can sometimes be left very high. Humor can be a
powerful and effective way to respond to misbehaviour, especially with older students, such as high school teenagers.

Use more than one way to calm down the students, instead of just using “Stop! Be quiet! Shut up! No chatting!” and similar strong phrases all the time during the class, make a joke-like way to deal with naughty students when their misbehaviour occurs. “Do I have to be angry?” “Come on, don’t make me mad.” “You know the right behaviour.” (From teacher-researcher’s reflection journals; week 3, Term 1; 12 Feb 2015)

Earning respect from students is also not easy for a beginner Chinese teacher. The classroom can easily get disruptive and noisy during the teaching process because the students lose respect for the teacher-researcher. Always yelling at the students may cause some rebellious behaviours from the students. The teacher-researcher needed to vary the volume during teaching. The goal is to help students learn the difference between having an obedience orientation and a responsibility orientation.

The management model should depend on the age of students. The teacher-researcher was teaching two levels of students in two different schools. The variation of the management model is essential to the success of classroom teaching.

The class was good at the beginning, but after I called the roll the students were getting noisy. I clapped my hands to remind them to pay attention to me again, but it seemed that some of the students did not care about me. I should be more serious next time. Maybe the claps were too childish for these secondary school students. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals, week 2, Term 1; 3 Feb 2015)

Analysis/further reflection: The management strategy must suit the age

The secondary school students did not show enough respect to the Chinese teacher. To get their attention, clapping hands was not appropriate. It usually worked for the students of a younger age, such as primary students before Year 5. The next time dealing with similar misbehaviours, the teacher-researcher could try to raise his voice or walk closer to the noisy students to calm down the class in a shorter time.
An obedience model of management (typical for teacher-centred educators) is an approach to classroom management in which teachers demand students to follow rules and obey authority through the use of reward and punishment. A responsibility model of management (typical for student-centred educators) is an approach in which teachers let students make responsible choices by explaining reasons for rules and applying logical consequences for misbehaviours. (Kauchak & Eggen, 2005 cited in Kerdkoshvili, 2013)

In today’s class, a student sitting at the back of the classroom kept chatting with his desk mate during the class. I waited until he stopped talking, which he did. But after five minutes or so, he started this misbehaviour again with a disrespectful expression.

I should have been tougher to earn the respect of the student who didn’t behave well, instead of just letting the student to stop the misbehaviour again. Some measurement should be taken to let the student realise the consequence of their misbehaviours.

For example, let him tell me his misbehaviour first and then arrange him to sit in the front of the classroom so as to keep an eye on him and to prevent him from interrupting the preplanned teaching process again. (From teacher-researcher’s reflection journals; week 4, Term 1; 17 Feb 2015)

_Repeated misbehaviour needs a varied approach_

Using student-centred classroom management does not mean that the teacher should not use some measures to let the misbehaving students become aware of their misbehaviour. The teacher should not use punishment especially physical. In mainland China, for example, if a Chinese secondary student misbehaved in this way, a Chinese teacher might send the challenging students out of the class, sometimes even with slight physical punishments to ensure the student would not disobey the rules that the teacher made. But in Australia, these kinds of teacher-centred management practices are seldom seen and are illegal to apply. The teacher-researcher was trying to get the challenging student to understand their misbehaviour by changing the position of the student in the classroom and prevent similar
misbehaviour again. But usually this kind of management would not work well after
the student went back to their original seat again.

6.5.2 Primary school students’ misbehaviour prevention

The primary school students’ common misbehaviours included chatting while the
teacher is talking, posing unrelated questions to the teacher and moving around
without the teacher’s permission.

The primary school students were easily thirsty, tired and distracted after
lunch. I did a lot more helping with their study especially during the open
questions about comparing the ways of treating aged citizens in Chinese
culture and Australian Aboriginal culture. The students were settled into
7 groups and each group had a team leader and a recorder elected by
themselves. The students were asked to freely share their ideas and write
them down for later whole class discussion. I walked around the
classroom to encourage them stay on track and gave them advice when
necessary. Some students asked to leave the classroom to go to the toilet
during this time. I only gave them the permission when they could find a
same gender buddy to accompany them. (From teacher-researcher’s
reflection journals; week 4, Term 1; 17 Feb 2015)

Analysis/further reflection: For younger children later in the day may pose a
problem. Keeping them motivated and responding to their physical needs may avoid
bad behaviour.

The status of students was carefully considered by the teacher-researcher, and as such
he needed to readjust his lesson plan to match the condition of his students. When the
students seemed uninterested in the learning process any more, he can came up with
some activities to encourage their participation in the lesson. When the students
needed to go to the toilet, for their safety and security, a buddy was needed to make
sure they really went to the toilet and nothing went wrong.
6.6 Listen carefully to students’ feedback

It is essential to give frequent positive feedback any time the students demonstrate success or growth with the preferred behaviour. As long as the students demonstrated a desire of learning Chinese or were asking reasonable questions about Chinese culture, the teacher should not hesitate to give them positive verbal feedback or little rewards to encourage them.

A strategy the teacher-researcher adapted was that it is possible to avoid bad behaviour by being positive and open to students’ ideas and showing the students respect. For example, Australia is a multicultural country, people around the world come to Australia for study and work. Therefore, the teacher-researcher needs to learn about different religions so as to not offend anyone in his class. The teacher-researcher learned about and respected all his students from different backgrounds. The students also respected the teacher-researcher and Chinese culture. So misbehaviours would reduce after this.

After watching a video of a Chinese song, one of the students said that she had seen a similar C-pop song before named “History”. But because of the noise in the classroom, I didn’t hear her comment until the classroom teacher told me that after class.

It is my homework to figure out whether this song could be useful as a Chinese learning material. This is a good example of the process of “教学相长” (teaching and learning can improve altogether). So I should listen more carefully to the students’ reply and encourage them to express more of their own ideas from the next class. (From teacher-researcher’s reflection journals; week 4, Term 1; 20 Feb. 2015)

Analysis/further reflection: Using praise and rewards for the students who are participating well can help to avoid misbehaviour.

Student’s feedback shows their understanding and feelings about the effectiveness of the Chinese learning materials and lesson. But if the classroom was too noisy and the teacher-researcher could not clearly hear or understand student’s feedback, it could
mean a lost opportunity for making improvements to future lessons and for keeping a good relationship with the students. It is essential to have five minutes of relatively quiet time for students to offer their ideas and comments for every lesson. Once their feedback was valuable on certain aspects of Chinese teaching, the teacher-researcher immediately gave them verbal praise or even little rewards (such as fortune cookies) for their creative and constructive ideas.

Another example of how the teacher-researcher listened to the students’ feedback was when the students had previously participated in a similar lesson.

While I was teaching the dialogue of bargaining in Chinese, the students told me that they already learned the same content from other Chinese teacher. So instead of keeping my class to the prepared lesson plan about shopping and bargaining in Chinese, I immediately came up with an activity that used their math ability to add up Chinese notes to figure out the total payment. (From teacher-researcher’s reflection journals; week 2, Term 2; 28 Apr. 2015)

*Analysis/further reflection: Be prepared to change the lesson plan if the students already know the content. This will avoid boredom.*

The students’ feedback gave the teacher-researcher a challenge to act according to the real circumstances. He used an activity to extend the content of the previous lesson to include the mathematical aspects of the topic-shopping and bargaining

Fortunately, this only happened once during the three terms. Since then, the teacher-researcher asked the Chinese teachers beforehand and then prepared new lessons in order to avoid this kind of awkward situation from happening again in future classes.

### 6.7 Student-centred relationships between teacher and students

The teacher’s role should be like a guide when it comes to the relationship with students. Looking at teaching practice and the teacher’s actions from the students’ perspective will assist with behaviour management.
6.7.1 Allowing the students to move

Things like giving students an opportunity to move and stretch after sitting for a long time was a useful strategy. If the students had been sitting on the floor for a long time without stretching their bodies, the teacher-researcher organised some physical movement, such as five minutes of movements from Tai Chi and Kong Fu. After this movement, the students became focused again just like being recharged. Some misbehaviour due to tiredness such as yawning and sleeping in the classroom, were also prevented this way.

6.7.2 Unclear instructions can affect the relationship

The teacher-researcher is a second language speaker in English and this fact sometimes caused some problems when giving the students clear instructions, as his pronunciation and accents caused some misunderstanding of some English words.

In the lesson today I said “Well done!” The word “well” sounded like “whale”. Therefore this phrase sounded like “Whale done!” and the students laughed hysterically. Some of them repeated the “whale done” with a very loud volume of voice and strange accents up to three times and some even more. My pronunciation mistake caused a lot of misbehaviour in this lesson. After I improved my oral English skills, in the second term this kind of misbehaviour seldom appeared again. (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals; week 2, Term 1; 5 Feb. 2015)

Teachers, especially language teachers, must give the students clear instructions. Otherwise the students would not understand their responsibility in the classroom. They could make jokes about their teacher’s English mistakes, or even not respect their teacher anymore.

In Australia, if the Chinese teacher could not make his instructions understood by the students, the students tend to judge the teacher’s qualifications and ability to teach them Chinese. They may have thought their teacher’s Chinese skills might be at a similar level of their English skills.

Another example is that the students cannot understand my instructions for the “Do now” activity, because I didn’t make it clear enough. I said “I
need two volunteers, one to write down the mean of the words on the whiteboard, the other makes the means of the sentence acceptable.” I should have made my instruction clearer by saying, “Now I am going to challenge you on the whiteboard. This is a sentence where a word is in the wrong order. Firstly, who would like to come to the front and write the pinyin under each character? Secondly, who would like to come and rewrite the sentence in the correct order?” (From the teacher-researcher’s reflection journals; week 3, Term 1; 12 Feb. 2015)

There are obvious grammatical mistakes in the classroom instruction languages, “means” should be “meaning”. The instructions were not clear enough for the students to understand what action was required from them.

Through reflection, the teacher-researcher realised the two levels of problem in his instruction. The student-centred procedure required the teacher-researcher to explain the activity clearly. But he was struggling with his English expression, which hindered his classroom management. Although he was planning to let the students participate in the review activities, his instruction negatively influenced his student-centred classroom management.

**6.7.3 Friendliness (overfriendly can affect the relationship)**

It is important to maintain a comparatively friendly relationship with the students when it comes to student-centred teaching, but the teacher-researcher also found that if a teacher is over friendly with the students, this may cause some problems.

After the first few weeks, the students liked my Chinese classes and they were getting friendly with me. Not only greeting me in Chinese, sometimes they wanted more than verbal greetings.

Some boys wanted to do fist punches or high fives with me. I did not refuse them, because at first I thought these behaviours were just showing their friendliness. But later on I found that I should not do fist punches or high fives in the classroom with some boys anymore, because I felt that they seemed not to regard me as their teacher during the Chinese class. I would like to have a good relationship with them after
class, but they might misunderstand my friendly response as a signal that they could be impertinent during their Chinese lesson. I did not realise that physical touch might cause me troubles later, therefore from now on I would avoid these unnecessary physical contact with the students.
(From teacher-researcher’s reflection journals; week 2, Term 1; 5 Feb. 2015)

A student-centred relationship does not mean that there are no boundaries between students and the teacher. The friendship between teacher and students could exist after classes or during the break time. However, during the Chinese classes, the teacher-researcher needed to ensure the students were respectful, otherwise the classroom would be in disarray.

Having just the right degree of friendliness is important and can affect the behaviour management in the class as it can avoid bad behaviour. Some students told the teacher-researcher during their interview: “If Mrs. K could be as friendly as you, we might not do some naughty things during the Chinese lessons. We know she wants us to learn more about mainland China and Chinese, but she acted as a boss and pushed us to remember some knowledge that we do not want to.” (From semi-interview notes, week 9, Term 1; 24 Mar. 2015)

6.8 Conclusion

Although managing a classroom was a challenge with the skills and experience outlined above, the teacher-researcher improved during the course of this research project. During the first cycle, the teacher-researcher was not quite familiar with the Australian students’ inappropriate behaviour and how to management these successfully. Usually, the teacher-researcher depended on the two experienced classroom teachers to deal with any misbehaviour by the students. In the second cycle, the teacher-researcher was able to manage the Chinese classroom more often. This improvement was due to the fact that most reasons for the Australian students’ misbehaviours were taken into consideration while planning and preparing Chinese lessons. The teacher-researcher felt that having a clear and consistent classroom management plan with an understanding of how the students would behave from
their perspective, was crucial in the running and organisation of a Chinese classroom in order for all students to learn and succeed to the best of their ability.

The teacher-researcher used an action research methodology to improve the behaviour management of the teaching and learning process. First, observations were noted on how the classroom teachers managed the children in their class. The teacher-researcher then modelled some of these strategies to maintain the consistency of management for the students.

The major finding was that there are many student-centred management strategies that can be used to avoid misbehaviour before it starts.

Although utilising student-centred management was usually effective, it might not be viewed as the correct method to be used in all situations. As every student and every classroom is different, a method that works with one student or class may not work with another. So the Chinese teacher should come up with different strategies to deal with different situations. Having a series of strategies such as those discussed in this chapter has been useful for the teacher-researcher to improve classroom management in the future.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

7.0 The context and research questions revisited

This research was based on the teacher-researcher’s participation in the ROSETE program as a volunteer teacher of Chinese to students in three schools in WSR. Two of these schools have provided the data for this research. At the same time as the research was conducted in the schools the teacher-researcher was undertaking a Master of Education (Honours) study program through the University of Western Sydney. A main aim of the ROSETE program is to have a cohort of native Chinese speaking teacher-researchers to support students in WSR and at the same time develop and record via their theses, how to make Chinese more learnable for beginning learners in Australian schools. To this end, the teacher-researcher posed the following research question:

How can a bilingual volunteer teacher-researcher use action research to develop a student-centred teaching framework to make Chinese learnable to beginning learners in western Sydney schools?

In addition, the three contributory questions were:

1. How could a bilingual volunteer teacher-researcher select and prepare a series of student-centred content, learning materials and resources to design the lessons suitable for Australian students?

2. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher-researcher utilize a series of student-centred teaching strategies to make Chinese more learnable?
3. How can a bilingual volunteer teacher-researcher develop a series of classroom management practices to make the student-centred classroom more effective?

This research has provided evidence to answer these questions and the summary of the findings now follows.

7.1 Summary of the findings

7.1.1 Student-centred content, materials and resource selection

The summary of findings in this section relates to the evidence provided in Chapter 4. The teacher-researcher used an action research cycle throughout the project and the selection of content/materials and resources was part of the second step within the first phase, which is referred to as the Planning and Teaching step (see Chapter 3: Figure 3.2) (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2014).

After one term of observing the classroom teachers’ Chinese lessons, and after considering the literature reviewed on selecting appropriate content (Harwood, 2010; Liyanage and Bartlett, 2010), the teacher-researcher made significant efforts to change the approach to content selection from a teacher-centred approach previously used in mainland China where the content would be textbook based with the series of lessons to be strictly followed.

The teacher-researcher explored content, materials and resources selection, to support a series of Chinese language lessons. The following examples were proved successful when choosing the content to develop student-centred lessons (Lu, Hou and Huang, 2010):

- Content themes may be syllabus based, for example “My Family” was the set topic but the teacher-researcher was able to choose “greetings” and “pets” as topics that all children could relate to;
- Content and resources which links to popular cultural knowledge held the students’ attention. The lessons which used popular culture themes, with modern you-tube resources, were successful with the secondary students;
• Content and resource choice was found to be more effective for lesson planning if the students’ prior knowledge and cognitive abilities were considered, and the content linked to scaffolding subsequent lessons e.g. where the previous knowledge of counting to 100 could be used as a starting point to link to people’s ages.

For the primary school students, it was found that successful content and resource selection involved:

• Surveying the students to gauge their interests and using this as a basis to plan a series of lessons;
• Focusing on an upcoming real life event (i.e. a trip to mainland China) to guide content selection. This event was an excellent opportunity to select content to include information on the towns that would be visited, the most famous sights and foods of the regions.

7.1.2 Student-centred strategies

This section summarises the findings drawn from the evidence provided in Chapter 5 and in terms of the action research cycle, is the second part of the second step Planning and Teaching (Efron and Ravid, 2013; Fautley, 2013).

After the content had been selected with a student-centred perspective in mind, and supported by findings in the literature relating to student-centred pedagogy (Taylor, 2014; Attard, et al., 2010), the teacher-researcher was confident to implement these with the primary and secondary students (Preus and Cohen, 2011; Zohrabi, et al., 2012). The findings and conclusions based on self-reflections and teacher feedback were:

1. Aiming to reduce anxiety in CLT by scaffolding the lessons and being flexible to change the lesson plan if necessary i.e.
   • By more carefully considering the steps involved in a lesson or task, the teacher-researcher proposed scaffolding as a method to assist with the students’ learning efficiency (new knowledge based on previous knowledge and not continuing if the understanding has not been gained).
• Secondly, being flexible with the lesson plan was shown to assist the beginning learners to become less stressed. Whilst it is important to adhere to the lesson plan, sometimes this is not possible and depending on how the students are reacting/understanding, the plan may need to slow down or change. This should not be a cause of great concern for the teacher-researcher when working with beginning learners.

2. Applying the “会意法” (huiyi) strategy where the Australian students’ perspective is appreciated. The teacher-researcher learnt that providing what seemed to be an acceptable explanation to beginning learners was often not the case when their prior knowledge and cognitive levels were not taken into account. In addition, it was found that:
   • Questioning throughout the lesson was important for the teacher-researcher to gauge the understanding of the children
   • Evaluating and reflection g on lessons that specifically tried to link content to the children’s general knowledge and cognitive level and their existing visual and auditory knowledge, helped the teacher-researcher to improve future teaching strategies
   • Incorporating children’s answers into future lessons was a successful strategy to improve the following lessons.

3. Teaching Chinese grammar patterns to young beginning learners did not work well. The teacher-researcher realised this difficulty and would propose not to use this strategy in the future. The children responded to explanations that related to popular culture more readily than formal, more traditional teaching methods.

4. Peer mentoring was a useful strategy as it allowed the students to take on the role of the teacher-researcher and share their personal Chinese learning experiences with the rest of the class. The teacher-researcher also became aware that student-centred activities can be more time consuming than teacher-centred methods and this needs to be factored into future planning.
5. The teacher-researcher promoted the add-on of games as a very successful student-centred strategy to keep the children active and interested. Successful games were those that were competitive and which involved the children physical moving. The teacher-researcher would also alert readers to the dangers if children push or rush, and that often student-centred activities can be noisy activities and therefore the location for the games needs to be considered so as not to disturb nearby classes.

7.1.3 Behaviour management

The evidence-base for the findings in this section has been outlined in Chapter 6. For the teacher-researcher who had come from the teacher-centred educational system in mainland China, managing the Australian students’ misbehaviours in the Chinese learning classroom was a challenge on many occasions (De Nobile, London and El Baba, 2015).

To address this, the teacher-researcher used the action research methodology to improve the behaviour management of the teaching and learning process. First, observations were noted on how the classroom teachers managed the children in their class. The teacher-researcher then modelled some of these strategies to maintain the consistency of management for the students. In addition, the literature provided some suggestions (Sida-Nicholls, 2012; Beadle, 2013; Jarman, 2015) and these were also used. These included:

- Establish an interesting Chinese learning environment in the classroom so children are not bored
- Setting up the daily rules and routines so all students are aware of these
- Avoid misbehaviour before it starts
  - Adjust the lesson pace so students keep up with the content
  - Allow students to move throughout the lesson
  - Give clear instructions
  - Establish a friendly relationship with the students
- Do not escalate low level misbehaviours by utilising humour to diffuse the situation
Although utilising student-centred management was usually effective, it might not be viewed as the correct method to be used in all situations (in some situations the classroom teacher would isolate the student or remove them from the classroom for continuing misbehaviour). Having a series of strategies such as those summarised above, and fully discussed in Chapter 6, has been useful for the teacher-researcher to improve classroom management in the future.

7.2 Limitations

7.2.1 Sample Size

The teacher-researcher gathered data from a total of 43 participants as part of the evidence presented from the Chinese lessons through self-reflections. From this participant group of 43, 13 students also participated in a semi-structured interview. This sample size could be considered small and a limitation to the research findings. However, as no generalisations have been claimed, the sample size did suit this research which aimed to use action research to improve the teacher-researcher’s teaching of Chinese to students in WSR.

If a larger sample size was needed, The ROSETE program would need to assign more schools to the volunteer Chinese teacher-researchers and this would impact greatly on the time allocation for the program.

7.2.2 Time

During the eighteen months of the ROSETE program, including the research training and the teaching and research time in WSR schools, the teacher-researcher was allocated one visit to each school each week. During the one visit at each school, the teacher-researcher would be assigned to teach two lessons. If a limitation of this study is the sample size and the amount of data collected, then this could be overcome if the time allocation at the schools was increased or if the number of lessons per visit was increased. However, the teacher-researcher does not regard this as a limitation. The amount of data was sufficient to analyze and allow the action research cycle to be followed to improve lessons in the future.
7.2.3 Lack of directly related literature

The amount of directly related, available literature on teaching Chinese using a student-centred approach with students in Australia is a limitation.

There are some articles and books on teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, but very limited literature on the field of teaching Chinese by using student-centred methods. Also limited was literature about student-centred Chinese teaching in Australia. The teacher-researcher read most of the references about English teaching and drew conclusions to adapt to Chinese teaching. This, and the theses of previous students in the ROSETE program will assist in providing more research and literature to fill this gap.

7.3 Implications and recommendations

7.3.1 Increase student numbers CLL

On a very small scale, an implication of this research (and only from the teacher-researcher’s own experience) was that the students at the WSR schools spoke about wanting to learn more about Chinese language and culture after the volunteer teacher responsibilities were finished. It is recommended that more students have the opportunity to learn basic Chinese language at a young age through pedagogies such as student-centred approaches. If students enjoy learning and have success, they might choose to continue their study in the future.

7.3.2 Student-centred – one method to make Chinese learnable

It is recommended that in future research to make Chinese learnable for beginning learners, other strategies apart from student-centred method could also be used. For example, using:

- Chinese songs to teach Chinese words (because of the tonal qualities of Chinese)
- task-oriented teaching methods to teach Chinese in certain situations, and
- computer technology to develop some Chinese learning software and computer games
These could all be used as part of, or in addition to, a student-centred approach to attract more students’ interests in successfully learning Chinese.

7.3.3 ROSETE program – cooperation amongst volunteers

A recommendation is that the volunteers in the ROSETE program could cooperate more with each other and exchange teaching experiences and materials. Discussing the problems informally with ROSETE colleagues was very helpful in the teacher-researcher’s content preparation processes and reviewing CLT. The recommendation is that formal meetings could be organised whereby the sharing of teaching materials and experiences, would provide support and save time.

7.4 A final self-reflection: the teacher-researcher’s improvements

7.4.1 English ability

Before the teacher-researcher came to Australia, his International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score was 6.5 overall (October, 2013). After the eighteen months of teaching in the WSR schools and participating in the ROSETE program this score has improved to 7.5 (on a mock IELTS test in February 2016).

Especially, the improvement in spoken English has greatly improved so that conversations with native English speakers (colleagues, friends and school students) can be undertaken with confidence. At the start of the teaching assignment in Australia, expression was sometimes unclear because of accent and pronunciation, both of which confused the school students. For example, in the first term of the teacher-researcher’s Chinese lessons, a mispronunciation of “well” into “whale” caused a bit of chaos as the students continued to laugh for quite some time during that lesson. As the teaching assignment and study continued, this kind of English mistake was reduced with English listening and speaking skills improving the most.

7.4.2 Teaching ability and experience

The teacher-researcher gained very precious pieces of teaching experiences in the three schools in WSR. First hand teaching data were collected from the student-centred Chinese lessons, developed and taught. At the same time, the true working conditions of a Chinese teacher in a secondary school and two primary schools was
experienced and this included having a clearer idea of the Chinese teacher’s qualifications and experiences and to consider these as a future career option. The ROSETE program has provided a great deal of pedagogical experiences and strategies to conduct successful Chinese lessons - to make Chinese more learnable for Australian students.

Prior to joining the ROSETE program, the teacher-researcher had gained a certificate to teach Chinese as a foreign language to non-native speakers. However actual teaching experience was limited, and none was with teenagers and young children as most foreigners in mainland China are adults. The opportunities provided through the ROSETE program have been treasured as a precious opportunity to gain first-hand experience in teaching Chinese with children and teenagers.

Another important finding for the teacher-researcher was his learning about being a professional teacher, to be confident and hence gain the students’ respect. It was a simple but important lesson. At the beginning of the term of teaching Chinese, the teacher-researcher had just graduated from the Ningbo University as an English major student and continued to wear the college uniform when at UWS and at the WSR schools. This continued for one term after which one of the Chinese classroom teacher’s suggested to change this and to dress formally as a professional Chinese teacher. The importance of how a teacher should dress had not been considered previously but the teacher-researcher found this to have an impact on the students and the school community and even personally.

7.4.3 Research skills

Before conducting this research project, the teacher-researcher thought that it would be an impossible task for a non-native English speaker to write an academic 40,000-word thesis in a second language. Being part of the ROSETE program has created opportunities to learn and improve the skills of conducting research, academic writing as well as patience and carefulness.

Being a novice researcher, the teacher-researcher was daunted by the thought that writing this thesis. Reading academic papers written in English was difficult and time consuming and at times there were feelings of confusion and depression. However as time went by the papers and materials became easier to read and the
ideas of other scholars’ academic works on teaching English and other languages and classroom management began to take shape in the Chinese lessons taught.

The ROSETE program also changed the teacher-researcher’s personal characteristics. The development of patience and concentration occurred as the program continued. Longer reading and writing sessions have added to the personal growth of the teacher-researcher and now at the end of this research and thesis writing journey, the final self-reflection is to recommend this program as a difficult but life changing experience.
REFERENCES


Dockrell, J.E., Lindsay, G., & Connelly, V. (2009). The impact of specific language impairment on adolescents’ written text. Exceptional Children, 75, 427-46.


APPENDICES
Appendix 1: UWS Human Ethics Approval

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

0 March 2015

Doctor Jinghe Han
School of Education

Dear Jinghe,

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal H10923 "An exploration of student-centred teaching in Sydney schools: A Bilingual teacher action research project", until 31 March 2018 with the provision of a progress report annually or over 12 months and a final report on completion.

Conditions of Approval

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

2. A final report will be due at the expiration of the approval period.

3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to being implemented. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form: http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/461351/HREC_Amendment_Request_Form.pdf

4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Ethics Committee via the Human Ethics Officer 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:

Jinghe Han, Michael Singh, Karen Li

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Professor Elizabeth Deane
Presiding Member,
Human Researcher Ethics Committee
Appendix 2: SERAP Approval Letter

Mr Keren Li
3 French Street
KINGSWOOD NSW 2747

Dear Mr Li

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled An Exploration of Student-Centered Approach to Making Chinese Learnable to Beginning Learners in Australian Schools: A Bilingual Teacher Action Research Project. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved.

You may contact principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to principals.

This approval will remain valid until 31-Mar-2016.

The following researchers or research assistants have fulfilled the Working with Children screening requirements to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research for the period indicated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher name</th>
<th>WWCC</th>
<th>WWCC expires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keren Li</td>
<td>WWCG21646662E</td>
<td>18-Mar-2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

- The privacy of participants is to be protected as per the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.
- School principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the principal for the specific method of gathering information must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school’s convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the research approvals officer before publication proceeds.
- All conditions attached to the approval must be complied with.

When your study is completed please email your report to: serap@det.nsw.edu.au
You may also be asked to present on the findings of your research.

I wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Robert Stevens
Manager, Quality Assurance/Research
12 June 2015

Policy, Planning and Reporting Directorate
NSW Department of Education and Communities
Level 1, 1 Oxford Street, Darlington NSW 2010 – Locked Bag 53, Darlington NSW 1360
Telephone: 02 9214 5560 – Email: serapinfo@det.nsw.edu.au
Appendix 3: Letter to Principals

Dear Principal,

My name is Keren Li. I am a Higher Degree Research student at the University of Western Sydney. I hereby cordially ask for your permission to conduct my research project in your school.

As one of the eight Ningbo volunteers in 2014, I am currently working on a research project entitled ‘An Exploration of Student-centred Approach to Making Chinese Learnable to Beginning Learners in Australian Schools.

This research project will focus on exploring student-centred methods to help Australian students learn Chinese. I am investigating what teaching content and topics are suitable for primary students, what teaching strategies are suitable for classroom engagement, and what kinds of classroom management can help students’ learning.

In order to address these three aspects, I will gather feedback from the classroom teachers and the students in my Chinese lessons. I would hold a 45-minute interview with the classroom teachers at their convenience. The students’ participation in this project through providing feedback sheet at the end of the semester will help me improve my teaching in the three aspects so as to benefit them as the learners.

The classroom teachers and students’ participation are totally voluntary in this research. They can withdraw from this project at any stage without any penalty. If a student or a teacher chooses to withdraw, the data from him/her will be withdrawn at that stage.

This letter is to ask your permission to access these potential participants.

This research has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The approval protocol number is “H10923”. If you have any complains or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the office of Research Service on Tel 02-4736 0083 Fax 02-4736 0013 or Email humanethics@uws.edu.au. If you would like to know more about the project, please feel free to contact me at Tel: +61 0450355805 or via email: 18143267@student.uws.edu.au or my supervisor on j.han@uws.edu.au

Kind regards

Keren Li
Appendix 4: Information Sheet (Parents/Caregivers)

**Project title:** An Exploration of Student-Centred Approach to Making Chinese Learnable to Beginning Learners in Australian Schools: A Bilingual Teacher Action Research Project

**Who is carrying out the study?**

A High Degree Research student: Keren Li

Your child is invited to participate in a study conducted by Keren Li, research candidate, Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney, and will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Hons) under the supervision of Dr. Jinghe Han and Prof. Michael Sigh.

**What is the study about?**

The main purpose of this study is through action research to develop a student-centred teaching framework to make Chinese learnable to beginning learners in western Sydney schools.

**What does the study involve?**

If you give your written consent for your children to be involved in this project, he/she will participate in the research project as a beginning Chinese learner in the weekly Chinese lessons.

During the class, your children may be asked to answer some questions about his/her interest of Chinese, and give some oral and written feedbacks about the Chinese lessons.

To do this research, I would also like to collect some information during your children’s learning process, such as classroom notes and Chinese handwritings as evidence. By analyzing these data, I will design more suitable lesson plans to your children. The content and materials will chosen from their interest, and will also based on the K-12 Mandarin syllabus provided by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training.

**How to make the data safe?**

All the data will be collected during the weekly Chinese classes on Tuesday or Wednesday between 9am to 4pm. Once collected, the data will be stored in a locked drawer or password assessed computer in the researcher’s office for 5 years, then they will be totally destroyed. The researcher and his supervisors who have the right to deal with the data, can only access the data in accordance with ethical guidelines. The data will kept anonymous when analyzed and incorporated into my thesis and related publications. If you have concerns about what has been recorded, you may access recordings of your child within the period of storage by contacting me personally or the classroom teacher.
Will the study benefit me?

This research project will analyze the process of using student-centred pedagogy in Chinese learning, to make Australian students in western Sydney a better understanding of Chinese language and culture. It may not have direct benefit to you, but it maybe good to enlarge your children’s knowledge and language ability. Let them have a cross-cultural communication experience to prepare for the multicultural environment in Australia.

Will the study have any discomforts?

This study would not cause your children any discomfort as a part of their weekly Chinese learning.

How is the study paid for?

As a volunteer Chinese teacher, the researcher is not directly paid by any agency.

Will any one else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?

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

What if I have a concern?

You can talk with me, or the classroom teacher or the school principal. If you require more information, I would like to discuss it with you further and answer any question about this research. My phone number is 0450355805. If you would like to contact my supervisor, Dr. Jinghe Han, you can also send email to her. Her email address is: j.han@uws.edu.au.

Can I withdraw my child from the study?

Yes. You have the right to withdraw your child from the research project at any time. If your child is not comfort in the research, you can withdraw your child any time you want. All the data gathered from your child. Your child’s Chinese learning will not be affected at all.

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaint or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Service on Tel 02-4736 0883 or email hunamethics@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 your child to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Appendix 5: Information Sheet/Dialogue Sheet (Students)

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

Project title: An Exploration of Student-Centred Approach to Making Chinese Learnable to Beginning Learners in Australian Schools: A Bilingual Teacher Action Research Project

Who is carrying out the study? Mr. Li

What is the study about?

This study is to find out how to use student-centred methods to help you learning Mandarin through weekly Chinese classes. My aim is to find the most suitable and useful materials to help you have a better knowledge of Chinese language and culture.

What does the study involve?

To do this research, I would like to collect some feedbacks from you. During each Chinese lesson, I would ask you some questions now and then. In some classes, I will hand out some informal feedbacks to you before our class, and gather them back after class. Some of the feedbacks will give me ideas to make the next Chinese lesson plan. I would also like to copy some parts of your school works and notes, and I would like to listen to your advice of improving my Chinese lessons. You need to do a questionnaire survey at the end of this term for about 30 minutes.

How long will the study take?

The Chinese classes will be once a week about 40 minutes to the two Y-4 classes, once a week about an hour to the Y-5 and Y-6 students. The questions and feedbacks can be conduct stimulus with the Chinese class process, less than 10 minutes each time. Totally, the research will be conducted in the two following terms.

Will the study benefit me?

This research is a win-win situation to both you and me, as I will gradually trying to find a more suitable way for you to learn Chinese from your aspects and interest.

Will the study have any discomforts?

This study will not cause you any discomfort as part of our weekly Chinese class. If you are not comfort in the research, you can withdraw any time you want. It would not have bad affects to you.

How is the study paid for?

As a volunteer Chinese teacher, the researcher is not paid by any agency.
Will any one else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?

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

What if I have a concern?

You can talk with me, your classroom teacher or the school principal.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Yes. You have the right to withdraw from the research project at any time. Your Chinese learning will not be affected at all.

Do you have any questions you would like to ask now before we begin?
Appendix 6: Semi-structured Interview Questions (Secondary Students)

1) What does student-centered mean to you? Do you think Mr. Li used this strategy quite often in your Chinese lessons?

2) What content did you think was the most interesting in the Chinese classes? Why do you think so? What content did you find boring during this term? Why do you think so?

3) Do you think your interest in learning Chinese has been influenced by learning the materials that I prepared that were based on your perspectives? Were there any classes that you found you were enthusiastic about? Which ones?

4) Do you think you can learn new Chinese knowledge easier and quicker if we used your previous knowledge? Do you think it is beneficial to your future career and life to learn Chinese and Chinese culture?

5) What do you think were the benefits of having games and activities in the Chinese lessons? What are the disadvantages of games and activities in Chinese lessons?

6) What are your suggestions for our Chinese language classes next term if we were to match the lessons with your interests?

7) Some of your classmates seemed to be more interested in learning Chinese than other students. How can I gain more attention from those who are less interested in the Chinese lessons?

8) Do you think my teaching instructions have already improved from the start of this term to the end of the term?

9) What other suggestions would you like to offer to improve my Chinese lessons for next term?
Appendix 7: Participant Consent Form (For Students)

Participant Consent Form (For Students)

Project Title:
An Exploration of Student-Centred Approach to Making Chinese Learnable to Beginning Learners in Australian Schools: A Bilingual Teacher Action Research Project

I, ...................................................., consent to participate in the research project titled: An Exploration of Student-Centred Approach to Making Chinese Learnable to Beginning Learners in Australian Schools: A Bilingual Teacher Action Research Project

I acknowledge that:

I have read Mr. Li’s information sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with Mr. Li.
The procedures required for the project and the time involved has been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.
I consent to the use of the feedbacks and questionnaires I complete in Mr. Li’s Chinese lesson for his research purposes.
I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.
I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time, without affecting my relationship with Mr. Li now or in the future.

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

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

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

Return Address: Keren Li, French Street 3rd, Kingswood, NSW 2747, Australia
Or via Email: 18143267@student.uws.edu.au |

This study will be submitted to the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee for approval.
The Approval Number is: H10923

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 8: Participant Consent Form (For Parents/Caregivers)

Project Title: An Exploration of Student-Centred Approach to Making Chinese Learnable to Beginning Learners in Australian Schools: A Bilingual Teacher Action Research Project

I, ………………………………, give consent to my child……………………………… to participate in the research project titled: An Exploration of Student-Centred Approach to Making Chinese Learnable to Beginning Learners in Australian Schools: A Bilingual Teacher Action Research Project

I acknowledge that:

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

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

I have agreed my children’s participation after discussed with my children.

I understand that my children’s involvements are confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about my children will be used in any way that reveals their identities.

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

I consent to the participation of my children in Mr Li’s Chinese classes and to do a survey about their interests in Chinese learning at the end of term 1.

Signed(Parent/Caregiver):             Signed(child):
Name: .............................. Name:..........................
Date: .............................. Date: ..........................

Return Address: Keren Li, French Street 3rd,Kingswood, NSW 2747, Australia
Or via Email: 18143267@student.uws.edu.au

This study will be submitted to the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee for approval.
The Approval Number is: H10923

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 9: Observation Notes-Template

Date: ______ / Week ______  Class: ________

Today I planned to:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

My class notes:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

My feedback to today’s lesson:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

My questions about Chinese in this class:

__________________________________________________________________________

How I would improve in future classes/lessons?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Appendix 10: Survey of Children’s Interests

Mr Li is trying to find out what you would like to learn in your Chinese classes next term. Would you please indicate in the table below what you think might be interesting?

First list your ideas on what you would like to learn in the Chinese classes.

If you are not sure you might like to tick some of Mr Li’s suggestions in the table.

Thank you for helping Mr Li to know your interests in learning Chinese.

What topic/s would you like to learn most in the next term? Please enter your own or choose from the list suggested.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic – Please list your interest in this table</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic – suggested by Mr Li</th>
<th>Tick if you think this might be interesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Food</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese Festivals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clothes</td>
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<td>Family Members</td>
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<td>Sports</td>
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<td>Chinese Calligraphy</td>
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<td>Chinese Kong Fu</td>
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<td>Chinese Music</td>
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<td>Chinese Cities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tourist Resorts</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for helping Mr Li.