Constructing the identity of a Mandarin teacher in Australia: A narrative self-study

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

University of Western Sydney

March, 2010
Declaration

I declare that except where due acknowledgement has been made this research is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

 ..................
Li Ye
March 2010
Acknowledgements

In the process of my thesis writing, many people have given me support and help, which made it possible to have this study in its present form. First and foremost, my sincere gratitude should go to my principal supervisor, Dr Marilyn Kell, whose guidance and engagement in this study provided me support to keep the study on track.

Secondly, special thanks also go to Professor Michael Singh, who gave me inspiration in framing this study and whose detailed advice facilitated my thesis writing. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to Dr Dacheng Zhao, whose consistent support and help in my daily life and research made life smooth for me.

In addition, my gratitude goes to all the other academic staff in my supervisory panel. From our weekly meetings, they helped me resolve problems emerging in the research and teaching process.

As a Volunteer Teacher Researcher, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity provided by the three parties who established this international cooperative program: the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau, the Department of Education and Training (Western Sydney Region) of New South Wales, and the University of Western Sydney.

I also appreciate the continual support from those schools where I taught, which gave me opportunities to experience teaching and Australian school life. My thanks also go to my supervising teachers in those schools. After each lesson, the class teacher in the high school gave me valuable comments; my mentoring teacher in primary school provided me great support and helped me adapt to the new environment. They both facilitated my learning process.

I also would like to thank all the people who provided data, including my high school class teacher and students. Finally, I need to thank my dear parents.
Their continual support and love motivate me to accomplish my goals in research and teaching.
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Abbreviations

DET: Department of Education and Training
L1: first language
L2: second language
NS (C): native speaker (community)
NNS (C): non-native speaker (community)
NSW: New South Wales
NSWDET: New South Wales Department of Education and Training
NMEB: Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau
ROSETE: Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education
VTR: Volunteer Teacher Researcher
ZWHS: Zhong Wen High School
Author’s Conference Presentations


Abstract

This study explores the process of how my experiences as a Mandarin teacher helped construct my second language (L2) teacher identity and make sense of my life as a Volunteer Teacher Researcher (VTR) within an Australian context. The second language (L2) teacher identity learning process within my teaching experiences is the main focus, supported by living and learning experiences in Australia and China, language skill development, and cultural background. My self-perception, intrinsic feelings and emotions and introspections, as I taught and lived within an Australian context, led to the construction of my L2 teacher identity.

This is qualitative research that uses self-study as its central methodology, conducted as a narrative inquiry. In order to capture a perspective of an individual’s experiences, narrative methods are adopted as a major method to depict my story, to explore my thoughts in terms of teaching practices and give a detailed picture of learning to be an L2 teacher within an Australian context.
Chapter 1

The journey of learning to become a second language teacher: Teacher identity construction

1. Introduction

One year ago, when I decided to come to Australia to be a Chinese volunteer teacher and to study for a Master of Education (Honours) degree, I started my journey of learning to become a second language (L2) teacher. As a novice teacher without pre-service teacher training, I faced many challenges: language, cultural shock, lack of formal teacher training or experience, and unfamiliarity with Australian local schools, students, and education. To me, the most important challenges were lacking not only necessary teaching skills and knowledge, but also the sense of being a teacher.

I was involved in the Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) Program, which aims to prepare future teacher-researchers through a combination of practice in academic research and teaching (Zhao & Singh, 2008); teacher learning through teaching and research. I had no teaching experience before I came to Australia and started teaching Mandarin as a novice. I built my sense of self as a teacher slowly, by struggling with a different cultural context, a different language, a different education system, a different mode of teaching, different concepts, values, and behaviours. With
support from the University of Western Sydney (UWS), the Department of Education and Training (DET) and my teaching schools, I constructed my identity as a teacher-researcher and developed my teaching skills over 18 months. This thesis discusses and analyses this process.

When I am learning about teaching through research and practice, who I am and what I can do, become two vital quests of my journey. Understanding and adopting teacher identity matters, on this journey. This study provides an opportunity for me to explore my L2 teacher identity construction through examination of my own thoughts and feelings and through the development of concepts, as revealed in a reflective diary. The first chapter outlines the research background, research rationale, research question, significance of the study, and thesis structure.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

I aimed to learn to become a Mandarin teacher in Australia and value the learning process of teaching. So the purpose of the research reported in this thesis was to contribute to my development as an L2 teacher through exploring my teacher identity as it developed through teaching and researching.

The key research question underpinning the thesis is: How is my identity as a second language (L2) teacher constructed, negotiated and developed through teaching, studying, and living in Australia? Three subsidiary research questions were developed, to help answer the above question:
1. What do my memories of my education experiences in China reveal about my concepts of being a teacher?

2. How do I develop my sense of being a teacher through my teaching experiences in Australia?

3. As a second language teacher how will being positioned as, and/or taking the position of a native speaker and/or non-native speaker influence development of my teacher identity?

1.2 Research context

To give a clear picture of this study, this section first provides information about the ROSETE program. Then, how I was involved in this program is clarified. Finally, the process of how I decided the research topic is described.

1.2.1 Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE)—the Ningbo Chinese Volunteer Program

My journey starts from an international cooperation program, ROSETE—the Ningbo Chinese Volunteer Program. It is the outcome of a partnership between the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), Western Sydney Region, the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau (NMEB) and the Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney (UWS).

This is an international exchange research-based program. For 5 years, from 2008, up to 50 Volunteer Teacher Researchers (VTR) from Ningbo, China will come to Western Sydney to study for a Master of Education (Honours) at UWS.
and teach Mandarin voluntarily at local schools every week. This is a new program that aims to prepare future teachers through a combination of research and practice (Zhao & Singh, 2008).

In China the VTRs undertook two months training, provided by NMEB, to teach Mandarin as a foreign language. After they came to Australia, DET provided three months (one day per week) teacher training to help and support VTRs teaching in Western Sydney schools. VTRs experience real teaching situations, and probe problems with a panel of supervisors to understand teaching through research-based evidence, which helps to improve their development as teachers (Zhao & Singh, 2008).

To clarify, this program is not the same as other teacher preparation programs. Although VTRs are trained by DET and teach at local schools, they are not qualified to obtain a NSW teaching certificate after completing this program. The training and meetings with DET and UWS are not equivalent to pre-service teacher training.

1.2.2 How I became involved in this research

I come from China. I dreamt of being a teacher when I was little. When I obtained my Bachelor of International Business and Management in Ningbo in 2008, I planned to study for a Masters degree in business. I never imagined that I would teach Mandarin, until I was informed about the ROSETE program.

As I read the information about the program, I struggled seriously. Several
times, I wanted to send off the application form but did not. This was one of the biggest decisions in my life. Applying for this program changed my whole plan of finishing a business degree and working in a company. However, eventually, my desire to take this challenge defeated my hesitation. I knew this program would give me the chance to realise my ambition of becoming a teacher. So I applied for this program and finally was given the chance after competing with more than one hundred applicants.

As a VTR in Western Sydney and a Masters research student at UWS, I taught voluntarily in local schools every week—the Zhong Wen Education Community, which includes one high school, Zhong Wen High School (ZWHS), and four primary schools ('Zhong Wen' is a pseudonym, and means 'Chinese language').

I had no teaching experience in China and had only attended a short-term training course for teaching Mandarin to foreigners. I was worried about teaching, even with support from research supervisors and other professionals from the DET. As I started teaching at schools, I encountered many difficulties. I saw my problems in teaching in many areas. So I decided to research what could help me improve my teaching, ease my teaching difficulty, and help me to understand more about teaching in Australia.

1.2 Choosing a research topic

In learning English, I experienced two teaching styles. One was a traditional teacher-centred approach at school, and the other was group work at university.
I studied at a branch of the University of Nottingham in Ningbo that implements western-based pedagogies and teaches in English with a focus on collaborative group work. Compared with the traditional teacher-centred approach, I found collaborative group work more effective for second language (L2) learning. When I first came to Australia I thought that group work might be a good method for me to teach with and could stimulate students’ interests in learning Mandarin. So, when I was choosing my research topic, I chose group work and wanted to investigate the effects of collaborative group work on L2 learners. I thought studying group work could help my teaching by giving me skills and tools to teach more effectively and deal with some teaching problems, such as student motivation and engagement in learning.

However, after I started teaching, I experienced a “reality shock”. Not only could I not organise effective group work, I could not control or discipline the class and could not stimulate my students to learn Mandarin. I thought it was not easy for a teacher like me, whose first language is not English and who has no teaching experience in an English-speaking country. I started losing confidence in teaching and was even scared of teaching the “naughty students”.

I tried to find the problem underlying my seemingly dysfunctional teaching. After some consideration and reflection, I initially attributed the problem to my poor spoken language. There was a voice inside me telling me that I could not be a good Chinese language teacher in Australia if I could not speak English well. It made me anxious and became the focus of my attention.

That was until I read an article by Pavlenko (2003) entitled: "I never knew I
was a bilingual”—re-imagining teacher identities in TESOL. For second
language learners, besides the dichotomy of native speaker and non-native
speaker, Pavlenko (2003) raised another group, called multilingual/L2 users.
She argues the advantage of a L2 user who has multi-competence and a unique
mind. Her argument opened a new window for me to understand my role from
a different perspective.

She made me think that it is impossible and unnecessary for me to become the
same as a native English speaker. Because of different experiences and
knowledge, I have my own advantages. I did not have to place myself in a
weaker position as a miserable non-native speaker teacher who could not teach
Mandarin effectively in English. It was not necessary, and it was stupid to do
so. Her idea of an L2 user influenced my thinking by helping me re-identify
myself as a bilingual person and suddenly gave me a new, suitable position to
reduce teaching pressures. This helped re-build my confidence to some extent,
and relieved some of my anxiety about teaching and research. It also helped me
refocus and refine my research topic.

1.2.1 Refining the research angle and topic

I began to consider the importance of self-positioning. Because I had misplaced
myself or mis-considered myself, my concern about my identity as a non-
native speaker dominated my role as a teacher. I worried about English
speaking during teaching, and this blinkered my attention on other areas. This
perception had become a “trap”. Pavlenko’s (2003) argument released me from
the “trap”. I could suddenly see beyond the language problem.
I realised that the reason for my dysfunctional teaching was not because of my poor English, but because I lacked a sense of and confidence about, being a teacher. In order to improve my teaching, extrinsic improvements such as knowledge of teaching strategies and skills and improvements in my spoken English were not enough. I needed to change internally, to rediscover myself during teaching and build my confidence. The essential step to achieving these aims was to better understand myself and my identity as a teacher. So, I decided to refine my research focus from the language learner, my students, to focus on myself.

The research reported in this thesis is a self-study. It is about my self-learning journey. Specifically, it analyses my teacher identity construction during teaching, studying and living in Australia. The main focus of this research is the identity learning process arising from my efforts to teach Mandarin. My confidence to teach my first language (L1)—Mandarin—to Australian students improved while I developed my teaching skills. My teacher identity has been shaped and constructed during the process of learning to become a language teacher.

1.3 Rationale for this study

realistic teacher education is not focused on teaching teachers to ‘know’ a lot about teaching, but to help them ‘become’ good teachers who understand themselves as teachers involving personal and professional change. (Schepens, Aelterman, & Vlerick, 2009, p. 4)
In teacher preparation, because of a realisation that effective teaching cannot be taught directly, the focus has been increasingly changed from “teaching of teaching” to “learning of teaching” (Hung, 2008, p. 39). For learning of teaching, the importance of studying teacher identity is emphasised in situated learning theory, because it views learning as ‘a process of identification—that is, of acquiring an identity, of becoming someone or something’, not primarily as the cognitive acquisition of knowledge (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005, p. 37). Compared with other professions, teaching places an emphasis on teacher identity:

… who one is affects one’s teaching … the essence of teaching is not the particular method that one uses, but the extent to which one incorporates his/her sense of identity into the teaching … the journey of learning to teach is a struggle not only around teaching methods and knowledge, but also essentially, about who one is as a ‘teacher’. Therefore, the sense of self as a teacher, or the concept of ‘teacher identity’ centres on the journey of becoming an effective teacher. (Zheng, 2008, p. 1)

The classroom situation is complex. Learning and using the right methodology or teaching skills is not the only issue within the complex classroom situation. Teachers play important roles in classrooms. Not only a teacher’s beliefs, knowledge and attitudes are relevant, but also the teacher’s whole identity matters for teaching and learning:

Teachers’ perceptions of their own professional identity affect their efficacy and professional developments as well as their ability and willingness to cope with educational change and to implement innovations in their own teaching practice. (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000, p. 750)

Therefore, to learn to become a language teacher, forming, constructing and
negotiating teacher identity is essential for building confidence as a teacher. The significance of identity for teacher development is represented as an onion-model, demonstrating ‘levels of personal and professional change’ (Korthagen, 2004, p. 4) (Figure 1.1).

This model demonstrates how the inner levels (competencies, beliefs, identity and mission) mutually influence the outer levels (environment and behaviour), such as where you are and what you do, which can be observed. There is an emphasis on the importance of identity and mission.

![Figure 1.1: The onion: a model of levels of change (Korthagen, 2004, p. 80).]
Preparing future teachers for the teaching profession should not only focus on changing behaviour, competencies or beliefs, but also take into account future teachers’ identity and their mission as a teacher on a more profound level. (Schepens, et al., 2009, p. 5)

To clarify, identity answers the question “who am I?” and mission is a spiritual-level understanding of “why do I exist?” (Korthagen, 2004). While both levels are vital to personal and professional change, this study is only concerned with teacher identity: who I am as a second language teacher. Specifically, this self-study examines my L2 (Mandarin) teacher identity formation process.

1.4 Preview of Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study, using self-study as its central methodology, conducted as a narrative inquiry to explore my personal experiences, thoughts and views about my teaching practices. It provides a detailed picture of learning to become a language teacher using my own voice of learning about teaching. It enables the reader to have a more personal insight into my development as an L2 teacher.

Four data collection modes were used: personal storytelling about my past education experiences; journals, including self-reflective journals and students’ classroom journals; interview of the classroom teacher and a co-VTR; comments/observations of my teaching from the classroom teacher and a co-VTR. The main data resource is self-reflections. Other resources, such as student journals and a teacher interview, are used to triangulate the main data source.
1.5 Significance of this research

There are three aspects to the significance of the research reported here. First, this research offers first-hand evidence of a novice teacher’s teaching experiences. This study offers insights into teaching improvement from the perspective of an L2 teacher. Through self-study, I have come to understand myself more deeply through the detailed analysis of evidence that enabled me to examine my identity during teaching. Diverging from other studies, this study investigates the relationship between an L2 teacher’s identity and teacher learning for a novice teacher-researcher from her perspective. Many studies examine teacher identity through a third voice, interpreted by researchers, rather than through teachers themselves (Dirsel-Duffield, 2002; Richards, 2006; Søreide, 2006; Zheng, 2008). The direct voice of novice teachers, about how they construct teacher identity, is a gap in the research. I played the roles of researcher and teacher at the same time, and this gave me an opportunity to contribute to this research gap. This thesis is interesting and informative, which is written in a manner that engages the reader and stimulates interest in the topic.

Second, this study is designed to inform second language teachers who are in similar situations/contexts as the researcher, to be aware of the influence of L2 teacher’s identity on teaching. As the global education market for second language teaching grows, the findings of this study will have implications for policymakers and course designers, who currently make particular assumptions about teacher preparation and skills development. There are indirect benefits also for other teacher-researchers in the ROSETE program. Over the next five years up to 40 more students from Ningbo, China will come to Western Sydney
as VTRs. This research will inform them, and the classroom teachers who undertake to have these students working with their classes, of one aspect of the dilemmas and concerns of novice teachers working in an L2 environment.

Third, this study does not view identity as a fixed phenomenon. This study uses the view that identity is changeable, negotiable, and constructible, through interaction with other people, and the world. It examines the process of constructing my teacher identity by analysing teaching, behaviour and feelings, as primary evidence. This thesis reports on the influences of this process in terms of improvements in myself.

1.6 Research outcomes

This study finds that: learning for novice L2 teachers is situated in daily experiences as individuals interact with others and the world. My identity as a teacher was constructed in my teaching-related life through interacting with students, colleagues and other professionals. Self-positioning and repositioning in terms of linguistic factors are influential for being a L2 teacher. My confidence to be a Mandarin teacher increased as I reformed my identity from a failed English speaker to an L2 user. However, this identity shifting process is not linear but cursive. My identity shifts among three imagined communities (Pavlenko, 2003) indicates that the line between each community is not as clear as claimed in her work. The reforming or negotiation of identity in the linguistic area to be situated not merely in terms of individual circumstances but the re-framing of institutional policies and practices.
1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is developed through the following chapters. Chapter 2 is a literature review about (language) teacher identity. This chapter first clarifies the concept of identity in this study as an ongoing process to make sense of self. Then, a social perspective of learning is introduced, to frame my learning experiences of teaching, in which teacher identity construction is the essence. Subsequently, the discussion moves to different forms of teacher identity, including social identity, professional identity, subject positions, teacher efficacy and language teacher identity.

Chapter 3 describes the design of this qualitative self-study, presented in a narrative form. It describes data sources, data collection and data analysis methods and considers ethical issues.

Chapter 4 aims to answer the first contributory research question. Data in this chapter draws on my memories of educational experiences in China. Analysis of these experiences demonstrates how they have influenced my understanding of being a teacher.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 are evidentiary chapters based on data from my reflective journal. They explore my teaching experiences in Australia to examine my L2 teacher identity construction. 10 story lines form these three chapters, describing different issues that helped develop my sense of being a teacher.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter. It constitutes a discussion of the evidence with reference to the literature of Chapter 2, illuminating the findings,
implications and limitations of this study.

1.8 Conclusion

This is an introductory chapter. First, it has introduced my background as a VTR under the ROSETE program. Second, the research purpose and questions were stated. Third, it introduced the research context, including a description of the ROSETE program and the process of my involvement in the current study. In addition, the research methodology, significance, outcomes, and structure of the thesis were briefly introduced. The next chapter reviews literature about (language) teacher identity.
Chapter 2

(Language) teacher identity: A review of the research literature

2. Introduction

The purpose of the project reported in this thesis was to explore my identity as a second language (L2) teacher by conducting a self-study to investigate how my teacher identity was constructed, negotiated and developed through teaching, studying, and living in Australia. As a review of literature, this chapter begins by defining identity. Following this, teacher identity is discussed from different perspectives: social identity, professional identity, subject positions, and teacher efficacy. The final section discusses the main ideas of language teacher identity.

2.1 Identity

This section first discusses the definition of identity between the essential identity approach and the constructivist identity approach. Then, literature on the social perspective of learning and community of practice is reviewed. Finally, literature on modes of belonging is reviewed, to explore the relationship with identity formation.
2.1.1 Definition of identity

Identity can be defined as something that makes an entity definable and recognisable anywhere at any time. There is a set of characteristics of entities that can distinguish an entity’s “self” from “others” (Jiang, 2006). This definition emphasises the difference between individuals. Each person has different characteristics that distinguish him/her from others. From another perspective, the word identity originated from the Latin idem ‘same’, ‘consistent’, and ‘essentitas’ (‘being’) (Lawrence & Cheung, 2005, p. 2). Accordingly, identity has a basic meaning of “essential sameness”. This definition focuses on the consistency of the essential part of one individual. Differences, emphasised in the first definition, are supposed to be consistent through time to keep the distinction of one individual from others.

Based on the meaning of identity—essential sameness, the “essential identity approach” raises the concept of ‘a true, authentic and original self in all human beings’ (Søreide, 2007, p. 23). This approach contends that no matter how external factors such as social roles or positions change, there is always a “true self” or “central personality” that will not ever change. ‘This essence or centre of the identity is perceived as a core that is surrounded by social roles and the expectations about actions and ideas inscribed in these’ (Søreide, 2007, p. 23). People will be influenced by external factors, but their essential identity will not change because they need this sameness to maintain a true, authentic and original self so that they can be defined as the same person even though contexts change:

in order to avoid a feeling of alienation and split personality, it is important for a teacher to find her true professional identity and to
maintain this identity as something pure, solid and stable … and thereby recognise him-or herself as the same person across situations and independent of specific contexts. (Søreide, 2007, p. 24)

Another view argues that identity is not fixed. Instead, it is ‘something complex, often contradictory, and subject to change across time and place’ (Morgan, 2004, p. 172). The “constructivist identity approach” argues that people are believed to constantly change, according to shifting contexts and circumstances. People continually negotiate their identity in order to balance the actions they consider normal and reasonable, what they do and what they wish to do … Identity is thereby not something ready-made that we can find or develop, but something we create and recreate through our relations to the world and other people … people construct their identities through relations, choices, practices and language. (Søreide, 2007, p. 24)

For example, in the context of language education, Morgan (2004) explores the transformative potential of teacher identity. Through interactions, students and the teacher negotiate different roles in the classroom to increase understanding of each other. Identity is much more like a process which is changing, multiple and even conflicting. Through participating in different activities and facing a variety of environments, individuals attach different identities to themselves. Identity is ‘the ongoing activity of trying to make sense of oneself and what one is doing and experiencing, of one’s past, present and future’ (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005, p. 423).

As a novice teacher working at different schools, and simultaneously as a learner in Australia and a research candidate at the university, there was a challenge for me to integrate these different roles to make meaning of my
personal and professional life. This was particularly so in relation to classroom experiences. It is important for me to understand and explore ‘who I am’ as a L2 teacher; what “being a teacher” means to me and what I can do to become a good L2 teacher in an Australian context. Therefore, this study adopts the second view of identity namely that as contexts shift, in order to make sense of life, identity is changeable, negotiable, and constructible through relations to the world and other people, personal choice, teaching practices and language. Identity construction is getting to know about self and answering the question “who am I?” It is a process of self-recognition, self-acceptance, self-understanding, and self-affirmation. This process involves not only subjective understanding but also others’ understanding about individuals (You, 2005).

2.1.2 The social perspective of learning and communities of practice

Traditionally, learning is assumed to be something that individuals do, and to be separate from activities other than teaching. However, Wenger (2000), who studied apprenticeships as learning models, argues that learning is social and embedded in our experiences of participating in daily life by interaction with others and the world. Learning or knowing is socially and historically defined. Relationships with different communities enable people to know about different knowledge. Hence, ‘knowing is an act of participation in complex social learning systems’ (Wenger, 2000, p. 226) called communities of practice.

As a social learning system, the concept of communities of practice encompass four elements: meaning—learning as experience; practice—learning as doing; community—learning as belonging; and identity—learning as becoming (Smith,

Learning is a process of participation in a community of practice, which can be found everywhere, including home, work and school. A community of practice for teachers, for example, might be the classroom, where constant interaction with students and other teachers occurs, or collegial groups planning and reviewing teaching, preparing curriculum, attending school meetings or undertaking professional learning activities. Teachers’ learning is embedded in their experiences and participation in teaching-related events, which can happen everywhere, by interaction with others and the environment. A community of practice is different from a community of interest or a geographical community in one basic element: each community of practice involves (intentionally) shared practice:

Members of a community are informally bound by what they do together … and by what they have learned through their mutual engagement in these activities … Communities of practice develop around things that matter to people. As a result, their practices reflect the members’ own understanding of what is important. (Wenger, 1998, p. 2)

As a teacher of Mandarin and a Volunteer Teacher Researcher (VTR) my learning to become a teacher-researcher is socially defined. I learnt about teaching gradually from real teaching in different schools. My learning to become a second language teacher was embedded in my participation in the community of practice, through interactions with students, class teachers, a co-VTR, and other colleagues and professionals. My learning of teaching was based on my experiences in daily life, rather than from separate ‘teaching about teaching’.
2.1.3 Learning, participation and identity

Participation is integral to being part of a community of practice. Learning involves participation by engaging in doing certain activities with people, acquiring necessary knowledge and skills, and also constructing corresponding identities:

In this there is a concern with identity, with learning to speak, act and improvise in ways that make sense in the community … this way of approaching learning is something more than simply learning by doing or experiential learning … [it] involves people being full participants in the world and in generating meaning. (Smith, 2003, para. 20)

According to a socially defined view of learning, knowing is also an act of belonging. For instance, if an individual who was competent in a community of practice were sent to another community, he/she would become a newcomer and would take time to become engaged. In a new community of practice, a newcomer would start to see things that he/she was not aware of before, which indicates learning. Hence, belonging is closely related to learning. In this sense, an individual’s identity plays a significant role:

Knowing, learning, and sharing knowledge are not abstract things we do for their own sake. They are part of belonging … in the landscape of communities and boundaries in which we live, we identify with some communities strongly and not at all with others. We define who we are by what is familiar and what is foreign, by what we need to know and what we can safely ignore … we define ourselves by what we are not as well as by what we are, by the communities we do not belong to as well as by the ones we do. These relationships change. We move from community to community. (Wenger, 2000, p. 239)
Identity is important to social learning because it articulates what matters and what does not, so that learning can take place. Teacher identity and teaching practice are co-related. Knowing who one is and what one believes as a teacher, decides what activities one participates in; the practices one engages in as well as what one does not engage in, also define who one is as a teacher. According to the conception of learning as a process of identification, learning to become an L2 teacher is ‘an evolving process of identity formation that is always under construction’ (Smith, 2006, p. 619).

2.1.4 Modes of belonging

Identity is related to the self, which is developed through interactions with the outside world.

Self can arise only in a social setting where there is social communication; in communicating we learn to assume the roles of others and monitor our actions accordingly. Our concept of self can be defined as an organized representation of our theories, attitudes, and beliefs about ourselves. The world of the self may appear to the outsider to be subjective and hypothetical, but to the individual experiencing it, it has the feeling of absolute reality. (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2004, p. 107)

Thus, in the process of learning to become a teacher, identity is socially constructed through transactions with the environment. According to Wenger (2000), the process of identity formation and learning can be seen in terms of three different modes of belonging, namely, engagement, imagination, and alignment. He defines these processes that shape and inspire individuals’ learning as follows:
Engagement: doing things together, talking, producing artefacts … the ways in which we engage with each other and with the world profoundly shape our experience of who we are. We learn what we can do and how the world responds to our actions.

Imagination: constructing an image of ourselves, of our communities, and of the world, in order to orient ourselves, to reflect on our situation, and to explore possibilities … thinking of ourselves as a member of a community such as a nation requires an act of imagination because we cannot engage with all our fellow citizens. These images of the world are essential to our sense of self and to our interpretation of our participation in the social world.

Alignment: making sure that our local activities are sufficiently aligned with other processes so that they can be effective beyond our own engagement. The concept of alignment as used here does not connote a one-way process of submitting to external authority, but a mutual process of coordinating perspectives, interpretations, and actions so they realize higher goals. Following the scientific method, abiding by a moral code, or discussing important decisions with our spouse can all become very deep aspects of our identities. (Wenger, 2000, p. 228)

Each mode of belonging contributes to the formations of social learning systems and identities, but the combination of these three modes can differ. For instance, a nation is different from a teacher’s professional community; because imagination is the basis for the former community, while direct engagement dominates the latter, which is based on everyday experiences of work. In addition, each mode involves a different kind of work. Engagement needs joint activities, while imagination requires taking some distance from our situation (Wenger, 2000).

The three modes of belonging show three different forms of identity.
Engagement is about mutual participation. What one does and experiences while interacting with others and the world, forms whom one is. Imagination refers to images of self and the world, and is related to exploring future possibilities. What I imagine or believe is essential to my sense of self. Alignment addresses the extent to which I coordinate perspectives and actions to fit within a broader structure (Smith, 2006). The relationship among these three modes of belonging can be conflicted, as well as complementary:

Using imagination to gain a good picture of the context of one’s actions can help in fine-tuning alignment because one understands the reasons behind a procedure or an agreement. It is therefore useful to strive to develop these modes of belonging in combination, balancing the limitations of one with the work of another. (Wenger, 2000, p. 228)

2.2 Sense of being a teacher: Different perspectives on teacher identity

Teacher identity has been studied from different perspectives. In some studies, the concept of teacher identity is related to teachers’ concepts or images of self, or to broadly accepted images in society about what a teacher should be like (Jansen, 2001; Søreide, 2006, 2007). Some studies emphasise the process of teacher professional identity construction and factors that are influential in this process (Zheng, 2008; Chiou, 2007; Hung, 2008). Other studies pay attention to teacher identity from a social perspective (Olmos, Ríos, & Vega, 2007; Amin, 1997). Three aspects of teacher identity are involved in these studies—social identity, professional identity and subject positions. They all contribute to building up a sense of being a teacher. In addition, this section reviews literature on teacher efficacy, which is included as another component in the sense of being a teacher.
2.2.1 Social identity

Identity, including teacher identity, is constructed as an ongoing process. It is characteristically temporal and embedded within daily life and the social context. As such, it is continually changing and being reconfigured as a result of interactions with others. ‘It is important to investigate the possible linkages between teacher identity and the position of individual teacher in the social context’ (Zheng, 2008, p. 2).

Because teaching is context-adaptive at the levels of classroom, school, and society, teachers have to ‘develop a type of identity that aligns them with their profession and with the specific contexts in which they teach’ (Pennington, 2002, p. 1). Thus, teacher identity can be thought of as a specific type of social identity. Three elements of social identity are:

1) Awareness of being a member of a certain social group or groups;
2) The values associated with that membership; and
3) The affect, or strength of feelings, associated with that membership.
(Pennington, 2002, p. 2)

Awareness of being a member of a certain group, and acquiring the associated values, are necessary to demonstrate a teacher’s social identity. Social identity theory argues that individuals understand self from the social group they belong to. It ‘espouses the concept of identity based on the social categories created by society (nationality, race, class, etc.) that are relational in power and status’ (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 25).
Since the context of teaching impacts on teaching and teacher identity, a teacher’s social identity should not be excluded from the study of teacher identity. Different social identities, self-claimed or other-assigned, influence a teacher in different ways: ‘identification with a negatively valued group, for even a short while, will have a negative impact on one’s level of self-esteem’ (Varghese, et al., 2005, p. 25). For instance, there is a questionable dichotomy in prevailing constructions of language teacher identity: native speaker teacher and non-native speaker teacher. The social category “native English teacher” enjoys a power and status that the category of “non-native English teacher” does not, as indicated in preferences of hiring native speaking teachers (Derwing & Munro, 2005).

2.2.2 Professional identity

In addition to social identity, professional identity is another dimension of teacher identity. There are three different perspectives on professional teacher identity. One perspective argues that teacher-as-professional is the “middle way” between teacher-as-artist and teacher-as-scholar (Pennington, 2002). This perspective is between a performance-based view and a competence-based view of teachers’ professional identity. A performance-based view focuses on teaching identity developed through practice, while a competence-based view emphasises the development of a teacher’s identity in terms of knowledge through the study and acquisition of skills to support their teaching (Pennington, 2002). To build professional teacher identity it is important to relate theories with realities, that is ‘to make available opportunities for novice
teachers to put knowledge into action, to develop routinised ways of thinking and acting related to classroom contexts’ (Pennington, 2002, p. 8). From this perspective the combination of knowledge/theory with practice/action in classroom contexts is essential to professional teacher identity.

Chiou (2007) raises another view of professional teacher identity. She distinguishes professional identity from self-identity and occupational-identity. She claims self-identity is a persistent self-understanding and construction. It is a feeling about who I am, what kind of social status I should have, and what kind of person I am going to be in the future and how to achieve this goal. According to this definition, teaching does not restrict self-identity. It is formed and constructed through the whole of one’s life, in particular by past experiences, background and culture, such as childhood and school life. Hence, understanding of a teacher’s past experiences and history is important to understand his/her self-identity. Occupational-identity is an understanding of the occupation, not only understanding the nature, meaning and significance of the job, but also showing professional dedication. In contrast, professional-identity is the whole perception of the meaning of one’s professional performance, including professional values, knowledge systems, professional behaviours and goals (Chiou, 2007). For example, professional identity involves one’s model of what it means to be a teacher; teaching strategies and skills in the areas of curriculum design and teacher-student relationships, and self-perceived and other-perceived identity.

Hung (2008) emphasises the role of reflection for professional growth. Applying situated learning theory, teacher learning is considered as a process
of identity construction. For professional identity construction, he argues that ‘it is important to educate teacher-learners into reflective practitioners who constantly and critically reflect on their teaching for professional growth’ (Hung, 2008, p. 48). Interactional reflection is encouraged, since the notion of reflection is a social practice. Through collaboratively reflective learning in a community of practice, professional teacher identity can be constructed by ‘socialising the teacher-learners into what it means to be professional teachers, i.e., coming to know what professional teachers know and learning to think, talk, and act the way professional teachers do’ (Hung, 2008, p. 48).

Graham and Phelps (2003) hold a similar view to Hung (2008). In order to establish professional identity, it is important for novice teachers to ‘understand their identity as a lifelong learner and consequently, their own values, attitudes and beliefs as learners’ (Graham & Phelps, 2003, p. 1). They emphasise professional teachers’ role as ‘expert learners’, who consistently reflect on their teaching as they seek to change and develop professionally, while criticising novice teachers’ weakness through self-reflection.

‘Expert’ learners are thus self-directed and goal oriented … Expert learners notice when they are not learning and thus are likely to seek a strategic remedy when faced with learning difficulties … Novice learners, on the other hand, rarely reflect on their own performance and seldom evaluate or adjust their cognitive functioning to meet changing task demands or to correct unsuccessful performance. (Graham & Phelps, 2003, p. 10)

However, neither Hung (2008) nor Graham and Phelps (2003) distinguish teacher professional identity from other identities, as Pennington (2002) and Chiou (2007) do. In these studies, the concept of professional identity is
defined differently (Chiou, 2007; Pennington, 2002) or not defined at all (Hung, 2008; Graham & Phelps, 2002). Generally, there is no clear differentiation in these studies of teacher identity or teacher’s professional identity. For instance, Franzak (2002) emphasises the importance of “critical friends practice” in building student teachers’ professional identity. She does not disaggregate teacher identity into different types, but her interpretation is based on the notion that ‘teacher identity is continually being informed, formed, and reformed as individuals develop over time and through interaction with others’ (Franzak, 2002, p. 259). That is, teacher identity is social in origin. The boundary between professional and other teacher identity is vague, and should not be too sharply emphasised.

2.2.3 Subject positions

Søreide (2006) studied teacher identity in another way, in terms of narrative construction and positioning, in which subject positions are the main resources used for identity construction. Subject positions are something we use or create in narratives to place ourselves in certain positions in the discourse:

The different subject positions give access to, for example, images, expectations, practices, opinions and values, and are therefore central in the construction of different understandings of the world and our place in it. (Søreide, 2006, p. 529)

Subject position is a specific view of how teachers experience and understand their world. There is a variety of frequently used subject positions for teachers defined in Søreide’s work. For instance, a teacher is positioned by interviewees as ‘someone with special competencies/knowledge’, ‘someone with dedication
to her job’, ‘someone who is reform and development oriented’ ‘someone who is learning centred, with a focus on the pupils’ learning and development’, and so forth (Søreide, 2006, p. 532). Through different ways of positioning, including opposition or distancing and positive identification or recognition, multiple teacher identities can be constructed in relevant subject positions (Søreide, 2006). For instance, Søreide (2006) provides four teacher identity constructions, named ‘the caring and kind teacher’, ‘the creative and innovative teacher’, ‘the professional teacher’, and ‘the typical teacher’.

Teacher identity can be examined through narrative construction and narrative positioning by analysing the positive recognition or opposition of the available subject positions (Søreide, 2006). In his study, the concept of teacher identity was related to teachers’ concepts or images of being a teacher, according to how they wish to present themselves. These concepts or images shape but do not absolutely determine the way teachers teach, the way they develop as teachers, and their attitudes toward educational changes. The main data sources used for analysis in the study reported in this thesis are in the form of narratives, such as self-reflections and narratives of past education experiences. Subject positions that emerged in these narratives contributed to my identity construction as a teacher of Mandarin and served to illustrate my concepts or images of being a teacher.

2.2.4 Teacher efficacy

Teacher efficacy is one of the key variables in student teachers’ professional identity formation (Schepens et al., 2009). It is closely related to teachers’
persistence, enthusiasm, commitment and instructional behaviour, as well as students’ outcomes (Moran & Hoy, 2001). Efficacy is defined as ‘an intellectual activity by which one forges one’s beliefs about his or her ability to achieve a certain level of accomplishment’ (Saffold, 2005, para. 4). Therefore, teacher efficacy is ‘a judgement of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated’ (Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 783). Correspondingly, teacher efficacy influences teacher behaviour in the classroom, the effort they invest in teaching, the goals they set, and their level of aspiration:

A teacher with high self-efficacy tends to exhibit greater levels of enthusiasm, be more open to new ideas, more willing to try a variety of methods to better meet the needs of their students, and more devoted to teaching. And they tend to be less judgmental of students and work longer with a student who is struggling. (Saffold, 2005, para. 4)

A teacher’s behaviour and concepts are correlated with his/her efficacy as a teacher. Positive teacher efficacy leads to positive behaviours and concepts, and, positive behaviours and concepts reflect positive teacher efficacy.

2.3 Language teacher identity

The study of language teachers often begins by viewing language teachers as technicians who are responsible for learners’ acquisition of the target language and then shifts to an emphasis on teacher identity (Varghese et al., 2005). However, not only do teacher beliefs, knowledge and attitudes matter in language teaching, but so do socio-cultural and socio-political dimensions of
teacher identity such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. Together, these are influential in shaping the identity of language teachers (Varghese et al., 2005):

By the same token, the teacher too was not a neutral player in the classroom, but on the contrary, her positionality in relation to her students, and to the broader context in which the teacher was situated, was vital (p. 22).

The following section focuses language teacher identity in terms of the acquisition of language.

2.3.1 Dichotomy of language teacher identity: A gap in the literature

With regard to language teacher identity, normally two main categories are presumed: native speaker and non-native speaker. Many studies have contributed to this area. For instance, Benke and Medgyes (2005) examine the different teaching behaviours of native and non-native speaker teachers from the learners’ perspectives. Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) studied the advantages and disadvantages of having a native speaker teacher. Modiano (2005) argues for the advantage of a non-native speaker teacher in giving learners opportunities to express their L1 personality in their L2 rather than imitating the foreign culture through learning L2 from native speaker teachers.

Studies examining the relationships between these two groups of language teachers are based on an assumption that non-native L2 teachers can speak more than one language, while native teachers are monolingual. “Native” and “non-native” are defined according to the target language. Native language
teachers teach in the target language, which is the first language for these teachers, while it is the second or perhaps third language for students. In contrast, non-native language teachers can switch between two languages, teachers’ and students’ first language and the target language, which is the first language for both teachers and students. However, there is a gap in this assumption: it ignores the possibility that native language teachers can also speak more than one language. As in my case, I locate myself as a Mandarin (L1) speaker teaching in an English (L2) context where my first language (Mandarin) is the students’ target language (L2 or L3) and my second language (English) is students’ first language. In short, I have to teach my L1, Mandarin, in my L2, English. I can also switch between two languages, based on my role as a native Mandarin teacher. Hence, the existing dichotomy of language teacher’s identity is not adequate to discuss my situation.

2.3.2 Conceptualising the L2 user

Besides the dichotomy of language speakers for language teachers, there is another concept, called ‘L2 user’. A multi-competence view of second language acquisition ‘treats the mind of the L2 user as a whole rather than as having separate L1 and inter-language components’ (Cook, 2005, p. 47). Instead of seeing teachers who use more than one language as having two separate and incompatible knowledge systems or minds, they are viewed as a group of teachers who have unique minds and ways of using their languages, because of the mutual influences between different languages. They are teachers who use ‘another language for any purpose at whatever level’ (Cook, 2005, p. 47).
According to Vazquez (2000), there are three steps in the identity shifting process of L2 learners: realisation; imitation; internalisation and the creation of a functional identity. The L2 user concept is similar to the internalisation step. In realisation, learners realise that, except for linguistic knowledge, there are other aspects of learning a language. Then learners try to imitate the language model of L2 teachers, which ‘involve[s] not exclusively the structural aspects of the L2, but also the identity-related aspects of the L2’ (Vazquez, 2000, p. 6). Finally, ‘successful L2 learners will move beyond imitation and put the internalized knowledge to creative usage, not just in [the] classroom environment but in authentic communicative situations’ (Vazquez, 2000, p. 7). Internalisation of knowledge and creation of usage support the unique minds and multi-competence of L2 users.

There are four characteristics of L2 users (Cook, 2005). First, the L2 user’s knowledge of the second language is different to that of a native speaker. Second, the L2 user’s use of language is different from the monolingual. Third, the L2 user’s knowledge of their first language is different from that of a monolingual speaker. Fourth, they have different minds from monolinguals. In addition, an L2 user is also considered to be ‘an individual who can freely access the resources available in the language to make meaning in situ’ (Armour, 2004, p. 104). It is impossible for L2 users to become native speakers who learned their first language in childhood. Thus, it is not rational to treat L2 users as failed native speakers. The L2 user concept enables language teachers to construct themselves and their students as legitimate L2 users rather than as failed native speakers of the target language.
2.3.3 Pavlenko’s model of L2 learners’ identity

Pavlenko (2003) combines and extends the concepts explored above. She explores three imagined professional and linguistic communities for pre-service and in-service ESL and EFL teachers enrolled in a TESOL program. She claims that ‘imagination is an important form of belonging to a community of practice’ (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 265). L2 learners invest in the imagined community that they want to enter. Dispelling notions of a dichotomy of L2 imagined community, native-speaker community and non-native speaker/L2 learner community, Pavlenko (2003) identified a third imagined community, categorising L2 learners’ identity as multilingual/L2 user community.

2.3.3.1 Native-speaker community

For the native-speaker community, standard language and native speakerness are the main focus. Teachers who invest in this community try to legitimate their identity as a native speaker. They struggle to enter this community by attempting to acquire a native-like competence. However, the adoption of a native-speaker standard leads to negative self-perceptions. Teachers try to imitate the exact same models, patterns and accents of native speakers. Whenever they fail they blame themselves and experience a profound loss of confidence. As one of Pavlenko’s (2003) participants noted: ‘there was a message inside me—in this country, if you do not speak English “properly”, you are less than human being’ (p. 258).
2.3.3.2 Non-native speaker/L2 learner community

Non-native speakers, or the L2 learner community, according to Pavlenko (2003), are in a temporary-turned-permanent location, from which these teachers would like—but are unable—to move to the native-speaker community. Teachers who place themselves in this community treat L2 learning as a never-ending process to achieve native level proficiency. Similarly to the native-speaker community, teachers who locate themselves in this community experience embarrassment, frustration, and desperation if they cannot achieve native-speaker competence. Pavlenko explains this with examples from Korean speakers: ‘I have felt sorry for my students for not speaking good English’ (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 259); ‘I could not express myself with lack of English proficiency. It made me feel losing self-esteem and becoming like a child’ (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 260).

2.3.3.3 L2 user/multilingual community

Repositioning their identity as L2 user leads teachers to see their own competence differently. Based on the concept of multi-competence, Pavlenko (2003) argues that teachers ‘who know more than one language have a distinct compound state of mind … and can be considered legitimate L2 users’ (p. 262). Pavlenko (2006) also proposes that bi/multilingualism is a unique linguistic and psychological phenomenon which needs to negotiate new and unfamiliar surroundings, rather than an expanded version of monolingualism. Negative self-perception caused by the dichotomy of L2 teacher identity can be relieved. Hence, reimagining themselves as L2 user/multilingual allowed these teachers to view their competence positively and build confidence.
2.3.4 Different bilingual selves

Pavlenko (2006) set up a study to examine whether people who use more than one language perceive themselves as different people when using different languages. She argues that ‘languages may create different, and sometimes incommensurable, worlds for their speakers who feel that their selves change with the shift in languages’ (p. 27). Many bilinguals who were researched experienced different selves when they used different languages. The first source of difference is linguistic and cultural differences and learning contexts:

Language and culture to be a unified ‘package’ that defines ‘the way the native speakers talk’ and thus links language/culture and personality … non-native speakers have ‘to assume certain cultural perspectives’, to ‘act according to the behavioural norms of the corresponding culture’, and to ‘conform to the way the native speakers talk’. (p. 12)

For instance, bilinguals need to ‘pick up’ the norms, habits, and taboos of a certain culture when they speak a certain language. They need to behave like a native speaker in a native context. French learners cannot ignore hugging and cheek kissing; Japanese learners have to learn bowing; and English cannot be used in the same way as Mandarin. Sometimes people will feel like a different person as they speak L2 or L3.

Another source of different selves is differences in language emotionality and proficiency relating to the perception:

that the first language is ‘real’ and ‘natural’, while later learned languages are ‘fake’, ‘artificial’, and performative ... it is possible
that the feeling of ease and comfort attributed to speaking one’s first language stems from superior mastery of the language, whereas the perception of artificiality stems from the need to manipulate less familiar repertoires of languages learned later in life ... it is also possible that the perception of naturalness of the earlier learned languages and artificiality of the later learned ones stems from differences in emotionality experienced when using these languages. (Pavlenko 2006, p. 18)

Bilinguals might be more emotional when they are speaking L1 than speaking L2 or L3. Late bilinguals, who do not learn L2 during childhood, might feel especially different when they express emotions in a different language. Using L2 looks like performing rather than speaking. People pay attention to the vocabulary and grammar, trying to find suitable words to express their feelings. They may feel separation with the real world when they are using L2. Proficiency is another critical factor that influences the feeling of being like a different person, since bilinguals pursue native-speakerness, which imposes pressures.

L1 is internalised within one’s life. Using L1 is natural and cultural; while L2 using is more to do with the literal levels. Using L2 in the literal level might be enough for communication; however, as a teacher the loss of cultural translation might lead to risks. For example, my reflections discussed later showed that although I have fairly strong academic literacy in English for Higher Education purposes, I was obsessed with “Australian ways” of teaching which was easily accepted by students and more effective for classroom management. Thus, in the literal level, L2 proficiency influences my feeling of being like a different person; but what affects more is particular ways of speaking and socialisation which can have students’ sympathetic responses in
the Australian classroom. The language and cultural issues may be explained by the notions of styles and registers in the field of educational linguistics. As presented later, I am clearly aware that I do not have the wide repertoire of Englishes required in engaging with Australian students in the classroom. The issue is not merely one of proficiency although proficiency is a contributory factor. It has to do with particular ways of speaking and ways of being Australian in a language classroom as indicators of full socialisation into the Australian classroom.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined positions about learning and identity. First, it defined identity as it is used in this study. Rather than a fixed phenomenon, this study defines identity as an ongoing process in which individuals make sense of themselves and the world. Thus, identity can be constructed, reformed and negotiated as individuals interact with the outer and inner worlds.

Second, this study adopted a social perspective of learning - communities of practice where learning is situated in daily experiences through interaction with others and the world. In addition, learning is related to belonging. Thus, identity is a central influence on learning.

Third, it identified four elements that contribute to the sense of being a teacher: Social identity, professional identity, subject positions and teacher efficacy. These elements underpin the initial sorting of data from my reflective journal.
Finally, in exploring language teacher identity, this chapter located a gap in the language skills of L2 teachers. That is, the dichotomy of language teachers as native or non-native speakers does not take into account the possibility that native speaker teachers can be bilinguals. Accordingly, Pavlenko’s (2003) three imagined communities of L2 learners became the turning point in understanding shifts in teacher identity. The next chapter introduces the methodological design of this study.
Chapter 3

Narrative self-study as research methodology

3. Introduction

The purpose of the project reported in this thesis was to investigate the development of my identity as an L2 teacher through self-study. The main focus of this qualitative study is my self-perception of becoming an L2 teacher, indicating construction, negotiation, and influence on my L2 teacher identity.

This study is a qualitative research project, which uses self-study as its central methodology. It is conducted as a narrative inquiry and constituted with four data collection modes: the narrative of my past educational experiences; journals, including a self-reflective journal and student classroom journals; interviews of a class teacher and a co-VTR; and comments on my teaching by teachers of other classes I taught and a co-VTR.

3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is ‘a situated activity that locates the observer in the world’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 4). It means the researcher plays a significant role in the study. Researchers bring their own assumptions, worldviews, and paradigms to the study together with interpretive and theoretical frameworks (Creswell, 2007). Within qualitative research, ‘the personal-self becomes
inseparable from the research-self’ (Creswell, 2003 p. 182); thus, it is characterised as having high involvement of the researcher, being value-laden, and using inductive logic (Creswell, 2007).

This study explores the process of how my experiences as a Mandarin teacher helped construct my teacher identity and how the concept of identity helped me make sense of my experiences as a teacher within an Australian context. It is situated in a teaching context and examines my L2 teacher’s identity construction process by reflecting on my own thoughts and feelings.

3.2 Self-study

Self-study is different from other research methods because of the role of the researcher who engages in the inquiry (Feldman, Paugh & Mills, 2007). It is an important vehicle for teachers to ‘find meaningful ways of researching their own practice and to better understand the complex nature of teaching and learning about teaching’ (Loughran, 2006, p. 48). Self-study focuses on self-development, in which researchers are deeply involved in their own environment.

3.2.1 Variable methods and data sources

Self-study is self-initiated and focused, improvement-aimed, and interactive; it can use multiple qualitative methods, defining validity as a validating process based on trustworthiness (LaBoskey, 2007). Self-study indicates the focus of research, while it does not restrict the methods and sources of data collection (Loughran, 2006). It requires researchers to step back to examine their
experiences and reframe their thinking. However, this is difficult to achieve, due to the high involvement of researchers in studies. Therefore, other related people’s perspectives are valuable for self-study. A diversity of data is important for self-study. From another perspective, it is also beneficial for the validity and data triangulation of a self-study that is going to be public (Loughran, 2007a).

3.2.2 Benefits of using self-study

Self-study is recommended in teacher education to study teachers’ own practices (Hamilton, Loughran & Marcondes, 2008), through ‘the investigation of our own practice, our own efforts to facilitate … learning’ (LaBoskey, 2007 p. 819). Through examining their own teaching practices, teachers try to know more about themselves and enable others to understand learning from their experiences.

Self-study benefits teaching by helping teachers find their own voices and explore their potential to change and improve. It also examines the influence of personal values and beliefs on teaching through concentrating on who they are, what they do, and what matters to them (Austin & Senese, 2007). For example, through self-study, teachers begin to notice the influence of their subconscious behaviour during teaching or interaction with students, then start to challenge their existing assumptions, beliefs, and values. In this study, I explored how I constructed my L2 teacher identity through the process of learning to become an L2 teacher and to find my potential to change and improve. Through the learning process of becoming an L2 teacher, I understand more what I did, and
3.2.3 Validity and generalisation

A significant purpose of doing self-study to better understand teaching and education is ‘not only to better inform the individual involved in the self-study but also to make that knowledge available to others’ (Loughran, 2007b, p. 17). Although the focus is self, self-study aims to have effects on others, such as teachers, students, and schools. Thus, the issue of trustworthiness is central in self-study.

When we engage in reflective processes that focus on ourselves, we cannot be sure of the accuracy of what we see. That is because when we reflect, we do not know if what we see in the mirror is accurate or the distorted view provided by a funhouse mirror. Our new knowledge, understanding, or insight may be flawed because it is based on a distortion of the world. (Feldman, 2003, p. 27)

To increase the validity of self-study, ‘we need to demonstrate that it is well founded, just, and can be trusted, by making our inquiry methods transparent and subjecting our representations to our own critique, as well as that of others’ (Feldman, 2003, p. 28). Therefore, this study provides clear and detailed description of the data collection process and how I built the representation from data. In addition, multiple data sources are explored, to seek multiple ways of representation of the study, which are used as data triangulation.

3.3 Narrative

Identity can refer to ‘how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people
understand their possibilities for the future’ (Norton, 1997, p. 410). In the teacher learning process, knowing what it is like to be a teacher is vital to better understanding and improving teaching. It is important to understand what ‘being a teacher’ means to a novice teacher, such as me, and how I position myself as an L2 teacher. As a consequence, teacher narratives are important data to get access to our own understandings, conceptions and experiences of teaching.

Since ‘our lives are storied and identity is narratively constructed … narratives are important in, and for, the construction of identity and senses of self’ (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 5). Narrative is a story about the past. Narrative accounts are an important part of self-study. Story is positioned ‘as both data and analysis and shows a variety of ways to structure responses to practice through self-study research’ (Loughran & Russell, 2006, p. 1). Teacher educators also use narrative inquiry not only to study their personal professional knowledge but also to help others understand their experiences (Kitchen, 2005).

Most academic works are written in the third person and the passive voice. Ellis and Bochner (2000) argue that ‘it’s as if they’re written from nowhere by nobody. The conventions militate against personal and passionate writing. These books are filled with dry, distant, abstract, propositional essays’ (p. 200). It is important to ‘make the researcher’s own experience a topic of investigation in its own right’ (p. 199). In studying my teacher identity construction, the most powerful evidence will be telling my own stories through my own voice, so that readers can see my experiences through a close and direct distance, rather than from a third-person voice.
3.4 Research design

This section provides an account of the key elements of the research design for this project. Specifically, the elements addressed here are the research setting, the participants, data collection (instruments and procedures) and data analysis.

3.4.1 Setting

This study takes place in a real teaching context in the Western Sydney Region. The study uses multiple qualitative data sources—the researcher, the classroom teacher, a co-volunteer teacher, and students from a Year 8 class in Zhong Wen High School (ZWHS). Information from the researcher’s self-reflective journals involves different primary schools and one high school. The other information collected from the classroom teacher, students, and the co-volunteer teacher is from ZWHS.

3.4.1.1 Teaching Mandarin in Western Sydney

ZWHS was established in 1976 and is a large multicultural 7-12 secondary school with 1,097 students (ZWHS, 2006). It has a large number of students from a non-English background, including Aboriginal students. Many of the students can speak more than one language.

I taught Mandarin to Year 8 students at ZWHS, as a volunteer teacher. Mandarin is an elective course, and introduces basic skills such as the alphabet,
common phrases, greetings and numbers, and applies a strong cultural focus, for individual interests and needs (ZWHS, 2006). Most of the students who choose Mandarin do so for their personal interest.

I also taught in four other primary schools. The situation of my teaching was similar in all the primary schools. Since my reflections mention teaching experiences in these schools by pseudonym, detailed information about each school is not given here.

3.4.2 Research participants

Except for myself, three groups were involved in this research project, namely, Year 8 school students, a classroom teacher, and a co-VTR. The total number of participants in this project was 31, including myself, 28 students, one classroom teacher and one co-VTR.

3.4.2.1 Year 8 elective Mandarin class

Many of the students in the Year 8 elective Mandarin class had a background in which English is not the first language. However, all students spoke English fluently at school and there was no problem in their being able to read or follow instructions given in English. Most students were beginners in Mandarin and had little knowledge of China or Mandarin.

As a self-study, this study examines my teaching improvement through a unique angle—L2 teacher’s identity. Therefore, feedback from the students I taught, in the form of journal entries about my teaching, is relevant to this
3.4.2.2 Classroom teacher and cooperating Volunteer Teacher Researcher

The classroom teacher is responsible for classroom behaviour management. She makes professional observations about my teaching and is best placed to monitor the development of my teaching skills. After each lesson, she talks with me about my teaching or gives comments.

The classroom teacher’s observation and feedback are relevant to this research because she has the professional skills to reflect on my identity as a teacher. Further, her relationship with the students enabled her to interpret the students’ responses to me.

From Term 2 to Term 3 in 2009, every fortnight, I team taught the same Year 8 class with another Chinese VTR. The co-VTR can interpret the classroom dynamics from a perspective similar to mine. Her observations and feedback will differ from those of the class teacher because they are those of a colleague who is also a novice L2 teacher.

3.4.2.3 Participation experience

As part of the normal teaching/learning process students routinely wrote their thoughts about the lesson in a journal. These were used, with informed consent, as a source of evidence to examine my L2 teacher’s identity from the student perspective.
The classroom teacher wrote comments about my teaching for each lesson. In Term 3 of 2009, she observed three of my lessons, using an observation schedule (Appendix 10). Her comments for each lesson, and the three observations were collected as a source of evidence.

My team-teaching partner, another Chinese VTR, also observed three of my lessons in Term 3, 2009, using an observation schedule that was provided (Appendix 10). Besides three observations, she gave comments for some of my lessons. These were collected as a source of evidence.

In addition, two 30-minute interviews were conducted to collect information from the classroom teacher and the co-working partner for data triangulation. Open-ended questions were designed to expand on and interrogate the observation data and comments. Both participants were interviewed in the later half of the data collection period (Term 3, 2009).

3.4.2.4 Relationship of researchers/investigators to participants

I am the volunteer language teacher of students, the colleague of the classroom teacher, and the team teaching partner of another Chinese VTR. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time. There were no consequences for non-participation. There was no research impact upon, or change to an existing relationship between participants and the researcher/investigator.
3.4.2.5 Recruitment

Purposive sampling was used to identify all participants. The teacher was chosen because she was the class teacher; the other VTR was involved because the school asked us to co-teach the Year 8 class once per fortnight; the Year 8 students were selected because they were the students in that grade at ZWHS who elected to study Mandarin.

I was a volunteer teacher at ZWHS since July 2008, under the direction and guidance of the class teacher, who was aware that my teaching had a research component. She had expressed interest in participating in that research. The co-teacher was another Ningbo VTR, who had expressed interest in participating in the research.

I taught the current cohort of Year 8 Mandarin since February 2009. They knew that I was a visitor from China and would conduct research and seek data from them. I explained the study to the students and answered their questions. They were aware of how they could participate, that participation was voluntary and there was no penalty for non-participation, that they would not be identified and that, as minors, their parent/guardian/caregiver needed to give written consent. Students took information sheets and consent forms with return envelopes home to their parents or guardians. The school was also informed about this study and gave permission.

3.4.3 Data collection

As discussed above, diversity of data is important for self-study, because of the
value of other people’s perspectives and the aim of data triangulation in establishing the validity of self-study. Hence, this study used different sources and methods for data collection.

3.4.3.1 The narrative of my past educational experiences in China

Writing of past experiences is not a reproduction, but a product of the present (Freeman, 2007). What people have experienced, shapes what people are like now. Understanding the past is necessary to understanding current experiences. Individuals and environment/context are closely related. Vazquez (2000) believes that ‘individuals and their environment can … not be studied separately; we will not be able to completely know either one, unless they are viewed as part of a whole’ (p.8). The importance of context or environment to an individual is supportive for my writing of past education experiences as a student in China. I was embedded in the Chinese education environment when I was a student in China. My concepts, values, and beliefs about teaching and being a teacher were influenced by the environment I was embedded in. Through writing of my past experiences, I can understand my life and myself in deeper ways. Examining changes from the past helps me to understand my current experiences.

Prior experiences as a student, concepts of being a teacher and past considerations of education, act as reference points for the main study and are useful for analysing the current experiences of teaching Mandarin in Western Sydney. These experiences are discussed in Chapter 4.
3.4.3.2 Journals

Journal writing is the most important data source for this study. Two types of journals were used: my self-reflective journals and students’ classroom journals. Self-reflection was the vital writing form for this narrative inquiry.

Self-Reflective journal

Self-reflection can provide detailed information for examining my L2 teacher identity development process during teaching. Additionally, self-reflection is recommended as a useful and viable tool for the study of language teaching and for teacher professional development (Lazaraton & Ishihara, 2005). It:

… gives meaning to experience and promotes a deep approach to learning … [and encourages individuals] to reframe problems, question their own assumptions, and look at situations from multiple perspectives as they analyze their lived experiences. (Plack & Greenberg, 2008, p. 1546)

Self-reflection is a lifelong learning tool because individuals are encouraged to ‘recognise gaps in their own knowledge and attend to their own learning needs’ (p. 1546). Learning is not only about doing, but also about thinking. Reflection can help teachers understand experiences deeply and challenge their assumptions, to find the gap between their knowledge and reality to achieve improvement.

Further, self-reflection is foundational for self-study (LaBoskey, 2007). Freese (2006) examines learning to teach by journal reflection in a self-study. In order to facilitate the self-study process, a professional development program raises four learning processes, in which reflection is the first step (Hoban, Butler, &

I used a journal, recording self-reflections of teaching experiences in Western Sydney. Journal notes, including comments from the classroom teacher and the co-VTR, were made after each lesson and self-reflective analysis took place for each lesson. The notes and the reflections were the main sources of evidence when examining my L2 teacher’s identity.

Self-reflection is a process of not only describing:

issues, ideas, and events; stating philosophical beliefs; or summarizing statements made by scholars … [but also including] the analytical introspection continuous reconstruction of knowledge, and the recurring transformation of beliefs and skills. (Gay & Kirkland, 2003 p. 182)

Hence, self-reflective journals for this study do not only describe what happened during teaching, but also present introspections, values, thoughts, analysis and personal feelings.

I taught 30 Mandarin lessons in Terms 1 to 3 in 2009. Reflective data were collected for each lesson and also for important experiences other than teaching.

Self-reflections in 2008

Besides teaching in 2009, I taught Mandarin at ZWHS for two terms in 2008 and wrote reflective journals. This starting point was a very important part of my teaching life in Australia as a VTR. Thus the 2008 reflections are valuable
for this study and are also included in the data collection and analysis.

**Students’ classroom journals**

I taught a cohort of Year 8 Mandarin students in 2009. As part of the normal teaching/learning process, at the end of each lesson students routinely wrote for about 5-10 minutes their thoughts about the lesson in a classroom journal. They wrote freely in their journals, which were not marked or assessed in any way. Instead of using their own names on the journal, students chose to code their names either as pseudonyms or as Chinese characters. Thus as a teacher and researcher, I was not informed about students’ identity.

Journal writing reflected deep and detailed information about the students’ opinions of my lessons and teaching. My thinking about the lesson or teaching might be different from students’ views. Journal writing gives students an opportunity to express their ideas, observations, and emotions and enables teachers to know students’ anxieties, problems, excitements, and joys (Kelly, 2009). In addition, classroom journals provide teachers with an alternative perspective on their teaching styles and techniques. In this instance, classroom journals were used as a data source to enhance my teacher reflections. Taking student understandings and feelings into account in teacher development is important. Having students write non-assessable journals as a part of my regular classes was a useful technique to evaluate my teaching from a different perspective and build a potential students-teacher relationship. Classroom journals were used, with informed consent, as a source of evidence to examine my L2 teacher’s identity from the students’ perspective. This study used students’ classroom journals written in Terms 2 and 3 2009. The quality of their
Having students write non-assessable journals as part of their regular classes is a technique occasionally used in the field of education. Classroom journals provide teachers with an alternative perspective on their teaching styles and techniques. In this instance, the journals were used as a data source to enhance a teacher’s reflections and add to the literature on the importance of taking student understandings and feelings into account when developing teacher skills.

3.4.3.3 Observation of the researcher’s teaching by the classroom teacher and the co-VTR

The class teacher and my co-VTR were asked to observe three of my lessons, using an observation schedule, derived from Cots & Diaz (2005). The observations were carried out in the later weeks of Term 3, 2009. Each observation by the classroom teacher took 75 minutes, and the observations by the co-VTR took 35 minutes each.

3.4.3.4 Interview of the classroom teacher and the co-VTR

Based on the observation notes/checklist and comments, two interviews were designed, to collect more detailed information from the classroom teacher and the co-VTR for data triangulation. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes and was conducted at a mutually agreeable time and place in Term 3 2009. A digital voice recorder recorded interviews. The interview transcript was shown to participants, which was an important form of member checking,
a usual practice in qualitative research.

Open-ended interview questions (Appendix 9) helped to gain information about their perspectives of my teaching skill development, student-teacher relationships, language use or development, teaching concepts or values, development as a teacher, and research impact on my teaching. All information was related to teacher identity construction, and was used to support the main data source—self-reflections.

3.4.4 Data analysis: Content analysis

This study used qualitative content analysis for analysing data because it ‘offers researchers a flexible, pragmatic method for developing and extending knowledge of the human experience’ (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1286). The object of content analysis is text data, including all sorts of recorded communication, such as interviews, observations, narratives, focus groups, and so forth (Mayring, 2000). The information collected for this study was in the form of handwritten notes (self-reflections, students’ classroom journals, comments from the classroom teacher and co-VTR, observation notes) and digital recordings of interviews. Thus, words or texts were the basic form for analysis.

In order to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study, qualitative content analysis examines language intensely, ‘ranging from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses’ (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1277). The focus of qualitative content
analysis is the characteristics of language as communication and the content or contextual meaning of the text. It is defined as:

a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278)

There are three approaches for content analysis, namely, conventional, directed, and summative content analysis. These three approaches are distinguished according to coding schemes, origins of codes, and threats to trustworthiness:

in conventional content analysis, coding categories are derived directly from the text data. With a directed approach, analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes. A summative content analysis involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1277)

This study uses a conventional approach to content analysis. When a study is designed to describe a phenomenon and there is limited existing theory or literature on this phenomenon, conventional content analysis is used to ‘avoid using preconceived categories … allowing the categories and names for categories to flow from the data’ (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). In the case of my study, it was designed to explore the process of my development as a second language teacher in Australia, through examining my L2 teacher identity construction. This was a self-study in teacher identity construction. Issues related to this identity building process are different in terms of different individuals. To find out what is influential in my experiences of learning to teach, in terms of L2 teacher identity construction, there was limited literature to guide my study. Therefore, a conventional research approach was chosen to
analyse my data.

This approach is called inductive category development, a process where researchers submerge themselves in the data, allowing new discernments to emerge.

The main idea of the procedure is, to formulate a criterion of definition, derived from theoretical background and research question, which determines the aspects of the textual material taken into account. Following this criterion the material is worked through and categories are tentative and step-by-step deduced. Within a feedback loop those categories are revised, eventually reduced to main categories and checked in respect to their reliability. If the research question suggests quantitative aspects (e.g. frequencies of coded categories) these can be analysed. (Mayring, 2000, para. 21)

Hence, the main idea of the coding process is to classify large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories, through developing a coding scheme to guide analysis. Categories are derived from data during data analysis.

3.4.4.1 Benefits and challenges of using conventional content analysis

The advantage of the conventional approach to content analysis is gaining a richer understanding of a phenomenon by generating knowledge directly from participants’ perspectives and experiences:

without imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives ... Knowledge generated from ... content analysis is based on participants’ unique perspectives and grounded in the actual data. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279)

However, the credibility of this type of analysis is criticised. To increase the
trustworthiness or internal validity, activities such as observation, triangulation, negative case analysis and so forth can be utilised:

One challenge of this type of analysis is failing to develop a complete understanding of the context, thus failing to identify key categories. This can result in findings that do not accurately represent the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described this as credibility within the naturalistic paradigm of trustworthiness or internal validity within a paradigm of reliability and validity. Credibility can be established through activities such as peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1280)

In addition, forming an analytic procedure or a coding scheme and careful description of the type of approach to content analysis can also increase the trustworthiness or validity of a study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Moreover, conventional content analysis is different from the grounded theory method and from phenomenology because it aims at concept development or model building, rather than theory development, even though the initial analytical approach is similar:

Another challenge of the conventional approach to content analysis is that it can easily be confused with other qualitative methods such as grounded theory method (GTM) or phenomenology. These methods share a similar initial analytical approach but go beyond content analysis to develop theory or a nuanced understanding of the lived experience. The conventional approach to content analysis is limited in both theory development and description of the lived experience, because both sampling and analysis procedures make the theoretical relationship between concepts difficult to infer from findings. At most, the result of a conventional content analysis is concept development or model building. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1280)
3.4.5 Analysis of self-reflective journals

In my study, there were four data collection modes: the narrative of my past educational experiences; journals, including self-reflective journals and students’ classroom journals; interviews of the classroom teacher and the co-VTR; observation and comments on my teaching from the classroom teacher and the co-VTR.

The main data resource was self-reflections. Other resources, such as student journals and teacher interviews, were used to triangulate and support the main data source (as shown in Figure 3.1). Apart from some apparent typographical
errors that might prove unnecessarily distracting, I have not sought to perfect
the grammar, in the interests of preserving the accuracy/integrity of the raw
data. The first and most important step of my data analysis was analysing my
self-reflective data. From 2008 to 2009 (5 school terms) I wrote 134 self-
reflective journal entries (2008 = 86 and 2009 = 48) (Table 3.1). They were
coded and categorised to facilitate conventional content analysis.
Table 3.1: Codes, themes and categories for self-reflective journal entries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>Total number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of reflective journal entries</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of labels for codes</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of themes</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of categories</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Categories are patterns or themes that are directly expressed in the text or are derived from them through analysis. To determine categories, self-reflection analysis starts with reading all self-reflective journal entries repeatedly, to achieve immersion and gain a sense of the whole.

Table 3.2: Examples of words highlighted from one reflective journal entry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Highlighting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 November 2008</td>
<td>1. I did not allow them to test my determination. I am learning how to be tough and do not let students influence me easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The arrangement of group work makes a large progress … This time I showed my authority and confidence and made groups for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. I tried to make them think by themselves. Even though Chinese is a new and different language for them, they still can find a good way to learn it by themselves if I give them some guidance or directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. In order to teach colours, I tried to find some interesting things to relate to this topic and meanwhile combine the Chinese culture. So I used some Chinese opera masks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each of the four passages in this table is an example of sentences and phrases I highlighted in my journal of reflections from 21 November 2008.

Then, codes are derived by first highlighting the exact words from texts to capture key thoughts or concepts (Table 3.2).

Next, I made notes of my first impressions and thoughts for texts (several
words or a short sentence). As this process continued, labels for codes emerged and became an initial coding scheme (Table 3.3). At last, 178 and 209 labels were derived from journal entries in 2008 and 2009 respectively (Table 3.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Labels for codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25/08/08</td>
<td>How to motivate students’ learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/11/08</td>
<td>Students’ interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/11/08</td>
<td>Teaching problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/02/09</td>
<td>Not aware of the multiple cultural situation in my class and my assumption (Christmas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/03/09</td>
<td>Assumed students’ learning situation and made inappropriate plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/05/09</td>
<td>Weak in controlling discipline &amp; concern during teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Codes were then sorted into themes, based on how different codes were related and linked. For example, as shown in Table 3.4, the codes ‘vague instruction’, ‘not clear instruction’, and ‘improvement of giving clear instruction’ talk about the same thing and can be grouped into the theme ‘giving instruction’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving instruction</td>
<td>Vague instruction (27/08/08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full clear instruction—not separated (27/08/08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improvement of giving clear instructions (12/09/08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not clear instruction (21/11/08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking for granted/presuming</td>
<td>Do not assume students’ knowledge background (01/08/08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing about students’ knowledge background and network (25/08/08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biased opinions about students (12/09/08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be aware of differences and be open-minded (12/09/08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching achievement</td>
<td>Happy and proud of what my students did (12/09/08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Praise (03/12/08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Result (05/12/08)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accordingly, the themes ‘taking for granted/presuming’ and ‘teaching achievement’ emerged because they talked about things other than giving instructions. There were 45 and 31 themes extracted from the 2008 and 2009 journal entries respectively (Table 3.5).
Table 3.5: Total themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student interest</td>
<td>1. Real teacher/Qualified teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pay attention to students</td>
<td>2. Professional teacher/Good teacher/Quality teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How to motivate and engage student learning</td>
<td>3. Student interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Giving instruction</td>
<td>5. Role as a researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Using computer/technology</td>
<td>7. Role as a Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Learning skills</td>
<td>8. Learn from colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Other teaching problems</td>
<td>9. Learn from other professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Teaching improvement</td>
<td>10. Awareness and trying to develop and learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Responsibility for student achievement</td>
<td>11. Student-teacher relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Confidence as a teacher</td>
<td>12. Individual vs teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Awareness and trying to develop and learn</td>
<td>13. Confidence as a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Learn from colleagues</td>
<td>14. Teacher authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Learn from other professionals</td>
<td>15. Building teacher sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Understanding students</td>
<td>16. Teaching Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Individual vs teacher</td>
<td>17. Teaching Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Student/learner vs teacher</td>
<td>18. Teaching Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. VTR vs teacher</td>
<td>20. Teaching Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Chinese and Australian education</td>
<td>22. Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Student centred</td>
<td>23. Negative feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Taking for granted/presuming</td>
<td>25. Persistence when things do not go smoothly and resilience in the face of setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Teaching and student learning</td>
<td>26. Positive attitudes about student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Contradiction—teaching concepts</td>
<td>27. Other teaching concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Teacher’s role (subject positions)</td>
<td>29. Giving instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Teaching motivation</td>
<td>30. Student interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Teaching achievement</td>
<td>Other teaching skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Teaching satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Teaching enthusiasm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Real teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Qualified teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Professional teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Good teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Quality teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Kids talking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Culture—English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Worried about English during teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Past experiences and current situation (English)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Real English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Change—English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others—English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(To clarify, No. 21 Chinese vs. teacher means the conflict between my role as a Chinese citizen and my teacher role. For example, I was asked to talk about some sensitive topics in class, such as one child policy, Tibet, and Taiwan, which was political issue in my mind and was easy to cause argument in class. Thus as a teacher, I did not want to bring political issues into teaching, although I had to give some answers. However, as a Chinese, I often wanted to make others understand my opinions and deal with some misunderstanding as well. So it was hard to balance.)
Subsequently, these emergent themes were used to organise and group codes into meaningful categories, once relationships among themes were identified. For instance, some themes can be parts of other themes, such as student interest and using computer/technology, which are related to how to motivate student learning; while some themes can be pulled together to form a new category such as kids talking, real English, and worried about English during teaching, which can be organised into one category named language; giving instruction, how to motivate and engage student learning, and timing and preparing can be combined as teaching skills. As a result, 9 categories emerged (Table 3.6):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.6: Nine emergent theme categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nine theme categories to frame data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Teaching skills/methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teaching concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teaching commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Teacher role vs other roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Awareness of consistent learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Responsibility for student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Facing setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Attitude about student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These nine categories frame the data analysis in Chapter 5, 6 and 7. In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, self-reflection is displayed in 10 story lines to show the process of how I learned to become a teacher. Story lines are stories drawn from several reflections that share similar issues. To make the story meaningful, some reflections are not displayed in chronological order.
3.5 Ethics: The risks of harm or discomfort to participants

In any research involving human participants it is the responsibility of the researcher to minimise risk of harm. Procedures built into this study mean that the risk of harm was minimal. For example, the class teacher may have been slightly inconvenienced in submitting to an interview. However, as the teacher being interviewed was the classroom teacher who helped my teaching, we regularly set aside time to talk over events in the classroom, and an interview was no more nor less inconvenient than these sessions. The co-VTR regularly observed my lessons and provided feedback. Students were routinely writing journal notes prior to data collection and were aware that no aspect of them (content, grammar or spelling) was assessable. Participation in the study was not compulsory and data was only collected from those who gave informed consent. The benefits listed previously outweigh the low level risks inherent in this project.

The researcher was the volunteer teacher of the students. Since participation was voluntary and it was not a requirement that all students participate, non-participation did not alter the teacher-student relationship. The students’ classroom journals were selected as a data source because they did not introduce a new, possibly discriminatory task that would impact on the students or their relationship with their teacher.

The research does not lead to any commercial benefits. Information collected for, used in, or generated by, this project will not be used for any other purpose. Research is a benefit to education and therefore an indirect benefit to students. An intended outcome is improved teacher confidence and competence, which
will be of direct benefit to students.

3.6 Consent process

Consent for participation in this research was sought from all participants and from the principal of the participating school. Prospective participants were given an information statement (Appendixes 3, 4, 6 and 8) that a) described the research and the researcher; b) informed the participant of the implications of participation; c) informed the participant of the voluntary nature of participation; d) provided details of the ethics approval number and details of a person who could be contacted if problems arose.

The classroom teacher and co-VTR gave consent for themselves. The students were not asked to give consent directly. They were first informed about the proposed study by reading the information statement. Then I explained about the consent letter and asked students to pass letters to their parent or caregiver to get permission. I received 12 consent letters.

DET approval was sought using the SERAP process (Appendix 2). This form required me to ensure the students’ vulnerability was not compromised. Ethical approval was also gained from UWS (Appendix 1). The Protocol Number for this project is H6826.

3.7 Confidentiality

The class teacher and the co-VTR may be identifiable to members of their group, such as other teachers in the school, the DET team of Mandarin teachers,
or other Ningbo VTRs. However, their comments reflect on the researcher, not on themselves. Therefore there is little likelihood that their identification could expose them to risk.

Children were involved as part of their normal classroom practices. Classroom journals were collected as a part of the normal classroom practices. The focus of this study was on myself. The classroom journal was part of normal teaching. The students used code names (either pseudonyms or Chinese characters) in their journals. I used these codes so that other members of their group could not identify an individual student.

Having detailed the research design, the next chapter commences the analysis. It outlines learning experiences and aspects of my Chinese background that are reflected in my values, attitudes and beliefs.
Chapter 4

Learning about what being a teacher means: Past educational experiences in China

4. Introduction

To address the first contributory research question: what do my memories of my education experiences in China reveal about my concepts of being a teacher?, this chapter describes and analyses my memories of my education experiences in China, displaying my understanding about teaching before I taught in Australia. Awareness of my education experiences in China is key to understanding my conception of teachers and teaching before I started teaching. The analysis will be compared with my professional learning to become an L2 teacher in Australia (Chapter 5). This chapter adopts a narrative style and is written in the first-person voice. Telling stories of my education experiences in China facilitates the capturing of a detailed picture of the process of my professional development as a language teacher in Australia.

4.1 Primary school

Two teachers with different teaching styles and methods formed my early images of teaching, education and being a teacher in China. Both of these teachers left a deep impression of teaching that I will never forget. One of them was my Chinese literacy teacher, and the other was my mathematics teacher.
This section tells about them.

4.1.1 Chinese literacy teacher

The teacher who taught Chinese literacy was a “typical” teacher in China. She was strict, teacher-centred, and not tolerant of students’ mistakes or misbehaviour. If students made mistakes, she punished them heavily—making them stand for a long time, do a lot of homework, stay for after-school detention, or copy from books.

At that time in China, rote-work was the main teaching and learning method. But my class teacher was quite “crazy” about using rote-work. As students we were required to memorise almost every word in our textbook, not only memorising words, but also the punctuation. In order to check whether we had memorised the text, every student had to recite it aloud in front of her. If the mistakes we made during recitation were below her standards, we had to memorise it again until we could do it perfectly. To check whether we could memorise every word and the punctuation, we had to write from memory in a notebook within a limited time and the teacher would mark our work. My recollection of learning Chinese literacy in primary school is full of memorising, repeating, and copying. Although I had a good memory, the task was still immense and made me feel pressured.

However, this was not the most terrible part. What I hated most was copying texts, not once or twice, but so many times, doing the same thing. Every week we had a huge homework workload. I still can remember that I had to hand in
no less than 20 pages of copying every week, one page of which included 400 words (Hanzi—Chinese characters). I really hated this work but I had to do it. Actually, I was not such an obedient student. To avoid this terrible work, I asked my friend to help me copy the texts. Sometimes we could not finish all the work, so I mixed some blank paper with written ones to cheat the teacher, because I knew she had no time to check each page.

Although I hated copying texts, I had to say that I did not hate rote-work. I liked memorising and showing the teacher I had a good memory, which gave me a sense of achievement. What I hated was spending so much time in copying the text that I had already memorised. What was the aim of this repetitive work? It was boring and of no benefit. I would rather go out and play with my friends, than stay at home doing boring work.

The way the teacher taught was very teacher-centred. All she did in class was talk—teaching us the knowledge, while all we did was listen or answer questions. She was used to writing a huge amount of notes until the whole blackboard was covered. Then she would rub the board clean and keep writing. We had to not only keep copying notes from the board, but also work at her speed of writing. If we did not write fast enough we would be left behind, filling in that part after class. The lessons she taught were boring and overloaded. This was especially so in the hot summer afternoons when I was tired; I often felt so sleepy that my eyes would not stay open. One day when she taught a lesson called “cat”, I fell asleep. When the teacher asked a question, I was caught. I stood up and was asked to answer the question. But how could I do that? I did not even listen. So I was punished, I had to stand on
my seat for the whole lesson. I felt so humiliated, embarrassed and hurt. My face burned. I could even feel others’ sneering at me.

I used to be very introverted at primary school. It always took me a long time to get used to a new environment. There was even a long period before I could recognise all my classmates. I would not raise my hand in class, even though I knew the answers to the questions. However, the teacher punished me in such a humiliating way. At that time, at that age, as a ‘good’ student in others’ mind, I felt so hurt and decided to hate that teacher.

Although I now laugh at my childish feelings and behaviour, I made an important decision after that lesson. I said to myself: “From now on, I will put my hand up for every question that I know in class, I will participate actively in school activities, and I will show the teacher how good I am!” So I changed gradually, I started to answer questions and become more active than before. I did not know whether the teacher changed her opinion of me, but I did feel I was more confident and my studies improved.

After I graduated from primary school with very good academic achievement, I still did not like that teacher. I thought she was so mean. I felt also fortunate for myself: what if I had not changed for the better after that punishment? What if I had become lost or gave up? What if I became more introverted? What would I now become? This learning experience influenced me, making me better understand the importance of the way that a teacher treats students, and how influential a teacher’s behaviour is on a student’s feelings.
4.1.2 **Mathematics teacher**

Another teacher I remember was my mathematics teacher. Although her teaching was also teacher-centred, she was so patient with students and never scolded us when we made mistakes or scored poor examination results. She encouraged us to be active in the class and answer questions. She was not miserly in her appreciation or praise as we made progress. She always talked to me gently and answered my questions patiently. I was good at mathematics at primary school, so it was not hard for me to get good examination results. I liked mathematics so much then and was very confident in this subject. I enjoyed answering questions actively in front of others and being praised by the teacher. Compared with Chinese literacy, I was always happy and looked forward to mathematics lessons and even mathematics examinations.

Motivation for learning a subject was so important for me when I was in primary school. I hated the Chinese literacy teacher and could not get good results in that subject, so I was not motivated to learn the subject. If I was good at the subject and liked the teacher, I was really interested in participating. In primary school, my interest or motivation for learning was closely related to the examination results and my feelings about teachers.

4.2 **Junior high school**

This section first describes a strange thing I had recognised, which made me reflect on my learning experiences at primary school and enriched my understanding of teaching. Then I introduce my memories of two teachers from junior high school that helped to broaden my understanding of being a teacher.
and teaching.

4.2.1 A strange phenomenon

As a result of my experiences in primary school, when I first went to junior high school, I did not like the Chinese literacy subject at all. However, I found a strange phenomenon: this subject in junior high school was so easy for me. I found I could memorise each text quickly, and my knowledge of punctuation and pronunciation were more consolidated than other students. I had memorised a large number of classical poems and other texts in primary school. Questions that others found difficult were not hard for me. I could answer them easily. So I was promoted as the representative for the Chinese literacy subject; this was something that I could never have imagined in my primary school.

I was so surprised and confused. Why could I do this? Why was I much better than others in junior high school? Were others too weak? Because in this junior high school, I was the only one who graduated from my particular primary school, I had no basis for comparison. But I attributed my good performance to my ‘terrible repetitive training’ in primary school by the very teacher I hated. No one could understand my complex feelings at that time. It was so ironic that I should thank the teacher who I hated most in primary school, for my achievements in junior high school; it was her terrible training that made me an outstanding student in high school. All the ‘stupid’ and ‘boring’ rote-work I disliked before led to my success now. I started to reflect again on my life in primary school. I had to admit that although my class teacher in primary school was not the one who students would like and that the way she taught was
boring and meant enormous amounts of work, the effectiveness and success of her teaching results could not be ignored. Although the process was painful, the result was worthy.

4.2.2 Chinese literacy teacher (junior high school)

I had a good Chinese literacy teacher in junior high school. She was sensitive, tolerant, and cared about students’ feelings. She seldom raised her voice or was angry with students. She understood students well. She would not say any words to hurt students’ confidence. Even though students might not get good results, she would encourage and appreciate the improvement or progress they made. She made students feel good about their abilities and confident about what they could achieve rather than what they could not do.

When I started junior high school, I felt shy about showing off my knowledge in front of others. So I did not raise my hand as often as I did in primary school. However, I found the teacher always knew what I was thinking. As I knew the answer to a question, even though I did not raise my hand, she knew I could do it and picked me to answer. If I did not know the answer, she seldom called me. I always wondered how she could read my mind. Then one day she told me: ‘When students know the answer, they normally look at me with sparkling eyes, showing me that “I know the answer, please pick me!” If they do not know the answer, they do not look at me. Instead, they keep their head down, pretending to be reading, thinking or doing other things. And you do that too.’ She looked at me and laughed. I blushed.
4.2.3 English teacher

I started to learn English at junior high school. The English teacher was my class teacher. To some extent, my English teacher was similar to my Chinese literacy teacher at primary school: she was also very “traditional”. She was strict and had high expectations. Since she was the class teacher, she expected us to be the best in English within the whole grade, which consisted of many classes. So she gave us many exercises and much homework. However, she was also different from my primary Chinese literacy teacher. She seldom scolded students or punished us in front of other classmates. In China, ‘losing face’ (mei mianzi) is a very serious problem. Even if I made some mistakes, I did not want this to be shown in public. I would rather the teacher talked to me privately. My English teacher understood much about students’ feelings and thoughts. She normally talked to students in her office or out of the classroom if students did not perform well in examinations. Moreover, although she was strict, she was encouraging when students did not do well in academic studies.

She used a rote teaching method, asking students to memorise everything. She was teacher-centred in her teaching. To learn English in junior high school I listened, kept notes and memorised. The focus in English was reading, listening and writing, while speaking was ignored. Our speaking ability was so poor that we dared not open our mouths in class. I had little chance to speak when I learnt English. Since I was used to listening and memorising, if I was asked to say something on my own, my brain was totally empty. I could always get a good examination result because I was able to use my good memory to memorise English. Therefore, although I was not so interested in the way she taught English, I was motivated to learn because it was not hard for me to gain
high marks in examinations.

Although my English teacher was not funny or interesting, she was very “responsible”. She thought she was responsible for our learning outcomes—our test results. She was devoted to her job, spending a huge amount of time and much mental effort to supervise our learning and behaviour, although she used a large number of exercises and extra lessons. Because she was the class teacher, she felt she was responsible not only for our learning, but also for our life at school. She cared so much about our future. Occasionally, when I got a bad mark, she talked to me, trying to find out the cause and help me. Therefore, although her teaching did not impress me, I knew she sincerely cared about my progress. Other students also felt her concern. So sometimes, even though we were so tired and bored of learning this subject, we did not show any disrespect or negative feelings towards her. She loved her job. Her commitment to and passion for her job were so much so that she did not get married, even though she was not young anymore.

In China, this kind of teacher is much respected. Teachers have special status in China. Chinese people treat learning as a very important thing for self, family, and even the whole country. So ‘教书育人’ (teaching and educating people) was a great and respected job in China. There is an old saying: (su yu - 俗语) ‘一日为师终身为父’ (one day being my teacher, forever being my father), demonstrating how important a teacher’s job and status are in Chinese society. Therefore, those teachers who are very dedicated to their jobs and treat students as their own children gain special respect in society. My English
teacher was more than thirty years old when she taught me. When I graduated from university, I heard that even though she was over 40, she was still unmarried, which is a very significant issue in China. Many people, including my family and me, expressed their admiration of her sacrifice and dedication to teaching and education.

### 4.3 Senior high school

This section draws on memories of my life in senior high school. Compared with junior high school, my academic performance was not Outstanding at senior high school. The English learning situation described below, also shows how I felt about language learning. Four teachers are described in this section, to illustrate how my memories contribute to furthering my understanding of teaching and being a teacher.

As I gained a good mark in the senior high school entrance examination, I was recruited by the best senior high school in our city. This school was frustrating, because everyone in the school was a top student from their respective junior high schools. I suddenly found that I was not so outstanding anymore. Everybody around me seemed to be more brilliant than me. I was only a normal, even unnoteworthy student. My academic performance was just in the middle. Gradually I lost confidence and became quiet in the classroom.

#### 4.3.1 Mathematics teacher

Teachers at this school were not boring. There were many teachers who could create a lively and interesting learning environment for students. In my first
year, I had a mathematics teacher who was very funny. He was so energetic when he taught. He seemed to never be lacking in energy. His body language was rich. He always waved hands or moved his body to show us how interesting this subject was and how enthusiastic he was about teaching us. If we encountered hard mathematics problems in an exercise, he always encouraged us to solve them in a short time, saying: “This is just a piece of cake. Quick! Quick! Quick!” Every difficult problem seemed to mean nothing to him. His attitude also influenced us so that we never treated a hard problem as a terrible thing; instead, we never lacked the confidence to solve these problems. He was so funny in class, always having fun with us and telling us jokes. When he talked in an excited mood, his spittle often erupted everywhere by accident, like rain. Everyone in our class liked him and his lessons. He was one of the most popular teachers in our school.

4.3.2 Chinese literacy teacher (senior high school)

Our Chinese literacy teacher was also popular too. She was young, tender and sensitive, enjoying every poem and literary text. Every time she read in her emotional voice, I was so touched. She was such a talented person, I admired her so much that I imitated her reading and writing. I did my best to finish every piece of work she gave to us. I expected her to read my work after each writing lesson and wanted her to see my good performance in this subject. I had never imagined one day I would like this subject that I hated so much in primary school. I even made a wish to become a Chinese literacy teacher.
4.3.3 English teacher and English learning

English learning in senior high school was not very different from that of junior high school. But my English teacher had been to the US for two years, her spoken English was very good and she focused more on teaching spoken English. She liked to let students practise speaking and conversation. Although her teaching was still exam-oriented, it was more interesting than before.

However, when I went to senior high school, I found that the standard of English that we had to learn increased markedly. I felt more and more exhausted. Every day we had to memorise a large amount of vocabulary, grammar and conversation. The examination questions became more and more tricky too. I was so afraid of learning English in the senior high school. Increasingly this subject became a burden, creating much pressure for me.

In the second year of senior high school, students had to choose their future learning orientation from arts or science. Because I lacked the ability for learning physics and chemistry, I decided to choose arts subjects, which included Chinese literacy, English, geography, politics, mathematics, and history. Students in the arts stream were expected to learn and use a higher standard of English than students in the science stream. Therefore, we needed to put much more effort into learning English and getting good marks from the examinations. If we did not get better English marks than the science stream, we would ‘lose face’. Hence, the pressure for us to learn English was much more than before. However, I often felt bored and felt sleepy when the English teacher was checking the examination paper or teaching us grammar. Even though I had remembered each grammar point, I could not answer the
examination questions correctly. I started to question my ability to learn English. Before senior high school, I was confident about learning this subject. But now I was not sure anymore. I could not perform with distinction in the examination and my results were always in the upper middle of the class.

4.3.4 New class teacher

Because I chose arts subjects, I was assigned to a new class, with a new class teacher, who had just graduated from university and had little experience in teaching. I did not know whether he was an expert in the subject he taught (Chinese literacy), but his lessons were really boring. Most of the time, he followed the exact procedures of teaching a new lesson, asking questions, and giving us standard answers from the reference book. This is a book that gives teachers exact model teaching strategies; lists acceptable answers; and details how to teach particular texts. Many of my classmates had the same opinion as I did: we could also teach if teaching was just like he did, with a textbook and a reference book with all the answers inside. He never got angry or even a little emotional. He always talked with the same voice, the same temper, and the same face.

Maybe it was because of his boring teaching, his personality, or his lack of teaching experience, but some naughty boys in the class often challenged him and made trouble for him, such as talking back or satirising him. I can still remember one day when a naughty boy scolded him, but he did not respond with any bad or emotional words although his face was burning. He just tried to persuade the boy with his peaceful voice. I felt sorry for him and the
situation seemed like “bullying”, although in this situation the student bullied the teacher.

It is reasonable for teachers to keep calm and not argue with students. But sometimes it is very necessary for a teacher to have some power and authority to deal with this type of situation with strong and effective methods. Being overly nice to students crosses the line in the teaching/learning situation when being tough rather than showing weakness is required of teachers. The rest of the students, like me, questioned his role as a teacher. We looked down upon him when he kept showing his lack of authority or power in dealing with tough situations. I reasoned that when a teacher loses authority or cannot establish authority among students, it is hard for the teacher to manage the classroom.

4.4 University

This section gives a picture of the different learning experiences I had at university. My life at university was a major influence on my understanding of teaching and being a teacher. It also made me think about the different roles teachers play in Chinese society and in western cultures. As the teaching at my university was all in English, my English learning experiences are described. Different education experiences, independent learning and group work, were also part of this experience. Here I recall my feelings and thoughts about teaching and learning.

4.4.1 Independent study

As I gained a first class mark in the university entrance examination, I had the
opportunity to choose among good, but not top universities. Hesitating, I was recommended a newly established university, which was a branch campus of the University of Nottingham. This university teaches in English and teaches in western ways. This was a good opportunity for me to take up the challenge to improve my English by attending this university. So I made one of the biggest decisions in my life. I decided to go to this university, to be one of its first cohorts of students.

The teaching, learning and organisation of this university were a shock to me. Everything was new to me. Independent study was the mainstream practice. Every student had a tutor who supported us in both study and life. We had a regular meeting with our tutor each term. If we had problems or difficulties, we could make an appointment with our tutor and ask for help. I thought this way of supporting students was a good method both for students and teachers. It saved much time. Any time we had problems, we asked for help. The teachers also did not need to take care of students or be with students all the time, as in school.

For each subject, the lecturers gave students a lecture every week. In seminars, students discussed any problems with the lecturers. There was not so much homework or many exercises given by teachers, but the workload and pressure were no less than in school. In this university, the lecturers only taught the main or key points in the lecture, not like Chinese teachers, who would spend much time teaching every detail to students and make them do a large number of exercises to consolidate this knowledge. In this university, learning independently was a key practice. If we did not spend enough time learning
outside the classroom, we would not get good marks in the examinations, which were not easy. It required much reading and work outside class. In Chinese schools, most of the learning pressure comes from teachers who push students to learn. But in this university, the pressure came from the whole environment, including the students themselves. It was totally our decision as whether to work hard or waste time. Students, rather than their lecturers, took the main responsibility for learning. We had no excuse if we could not get good results, because the lecturers treated all students the same. Students, through their efforts at learning, made the difference.

4.4.2 Different teacher roles in China and in Western cultures

Although this way of teaching and learning made sense to me and was more flexible, I still found it hard to adapt to. It took me a long time to understand that the lecturers would not teach me hand-by-hand and that I had to figure out what was necessary to learn and how much effort I had to put into learning each subject. The lecturers would only guide my learning, rather than giving me answers or making decisions for me, or pushing me to work harder. If I could not be my own boss, I would not be good at studying in this university. I had become used to teacher-centred education and was happy to sit down, listen and learn from teachers. But here, lecturers never gave an exact answer and there was no one right answer. I had to learn how to think critically and be creative. This was not emphasised at school, where correctness was the main focus.

This style of education was effective to a certain degree, but I felt the role
lecturers played was not that important. They were not as responsible as Chinese teachers for student achievement or learning outcomes. They did not treat teaching as such a sacred job. In China, teachers seemed to have a missionary zeal. For the university lecturers it was a job without so much mental concern or as deep feelings for the students as Chinese teachers. After such a long time in the Chinese education system, I had internalised the concept of the sacredness and importance of being a teacher. Sometimes I felt that the lecturers in this university were so far from my life, not only because of language or cultural differences, but also because of the roles they played as lecturers. Deep in my heart, I felt the Chinese concept of “teacher” meant much more to me.

4.4.3 Group work

Group work was another method that was new to me. In my past experiences of learning English, it was my own business, and I did not have many chances to practise English with others. But here, we learned English in groups, we had to help each other in activities and learn from others. We were even expected to write essays by cooperating with others too. Every term, at least one of our tasks had to be finished by working with others. This way of learning gave me more opportunities to communicate with others and to be braver about talking in English. By working with others in class, we could be more creative and open-minded, and I could see my own weaknesses more clearly. However, it was difficult to get used to this learning and teaching method. At the beginning, students were often quiet, saying nothing when we were required to discuss a topic. As time passed by, we gradually learned how to participate in groups and
become more involved.

4.4.4 English learning

My English language proficiency improved greatly at university. In order to facilitate our learning of academic subjects (all taught in English), such as business, finance and accounting, we had to learn English for the whole of the first year at this university. This was the first time I felt English was closely related to my life and was important and interesting, because this time I learnt English for a purpose (I had to learn English as a tool to learn other subjects) rather than just learning. I learned English in a small class every day, with no more than 15 students. Listening, speaking, reading and writing in English became the most important things in my life. The lecturers did not teach from out in front of the class all the time. They were funny and humorous. They could sit on the table and talk to us like friends. They were tolerant of our mistakes, which made me feel freer to use English.

Speaking became a major issue for me. We had to communicate with teachers and other students in English. Languages other than English were not allowed in class. Exercises or activities we did were not grammar or memorising anymore: interesting topics, main issues in the world, pictures and songs could all be our learning objects. Every lesson was interesting and challenging. I could see my progress day after day. Students were divided into different classes according to their examination results and daily performance (50 % each). Examinations were not the only measurement anymore. I did not have to worry that I would be totally down if I could not get a good mark in the
examination. At first I was in the A7 class (A8-A1, B8—B1, A8 being the worst, and B1 the best). One year later, I had moved to B2. I was so proud of my improvement.

In my third year at university I went to the UK, as an exchange student, for one year. Everything was similar to my student life at the Ningbo campus except most of my classmates were English speakers. I was excited when I first arrived in the UK and confident about communicating with English speakers. However, after a period of time, I became afraid to communicate in English, as I noticed my English was poor, compared with native English speakers. I gradually lost confidence and grew increasingly anxious about talking with others. I hid in my bedroom every day, worrying about my English proficiency. Every time I walked out of the room, even if I was just going to the kitchen to get some food, I was worried about meeting any foreign roommates who might try to talk to me. I had a mental barrier about speaking in English when I was in the UK.

4.5 Analysis and discussion

This narrative account of my past education experience has two main focuses: one is about my perceptions of teaching and being a teacher, and the other is about English learning. For the first focus, before the story of my study at the university, I described 8 teachers who influenced me as a school student and helped form my image and understanding of being a teacher. Then, when reflecting on the university, I did not talk about a specific teacher; instead I described a new education style, and how that, and the role university lecturers
played, differed from normal Chinese education and Chinese teachers. Through analysing this part of the narrative, my subject position of being a teacher, and what being a teacher meant to me before I came to Australia, are explored in this section. The other focus of the narrative described my experiences of learning an L2—English. These language-learning experiences implicitly constructed my views of language teaching and learning, and influenced my teaching in Australia.

4.5.1 My perceptions of “teaching” and “being a teacher” in China

Figure 4.1 shows a map of the different teachers and education styles I experienced in China. The characteristics of the eight teachers who influenced my student life at schools are illustrated. My feelings and perceptions about their different teaching styles and behaviours are displayed. The arrows indicate my memory sequence.

4.5.1.1 Teacher 1: Chinese literacy teacher (class teacher) at primary school

Teacher 1 was described as a “typical” teacher in China, who was strict, teacher-centred and intolerant of mistakes, focused on rote-work such as memorising, reciting and copying, and was used to employing punishment. I expressed a negative attitude to her teaching. I felt consumed and pressured by her crazy use of rote-work; hated doing repetitive and useless work; while her teacher-centred teaching (the teacher taught in front of the class and students listened and copied notes) made me bored and tired; I suffered humiliation, embarrassment and hurt from her punishment, which caused me to hate this teacher even more.
I learned two important things from these primary school experiences. First, I learned the importance of using teaching methods. As I said, rote-work is a common tool used in teaching in China. I am not opposed to this learning method because my ability for memorising was outstanding. I enjoyed showing the teacher that I could memorise quickly. What I hated was doing the same, and useless work again and again: copying texts aimed to help memorising, which I had achieved. Hence, copying texts many times beyond this, was a waste of my time and energy.

Then in the junior high school, I found I was good at Chinese literacy because of the ‘terrible training’ from Teacher 1 at primary school. I had complex feelings as I realised that: I hated Teacher 1 at primary school because of her extreme way of teaching, but my achievement at junior high school was also because of her stupid insistence on boring rote learning. Students hated her way of teaching but her teaching was effective, although the process was painful.
Figure 4.1: Mapping my perceptions of teaching and being a teacher in China
This teacher taught me two lessons about teaching. First, rote learning was effective for learning, but the way Teacher 1 used it was too aggressive and extreme—rote learning was her only teaching method. Moreover, her strict, teacher-centred approach, punishment and intolerance, reinforced students’ negative responses to this method.

Second, I learned the importance of the way teachers treat students and the influence of teacher behaviour on student feelings. Teacher 1 was used to using punishment to discipline students. The punishment she gave me hurt my self-esteem. I felt humiliated and embarrassed. From this experience, I had a sense of the influential effects of teacher behaviour on student feelings and behaviours.

4.5.1.2 Teacher 2: Maths teacher at the primary school

Compared with Teacher 1, I preferred Teacher 2, not because of her teaching methods, but because of the way she treated students. Teacher 2 was also as teacher-centred as Teacher 1. However, Teacher 1 used to severely punish students who made mistakes, while Teacher 2 was patient, encouraging and appreciative of students’ efforts. Teacher 2 respected students more than Teacher 1 and avoided hurting their feelings. Therefore, I liked Teacher 2 and was more motivated to learn her subject—mathematics. Although my interest in learning mathematics was closely related to my ability, the influence of this teacher cannot be ignored, because of the way she treated me. My feelings about the teacher, my learning motivation and learning outcomes were
The narrative about Teacher 3 indicates that I cared about the way a teacher treats students much more than the methods a teacher uses to teach. Again, I valued the teacher’s encouragement and appreciation. Because my feelings were hurt by the inappropriate punishment meted out by Teacher 1, I value the way teachers care about student feelings and regard it as one of the important features of a good teacher. Teacher 3 paid attention to taking care of student feelings, seldom raising her voice, rarely saying words to hurt students’ feelings, and was never angry with students. Because she understood students well, she helped build my confidence as a student. She observed student behaviour in the class, coming to understand students’ habits in answering questions, which made me wonder about how she could “read my mind”. She helped students build confidence in learning and their own abilities through appreciating what they could achieve rather than what they could not.

Teacher 4 was a very special teacher. On one hand, I used ‘traditional’ to describe her as a teacher: strict, holding high expectations about student performance, making extensive use of rote-work (memorising), teacher-centred, giving extra lessons and assigning a large number of exercises and homework to consolidate student learning. On the other hand, she respected students and cared about our feelings. She also punished students to some degree, but privately, rather than in front of others, to prevent students losing face.
Moreover, she was encouraging rather than expressing negative attitudes to students about their failures in academic studies.

In addition, the most important feature that made me respect and like this teacher was her responsibility and dedication to her job. Although her teaching was not fun enough to motivate student learning, she took responsibility not only for student learning, but also for students’ lives and futures. The role she played, as a teacher, was much more like a “mother” who treated students as her own children. Her heartfelt dedication and enthusiastic attitude to being a teacher outweighed her weakness in teaching. She gained students’ respect and status because of her personality and sacrifice to her role and job as a teacher. The job of a teacher is an especially significant role in Chinese society, which treats teaching as a sacred job; teachers bear a mission to educate the next generations and thus the future of the country. Hence, compared with western culture, Chinese society places a different value on being a teacher. People respect teachers greatly and expect teachers to be fully devoted to their job. That is why Teacher 4 sacrificed marriage for her job and gained the respect of others. That Chinese society values teachers’ role and job influences my concept of what it means to be a teacher.

4.5.1.5 Teacher 5: Maths teacher at the senior high school

Differently from primary school and junior high school, teachers at my senior high school knew how to create a lively and interesting learning environment for student learning. Teacher 5 created a deep impression because of his different teaching methods, which I had not previously experienced. I was
interested in his lessons because he was funny and energetic in teaching, using his rich body language, having fun with students and telling jokes. He was enthusiastic and encouraging in teaching: he treated difficult problems as “nothing”, convincing students that problems were not terrible, and building student confidence in dealing with difficulties. His easygoing attitude towards difficult learning tasks helped construct students’ positive attitudes when facing problems. Although I was not good at mathematics at senior high school, I enjoyed his lessons and did not feel much pressure learning this subject. Thus, student motivation in learning is related to the teacher’s ability to create a good learning environment.

4.5.1.6 Teacher 6: Chinese literacy teacher at the senior high school

Compared with the other teachers, Teacher 6 was preferred for a different reason: she was talented in Chinese literacy. Her professional ability in her subject attracted me. She was an expert in her own area. I was impressed and surprised by her excellence. I adored her so much that I imitated her reading and writing styles, making every effort to learn this subject to catch her attention. I tried my best and expected her appreciation. Gradually I built my interest in this subject because of her influence and conceived a dream of becoming a Chinese literacy teacher. Therefore, a teacher’s profession, proficiency and expertise in their subject area are influential for student learning.

4.5.1.7 Teacher 7: English teacher at senior high school

Teacher 7 taught English in a similar way to Teacher 4, my first English teacher.
Education in China is exam-oriented. My English teacher at senior high school mainly adopted rote-teaching approach such as memorising and used examinations to measure student learning. Teacher 7 had good spoken English and focused more on speaking than Teacher 4, who paid little attention to spoken English. I felt English learning was more interesting, harder and more pressured than in junior high school. I did not say much about Teacher 7 in the narrative. Instead, I described my English learning situation at senior high school, which is discussed later.

4.1.5.8 Teacher 8: New class teacher (Chinese literacy teacher) at senior high school

This was another important teacher, experience of whom helped to form my conception of what it means to be a teacher. He was an inexperienced teacher when he became our new class teacher. His teaching was boring because he followed the exact procedure of teaching, as set out in the reference book. He did whatever the reference book said—what content or key point to teach, what questions to ask, and what answers should be given. I even thought I could be a teacher just like him if that is all that is required. However, I expressed negative attitudes to this model of teaching.

Teacher 8’s over-nice attitude to student behaviour helped me to better understand about teacher authority. He was weak when he dealt with student misbehaviour. While he tried to be nice to students or his personality did not allow him to be ‘bad’ to people, his powerlessness gave students opportunities to challenge his teacher authority. This made me question his role as a teacher:
I even thought that “naughty” students bullied this teacher. This narrative indicates my opinion of being a teacher: teacher authority is necessary and important for teaching and classroom management. Becoming a teacher means learning how to build and use teacher authority appropriately.

4.5.1.9 Independent study and university lecturers

My university gave me opportunities to have different educational experiences and opened another door in my developing understanding of teaching and being a teacher. One of the most important things I experienced was independent study: students had to be bosses of their learning, rather than being taught everything hand-by-hand by their teachers. In addition, critical and creative thinking was the main focus of my university education, rather than the correctness emphasised in my Chinese schooling. My attitude towards independent learning was positive but I had difficulties adapting to it after being enculturated in Chinese schooling for a long time.

The lecturers at my university were also different. First, they were funny and humorous in class. Second, they were not as serious as Chinese teachers in class: they could sit on the table and talk to students as friends. Reflecting on the emotional pain I experienced as I tried to teach Mandarin in Australian context, I realised that I had transferred these values to my teaching. Student behaviour challenged my belief in the sacredness of a teacher’s role. Third, they were tolerant of mistakes, which encouraged the risk-taking needed for learning—I used English bravely and freely. Fourth, they played a guiding role in our learning. However, compared with the role my Chinese schools teachers
played, I felt the university lecturers were not as responsible: “teaching” and “being a teacher” just meant a job to them. They did not treat teaching as a sacred job, nor did they hold a missionary zeal for their job, as my Chinese school teachers did. Even though I could understand they were from a different culture (the UK having different education styles and values), I felt they were far from my life and could not touch my heart deeply. As the narrative showed, I was more supportive of and influenced by the traditional Chinese concept of “being a teacher”.

4.5.2 Subject positions of being a teacher

The first subsidiary research question addressed in this thesis is “what do my memories of my education in China reveal about my concepts of being a teacher?” This question required an understanding of what “being a teacher” meant to me before I started teaching Mandarin in Western Sydney public schools, so I could compare this with my construction of “teacher” in Australia and explore my professional learning as an L2 teacher. Narrative construction is related to narrative positioning in the discourse by a positive recognition or opposition of the available subject positions (Søreide, 2006). Subject positions, which emerge in the narrative of my past educational experiences in China, give access to my understanding of “being a teacher”. Accordingly, there are two analytical steps employed here to examine my understanding of “being a teacher” in China:

1. Identification of subject positions which emerge in the foregoing narrative;
2. Analysing my positioning by distancing or identification of available subject positions of “being a teacher”

Analysing my subject positions as these emerged in my narrative, provides a richer understanding of what “being a teacher” meant to me before I started teaching Mandarin in NSW.

4.5.2.1 Emerging subject positions in the narrative

There are 19 subject positions available in the narrative (see Table 4.1). For instance, a teacher is positioned as someone who is teacher-centred (Teacher 1), as someone who cares about student feelings (Teacher 4), or as someone who is concerned with the learning environment in the class (Teacher 5 and lecturers at university).

4.5.2.2 Positioning by distancing or identification

Having identified 19 subject positions that emerged from the analysis of the narrative, I will now analyse my positioning towards these different subject positions. Possible positioning may be either negative or positive. Distancing or opposing a subject position indicates my disagreement with being a certain kind of teacher (Table 4.2); while identification with a subject position shows my positive attitude towards becoming such a teacher (Table 4.3).
Table 4.1: Range of subject positions of teachers in the narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher subject positions in the narrative</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. teacher-centred</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. exam-oriented (exercises, extra lessons, and high expectations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. rule-oriented (punishment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. correctness oriented (strict and intolerant to mistakes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. rote-work oriented (memorising, copying)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. caring about student feelings (talk to students in private)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. encouraging and appreciative of student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. understands students well (knowing about student habits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. dedicated to the job (treat teaching as a sacred job, sacrificing marriage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. concerned with the learning environment in class (funny, humorous, friendly, activate student learning, rich body language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. has special competence/knowledge (talented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. lacks teacher authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. a kind person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. lacks teaching experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. responsible for student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. curriculum-oriented and inflexible in teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. plays a guiding role for teaching (independent study)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. enthusiastic about teaching (energetic, enthusiastic, love the job)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positioning by distancing or opposition

I have attributed negative positioning to nine of the nineteen subject positions.

Table 4.2: Negative positioning of nine subject positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A teacher is positioned negatively if they</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>are teacher-centred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are rote-work oriented (memorising, copying)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are exam-oriented (exercises, extra lessons, and high expectation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are rule-oriented (punishment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are correctness oriented (strict and intolerant to mistakes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack teacher authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are a kind person (over-nice to students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack teaching experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are curriculum-oriented and inflexible in teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 shows those nine negative subject positions.

I felt bored by teachers who took a teacher-centred approach, and found the tasks overwhelming. So I just sat and listened to the teacher talk. Memorising
and copying exhausted me. I expressed a particularly negative attitude to Teacher 1’s over-use of rote learning. Although Chinese education is exam-oriented, my feeling about exam-oriented teaching was not supportive. I felt pressured and bored when teachers imposed their high expectations on me because of examination considerations, forcing an immense workload on me to learn. As long as examinations were not the only concern in learning, I was more confident and progressed quickly. For instance, at university, learning outcomes were measured by examination results as well as by daily performance.

Teacher 1 relied on punishment to manage student behaviour and learning. Her punishment of me when I fell asleep in her class hurt me and influenced my feelings about her and her teaching. She focused on correctness of what had to be learnt. In contrast, the university lecturers were not fussy about making mistakes, which made me feel ‘freer in using English’. Hence, I distanced myself from “correctness” oriented teaching.

Teacher 8 was a nice and kind person, who ‘never got angry or even a little emotional’. However, he was considered overly nice as he could not deal with the students’ misbehaviour, and this led them to disrespect him. He tried to be kind even when students scolded him. His weakness in managing student behaviour and classroom situations indicated his lack of teacher authority and teaching experience. My position towards this situation is clear. Teacher authority is necessary for a teacher to manage the classroom situation, student behaviour, and to facilitate teaching and learning. When a teacher lacks teaching experience and is overly nice to students in tough situations, there is a
negative impact on teaching and classroom management.

In addition, I was critical of his inflexible teaching method. I do not support this way of teaching, which is curriculum-oriented and based largely on reference books. For me, the curriculum and reference books are there to give teachers guidance in teaching; they are not prescriptions. Teaching that follows the exact procedures specified in reference books is not effective. If teaching totally relies on reference books, there is no need to teach, because students could just buy the reference books and copy answers from them.
Positioning by positive identification

I identified 10 positive subject positions (Table 4.3)

### Table 4.3: Positive positioning to nine subject positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A teacher is positioned positively if they:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• care about student feelings (talk to students in private)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• encourage and appreciate student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• are patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• understand students well (know about student habits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have special competence/knowledge (talented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• are concerned with the learning environment in class (funny, humorous, friendly, activate student learning, rich body language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• are enthusiastic in teaching (energetic, enthusiastic, love the job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• are dedicated to the job (treat teaching as a sacred job, sacrificing marriage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• are responsible for student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• play a guiding role for teaching (independent study)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the narrative, caring about student feelings was emphasised. Since I realised the influence of teacher behaviour on student feelings (in Teacher 1’s case), caring about student feelings became one of my important standards for evaluating a teacher. One of the important reasons for my positive attitude to Teachers 2, 3 and 4 is that they cared about student feelings.

Teachers who are patient, encouraging and appreciative gain my preference, as did Teachers 2, 3, 4 and 5. They know how to appreciate student progress, encourage them when they face setbacks, and help build student confidence in learning.

I also appreciate a teacher’s ability to understand students, to facilitate teaching and to motivate student learning. Teacher 4 observed students’ habits when they asked questions. She understood student behaviour and thoughts, so she could use that to her advantage in teaching.
In addition, I admired Teacher 6, who possessed special competence/knowledge in her subject. Her talent in Chinese literacy impressed me and influenced me to imitate her writing and work hard in her subject, and led me to wish to become a Chinese literacy teacher, like her, in the future. Hence, I consider a teacher’s competence in his/her teaching subject to be essential.

The next feature I regard as important to being a teacher concerns the learning environment. Teacher 5 and the university lecturers were good at creating a lively, interesting and relaxing environment for learning. They were all funny or humorous. The university lecturers built a relaxing learning environment: their tolerance of mistakes gave students the courage to use the language; they could sit on the table, talking to students like friends, rather than teaching in front as “professionals”. Teacher 5 was energetic and enthusiastic in teaching, with his rich body language and fun making. He knew how to activate student learning and build our confidence in dealing with challenging questions.

Enthusiasm, dedication and responsibility are significant to “being a teacher”. Teachers 5 and 4 both loved their job and were enthusiastic about teaching. Teacher 4’s responsibility and dedication to teaching impressed me and reinforced for me that the concept of “being a teacher” is that of a dedicated missionary. In comparison, the university lecturers played a guiding role in shaping student learning, a practice which I support. However, they treated teaching just like a job without any deep feelings, which made me feel far from them.
4.5.3 English learning experiences in China

In addition to the analysis of the different teachers I had in China and my perceptions of being a teacher, the second theme in the narrative concerned my English learning experiences, which have informed my growing understanding of language teaching. Figure 4.2 displays the process of my English learning from junior high school to university. The arrows also indicate my memory sequence.
English learning at junior high school

- Rote-work (memorising-focus)
- Exam-oriented
- Teacher-centred (listening and keeping notes)
- Speaking ignored
- Not funny or interesting

English learning at senior high school

- More focus on speaking
- More interesting than English learning at junior high school
- Teacher-centred
- Rote-work (memorising)
- Exam-oriented
  - Bored
  - Hard and exhausted (burden and pressure)
  - High expectation (losing face)

English learning at university

- English was important and closely related to my life (I learnt English for purpose. I had to learn English as a tool to learn other subjects rather than just learning)
- Interesting topics
- Not focused on grammar or memorising
- Small classes
- Teachers are funny and humorous. They could sit on the table, talking to us like friends.
- Tolerant of our mistakes (freer to use English)
- Speaking became a big issue (communicate in English)
- Examination was not the only measurement
- Group work (braver to talk in English; more creative and open-minded; seeing own weakness)

Figure 4.2: English learning experiences in China
4.5.3.1 English learning at high school

English learning was similar, between junior and senior high school. Examination-orientation, rote-work and teacher-centredness were three main features of my English learning at high school. Examination results were the major vehicle for measuring students’ learning outcomes. To gain good results in examinations, a large number of exercises, homework and extra lessons were necessary to build the bases for learning English and to deal with difficult examination questions. Teaching focused on grammar and vocabulary rather than on communication. As a result, I felt exhausted, depressed and overwhelmed by this kind of English learning.

Rote-work played a central role in my English learning at high school. Memorising was the major tool teachers demanded we use for learning, because the examinations were grammar and vocabulary focused: ‘Every day we had to memorise a large amount of vocabulary, grammar and conversations’. I am not interested in this way of L2 learning although I have a very good memory. However, I was motivated to learn English at junior high school because I could gain good examination results that I could achieve with my good memory.

However, when I went to senior high school, I was not motivated to learn English, because memorising everything did not work. I could not gain good marks in examinations by relying only on memorising, due to the increased difficulty of the examinations. As a result, ‘I was so afraid of learning English in the senior high school. This subject increasingly became a burden, creating
much pressure for me’.

Teacher-centred teaching was another feature of my English learning at high school. Examination-orientation teaching drove the substantive content of every lesson. Hence, due to limited time, teacher-centredness necessarily dominated, in order to keep up with, and to stay focused on, the curriculum. Teachers taught and asked questions from the front, while students listened, kept notes and answered questions. There was a lack of communication between teachers and students. Moreover, the large number of students (about 43) in one classroom reduced chances of communication.

The difference between learning English in junior and senior high school was the emphasis of the latter on speaking. At junior high school, speaking was given little attention, leading to weakness in my speaking ability. In contrast, oral English was given greater emphasis at senior high school. The reason that I thought English learning was more interesting at senior high school than junior high school was the teacher’s greater focus on speaking. Although the teacher was also exam-oriented, English learning at senior high school was more communication-oriented than in primary school.

4.5.3.2 English learning at university

English learning was very different at university. My experiences of English learning at university increased my understanding of language learning and teaching. There are four important lessons from this experience. First, the motivation for L2 learning increases as the target language increases in
importance and relationship to the student’s life. English learning was far from my life at high school. I only learned English in English classes. Outside the class, English was not related to my life. In contrast, at university, English was used as a tool for learning other subjects, which were all written and taught in English. Thus, English was closely related to my life. I had to communicate with others in English at university. Languages other than English were not allowed in the classroom.

Second, communication is essential in L2 learning. Communication was emphasised at my university instead of memorising. English was the language of communication between each other in the classroom. A variety of interesting topics were used for teaching. Understanding of, and discussion of these topics became the main issue in learning English rather than memorising grammar and vocabulary. The focus was on using the language rather than on passing examinations. In addition, small class teaching and group work facilitated L2 learning and increased the use of English through communication. Compared with the large number of students in my classes at high school, the lower student numbers in university classes increased my opportunities for communication. Group work created a context for students to use the language to talk about different topics and encouraged us to use the target language more often.

Third, a relaxed environment is beneficial for L2 learning. At high school, the pressure came from formal teaching styles, examinations and competition. At university, the lecturers knew how to create a good environment for L2 learning—they were funny and humorous, talked to students like friends, and
tolerated mistakes as students learned to communicate in English. I did not feel pressure, burden or loss of face as I learned English at university. I felt freer and encouraged to use English because of the relaxing learning environment and my English improved quickly.

Fourth, the measurement of student performance influences student learning. Since examinations were the only tool used to measure high school performance, learning was meaningful only insofar as students gained good results. However, at university, examinations were not the only measure of student learning. Daily performance was also included in assessment. The pressure of sudden failure was eased. As a result, learning was more consistent and persistent.

4.5.4 Concepts of language teaching

According to the foregoing analysis, my initial conceptualisation of L2 teaching was formed from the following four key elements, which emerged from my English learning experiences in China.

4.5.4.1 Communication-orientation

Rote-work such as memorising is not enough for L2 learning. A central issue of learning an L2 is communicating, rather than passing examinations. Maximising the use of the target language is beneficial for communication. Language learning is more effective with small classes and group work, which increase communication and language use.
4.5.4.2 L2 learning benefits from being related to life

L2 learning that is far away from life is not meaningful for students. The motivation for learning an L2 increases when students possess specific purposes for language learning, such as learning English for the purpose of learning other subjects. The realisation of the importance of the target language, and the relationship between language learning and life (e.g. study, work, travel, interest) helps make meaning of L2 learning.

4.5.4.3 Measurement of student performance

The way that student performance is measured influences student learning. A single measurement such as examinations imposes pressure on students focused on a specific time and event. Other assessment vehicles such as daily performance can diversify the basis of measurement and motivate persistent learning, rather than making an effort at the last moment. This is likely to work not only for L2 learning, but also for other fields of study.

4.5.4.4 Supportive learning environment

The last element I learnt about L2 learning was the need for a supportive learning environment. Teacher-centred teaching is not beneficial for L2 learning. As L2 learning for communication is very important, the model of “teacher talks and students listen” is not suitable for communicating. Teachers who create a relaxed, supportive learning environment, as my English teachers at university did, can positively influence L2 learning. Students are freer and encouraged to learn and to use the target language when they feel secure; as in
my narrative, everyone had to use the target language to communicate; teachers
teach as friends; and the making of mistakes provides resources for learning
and is not punished.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the first contributory research question: what do my
memories of my education experiences in China reveal about my concept of
“being a teacher”? According to the narrative, two clues led to the answer to
this question. The first clue was the analysis of different teachers and teaching
styles I experienced. This helped construct my understanding of “being a
teacher”. Nineteen subject positions were extracted through an analysis of the
narrative. I opposed nine subject positions and identified with 10 others.

Teachers who are teacher-centred, rote-learning oriented, exam-oriented, rule-
oriented, correctness oriented, a kind person for kindness sake, curriculum-
oriented and inflexible in teaching, lack the authority of a teacher or lack
teaching experience are not preferred. Instead, teachers who are encouraging
and appreciative, patient, concerned with the learning environment, responsible,
enthusiastic, competent in teaching their subject, dedicated to their job, caring
about students’ feelings, who understand students well or play a guiding role in
teaching, were positively identified. These contrasting positions indicate my
educational philosophy and understanding of teaching and the kind of teacher I
aspire to be. In the next chapter, this analysis is also compared with the
construction of my teacher sense during the process of learning to become an
L2 teacher in Australia.
The second clue in the analysis is my English learning experiences in China, which helped form and refine my understanding of L2 learning and teaching. After comparing the English learning experiences at high school and university, four important elements were identified from this analysis. Communication is central to L2 learning; L2 learning is meaningful when the target language is learned for purposes related to students’ lives; a relaxed and supportive learning environment benefits L2 learning as it motivates and encourages student learning, as it gives them a sense of security for taking risks in their learning; diverse measurement for student performance is positively related to persistence in students’ learning and their improvement. After answering the first contributory question through discussing a narrative of my past educational experiences, Chapters 5, 6 and 7 deal with the second contributory question in terms of my teaching experiences in Australia.
5. Introduction

In order to examine the process of how I built or constructed my L2 teacher identity as a VTR in Australia, this and the next two chapters analyse my teaching experiences in Australia and address the second contributory research question: how did I develop my sense of being a teacher through my teaching experiences in Australia?

I have constructed 10 story lines from my self-reflections, supported with triangulating data. Each story line illustrates one or more of the nine emergent categories (Table 3.5). Throughout the three chapters, data from my reflection journal are referenced with a date and a category name matching the nine emergent categories. This chapter analyses story lines 1, 2 and 3.

5.1 Story line 1: Chinese and Australian educational difference—Collective vs Individual

I have experienced both Chinese (as a student) and Australian (as a teacher) education. Chinese schools, based on the Eastern value of collectivism, lead to
the concept that learning is not only for self; emphasises the student role and collective benefits, so that discipline is not a big concern in Chinese classrooms. In contrast, schools in Australia value individualism and encourage fun learning, learning for self and providing opportunities for each individual to participate. My L2 teacher identity was formed as I started to understand the advantages and disadvantages of these two opposing values and their influence on my professional education.

The first story line describes what I understand about individual (Australian) versus collective (Chinese) education. It starts with my first big shock when teaching Australian students.

Today I had the most terrible day in my life. Everything was totally a mess. I could not control the class at all. Students made noise, moved, and even stood beside the window to talk to people outside. I was so frightened. How could Australian students be like this? … I was so tired and depressed. My voice was mute after this lesson. I was so sad that I had only one thing in mind: I want to go back to China; I cannot stay if it’s always like this. My tears were nearly coming out.

Then I went to observe another lesson. This class was much more horrible than mine. There was not one minute that students behaved … When the teacher raised her voice, they even said: “Relax, Miss!” oh my god!! Was that a lesson? It was totally a disaster. Although it was a little ironic, but I have to say suddenly I felt students in my class today were not that bad to me, at least they let me finish my lesson.

The school motto is to be a safe respectful learner. Clearly respect is a focus for this school. But students do not respect teachers as Chinese students do. The classroom discipline is hard to control. Teaching in China seldom has this kind of problem. Why is there such a big difference for Chinese and Australian students? (05/08/08, Facing setbacks)
I faced serious student behaviour problems, which are seldom an issue in China. I was frightened, and wondered why discipline concerned me in Australia. Then a teacher reminded me it was because of the different values for Chinese and Australian society.

A teacher told me that Australian students do not consider others about. Today’s class was about action painting using paper clips and magnets … there were only 12 magnets so the kids needed to share with each other. But many of them did not want to share. That’s the difference between different cultures, values, and ideology. Western culture is more self-centered than Asian’s. It considers more about privacy and individual. Chinese culture is more considering of sacrifice and community and family and harmony. (26/08/08, Teacher roles vs other roles)

Australian students act as individuals first. They consider themselves more than others. Hence, they pay less attention to others than Chinese students did when I was at school. Therefore, they misbehaved in class when they did not want to learn. They were not willing to learn, regardless of teachers or classmates; they did not share magnets if they did not want to.

The above consideration was reinforced as I handed out consent forms for my research.

Today I gave out the envelope of consent forms. I really wanted all the students to bring back the permission letters from their parents. However, I did not expect that one student would just leave the letter on table as he left the classroom in front of me. It was quite a shock. They did not even want to pretend to be taking this letter back … that was a big difference with Chinese students. I think Chinese students, even though they are not willing to do something, they would not express it in front of the teacher … It is a difference between Chinese
students and Australian students. (03/06/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

I thought this student behaved in an individual manner that seems typical of Australian students. They do not think much about what they should do as students. He did not think how disappointed I would feel when he left the letter on the desk. He just knew that he did not want to take part in the research. Chinese students understand the role of students and their relationship with teachers. They would put this ahead of being an individual in this instance. For example, in this situation, even though a Chinese student does not want to take part in the research, they will not leave the letter after class in front of the teacher. They will take the letter home first and will not bring it back, which indirectly indicates that the student does not want to participate in order not to offend or hurt the teacher, making her ‘lose face’ publicly.

Australian education is different from China’s. Australian schools encourage participation and involvement in school activities to motivate students’ learning. In a school assembly, I was surprised that most students could perform on stage, regardless of appearance and ability, which seldom happens in China.

In their assembly, I found one thing that surprised me. Most students had the opportunity to talk on the stage, not only good clever students, but also those quiet shy kids. This seldom happened in China. In China, everyone who performed on stage was selected with high standards, which made school a place full of competition. But here, every student was given the opportunity, which made school a fun learning and playing place. I saw one girl who was not rewarded was invited to shake hands with every rewarded student. She was happy and excited. This made her feel involved and special rather than being sad about not getting the reward. Thus I found students are more
confident and engaged in school activities, not for competition or being the first, but for fun and participating. Participation and involvement motivates learning. (12/08/08, Teaching concepts)

Essentially this contributed to the individual and self-orientation of students, as students were motivated because they could take part in the assembly. In contrast, a collective sense is taught in China to contribute to learning.

Collective sense is emphasised and taught in China from when we were little. Collective is bigger than individual. Individual can sacrifice some benefits if it is necessary to fulfil the collective benefits. For western culture, personal value and feeling is bigger than collective, which is the reversed of China. Both concepts have advantages and disadvantages. Students here study for their own interest. If they are not interested, they are not motivated to learn. But Chinese students can learn something they do not like for reasons like future career or family expectation, because learning is not a personal thing. (12/08/08, Teaching concepts)

However, for behaviour management and discipline, a collective sense is more important than individualism. A student’s behaviour is not only his/her business. It influences others and harms the collective benefit. This consideration has positive effects for discipline. As I noticed, the school was going to raise this issue, trying to teach students a sense of collectivism, which helps respect, learning, and discipline.

Schools try to teach students about respect and consideration for others. Today I saw an assembly in high school … the aim of this assembly was teaching students how to behave, being a safe, respectful learner, telling them honour and misbehaviour are all related to others … I could see that the high school was trying to build collective values in students. It is necessary to help students build a sense of belonging and honour for their own schools. Because they spend lots of time at school which is a collective society, they
should learn how to deal with social relationship, how to get along with others, and consideration for others, to help the harmony of the society. Moreover, this sense can help them achieve better performance, no matter the academic or non-academic results. (14/08/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

This first story line describes my perception of the differences between Chinese and Australian education in terms of the individual and collective values in society. In Australia, students act as individuals before they consider their role as students in a collective society. They seem to be unaware of the value to society of functioning collectively. Consequently, discipline, respect and learning motivation are important issues for teaching in Australia.

5.2 Story line 2: Chinese and Australian education differences: Result and knowledge driven vs Process and development

My experience as a Chinese student in a system that was outcomes driven founded on knowledge transmission, initially impacted my teaching in Australia. I found that this approach resulted in difficulties with lesson timing and inflexible teaching. Over time I adapted methods and concepts of teaching to focus more on the student learning process and development. The adaptation of my teaching to the Australian context indicates my teacher identity was developing, in terms of negotiating different concepts and changing behaviour.

The second story line describes how I came to understand process and development-oriented teaching, enabling me to reposition my role as a teacher. The story starts when I wondered why my students did not appreciate their good learning environment.
Today the topic is about Chinese students. When I talked about the school timetable, one student asked me if it was boring to study for such a long time … I said I did not even think about that because every student around me did that in China … I often wonder why Australian students do not appreciate their school and study. In my opinion, their school lives are much better than ours. No huge competition or exam pressures; small amounts of homework; and teaching catered to their interest and needs. Why do they still complain this lesson was boring or that lesson was not interesting? We did not even have time to think about these questions in China. (01/07/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

To my mind, student complaints about being bored were unnecessary. My frustration derived from my perception of teaching influenced by the “Chinese teaching style” I had experienced. In that context, result orientation and knowledge feeding were supposed to be the normal way of learning. I felt my students should appreciate their “Australian learning environment”. Although I made an effort to adapt my teaching, I did not internalise the education style that emphasises learning process and development.

I thought, learning and playing were difficult to integrate: fun learning reduced the amount of knowledge that students could learn.

There is always a conflict between my two minds. One wants to satisfy students’ need about fun learning … I know students can learn through fun learning, but I am not sure how much they can learn. Students focused more on having fun and playing rather than learning. Another mind thinks that practice and exercise are necessary even though students do not like it. I think a teacher’s responsibility is to make sure that students are learning, not only playing without thinking. I want to be a fun and interesting teacher who does not force students to learn. But I always feel frustrated when students did not learn much, which made me feel I have to do something to improve their learning. (20/08/09, Responsibility for student achievement)
On one hand, I tried to adapt to teaching that values fun learning. On the other side, I was still the person who focused on learning results and knowledge feeding. I did not believe that students who learned with fun could gain as much knowledge as they did with “serious teaching”. Then I observed a science lesson that made me think again.

Today I observed one science teacher’s lesson in high school. The topic was learning about eyeballs. I felt really impressed: students had real eyeballs to observe [and dissect]. In China I only learned about eyeballs from the textbook. Handling eyeballs is more useful than any words to brand the knowledge into minds. It’s hard for me to forget such an impression although it was a little disgusting and scary … Using real items for teaching is more efficient than only teacher talking. (14/08/09, Teaching skills/methods)

However, the way that the teacher taught shocked and confused me. Although I noticed the significance of learning by doing, I believed he did not teach anything to the class.

For the whole lesson, the teacher just wrote on the board, letting students do the experiment all by themselves without any further teaching or explanation. Students just asked questions when they had problems … I do not know if it is the common way of teaching in Australia. But … in China, teachers should be an expert in their subjects and always teach a lot during class and should be able to answer all students’ questions … in my opinion, the teacher cannot be the one who wrote instruction on board and teach nothing in class, just asking students to follow the instructions and finish tasks. This is a conflict in my concept of a responsible teacher. (14/08/09, Teaching skills/methods)

I was critical of the science teacher’s irresponsibility because I thought,
“teaching something” was the centre of teaching, rather than “learning something” for students. This made me recall my university days where teachers there also did not “teach” a lot, making me think they were not as responsible as Chinese teachers (see Chapter 4).

In China student achievement was measured by what the teacher had taught. Teachers emphasised content over process. This was supposedly what “responsible” teachers did. My focus of teaching in Australia was how much knowledge a teacher taught, rather than how the students learned and developed.

Gradually, a change in my concepts and subsequent behaviour happened. a lesson about making dumplings is an example.

Today I taught J’s class how to make dumplings. Every student was happy and involved … I was concerned with the flavour of the dumpling, but J said it did not matter. What she wants students to do was to have a try at making dumpling, knowing some Chinese culture, and having fun … The most important thing was getting students involved and learning something. Students would feel happy even though the flavour was not good. Again I felt the difference of Australian education attitude. What teachers care about is student involvement and interests. Through doing and experiencing it students can learn independently with the teacher’s help. But in China, if it was a dumpling-making lesson, teachers might pay more attention to the result of the lesson: how well students can make dumplings. Maybe there would even be a competition between Chinese students. Education in China cares much more about the learning result than the process. (12/08/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

I understood J cared about the learning process and what students could learn in class, rather than the students’ results. She emphasised the learning process
and student development through learning, not how much I could teach and what result I could gain through teaching.

Two further examples illustrate my change from a results and knowledge feeding focus on teaching to a process and development orientation. The first example is about teaching students how to write Chinese characters.

I found most students considered writing Chinese characters as drawing. They think Chinese words are like different pictures. They like to draw them in the way that they like, regardless of the strokes and orders. For instance, they write 四 by drawing a square and then two bent lines inside. This is weird.

I was considering that it would be better to teach strokes and orders first, otherwise students would write characters inappropriately. As a teacher, it was my responsibility to teach students the right way to write Chinese characters. However as I tried, I found it was boring and was too hard for students to understand. Then I thought maybe it does not matter if they write in a right way or not as long as they have fun. I was so struggling about teaching writing. What I was taught in China seemed not working well in teaching Australian students. (09/09/08, Teaching skills/method)

I was struggling because I considered the right way of writing could only be taught as the way I was fed with the knowledge. As long as I wanted to apply fun learning process, students could not gain this knowledge. I found teaching the right technique was boring but necessary although hard to achieve if students wanted to have fun learning it. I was still trapped by the teaching emphasis on knowledge feeding, rather than considering how to facilitate the learning process for student development as mastering this knowledge.
As time passed by, I understood more about the importance of the learning process and how students learned. Then I found the solution to coordinate the knowledge I taught and the way students learned it.

I had to explain clearly to students about ‘writing’ characters rather than ‘drawing’, so that students could build a right concept of writing Chinese characters at the very beginning of learning Mandarin. To facilitate their learning of such a different knowledge system, I started to teach calligraphy, introducing four treasures of calligraphy. By using the treasures the students became interested and engaged in learning Chinese calligraphy. Then I told them the rules of writing characters through doing calligraphy: writing characters has orders and rules. Students more easily accepted and remembered this new way of writing. They understood that doing Chinese calligraphy should go with particular equipment (four treasures), particular environment (quiet) and particular mood (calm and peaceful), to achieve the aim of cultivating temperament and spirit. Thus it was easier for students to understand and accept a particular way of writing for such a special thing. The teacher is like an actor and facilitator for student learning. (09/07/09, Teaching skills/methods)

I have learned how to pay attention to student development and learning process rather than focusing on what knowledge I could teach and what result students could gain. I repositioned my teacher role as an actor and facilitator for student learning instead of a knowledge provider. As I created a special context with an interesting topic, they learned and accepted much faster. The class teacher that I had, changed the way I taught writing.

I think you are very particular about like writing, and learning to write, memorising and giving them test, write this in Chinese character … using Chinese characters. And then you have changed that, I have noticed that your lessons are based more on things that interest them, more hands-on experience, more making things. (Class teacher’s interview)
The way a teacher performs (teaches) on the stage (class) influences the audience (students). The teacher has to facilitate the learning process for students rather than feeding them knowledge directly.

Another example indicates one serious problem with my teaching—timing, which emerged at the very beginning of my teaching and lasted for a long time. Almost after every lesson, the class teacher suggested I should be more aware of time and finish the lesson at the right time:

Not being conscious of the time when lesson should finish (Comments from class teacher 12/05/09)

Be more conscious of bell times (Comments from class teacher 28/05/09)

Need to be conscious of bell time (Comments from class teacher 25/06/09)

I kept having timing problems because I prepared too much for one lesson.

I always prepare much for one lesson. … I have timing problem because of this. Today I prepared too much and could not master the timing and teaching tempo. The time was not enough for me to finish everything I prepared. This lesson ended hastily. (24/10/08, Teaching skills/methods)

As the example illustrates, over-preparation could work as a backup. The class teacher also positively recognised this.

And one good thing about you is you always overly prepared, like you always have extra stuff, if you cannot finish in one lesson, but it’s still there, which is really good, like not locked for work or you know, do not have that bit of spare time where kids are misbehaving. (Class teacher’s interview)
However, with over-prepared resources, I was often pressed to finish everything I had prepared. To finish everything I prepared in one lesson, my teaching was rushed.

I always prepare too much and wanted to squeeze everything in one lesson regardless of time. I need to be careful of students’ reactions to the activity and change or adapt my strategy accordingly. Do not stick to the original plan without considering the real situation. I need to have some flexibility in class and change with the situation. (27/08/08, Teaching skills/methods)

As the evidence shows, I prepared a lot and tried to finish everything in one lesson. I did not adapt my teaching according to the real situation. My teaching was inflexible, which led to timing problems. As I taught, I focused on content and trying to finish everything I prepared, regardless of the actual situation. It indicates my focus of teaching was results-based and knowledge feeding.

As I taught calligraphy in primary school, the timing problem was reduced.

Today I taught the students calligraphy. All the students showed great interest in learning this. This class was different from the ones I taught before. I did not consider how many things I had to finish in one lesson anymore. Although I prepared many activities for one lesson, only three were used. I prepared four knowledge points to teach. However, as I realised students had not mastered the name of four treasures and how to hold brush, I did not move to others until students consolidate the knowledge with the help of different activities. From the real situation in class, I finished this lesson perfectly, right on time and with the suitable methods. (09/07/09, Teaching skills/methods)

As the example shows, I did not try to finish everything prepared in one lesson.
Instead, I adapted my teaching to the situation, and finished the lesson on time. This demonstrates the change of my teaching focus from results and knowledge feeding to process and development. I considered how well students learned, rather than what I had taught.

5.3 **Story line 3: what student-centred teaching means to me?**

My school education in China was very much teacher-focused. Teachers were conveyors of knowledge, highly esteemed and dedicated. When I encountered student-centred learning at university I did not really comprehend it. Combining past images of being a teacher and my learning experiences, I gradually developed my teacher identity as I began to understand student knowledge systems, became conscious of individual differences, catered for different student needs, appreciated student learning interests, preferences and psychology, became aware of student feelings. Importantly, I understood that teaching should neither always please students, nor pander to every student, and is not teacher-dominant.

The third story line describes the development of my understanding of student-centred teaching. Seven elements contribute to the question, what does student-centred mean?

5.3.1 **Student knowledge systems**

First, it is necessary to know about student knowledge background and networks.

Students … have their own unique knowledge network from their
particular background and experiences. They learn new things through or by using their existing knowledge. As teachers …we need to find out what is the most suitable way for students to learn. (25/08/08, Teaching concepts)

Since students have different knowledge system and background, a teacher should help connect their existing knowledge network with the new knowledge to facilitate learning.

Today I chose Chinese poetry as the topic to help students learn more about Chinese culture, revise numbers, and learn some new words. This was like a totally different world for students. In order to make them understand deeply, I used painting as a metaphor. I compared and contrasted Chinese calligraphy painting with western oil painting. One is vague and abstract while the other is realistic. Chinese poetry is just like Chinese painting, which needs imagination to understand. It was much easier for students to learn about Chinese poetry through relating it to painting which they were more familiar with. I tried to build a bridge between their old knowledge and the new one. (20/08/09, Teaching skills/methods)

New knowledge could be learned more easily if it was linked to the existing knowledge systems. Knowing about student knowledge networks and backgrounds helped this process.

5.3.2 Individual difference

Second, as long as I noticed the importance of knowing about student knowledge systems and backgrounds, individual difference emerged as an issue. Different students have different learning styles.

Today we had the second training session from DET. The topic was different learning style of students. It was the first time I touched this concept. I’ve never realised that people have different learning
I was always wondering: why some of my classmates could not learn quietly even for a while? Why some students could not memorise things by heart but could learn and finish hands-on tasks faster and better than others? Today I got the answer: that’s because each person has a particular way of learning … this is a really important thing that I’ve learned to become a good teacher. I should understand that different students have different learning styles. Some students cannot achieve good learning outcomes is not because they cannot learn well; instead, the reason might be the unsuitable teaching and learning styles. (28/07/08, Teaching concepts)

It is important to be aware of individual differences. I found that cultural difference is also important. To teach about Mid-Autumn Festival, I bought moon-cakes for the students to taste. Since lotus with egg is the traditional filling for Chinese moon cakes, I assumed that the students would not dislike it.

Another mistake I made was ignoring cultural difference. Australia is a very multicultural country. There are various customs and habits; especially in eating … I did not think that some students in my class might not eat eggs. I should buy moon-cakes with different fillings to cater different students’ preference of food. It was my fault. I should always keep in mind: students are different and cultures are different. I could not trap myself in my own small world, considering everybody is the same. There is an old Chinese saying says 因材施教, which means teach according to students’ ability and difference. There are no two people are exactly the same. As a teacher, it was important to be aware of individual difference and be open-minded. (12/09/08, Teaching concepts)

I did not consider the possibility that some students would not like this flavour because I did not pay attention to individual differences. I assumed that each student was the same. A similar situation happened in the lesson about Chinese New Year.

Today I wanted to teach them Chinese New Year. I thought I needed
To start by something they were very familiar with … so I decided to compare Christmas with Chinese New Year. I asked students: “what is the most important festival for you?” I imagined, most students would give me the ‘right’ answer. However, what surprised me was only a few students said Christmas, some students even said ‘Chinese new year’. After the first surprise, I realised that students in this class have multiple backgrounds other than English … I asked an inappropriate question and ignored the multiple cultures of this class. Maybe talking about Christmas directly at the beginning was better than asking this question. (03/02/09, Teaching concepts)

To link the new knowledge to the existing knowledge system of students, I planned to introduce the topic by discussing the difference between Chinese New Year and Christmas, because I assumed Christmas was the most important festival for the students, as Chinese New Year is to me. Although Christmas was important and familiar to students, it was not the most important festival for some students. It taught me not to take students for granted or ignore individual differences.

I demonstrated this learning in another dumpling making lesson. I paid attention to different student eating preferences and prepared a variety of fillings.

Today I taught how to make dumplings … since last time I bought moon-cakes but some students did not eat eggs, I understood more about Australian’s multiculturalism. This time, considering some students could not eat meat, celery, or eggs, I prepared six types of fillings. In the class, I made 6 groups to make dumplings with different fillings and planed to cook different types of fillings separately. (09/09/09, Teaching concepts)
5.3.3 Catering for student needs

Third, because students are different, it is important for teachers to cater to different needs. I used to think of equal education as treating each student equally. However, I learned the concept of equity from a supervisor.

I had different standards for different students. I thought this was unfair. However supervisor K gave a totally different answer: … what Australian education wants to achieve is equity, which does not mean equal process. In order to achieve equity, teachers are supposed to treat different level students in different ways. Some kids may need more help and attention than those who are bright. This is the essence of student-centred education - equity, rather than treating every student equally or an absolute equal process … I never thought from this angle before, which was quite different, useful, and reasonable. (19/06/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

Talking with supervisor K, I started to understand the importance of catering for individual needs. I did not internalise this concept until I met a problem in teaching. In one lesson, I designed a game to help engage students. However, most students could not get the right answer, except a boy, who was the only winner of the game.

I taught asking the price to review numbers. I prepared a game to involve students and help revision. As students played the game … there was one boy who did much better than others. Other players were worried and tried to copy his right answer. At the end of this game, another boy said, ‘Oh, I hate this game,’ which shocked me. I found most students had not mastered the knowledge and I made this game too hard for them. Thus as soon as they got stuck … they felt nervous. One clever boy played this game perfectly … which made other students feel even more embarrassed. I think I should have made the difficulty of the game in a moderate level so that most students could have some achievement, setting one or two hard
questions to meet some high-level student needs. (19/03/09, Responsibility for student achievement)

Analysing this event shows that the students were at different levels in learning Mandarin. I made the game too hard for many students so that they felt frustrated. I treated every student equally and did not take care of different student needs. As a result, the effect of the game, and the learning outcome, was negative.

5.3.4 Understanding students: interest, preference and psychology

Fourth, understanding students plays a significant role for student-centred teaching. As a teacher I should be appreciative of the students’ effort, rather than being biased against some students. In one lesson, students were required to present their work and also mark other groups’ presentations. A boy who often misbehaved gave a very bad mark to another group. I was unhappy because I thought he was giving bad marks on purpose. However, I was wrong. I said to the class teacher:

‘It is not fair to give a bad mark to another group on purpose’. But the classroom teacher explained the boy gave a bad mark because there was no cooperation within the group. So it was reasonable to give them this mark. I was so shamed because I assumed that naughty boy was messing up. I did not trust him. I was biased against him. Anything he did made trouble for me. How bad I was as a teacher holding a bias against my students. I was so disappointed in myself. (12/09/08, Teaching concepts)

Biased opinions about students result in ineffective teaching, preventing teachers from exploring students’ potential, efforts and development, and
magnifying their shortcomings. In contrast, a teacher should turn an attentive eye to students’ strengths.

Today I taught students how to make a school uniform … with paper folding. I did not teach step by step. Instead, I put the overhead on and let students try independently. As they had problems, I came and helped. As I expected, two minutes after they started, many students started asking for help. I could hear ‘miss, I need help’ everywhere.

What was unexpected was student A, who was often naughty … not paying much attention to learning … but today when I was helping others, A went to me and showed me what he had done. I was really surprised. He had nearly finished without any of my support. Moreover, his behaviour today was really impressive.

Then I realised that this student learnt things quickly and is easily bored. He is good at hands-on activities. He likes doing craft … so I went to him and said, ‘A, could you go around and help other students who have difficulties in doing their job?’ … he looked at me with a very surprised face. After one second, he smiled and went to help others without saying a word. Even after he finished his work, he sat on seat quietly instead of mucking around.

As the classroom teacher told me, he was a problematic student in other classes. He was so naughty that other teachers find him headache. However, today in my class, he did not behave badly. As a teacher, I should have an appreciative eye to discover student strengths, encouraging them to build confidence and preserving their interests for learning. (06/08/09, Teaching concepts)

In addition, I made efforts to understand the students’ interests so that I could motivate and engage their learning. For instance, students were interested in Chinese culture. Things that are specific to China or different from their lives would catch their attention. Evidence from students’ classroom journals shows students’ preferences for these topics (student classroom journals are referenced with the pseudonym and the date):

Dumplings are yummy! Wǒ xǐhuān dumpling. 😊 (No. 4, 09/09/09)
Today was fun and yum. I wish I could have dumplings everyday and every lesson. (Can we?) (Fish, 09/09/09)

Today was very exciting learning Chinese calligraphy. I enjoy every lesson and wish it could go on forever. (Flower, 28/05/09)

Today was fun making lanterns so we are having lessons next week? It was fun. Thank you 😊 (Lollipop, 03/09/09)

Students showed interest in learning calligraphy, making lanterns and dumplings. They asked for more lessons on topics they preferred (Student Fish, 10a and 四) and drew happy faces to express their positive attitude toward learning. Student No. 4 even wrote a sentence in Chinese to tell me that he liked the lesson: Wǒ xǐhuān dumpling (I like dumpling).

When students were learning what they were interested in, they were involved and even behaved differently, which surprised me:

Then students did calligraphy, tracing Chinese characters and [drawing pictures] … normally, there were some students who left their work in the classroom. However this time they took all their writing and paintings, asking me that if they could keep their work. They did like the calligraphy very much. (05/12/08, Teaching skills/methods)

As the example indicates, students rarely cared about the work they did in class. But after their first calligraphy they took away all the work they had done. It surprised me and helped me understand more about the importance of student interest in motivation and engagement.

In choosing teaching topics, I focused not only on typical cultural artefacts that interest students, but also on things that students were sympathetic with.
Students wanted to know a real picture of China … most students were happy to know something about Chinese students. So I prepared videos of morning exercise and eye-protection exercises that Chinese students do every day and talked with them about the differences between Australian and Chinese students. I also told them the timetable of Chinese students and my own timetable in high school. They were very surprised by the long time Chinese students spent studying and the heavy workload they had. (01/07/09, Teaching skills/methods)

Besides typical cultural topics students were willing to learn something that they felt was relevant and meaningful to their lives as students of Chinese. They were happy to know what Chinese students do for learning and play. They wanted to know about Chinese students who were in their age group, which they might resonate were closely with their life in Australia.

Students also had a preference for learning using technology, games/competitions and rewards. One student wrote in the classroom journal: ‘This lesson was cool because we went to the common room and learnt about music’ (Elephant, 03/06/09). The common room is an interactive room, using technology for teaching. The coolness of the lesson related to going ‘to the common room’ ahead of the interesting topic (music). This is indicative of the influence of technology for motivating learning and engagement.

Today I used a computer to teach the class. As I expected, students concentrated more than before as they looked at the screen. They were quiet, cooperated and listened carefully … Today I found technology could be a good teaching tool. (22/10/08, Teaching skills/methods)

Using technology, stimulated students to learn differently. They were involved as they learned with a computer. Employing technology for teaching language
engaged students and facilitated classroom management.

Students enjoyed playing games and participating in competitions, which are beneficial for learning participation and involvement. Students had fun in learning through games, as shown in classroom journals:

Today was fun playing that memory game. It was fun. I wish we can play that again. (Lollipop, 28/05/09)

Today was very fun because of the memory game. Also I wish that we can play more fun games with friends 😊 (♥, 28/05/09)

Today was fun and it was so good I wish I can do more like this and playing games and laughing with everyone!! 😊 (♥, 11/06/09)

The following is an example of introducing new knowledge through playing a game. Students were required to find out the rule (transliteration) when they played the game.

The students were a bit tired and losing attention, I wanted to do something interesting to get their attention back. So I played a game with them: I said some Chinese words that they haven’t learnt and they had to guess the meanings. Because these words were all transliterated from English and were things that they were familiar with such as car brands, fast food and country names, students could get the idea very quickly, involving in guessing meanings … After this interesting game, I wanted students to think about the rule in translating. Students were so clever and get the answer quickly … After students found the transliteration rule, I started to teach this lesson-country names (most of them were transliterated). As I wrote the Chinese pronunciations on board and read them out, students matched Chinese with the corresponding English names very quickly and learnt very well with full concentration. (02/04/09, Teaching skills/methods)
Rather than teaching the knowledge directly, a game was more attractive to introduce the new knowledge in a relaxing and interesting way. Students enjoyed the game and were involving in learning knowledge. The class teacher noticed how good concentration and participation resulted in learning.

The lesson was good. I think the students participated well and they could do the activity of guessing the name of the countries. The lesson was interesting and did not require too much preparation. (Comments from class teacher, 04/06/09)

She observed students actively participating in the name guessing game. It was this game that made this lesson interesting.

Furthermore, the data shows that the aim of playing games - facilitating and improving learning rather than just playing—was achieved. Setting games without a learning orientation is worthless. In the example of transliteration, I used a game to teach students the translation rule, facilitating new knowledge acquisition.

Using rewards in activities encourages active participation. In a speaking activity, I taught students how to sing a simple Chinese opera. To encourage them I used some special rewards.

Since I considered that students might not be brave and motivated enough to sing in front of the class, I prepared some special and pretty Chinese knots, which were designed according opera faces, as rewards. After students learned about different meanings of colours in Chinese opera faces, watching videos of Chinese opera, opera changing face, and Chinese kids singing opera, they were all desired to have one of these Chinese knots with special meanings. This
strategy worked quite well. Many students, including those who were normally naughty, disengaged, or shy, wanted to gain the special gifts by finishing the task of singing. (25/06/09, Teaching skills/methods)

What I prepared as rewards was relevant to the knowledge that was taught. In this example, I was teaching Chinese opera and the meanings of different colours of opera faces, such as brave, kind, and noble. Anyone who sang could choose a knot. Students who gained knots wanted to know the meanings of the different colours.

I also used other rewards such as Chinese fake money, which students could win in different activities to buy Chinese sweets or small Chinese gifts from me. Using these rewards worked well to motivate learning, as the classroom teacher and students noted.

It was also a very good idea to use money as an incentive as this worked very well as a motivating tool for them. The idea of buying stuff at the end of the lesson was also very effective. I suggest you keep on using this strategy this term. (Comments from class teacher, 04/05/09)

The class teacher recommended that I continue using the strategy of giving out Chinese money and buying Chinese gifts as learning incentives. This strategy was effective because it was a motivating tool for students.

Student interest in gaining these rewards reinforces the effectiveness of this strategy. Student No. 4 expressed disappointment at losing the reward, a Chinese sweet: ‘I didn’t get a lolly 😞’ (No. 4, 17/06/09) and felt happy about winning Chinese knots in another lesson: ‘Today was fun I won Chinese knots’ (No. 4, 25/06/09). Student Flower was also engaged with winning the rewards:
‘It was very fun today and yum. I love chocolate so much. Thanks’ (Flower, 29/07/09).

Besides being appreciative and discovering students’ learning interests and preferences, understanding what students think and capturing their psychology about learning is another important issue for understanding students. For instance, I taught a Chinese song in one lesson. The lesson did not go as planned. So I reflected on the problem:

I should not give the lyrics to students before they listen to the song. As I learned in DET training, in order to keep student attention and interest, a teacher should give them a sense of mystery to make them think and keep their sense of freshness. In terms of this, since I gave students lyrics before they listened to the song, they lost interest and did not pay full attention to listen to the song. (13/08/08, Teaching skills/methods)

Then in another lesson, learning from the past experience, I set up a mysterious environment to make an activity engaging, which led to a good result. This was a lesson about a Chinese legend. The whole story was divided into several parts. Different groups of students in my class had different parts of the legend and had to finish certain tasks according to the story they obtained. At the end of the lesson, they were required to present their work. In order to concentrate students on the presentation, I was concerned with setting up a mysterious environment:

I realised the importance of setting a mysterious environment, not showing all materials at once, to maintain students’ concentration. On the written instructions … for every group, I wrote ‘do not tell other groups about your part of story’ so that I could keep the sense of mysterious and freshness of this story. Because each group had only a
part of this story and wanted to hear the rest of it, as a result, they listened carefully … keeping student curiousness about the activity or teaching content was really important and useful for teaching. If I showed everything to students, they would not be as engaged in the activity as they were in today’s lesson. (12/09/08, Teaching skills/methods)

As the reflection indicates, I had learned about this strategy in methodology training (Self-reflection, 13/08/08). However, I did not use it or even notice it until I met a problem in one of my lessons. After I was trapped I started to realise and link the knowledge I learnt about teaching with my real situation. Problems I faced in reality naturally elicited useful knowledge I had learned before. Therefore, my sense of being a teacher in terms of using skills and methods was not formed or gained directly from learning in training or being taught. Instead, it was constructed by combining my own experiences with knowledge I had learned, which mutually influenced each other. Another example is, knowing what students were thinking about.

I think students have ambivalence in their mind. They wanted to show how good … they are, but they also did not want others to recognise that. So these students normally did not participate actively. But as soon as they got the opportunity … they would do their best to ‘show off’. I realised their conflict minds and gave them the opportunity to ‘show off’. I did not always call students who raised hands. Sometimes I chose some quiet students who looked at you with their sparking eyes, showing that ‘call me, call me!’ (22/10/08, Teaching concepts)

Because I had this experience before when I was at junior high school, my Chinese literacy teacher could always tell from my eyes whether I was eager to ‘show off’ or did not know the answer. She could ‘read my mind’ and gave me
the opportunity to show how good I was and built my confidence in front of others (see Chapter 4). As I had the similar experiences before as a student, I could understand student psychology in the same situation. Understanding what students think about benefits teaching.

It is also important to capture student psychology, designing the lesson to motivate and involve students and to cater to student need.

In order to make primary students take calligraphy seriously, I told them the paper used for calligraphy was different from normal paper, giving students the opportunity to touch the paper and feel the difference. Then I said only students who could do calligraphy well on the normal paper could have chance to use the special paper. Thus they all did calligraphy seriously. Moreover, I limited the time to do calligraphy. Then I changed to other activities. Since the time was limited, students appreciated the chance … enjoying more and were willing to do it again. But in high school, I just gave students the special paper directly and spent the whole lesson doing calligraphy. As a result, students did not treat calligraphy seriously and ruined many pieces of paper. They felt bored as time went by, starting to muck around and showed little interest in doing it again.

Teaching the same thing, but change my teaching strategy slightly, resulted in a totally different student attitude. As a teacher, I have to be a performer as well as a playwright. As a playwright, I have to enrich the play (lesson), making it attractive. As a performer, even though I know what is in the play (lesson), the audiences (students) do not. The performer needs to perform, handling the tempo of the play (lesson). (09/07/09, Teaching concepts)

I positioned my teacher role as a playwright and a performer. The playwright has to learn how to make this play attractive. Teaching is just like a play: if there is no suspense or passion, the words will be flat, nobody will want to watch it, even though the content is meaningful. A playwright needs to include
content and set up suspense or mystery. It is the same for the teacher. As a performer, even though I knew everything about the play (I had plenty of calligraphy paper) I pretended to lack the paper so that students would appreciate the opportunity.

5.3.5 Being aware of student feelings

Fifth, student-centred teaching takes care of student feelings. As analysed in Chapter 4, caring about student feeling was one of my important standards for evaluating a teacher, as I positively identified in Teacher 4’s behaviour.

Thus when I observed a lesson at ZWHS, I was critical of the way the class teacher dealt with discipline problems. To my understanding, yelling and being terrible to students hurt student feelings and was ineffective for classroom management.

She yelled to students and blamed kids when they could not learn well or behave. She did not consider this may hurt the kids’ enthusiasm and pride. Today as students misbehaved the class teacher got angry and said this was the worst and least responsible class she had ever had. I did not like it when she talked about students like this … I felt it was humiliating. How did students feel as she said that? I felt bad and sad. There must be lots of ways to keep students settled, rather than scolding and humiliating. If she kept doing this as students misbehave, I do not think students would get better. They would start to hate my class. (24/09/08, Teaching concepts)

A teacher should take care of student feelings. Even if students misbehave, being angry with students and using bad words to hurt them is not appreciated.
As a teacher, sometimes my subconscious actions would also influence student feeling. In one lesson I was mad at student misbehaviour, warning a naughty student by calling his name. This was just my subconscious behaviour, but it affected this student.

I was a little mad and called a naughty boy’s name. He was threatened and afraid of my anger. After that he tried to show good behaviour to compensate his ‘bad’ impression in my mind. He kept showing me that he had done every task: “Miss, I have finished all the tasks you gave me.” … In fact, I did not have a bad impression of him. I just saw he was chatting while I was talking and called his name subconsciously to try to get his attention. However, in his opinion, my action might make him embarrassed in front of classmates. He was afraid about my anger, trying to do something to show me that he was a “good” student. I realised that I should be aware of the influence of my behaviour to students. Students were sensitive to the teacher’s behaviour. Some of my subconscious actions might mislead students and impact on their feelings. (11/02/09, Teaching concepts)

As the reflection shows, teacher behaviour influences student feeling. As a teacher, I should be aware of the impacts of my behaviour, taking care of student feeling. This indicates my understanding of student-centred perception.

5.3.6 Not satisfying everything student requires

Sixth, ‘student-centred’ does not mean satisfying every student requirement. I used to feel frustrated when students did not appreciate my teaching efforts.

This was a terrible lesson. I prepared a lot and made efforts to make the lesson interesting and involved. But students seemed not to recognise my efforts. They wrote in journals that they wanted to play Chinese games, drawing, listen to Chinese music, and so forth. I satisfied all these wishes and thought that they would be happy. However they were … naughty in the class. I felt really bad.
In my opinion, I was student-centred because “I satisfied all the wishes” students wrote in their journals. I expected students to be involved, as their needs had been met. Then my understanding of student-centred as satisfying every student need changed, in a lesson about flying kites.

Today students were allowed to go out to fly kites that they had made. As I brought students out, I was supposed to give each group 8 minutes to fly. However when I saw students enjoying flying their kites, I was unwilling to stop their happiness, forcing them to go back. So, as students asked for more flying time, I said, ‘Yes’. As a result, there was not enough time for the rest of groups. I did not treat my rule seriously and still lacked the sense of being a teacher. Student-centred does not merely mean giving students anything they want to make them happy. This is not meeting students’ needs. It spoils students and reduces teacher authority. This would make students treat you as a person who is weak, lacking in professional skills and unable to control the class. (12/05/09, Teaching concepts)

I broke my own rule because in my mind I tried to please students more than taking care of the whole class. I thought I was meeting student needs. However, as a result, I did not take care of the majority of student needs (time was not enough for all groups to fly their kites) by satisfying certain student needs. Student-centred is not satisfying every student’s need, but paying attention to student needs as a whole.

A similar problem happened when I paid more attention to certain students than others, causing inattention problems for the whole class. As in the following example, my attention was caught by an active student for a long time until I
realised the class was ‘out of my control’:

Again I had the problem of paying too much attention to an active student … at first I could not help replying because I felt really good that a student showed such an intense interest in learning. Then I found some other students started being naughtly. The situation was a little out of my control. So I tried to get attention back from the active student. (13/08/08, Teaching skills/methods)

As a novice teacher, I was easily influenced by student response. The student in the example showed interest in what I was teaching, giving me a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Thus I spent much time talking to her and answering her questions. As a result, other students started being naughtly and I found it difficult to get the class under control.

As I understood how satisfying any requirement of a certain student influenced my ability to take care of the whole cohort’s need, I learned how to say no to some requests:

I used to meet each of her needs because that is what I thought meeting students’ needs meant. But I found I was wrong. It was not fair to other students and seriously interrupted my plan. I have learned how to say no to her as she kept … interrupting my lesson. I realised the importance of considering the whole class situation, not focusing on certain students who seemed naughtly or active. (12/09/08, Teaching concepts)

Satisfying every student need was not student-centred. As a teacher, I have to consider the situation according to student needs as a whole, and then cater for certain student needs. Catering for certain student needs does not mean hurting other students.
5.3.7 Not teacher dominant

Seventh, student-centred is student focused, not teacher dominant. As analysed above, being conscious of individual difference, catering for student needs, taking care of student feelings and so forth, indicates the student focus of teaching in Australia. I was taught in the teacher-centred way in China, being used to listening to the teacher talking and explaining in detail for a long time (see Chapter 4).

Although I recognised the different situation in Australia, sometimes I still talked too much, trying to explain everything in detail, as noted by the class teacher:

Sometimes I’d recalled there was more talking on your part … at times like you keep explaining things and talking to the students. So they are used to variety. They want a bit of talking, they want a bit of writing, they want a bit of watching something, and then drawing or doing something. (Class teacher interview)

She commented after one lesson: ‘just talking to students without giving them activities to do is not very engaging’ (Comments from class teacher, 25/06/09).

Over-talking or explanation also leads to timing problems. I raised the same problem in self-reflections:

I spent too much time in teaching pinyin and pronunciation. Students felt bored and started talking. I also felt tired for spending so much time in talking. I need to make them talk, participate and think, rather than only listening to me talking (24/10/08, Teaching skills/methods)

As I recognised, teaching in Australia, student participation was important. Too much teacher talk bored students, even if the explanation of new knowledge
(pinyin) was necessary. The lesson ended poorly because I talked too much and did not have time for the activities I had planned.

I needed to adapt my teaching to the circumstances, as this reflection on teaching a lesson on Chinese poetry shows.

The problem of my teaching for this lesson was I talked too much, which was hard for students to concentrate. Because this was very new to students and was very cultural and unique, I tried to explain as much as I could to help students understand. But I found this way was not effective. Students lost attention after my long talk. So I changed to ask questions to make them think and gave them enough time to think. After that, students were more involved, giving me different answers, and paid more attention to what I taught and asked … although some answers were funny, they had been thinking and tried to understand what I was talking about (20/08/09, Teaching skills/methods)

Therefore, student-centred teaching is not teacher dominant. The focus is students. The importance of teaching is helping student learning, which leads to the role of teacher as guide rather than knowledge giver. No matter how detailed I explained about Chinese poetry and pinyin, the students could not learn until they had the opportunity to think and practise by themselves.

I found it hard to adapt to the new style of teaching and learning I experienced at university. The teacher’s role as guide rather than hands on teacher confused me. Through teaching in Australia, I understood more about this way of teaching and the role teachers played. Teachers cannot dominate in student learning because they cannot just feed the knowledge into students’ minds.

No matter how much knowledge a teacher has, it is impossible to
engraft the teacher’s knowledge to students’ brain, through teacher talk. Students have their own existing knowledge system. The role a teacher plays is guide to rather than giver of the knowledge. Teaching is like labyrinth. The teacher knows where the exit is and how to go out. But students are standing at the entrance, trying to go out. Even though the teacher tells students where the exit is, students cannot go out without knowing the route. The important thing … is, leading students to the exit until they can go out independently, not telling them where the exit is. Students still need to go out by themselves. As long as they know more labyrinths, they will know how to exit a new labyrinth independently. (20/08/09, Teaching concepts)

To summarise, story line 3 describes my understanding of student-centred teaching. Student-centred is student focused, not teacher dominant. Students have their own knowledge systems and background. The role a teacher plays is guiding rather than knowledge feeding. Teachers should be aware of individual differences and cater for student needs, which does not indicate satisfying every student’s needs. In addition, it is necessary for teachers to take care of student feeling and be conscious of their own behaviour, which can influence student feeling. Students’ learning interests, preferences and psychology also need attention.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter is the first of three that introduce my teaching experiences in Australia through 10 story lines. Story line 1 displays my understanding of the influence of (sometimes competing) Asian and Western values to education. Story line 2 describes how I learned and adapted to the process and development approach to education. My teacher identity was formed and reformed as I changed my teaching concepts and methods. Story line 3 outlines
how I learnt to understand about the concept of student-centred teaching. My sense of being a teacher increased as this learning happened in teaching experiences, training, observation, and interaction with professionals. The next chapter illustrates story lines 4, 5 and 6, to further explore my teaching experiences in Australia.
6. Introduction

This chapter continues the analysis started in the previous chapter. It displays and analyses story lines 4 (the student teacher-relationship), 5 (negotiating between the roles of an individual and a teacher), and 6 (how my role as a VTR influenced being and becoming a real teacher). As more data is analysed, evidence emerges that answers the research question: how do I develop my sense of being a teacher through my teaching experiences in Australia?

6.1 Story line 4: Student-teacher relationship—Mutual trust and understanding

Teachers in China have great authority. They demand hard work from students, and I had at least one teacher who had no qualms about humiliating students. At university, the teachers had minimal contact with students. We were trusted to work collaboratively and develop independent learning skills, concepts that were new to me (see Chapter 4). As a teacher in Australia I found I needed to understand and practise mutual trust, which underpins a positive student-teacher relationship. My teacher identity formed, as I understood the importance of building mutual trust between teachers and students: teachers
show concern for students, give choice to students, and provide opportunities to students. Teachers who build a mutual trust relationship with students facilitate the teaching and learning process.

The fourth story line is about my understanding of student-teacher relationships. For me the main issue was establishing mutual trust and understanding to build a good relationship with the students. Observing K, teaching, I realised that as a teacher it is not always necessary to keep my feelings and concerns to myself. He talked to the students about going outside to do an activity.

Considering students would be ‘out of control’ outside, each group was only allowed to be outside for no more than 10 minutes. K asked the students why they could only go outside for such a short time. Students started to think about it. Then he told students about his concerns for student misbehaviour outside. If students could behave properly, they could have more time out for next week’s lesson. There was a mutual trust between teachers and students. As a result students were sympathetic to teacher’s feeling and behaved properly.

From this, I started to understand, it is unnecessary for teachers to always to keep their feelings inside. Sometimes, it was better to show students their concerns, or fear. Students were kind enough to understand teachers’ difficulty and cooperate. (28/04/09, Teaching concepts)

Mutual trust is important in building a good student-teacher relationship. Showing teachers’ concerns to students can lead to a closer and deeper relationship. As long as the teacher tells students about his concerns and his expectation of the students, they are sympathetic and they understand the teacher. Although teachers need some distance from students to build up teacher authority, mutual trust is not contradictory, to make students feel more
close to the teacher without reducing teacher authority.

Giving students choices also illustrates the importance of mutual trust for building a good student-teacher relationship. Rather than making decisions for students, giving students some freedom to make their own choices could be beneficial for both learning and teaching:

The book W gave me said that students are more involved when they have choice. So as I taught the topic of sport, I did not decide the sports students needed to learn. Instead, I divided students into groups and let them work together to choose sports that they liked best or wanted to learn most. As a result, students were involved in discussion to choose the favourite sports that they wanted to learn about in Chinese with group members. (27/08/08, Teaching skills/methods)

With the help of a supervisor, I learned the importance of giving students choices for student engagement. Then I used it in one lesson about sport, which worked well. Sometimes as a teacher, I had to trust students. They were good and clever enough to make their own decision. By giving students some freedom and trusting them, they could achieve better outcomes than being taught directly.

Giving naughty students opportunities can be better than controlling or restricting them. Giving them the chance to participate and show their ability was beneficial for the whole class:

In the third listening activity, I did not read the conversation by myself. Instead, I gave students an opportunity to read. Several students wanted to try but I chose a naughty boy. He was so happy when I chose him and tried his best to read. Several times, I asked
him to read again loudly and clearly, testing if he would give up. What surprised me was that he did not give up and completed all my requirements. Based on his reading of conversation and instruction, other students were asked to pick up the right answer and stick it on the board. This boy was happy and satisfied, not interrupting me anymore and listening carefully for the rest of this lesson. (19/02/09, Teaching skills/methods)

This incident indicates the importance of trusting students. Giving this naughty boy the opportunity to read in front of the class and manage the activity procedure satisfied his desire for attention and gave him a sense of achievement, so that he had the confidence and interest to cooperate in this lesson. He learnt well because I gave him an opportunity to be involved. As a result, he did not disappoint me and was more engaged in the lesson.

Mutual trust and understanding allows teachers to express their fears or concerns to students. When teachers indicate that they trust students to make decisions, students take the opportunity to show the teacher they are willing and able to learn.

6.2 Story line 5: Negotiation of roles: Individual vs Teacher

As I taught, I struggled with two different roles, learning how to put the teacher ahead of the individual. As a teacher, I had to consider lesson design, teaching concerns, student learning difficulty, reporting to deputy, using wait time, or teacher authority. Often these seemed to conflict with my personality, which wanted to befriend the students and make their time in the Mandarin class
enjoyable. During the process of learning to teach, I often felt hurt when students were naughty, when I lost control of the classroom situation, or when I felt I lacked teacher authority. I defined my position as an individual first, which made me vulnerable and unaware of my role as a teacher. This story line describes how I negotiated between my role as an individual and a teacher.

### 6.2.1 Individual role bigger than Teacher role

When I was teaching, I often worried about student feelings. I was nervous as soon as I found that students were bored or restless:

As time passed, Student J felt bored and became noisy. This made me a little nervous. I was so worried that students would feel bored in my class. Moreover, I found similar emotions from student B, the best student in my class. So I got rushed and felt nervous. I wanted to finish this part quickly and move to another interesting activity, even though most other students had not mastered the knowledge. I was influenced a lot by students’ emotions and behaviour. (05/12/08, Teacher roles vs other roles)

This example indicates that by assuming students became restless because they were bored in my lesson, I subconsciously put my role as an individual before my role as a teacher in the class. I wanted students to like my lesson and like me and believed that their restlessness meant I was a boring teacher and my lesson was not interesting. As a result I was nervous and rushed to finish the task and move to another, even though I knew most students had not finished. I did not consider the situation from a teacher’s perspective. That is, I did not consider whether the students had mastered the knowledge.
Another example also shows the contradiction between individual role and teacher role during teaching. In a lesson when I planned to teach the numbers 1 to 100 I realised some students had difficulty mastering all the numbers, but I persisted in keeping to my original plan, rather than adapting my lesson:

The teaching of 1-10 went well because I used the activity and games in Zouba\(^1\) to catch students’ attention and they learned very quickly. However, when I started teach more than 10, they started to lose attention and started talking again. I asked one student, who has learned 1-10, if he could still remember number 1-10. He said no. I was surprised and finally realised that most students could not remember 1-10.

Then although I saw the problem of my teaching, I still stuck to my thinking. I thought I could not go back to teach 1-10, because I had moved to nearly 100, although afterwards I thought, going back to teach 1-10 was OK. I should make decision very quickly to find the solution best for students’ learning. But I did not do that due to my nervousness and embarrassment at that time. It was losing face to admitted my mistake and go back to teach 1-10. No one noticed my embarrassment but I could not help feeling bad and stuck to my own thinking. (03/03/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

As a teacher, I was supposed to pay attention to students’ learning processes, and make sure the lesson was suitable for them. In this example, I realised that I had set a task that was too difficult for students to finish in one lesson. I knew I should change my plan but did not want to lose face by admitting that I had made a mistake. I stuck to my original plan and kept myself in a safe place. This example demonstrates how my role as an individual conflicted with my role as a teacher. It also reflected that I lacked a sense of being a teacher.

\(^1\) A software program to teach Mandarin Chinese developed by NSW DET.
The third example happened when I was asked by the class teacher to talk with the deputy about student misbehaviour in my class. But I felt uncomfortable because it was like complaining and I did not want the deputy to undervalue my ability:

Today the class teacher asked me to see the deputy to talk about a naughty boy’s misbehaviour. I knew she did this because she was trying to help me. But I felt so weird in doing this it was like a child, telling on somebody and complaining. Although I was told that as a teacher, I had this responsibility to let the deputy know my class situation to ease my teaching difficulty and let them help me, a novice, to get through the hard situation, it was still not easy and calm for me to do this. I felt really uncomfortable when I was talking with the deputy about a student’s misbehaviour. I felt it was not such a big deal. Why should I bother the deputy? It showed that I did not have the ability to deal with students. Moreover the student’s behaviour was not that serious. Although the class teacher wanted to help me, and got me to talk to the deputy, but I still felt really uncomfortable and embarrassed. (Self-reflection, 14/05/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

I did not have a clear sense that I was a teacher. I felt embarrassed when I told the deputy about student misbehaviour rather than feeling responsible to report it. I was concerned that my ability would be questioned and give the deputy an impression that I was complaining and turning somebody off. All of my consideration started from the position of an individual instead of the teacher role. The feelings and concerns of an individual exceeded the teacher’s reason and responsibility.

I also felt embarrassed when students said nothing. So when I asked questions that didn’t get many responses, I would just give answers rather than giving students time to think because I felt embarrassed with this “cold stage”.

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Then I start to teach them Chinese characters. First I asked them: do we need to learn characters? And let them discuss. I felt uncomfortable when they said nothing. I felt embarrassed and didn’t want to spend much ‘wait time’. So I just gave them the answers. I needed to use wait time and let the students talk. If I always give them answers, next time they don’t think they should answer the question; anyway, ‘Miss Li will give the answer.’ (24/10/08, Teacher roles vs other roles)

As a teacher, I was supposed to use ‘wait time’, giving students enough time to think. Caring about my feelings and ignoring student needs indicates the individual role suppressed the teacher role.

I got along with students as if they were like friends, which caused problems when building my teacher authority. This example describes my experience of noticing the importance of teacher authority:

Today I went to the aquarium with a primary school. While we were waiting for the tickets outside the aquarium, I talked with some students. There were two kids who were so cute and talked to me for a long time, showing great interest in me and the things I had brought with me. I was nice and patient in talking with them.

It was good at the beginning, but then I found things went out of my control. They were so over the boundary: as we played games, they started to tickle me; then they asked me to borrow my iPod and refused to give it back to me. I was frightened by their behaviour. I tried to persuade them to give the iPod back to me, in a soft voice and with a smile. But it did not work at all. They did not think I was serious and really meant it. I was mad when they started to fight for my iPod. I gave them a bad face and ordered them to give it back to me. After they felt that I was so serious, they stopped fighting and gave it back to me and said sorry.

This was the first time I felt that I needed to keep a distance from students and build my teacher authority. Before that I always thought...
kids were cute. I could not help but treat them as lovely kids like my little brother and sister, but not students.

From today’s experience, I started to know how important it is to set up rules and make them routine. I was too nice to let them test my boundaries and authority. It is necessary to keep some distance from students so that they know you are the teacher and they can see your authority as a teacher. (06/08/08, Teaching concepts)

As the example shows, I gradually recognised my role as a teacher, and developed my sense of being a teacher. At first, teacher authority was foreign to me, as I treated students like little brothers or sisters, thinking other teachers were too serious. When students crossed the boundary and I lost control of their behaviour, I started to realise the importance of teacher authority and rules, as well as building my sense of being a teacher.

This made me recall the new class teacher in senior high school who could not build teacher authority. He was overly nice to students, which caused student behaviour problems. I was critical of him and his behaviour left a strong impression. I realise now that he could not negotiate his role as an individual and a teacher because he did not understand the use of authority. I learnt that separating individual and teacher roles is necessary for becoming a teacher.

6.2.2 Awareness of the problem and change of mind

As I was conscious of the problem about conflicting individual and teacher roles, I tried to get rid of influential individual feelings and tried to think from the teacher’s perspective.

Also to be a teacher, I found I needed to be a different person during class. I tried to put my role as a teacher in front of my role as a person. For instance, when I saw a boy being naughty during class, as a
person, I felt really bad and depressed, but as a teacher, I could not let such feeling lead my way during teaching. I tried to ignore this feeling and think reasonably, trying to find a good way to deal with any troublesome situation and teach effectively. Thus during teaching, I often felt that my different roles were competing with each other and I tried my best to focus on the teacher’s role and build my sense and ability as a teacher. It was hard. I was often struggling with different feelings and learned slowly. (19/06/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

I used to feel, personally, hurt when students misbehaved. But as a teacher, I learned to deal with this situation rather than being dominated by negative feelings.

Similarly, the starting point of my teaching was not pleasing students or making students like me.

Last term I worried more about whether students would like me, how to please students, whether my lesson topic was interesting enough to catch students’ interest, and whether I should have prepared more lollies or gifts to ‘bribe’ students once they got naughty, and I did not want to be strict or severe when they misbehaved because I was worried that they would hate me if I did so. This attitude and mind-set put me in a very passive position as a teacher. (03/09/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

I did not place myself in a teacher’s position. I tried to please students by teaching an interesting lesson; I gave students gifts and dared not to be ‘bad’ to them even when they were misbehaving, trying to make them like me. I did not consider teaching from a teacher’s perspective.

As I realised my problem, my opinion changed:
I am the teacher, what I prepared and aimed to teach was what I considered as good, useful, and necessary for students. I understood that, choosing interesting topics and preparing attractive games or activities for students was not for pleasing students and getting them to like me or to cooperate with my teaching, but because it was good to motivate learning and helpful for teaching. My new mind-set rearranges my position in a more active place, which could lead the teaching and classroom situation, but not be so influenced by students attitudes and teaching situation. If students misbehave, I will try my best to manage discipline and get them back to work. I should not spend too much time on considering how to please students and worry if they like me or not. (03/09/09, Teaching concepts)

As a teacher, I should consider whether the lesson I prepared is beneficial for the students, rather than making them like me. Thinking from a teacher’s perspective, I developed and showed my teacher authority purposefully, to better manage classroom situations, which impacts on student learning.

Before this lesson I always tried to please students. I was so influenced by students’ thinking. I spent a lot of time preparing interesting topic, activities, and games. But students were often naughty and disrupted my teaching. And their learning did not achieve my expectation. So I decided to change my teaching methods. I wanted to follow Zouba and be consistent in teaching content. Today I did not prepare as much. Students did activities from Zouba, switching to a different task after a short time. I worked seriously at managing classroom discipline and student behaviour in this lesson. As a result, students behaved really well, which surprised me. The change of students’ behaviour might also be because of my change of teaching. They felt different with this way of teaching and saw improvement in their Mandarin. (26/05/09, Teaching skills/methods)

I considered what was beneficial to students, adapting my teaching accordingly. I did not design any garish activities or use rewards to make students like me
anymore. I changed to Zouba, which focused on student learning rather than pleasing students. I dealt with classroom discipline, instead of being tolerant of student misbehaviour. As students felt I was serious about teaching and their learning, they behaved better.

6.2.3 Misunderstanding and misleading of teaching and correction

Since recognising the importance of a teacher’s perspective, I re-positioned my aim and my teaching strategies to focus on student learning, using Zouba, rather than making students like me.

Since last time, I realised that I was the teacher; I had the right to decide what to teach and should not always want to please students, which was ineffective for building my teacher authority. So I became more strict in recent lessons: I followed exactly Zouba rather than making a lot of fun stuff such as games, calligraphy, music, and videos, which I had done before. Because these things made the learning process slow and dispersive—students did not learn much language knowledge but often mucked around. (11/06/09, Teaching concepts)

Using Zouba, my teaching was becoming stricter because the fun learning, which I had emphasised before had been eliminated. I thought games or other interesting activities affected learning negatively because they slowed down the learning process. As I repositioned myself as a teacher, my consideration and behaviour were all influenced.

However, this strategy worked well only for a short time.

Since I started using Zouba and focused on language teaching, students responded well, which made me think this way of teaching
was good and suitable for both the students and me. However, after several lessons like this, students became naughty again and said the lesson was boring in their journals. Then I started to think why this happened. I thought that I began to build my teacher authority. But today I was confused again. Following Zouba exactly improved teaching and learning results and built my teacher authority but bored the students. This change worked at first but failed. I wondered why. (11/06/09, Teaching skills/methods)

I found the answer as I discussed the effectiveness of rote learning with supervisor K. I thought rote learning was a bad teaching method. However, I was surprised that students responded positively. I started to question my previous idea. K gave me a new understanding about using rote learning.

I used to have negative attitudes about rote learning. But last time when co-VTR asked students what was the engaging part in her lesson some students said revision or reinforcement (repeating and memorising) was very important. I was so surprised. Then K said rote learning is not bad. Actually Chinese education is also successful and rote learning has been proved to be effective. But the way that rote learning was used for teaching was not right because Chinese teachers used few other teaching strategies. In fact, if we used diverse teaching strategies during class, rote learning such as reviewing, repeating, and memorising could achieve unexpectedly good effects, as the students in our class commended. Rote learning can be effective and different for students within a variety of different teaching methods. It can reinforce the learning outcome and make the learning process easier than always introducing to new knowledge in each class. (19/06/09, Teaching concepts)

There is no right or wrong teaching method. In fact, rote learning has proved to be effective, as my past educational experiences show (see Chapter 3). I did not hate the method itself. Actually I liked memorising. What I hated was the way that the class teacher used rote learning, only rote learning, which drove me
crazy. However, I could not ignore the effectiveness of rote learning, which prepared me for Chinese Literacy at junior high school. The primary Chinese Literacy teacher was too extreme about using rote-work, and this made me reluctant to use her teaching method.

I had the same problem as I changed my teaching strategy. It was good to focus on student learning, but the way I achieved this goal was too extreme. I removed all interesting teaching methods. Students felt different and responded well at first, but they soon lost interest and responded negatively. In fact, the way I taught before, which focused only on interesting methods to make students like my lesson, also had the same problem. Students had fun games or interesting things to do for every lesson, with little rote learning work. It also lacked diversity. Thus as students had some rote learning, they responded positively. As a result, I understood the importance of using diverse ways of teaching. The class teacher recognised my efforts to use a range of teaching strategies:

You always use a variety of activities, not just boring writing. Yours is like talking, a bit of writing, something on the overhead, something … like a power-point presentation. You do have a variety of activities. (Class teacher’s interview).

In my journal I considered the importance and effectiveness of using a variety of teaching strategies.

The combination of different teaching methods was significant for an effective lesson. The way I taught before, no matter it was full of interesting activities or following Zouba, lacked variety and diversity. I only used fun stuff to attract students or Zouba to teach. Maybe students feel different (interested, and improving) when I change
teaching methods. But after several lessons repeating these and only these processes, they started to feel bored. So the better way might be a combination of the previous and later methods. (19/06/09, Teaching concepts)

Only interesting games, Zouba, or rote-work could lead to consistent effective learning outcomes. Using a variety of ways for teaching could attract students and help them learn effectively.

6.3 Story line 6: being a real teacher: VTR vs Teacher

Story line 6 illustrates my identity construction as a “real” teacher, in terms of my role negotiation between VTR and teacher. A “real” teacher should have teacher authority and capability in handling classroom management. Sense of belonging also contributes to my identity as a “real” teacher, as I was recognised as a member of the particular teacher group. In the process of learning to become a “real” teacher, my teacher efficacy was reinforced as I built my teaching confidence and ability to deal with emergencies.

I was a not real teacher who worked at school every day. I lacked the experiences of other teachers in terms of both formal teacher training and practice teaching. I was not allowed to teach without being with another teacher. I was a novice Mandarin teacher learning how to teach. Sometimes I felt powerless or lacking in teacher authority because of my role as a VTR; sometimes I was aware of my incapability to deal with classroom management and emergency; and sometimes I felt I did not belong to the school community.
6.3.1 Power/authority

As a VTR, I had to teach with the help of a class teacher. I was a beginning teacher, learning how to teach and manage classroom situations.

I often struggled with my role as a teacher and my role as a student. The classroom teacher always interrupted my teaching and recommended what I should do in class. I knew she was trying to help. However, she kept interrupting me and I could not finish my lesson on time. I appreciated her help, but I did not want her to interrupt my teaching. Not only because it was wasting teaching time, but also questioning my authority in front of students. Many times when I could not control the situation, she jumped up and helped me with discipline. Although I was told that I was not supposed to take the responsibility for managing discipline, I felt my teacher authority was questioned if I kept leaving the discipline problem to the class teacher. (13/08/08, Teacher roles vs other roles)

My role as a VTR influenced my role as a teacher. I knew I was a learner of teaching. However, as long as the class teacher was in charge of classroom management, I did not feel like a real teacher.

The class teacher also mentioned this in the interview:

You have gained much more confidence. Your voice is improved. The way you deal with the students, the way you show authority. But I do think you need to show a little bit more authority. Because when you tell them I need silence, I have noticed they respond, they become quiet. But you don’t do that all the time, because probably you leave the discipline things to me … thinking that I will discipline them. That’s fine, but during your teaching or talking … if you just stop and discipline them there, I think it’s going to help you a lot. Then they will know that this teacher really means business … we cannot muck up. So the kids will try, they will try every new teacher. They want to talk over them. They want to just do their own thing, unless you tell them that you are the boss … you want it this way, they won’t do it.
She noticed that I was hesitating as I dealt with classroom management. My role as a teacher conflicted with the role of VTR because a real teacher was supposed to show authority for discipline management, while this was not one of my responsibilities as a VTR. Thus I encountered problems balancing these two roles.

The class teacher also noticed my concern:

You might also feel at times, you are not sure how much authority you’ve got … so in that case, they [students] can pick on that and say that you do not have that much authority, like she’s not a main teacher, she’s a Chinese teacher, we see her only once or twice a week, but she does not have full control of us … if there are two people in the classroom and suppose I am here with the deputy principal, they will probably undermine my authority and respond more to the deputy principal (Class teacher’s interview).

Because I was not the regular teacher, students sometimes did not take too much notice of my authority; and because there were two teachers in the classroom, my authority was reduced. Schools treated me more as a learner than as a teacher. I often felt powerless and far away from a real teacher.

Today was GPS’ (a primary school) multicultural day. Students learned and experienced different countries and cultures. One class was learning Chinese. The teacher said I would be asked to teach for a while. However, I was only asked one question. Although it made students happy, I felt bad because I had prepared a lot but the school did not let me teach. I think it would be better for me to practise teaching rather than answering questions. (26/05/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)
I felt frustrated that I was supposed (and prepared) to teach but only had to answer a question. I did not do what real teachers were doing.

Another thing that made me feel powerless and not a real part of the school was my transfer.

Today when I went to the staffroom I was shocked that everything was a mess. I was told that they were moving departments and offices. There was a big change among departments and I was assigned to a different department with a different head teacher. But nobody told me anything about it. (09/07/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

The school changed me to another one without informing in advance. I was surprised that I was only told about the change in departments when I went to teach. As a VTR, I felt confused about my role, and now the school reinforced this confusion by treating me as an outsider. I did not feel a real part of the school.

6.3.2 Capability

Developing the ability to deal with discipline and emergencies is another element of becoming a real teacher. As a VTR, it was difficult to develop this skill. However, I knew that if I kept avoiding handling discipline problems, I would not become a real teacher who could not only teach well, but also knew how to deal with student (mis)behaviour. So, my goal of becoming a real teacher motivated me to make an effort to deal with classroom management.
I was conscious of learning and improving my classroom management skill, as shown in the co-VTR’s interview:

I think we all think about how to improve our lessons and how to be a better teacher. So we … ask for help from others with experience … and after each lesson, we talk about the delivery and get feedback and comments from the class teachers … in training sessions, I think we are much more willing to talk about our lessons, our problems, and our difficulties as a teacher. I think that’s a pretty good way to develop our professionalism as teachers. (Co-VTR’s interview)

However, sometimes I became conceited about my improvement, until students shocked me, which made me realise I was still a long way from becoming a real teacher.

Recently my feeling about myself was a bit arrogant. I thought students were obedient now and I could totally handle them in the class. I did not expect they would misbehave and be naughty again. After a period of peaceful and smooth life in ‘heaven’, students showed me the reality again: talking, moving, and not cooperating. I overestimated my ability and downgraded the difficulty of my class. I still have a long way to go to be a ‘real’ teacher. I should keep learning and practising. (24/10/08, Awareness of consistent learning)

To become a real teacher, I had also to learn how to deal with student behaviour not only in my class. After teaching my students for several months, I thought I had built up teacher authority and could deal with student behaviour problems. However, as I taught another class, one which I had not previously taught, I found my weakness in classroom management.

Today at the class teacher’s request, I went to teach another of her classes paper folding. J (the class teacher) left for a while. In that time, one boy ran into the classroom and talked with one student, totally ignoring me. I asked him to leave. But he did not listen to me, but got another student to come into the classroom. I did not know their
names and whether or not they were students in this class. I felt so bad because I could not do anything to deal with this situation. I even felt some students’ sympathy in their eyes. I could not feel more powerless than that. How weak I was in this situation. This was not my class. These students were not those that I was familiar with. I did not have authority among them at all. How could I make them follow my order? I still have a fair way to go to become a real teacher who has the authority to deal with any discipline problems; at least I should know how to deal with these unexpected situations in an unfamiliar environment. (14/08/09, Awareness of consistent learning)

I had to keep improving my teaching skills. As time passed by, the new group of VTRs came. One day, as I observed the new VTR’s lesson, I noticed my own improvement.

Today I observed the new VTRs’ lesson. Their lesson made me think about myself 15 months ago, struggling with how to prepare lessons, manage classroom discipline, and communicate with students. Compared the old me, I felt more confident and experienced now. I saw a huge change and improvement in my teaching. I felt proud of myself. I think I am really on the way to becoming a ‘real’ teacher. (23/09/09, Teaching skills/methods)

Comparing my teaching with the new VTRs, I saw my own improvement. I was more confident and experienced in teaching, compared with the person one year before. I felt I was becoming a real teacher as I learned, and improved my teaching ability.

My ability to deal with emergencies also improved. I was not as nervous as before when I faced the emergency of teaching my co-VTR’s lesson without preparation.

Today my co-VTR felt sick in the car so she was sent home. I needed to teach her part of the lesson. I was supposed to be nervous because of this accident, as if I was the girl one year or even half year ago. But actually I did not feel nervous or worried at all. I was so calm and just
had a look of the contents I needed to teach. This was the first Chinese lesson for the term and it was last period. Students were excited about the new classroom and not very well behaved. However, I think I dealt with it really well. (29/07/09, Facing setbacks)

I was calm as I encountered this emergency because I was confident. I believed in my ability to teach and manage student behaviour. As a result, the class finished well. I was becoming a real teacher in terms of handling emergencies and classroom management.

When accidents happened, the way I handled them also illustrated the improvement in my teaching capability.

After I set up the computer, I could not find my USB, which included my lesson plan and PowerPoint slides that I was going to use today. So I decided to change my lesson from Chinese poetry to learning new sentences with Zouba. But I did not know it was my unlucky day. The disc would not work in the laptop. I was a little hurried, especially when the lesson was halfway through. Students were talking and the new teachers were observing. But I told myself, calm down, calm down. Do not freak out. You can do it! … I decided to change this lesson to a revision. Because students were disorderly, it was hard to get them back to work, especially revision. I put all my efforts in getting them on task and fully concentrating. I felt amazed at myself. I was not scared of anything and controlled the class extremely well. The speed of the lesson was not slow, but students followed and finished all the tasks I gave them. I did not have time to think about my language or my skill. All I thought was to control students’ behaviour and get them on task. All the words that I needed just came out of my mind. Students listened to my words and follow my instructions; as soon as I raised my voice or stopped and looked at them, they became quiet and quickly got back to work. (12/08/09, Facing setbacks)
As I met the problems of losing my USB and having a dead disc, I was a little worried at first. But I did not show it. I prepared well mentally by telling myself to calm down and believing I could deal with the incidents. Then I forgot things other than teaching, concentrating on how to get students back to work and regulating their behaviour. As I totally concentrated, I did not have time to be scared or worry about teaching skills or language.

This lesson was also observed by the new VTRs. My nervousness at being observed disappeared as I focused on dealing with the incident. I did not have time to think about other things except for teaching. I was just being myself.

Before I taught this lesson, I was a little nervous about new students observing my lesson. However, because of the laptop issue, I forgot to think about this and taught in my own way without any nerves or worries.

After the lesson, one new VTR asked me, “What did you say when some boys got naughty?” I stopped for a while and said, “I do not know. I cannot remember. I just say it without thinking.” After I said that, I was surprised at myself: how could I do this? I did not worry about or even think about my English at that time. I just say things I want to express without thinking. It was just natural, as my teaching went on. How amazing that I could do this.

The new teachers and the class teacher all gave positive feedback for this lesson. The new VTRs even told me that they have observed some local teachers’ lesson at high school, but what they did was not better than me. I could handle the classroom situation and manage students’ behaviour better than them. That was a big surprise! I did not know I had progressed so much. But today through others’ questions, observations, and comments, I suddenly see my own development as a teacher. I was so surprised and happy: I can do it! (12/08/09, Facing setbacks)
I was even surprised at myself because I did everything naturally without so much thinking. Until the new VTRs and the class teacher told me, I did not notice how much I had progressed. I had internalised ways of teaching and managing the classroom.

6.3.3 Belonging

In addition to power/authority and capability, belonging is important in feeling like a part of the school. As noted above, since I was a VTR, schools did not often treat me as a staff member. I felt that I did not belong to the same community. Acceptance and recognition by others were necessary for me to identify as a real teacher.

Participating in school activities other than teaching Mandarin increased my sense of belonging.

Today was multicultural day. I prepared a lot of Chinese food and gifts for sale. Many students and teachers dressed up, mostly in their own cultural clothes. School also invited students and other people to perform on stage. Multicultural day was really a good way to make students learn more about other countries. Attending this event at school made me more like a part of this school rather than an outsider. (11/09/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

Being invited to Multicultural Day made me feel more like a part of the school rather than being used as a tool for teaching Mandarin only. Engagement in school daily activities helped build my sense of belonging as well as being a real teacher who was recognised by the school community.
I was invited to join the school forum to communicate with students and other teachers. This indicated the school’s recognition of me as a member.

Today J (class teacher) told me she had formed a forum and wanted me to join. I was really surprised and happy, because it made me feel I was a real member of this school. I was not an outsider anymore. As I registered as Miss Li suddenly I felt I am a real teacher now. Students who knew I had registered were happy and expected to chat with me this evening at 8.00pm. This feeling was kind of complex: as I started teaching at PPS (a primary school), from feeling at sea at the beginning, till adapting and getting used to the whole situation, I liked kids in this school so much and felt so touched by all the help from all the teachers and colleagues. However, many times I still did not feel so involved in the whole school life, after all, I only went to school one day every week I often felt lost when I was wondering if I had the right to control students behaviour out of the Mandarin classroom … But this time when J let me join the forum, I started to actually have some real sense that I am a teacher. (25/06/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

In my heart of hearts, I did not see myself as a real teacher who was a member of the school community because I went to school only one day a week and had no right to get involved in the school other than Mandarin teaching. I was constrained by the role as a VTR. I did not feel I belonged to the schools. As the high school invited me to participate in the Multicultural Day and a primary school asked me to join the forum, I had more of a sense of being a real teacher.

Additionally, the teaching context also impacted on my identity as a teacher. I had been a member of two different departments at high school. The first department did not support my teaching, while the second one was more encouraging.

Today the new head teacher gave me some useful books on classroom management and teaching skills. He was really supportive,
considerate and helpful. I felt much better teaching high school because of his promise that we could tell him whenever we had problems in teaching. Now we can do anything we think is meaningful and interesting for students, no need to worry about if materials, resources or rooms are available or not. I can teach more confidently with enough support and backups. Sometimes teachers cannot teach well not because of skills, but because of the real situation and context. I was constricted by the school situation and my own situation: because I am not a real teacher, I do not think I have the right to ask for anything or give students permission; I didn’t know who to find when I had problems so I just gave the plan up. I worried about things other than teaching, which made me feel more pressured in teaching. As soon as I got rid of these things that worried me, I taught more easily and confidently … new colleagues are more passionate than the old ones. They treat me as one of their group and are very helpful. They are so nice and I like them very much … I felt so much pressure from the old environment and did not feel included in the whole system. They treated us as outsiders and we worried about things other than teaching. But now … with the support of new colleagues, I can focus on teaching and preparation. (14/08/09, Teacher roles vs other roles)

Whether the environment was supportive or not influenced much of my teaching. Since I was a VTR, I was not assigned to the official school system. To teach effectively, I needed enough support from the head teacher and colleagues. A supportive environment gave me security, as I needed teaching equipment and resources that were accessible to me only with the support of others. Thus, a supportive environment made me feel more like a school ‘insider’.

To sum up, to identify as a real teacher, I negotiated my role as a VTR and a teacher. I felt a lack of teacher authority since the class teacher was in charge of
the classroom management; I felt powerless, as I felt that the school did not treat me as an insider. To become a real teacher, I was aware of the importance of skilled teaching and discipline management. Improving my teaching skills helped me construct a sense of being a real teacher. A sense of belonging also influenced the development of my teacher identity.

6.4 Conclusion

As the vehicle for story lines 4, 5 and 6, this chapter has continued to explore my teaching experiences in Australia and my teacher identity construction. Story line 4 is about my understanding of student-teacher relationships. The central issue I raised is mutual trust and understanding. Story line 5 demonstrates how my sense of being a teacher increased as I negotiated my role as an individual with my role as a teacher. Story line 6 illustrated my teacher identity construction in terms of a desire to become a “real” teacher, who is capable in dealing with classroom management, has teacher authority and is recognised as a member of the teacher community and the schools. The next chapter displays story lines 7 to 10.
7. Introduction

This chapter continues exploring the development of my teacher identity through story lines from my reflective diary. Following on from the previous chapters, there are three story lines: 7 (ineffective teaching and positive attitudes towards student learning), 8 (my teaching commitment from different perspectives), 9 (my understanding of L2 teaching) and 10 (how I negotiated my identity as an L2 teacher who had to deal with being positioned as, and/or taking the position of a native speaker, non-native speaker, or L2 user).

7.1 Story line 7: Responsibility for teaching ineffectiveness

Students in China are regarded as responsible if they are motivated and acknowledge the teacher’s authority and superior knowledge. They rarely misbehave. This is not what I found in teaching at first. Initially, I attributed responsibility to lack of student motivation, ignorance and non-awareness of teacher feelings, resulting in misbehaving students. The perception that I, as a teacher, should take the responsibility for student achievement and teaching effectiveness emerged as I changed my negative attitudes about student learning. This change also increased with my teacher efficacy as I began to
believe in my own ability to be a teacher and to bring about the desired learning outcomes.

Initially, I thought that I could not teach well because of the students—they lacked motivation to learn or could not understand me; or the context—I could teach better at primary than at high school. A change in my thinking happened as I realised that I was responsible for ineffective teaching.

At first I put the students’ restlessness and bad behaviour down to a lack of motivation and poor attitudes.

… they do not really having the passion to learn. They cannot listen to me for more than 5. And once they start to talk, it is difficult to get their attention again and keep them quiet. (27/08/08, Attitudes about student learning)

I thought the students came to my class to have fun and relax, not learn Mandarin. This concerned me.

I think I should not be so serious about teaching Mandarin to them. I should give them interesting lessons such as games, movie, or music rather than teaching much language knowledge. (01/05/09, Attitudes about student learning)

I formed a negative attitude about student learning as well as my teaching—I did not think I should teach Mandarin seriously; instead of focusing on teaching language knowledge, I decided to let the students have fun.

I also put my ineffective teaching down to the students’ failure to care for my
feelings. I believed I had made a great effort to teach but the students did not appreciate it.

I tried my best to make this lesson interesting: I prepared many coloured pictures of movie, music, sport, and kung fu stars that they were familiar with. Besides, in order to involve them, I gave them fake Chinese money to buy lollies and Chinese gifts from me. This strategy did work for a few students, but some of them kept losing attention and being naughty. Especially one student, who interrupted me all the time to get my attention, asked stupid questions, argued with me, and tried to fool me. He never thought this was not only his classroom and I was not only his teacher, how could he always be so annoying and make trouble for me? … I felt my efforts were wasted and students did not care about my feeling or their Mandarin learning. (30/04/09, Responsibility for student achievement)

Another reason I argued for ineffective teaching was the context. I considered why I taught better at primary school. I reasoned that primary school teachers discipline students better and that classes at primary school all had existing rules, which facilitated my teaching. The seating arrangements also made it easier to manage the class.

The first lesson in primary school was great, compared to my lesson in high school. I think this might be because primary kids have a regular and formal classroom discipline system and the classroom teachers have more power in controlling misbehaviour. By observing primary teacher teaching and their classroom rules, it was easier for me to fit into this regular situation or context, which made my teaching easier than in high school. Before I went to teach in primary, the teacher had already set up the classroom rules and the kids were familiar with these rules. Besides, primary kids were much more interested in learning new things … third, students sat on the floor. This was easier for me to see the whole class and manage their behaviour. I did not need to raise my voice as I did in high school. (30/04/09, Responsibility for student achievement)
This is another example of student motivation I felt that my teaching was smoother and more effective because primary school students were more interested in learning Mandarin.

My thinking about ineffective teaching and student motivation changed as I observed my co-VTR’s (WT) lesson.

I found she was relaxed and patiently conversed with every student in Chinese. Interestingly, almost every student listened carefully and tried to respond to her, rather than talking to others or feeling bored. They were pretty involved, which surprised me. From my own teaching and observation of her lesson, I found that students were willing to learn. My thoughts about them before might be totally wrong … I felt guilty. (02/04/09, Attitudes about student learning)

In her lesson, there were no games, movies, or lollies, which I used to motivate student learning. She was patient with every student and students responded well to her teaching, which surprised me. I realised that students at high school are motivated to learn. It was not that they were not interested in learning Mandarin. It was my teaching that had caused problems.

I was blinded and felt threatened by some of their behaviours and let the first impression drive me to a long and wrong way from what they actually wanted and liked. I had negative feelings and emotions to them and was even afraid to teach them. But today suddenly I found that they were so willing to learn. I had been blinded by my prejudice. My feeling, behaviour, and teaching influenced their learning and behaviour. If the way I teach could engage them, they learned well. If I thought they did not want to learn and had negative attitudes to them, they could feel this and did not become involved. I was the one who led teaching and the students’ learning.

I was so guilty that I forgot what was most important to be as a
teacher-没有教不好的学生，只有教不好的老师，(there are no
students who cannot be educated well, there are only the teachers who
cannot teach well). I did not reflect on my own teaching methods and
behaviours, but blamed the students. It is terrible when a teacher
starts blaming students and has negative emotions towards students,
which would end in a vicious cycle: students can feel the teacher’s
negativity. They will be influenced by these energies and behave
much worse. (02/04/09, Attitudes about student learning)

As mentioned in Story line 3, teacher behaviour influences students’ feelings. I
had to change my attitude about student learning. With a positive attitude, I
could be a more motivating teacher.

Today I learned that every student wants to learn. It was me who
needed to change teaching method and attitudes, keeping a positive
feeling or energy for students. I believe that I have the ability to
engage students. (02/04/09, Attitudes about student learning)

I saw that, when the teacher has an appropriate attitude, students are motivated
to learn. WT was patient and appreciative of students’ efforts, which
encouraged student learning. I recognised how a teacher’s positive attitude
influenced teaching and learning. Further, I believed I had the ability to bring
about desired learning outcomes by changing my attitude.

As I re-constructed my understanding of teaching and learning, the way I
taught was also modified.

My main aim was to test whether my new teaching strategy worked.
First, I spent about 15 minutes practising Chinese conversations with
students. To get their interest, I prepared lollies, chocolates and
different Chinese gifts. I gave different prices for each gift and sweet.
Once a student had a good conversation with me, he/she could earn
the Chinese money to buy gifts.

... I found the money and gifts worked quite well. Everyone wanted to try to get the money. I could tell my new teaching strategy was good. And students did want to learn if I was patient enough. (08/04/09, Attitudes about student learning)

As in Story line 5, the aim of teaching was not pleasing students or making them like me. The focus moved back to language teaching. I was patient with students, spending time practising with most students. The strategy of using rewards aimed to motivate student learning rather than having fun.

In my interview the co-VTR talked about having a positive attitude to student learning. She noticed that I had a positive attitude.

You have a positive attitude, 'cause before each lesson, you always prepare a lot of work; you always prepare a lot of PowerPoint slides, a lot of worksheets and a lot of Chinese gifts. So from your preparation, you have a very positive attitude to your job (Co-VTR’s interview).

She recognised that I made the effort to make my lessons attractive to engage students. In her opinion, lesson preparation was a measurement of a positive attitude. I prepared well for each lesson, indicating my positive attitude to teaching and student learning.

This story line displays how I understand the teacher’s responsibility for effective teaching. My understanding changed from blaming ineffective teaching on external factors such as students or context, to blaming my attitudes. As a result, I developed a positive attitude about teaching and student
learning, believing students are motivated to learn if the teacher engages them.

### 7.2 Story line 8: Teaching Commitment

My teaching in Australia has been underpinned by a sense of being a teacher (deriving from my school experiences in China) and a sense of achievement, satisfaction, dedication and enthusiasm about teaching that developed as I grew to identify as a teacher. Constructing my teacher identity helped me to understand how teacher efficacy is dependent on commitment, as it relates to my enthusiasm and devotion to teaching, the value of a positive attitude toward teaching and learning about teaching, a sense of achievement and satisfaction in student improvement, and a sense of mission.

My dedication and commitment to teaching was positively recognised by my co-VTR:

> I think you are a devoted teacher, very diligent and very committed to your work, to your job, very responsible … because I observed what you did, what you prepared … I can perceive that you have a positive attitude, and you like your job, and you want to do your best. (Co-VTR interview)

The devotion and diligence she saw in me reflected the sense of being a teacher that I gained in the process of a Chinese education. The responsibility of being a teacher weighed heavily on me, especially when I read the students’ journals. One boy asked me to look at his journal:

> He wrote: “this class is interesting (can I have chopsticks).” I realised that he tried to write something good in the journal book to please me because he wanted to have chopsticks.
I felt sad and offended because I believed my responsibility was to engage students in interesting lessons. But this boy only wanted a prize. He did not seem to recognise my responsibility.

Chinese culture and social values influenced my mission to be a teacher. However, students did not care. They even tried to write praise to trade something from me … It really hurt my feelings and made me sad.

My sense told me that, from another perspective, I could think, the student was quite interested in Chinese culture and wanted to have chopsticks. But … I felt depressed. (11/02/09, Teaching commitment)

As shown in the narrative of my past experience, teaching was a respected job because teachers played a special role in Chinese society. In my mind, teaching was a missionary job, which required enormous teacher responsibility and effort. I was dedicated to improve my teaching and my understanding of students and student behaviour. One student trying to trade a reward by pleasing me, hurt the feelings of a teacher who was dedicated to her job.

As a teacher, I felt happy and proud as my students enjoyed learning Mandarin and learned it well. ‘I think the happiest thing teachers want to see is students’ achievement and enjoyment of what they are learning’ (Self-reflections, Happy and proud of what my students did). It shows my sense of achievement as a teacher. My commitment to teaching was demonstrated as I achieved the goal of having my students sing Chinese opera.

It was really interesting to see Australian students sing Chinese opera. Even for Chinese people, it is not common to sing opera, unless you were an opera actor. But now we had Australian kids singing Chinese opera! Isn’t that amazing and interesting? I enjoyed seeing Australian
kids learn Chinese language and culture and like their smile and laugh in Chinese class. It made me feel happy. (25/06/09, Teaching commitment)

The reflection shows how much I enjoyed teaching Australian students about Chinese culture and language and the satisfaction and sense of achievement I gained teaching them to sing Chinese opera.

When students made small improvements I was even more motivated to help them learn.

What surprised me was, a naughty boy, who I thought did not learn well, knew most of the content we reviewed and could answer almost all questions … I was happy about this. Today I knew that all my students had learnt something. They all progressed, at different levels. I was happy for them and myself. As long as students like learning Mandarin, I will try my best to make the lesson valuable and interesting. (29/07/09, Teaching commitment)

This reflects my teaching commitment, as I intended to make more efforts in teaching as my students improved. My responsibility as a teacher encouraged me to keep learning and improving to reinforce student learning.

Another example relating to my teaching commitment was the last lesson I taught in 2008.

I received a thank you card and Christmas gift from the students. I was surprised that they prepared these things for me. When I opened the card I saw all the students who attended today signed card and wrote some lovely words for me. They wrote xiexie (thank you) to me … for my effort in teaching them Chinese this year … I appreciated that my efforts were recognised by students … I enjoyed
teaching Chinese to them very much. I nearly cried and was so affected … a girl wrote her name and “love you” in Chinese (艾丽可, 愛你). I was so glad that my students could write Chinese to me; this was the best gift they gave to me. No matter how much they would forget many years later as long as they remembered one word, I would be very happy and appreciate this period of time with them. This experience and these students are treasures and precious in my life. I hope that many years later, although they might forget my name and appearance, they would remember that they had a Chinese teacher. (05/12/08, Teaching commitment)

As I received the thank you card from students, the thing that touched me was that they wrote Chinese for me. That was the best gift. My enthusiasm for teaching would be satisfied if students could remember even one Chinese word when they grew up.

My appreciation of the opportunity to be a VTR in Australia also indicated my commitment to teaching:

Somebody questioned my decision to come to teach in Australia. But for me, I did not count my loss. What I counted was what I could get: the uncommon experiences we have in teaching Australian kids and popularising Chinese culture; making many friends from a different culture; building good relationship with experienced teachers who I can learn a lot from; opening my eyes and learning about a different world … all of these experiences are priceless and can be the most important and valuable treasure in my entire life. All of these create potential opportunities and networks for my future. I so appreciated this opportunity. If I could have another chance to choose, I would still choose to come to Australia to teach. I will never regret this decision. (13/08/09, Teaching commitment)
Although my decision to come to teach in Australia was questioned, I had an understanding of how valuable it was to me. Choosing to learn teaching in Australia was influenced by my enthusiasm and desire to teach.

7.3 Story line 9: Teaching L2

To teach L2 effectively, it is important to create a supportive learning environment, emphasise communication, make language learning meaningful for students, link cultural knowledge and balance the use of activities in four language skills. This story line describes incidents showing how I developed an understanding of the importance of these five elements.

My past English learning experiences in China demonstrate the importance of L2 teachers consciously creating a supportive learning environment. In Australia, the problem I had was that students were unwilling to practise speaking. I used to think they refused to do so because they did not respect me. However, as I reflected on my English learning experiences, I came to understand student feelings.

High school students were sensitive about speaking in front of classmates and their friends. They were afraid of making mistakes and losing face, not because of they did not respect me. The best way is letting them … practise speaking in pairs with their friends. (15/08/08, Facing setbacks)

When I was at high school students did not want to “show off” or “lose face” speaking a new language. As a teacher, I had to create a supportive learning environment in which students could feel secure (working in pairs with friends)
as I did in university.

I also identified with the importance of creating a relaxed learning environment for student learning.

Today I brought one typical Chinese snack for students to try. Although few of them liked it, they seemed more open and relax as they tasted it, telling me whether they liked it or not in Chinese … it was good to give students some time to relax and breathe during a long lesson … trying some interesting cultural things, such as food and music. Combining teaching, learning and entertainment together can make students feel freer to talk and think. It was better than controlling them for a whole lesson, because many students tried to disrupt the lesson or misbehave because they felt tired, bored, or could not concentrate anymore. (20/08/09, Teaching concepts)

The idea of combining learning with entertaining worked well, giving students space to relax and become more open to speak in the target language.

In addition to creating a supportive learning environment for L2 learning, I also paid attention to maximising target language use when I taught. Observing a Mandarin teacher’s lesson, I positively identified her way of using the target language for some frequent and regular communications with students.

For example, she used the target language when she asked students to sit down, whether they wanted to have a drink or have a rest, and so forth. These words are not the learning aim for this lesson, but will be used for almost every lesson. Using the target language for instruction and communication is effective in creating a good learning environment for students, and getting them used to the target language … I should also use the target language as much as possible to create a good learning environment for students. (13/10/08, Awareness of consistent learning)
Learning from the observation, I made efforts to increase the opportunities for students to use Mandarin on a regular basis, which helped them get used to using the target language without so much anxiety.

I set up a rule of greeting the students before and at the end of the class in Mandarin. In China, students greet with teachers formally by standing up and saying hello or goodbye. In order to make the class more Chinese like, I used the same method to make students know more about Chinese culture of respect, while maximising use of the target language the class … in order to have the students speak the target language more, I asked each student to say something in Chinese when I marked the roll. (30/07/08, Teaching skills/methods)

I explored as many opportunities as I could to use Mandarin for speaking and listening. In the kite-making lesson, students could only get tools if they asked in Mandarin, as the class teacher commented:

[It was a] very good idea to continue asking them request things in Chinese. You went one step further and asked them to ask for things in a sentence. Students did well and made a good effort (Class teacher’s comments).

Maximising target language use indicates my understanding of and opposition to the examination-orientation of L2 teaching and learning in China. My aim in Australia was use, rather than examinations. Maximising target language use, benefits language practice, as well as communication.

In my reflection, I recognised the effectiveness of having listening activities:

I prepared several activities … I had expected most students would focus on listening activities. But I did not expect that all of them would be so quiet and focused. They tried hard to listen … [and]
when they got the right answer they were happy and proud. Listening activities could make whole class focus, because they also wanted to test their ability without worrying about being laughed at by others. (19/02/09, Teaching skills/methods)

In a seventy-five minute lesson, I had to learn how to balance the teaching of four language skills.

I’d better cover most of the 4 skills of listening, speaking, writing, and reading by using different activities. I should have different waves or tempos in one class: if the students are very restless, I need to do some quiet activities to settle them, such as listening and reading, which can concentrate their attention. After they get involved, I need to do some lively tasks to engage them (speaking activities in games). But these tasks should not be too long, or the class will lose control. (15/09/08, Awareness of consistent learning)

If possible, it is good if all four skills are covered in each lesson. Different activities have different effects. Listening and reading activities are effective for settling down and for concentration, while active activities, such as a speaking game, are useful to cheer students up but cannot be used for a long time, as this might cause student behaviour problems.

I found that what I taught should make sense to the students. When I taught a lesson about the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, I met a problem:

Since the last successful experience of teaching Mascots, I decided to teach more about the Beijing Olympics. I showed students the video of the opening ceremony, which I thought was amazing and fantastic … however, the students did not show much interest in watching the opening ceremony. … As they watched the video, they could not stop laughing (15/08/08, Teaching skills/methods)
I felt bad about this until I realised the importance of teaching knowledge that makes sense to students:

I thought they did not respect my culture … how could they be so disrespectful and flippant? Then I thought they laughed because they did not understand. The video did not make sense to them. Many amazing parts that I thought meaningful actually meant nothing and were funny to them. From this I learned another thing: the teaching content should be related to student life and knowledge background. Without this linkage, it does not make sense to them, because it is too far from their world and what they’ve already known. The teacher plays a role bridging the relationship between what students already knew and what they are going to learn. (15/08/08, Teaching skills/methods)

Students watched the video without knowing anything about the meaning of the performances. They could not understand the performances in the opening ceremony because their existing knowledge network did not link to it. As analysed in Chapter 4, my past experience of learning English told me the importance of making learning L2 meaningful to students. As a teacher, it was my responsibility to be conscious of this: as the knowledge was not meaningful to students, the learning and understanding were difficult.

There is another important message in this incident: language learning cannot be separated from cultural understanding. Learning an L2 is also learning another culture. Linking the knowledge I taught with cultural meaning was significant. For instance, as I taught numbers, I also taught about lucky and unlucky numbers, so that students could understand Chinese people’s habits and preferences or taboos around using numbers in daily life.

The best part … was adding cultural elements in teaching language.
For example, today when I taught numbers, I also talked about lucky and unlucky number for Chinese people, their meanings and how this shows in daily life such as phone and licence numbers. In addition, I also told them how to use one hand to count in Chinese style, which was important as they communicate with Chinese people. The students were all interested in this and listened and learned very carefully. (10/09/08, Teaching skills/methods)

As I taught colours, I combined this with knowledge about Chinese opera facial make-ups.

In order to teach colours, I tried to find some interesting things to relate to this topic combined with Chinese culture. So I used some Chinese opera masks. I bought some Chinese knots with opera facial masks. In Chinese opera, the colours of facial masks have different meanings so that the audience can know which character is good or bad at a glance. I brought these knots to the class and told them the meaning of the different colours. For instance, red facial masks means brave and royalty, black means selfless and green means impulsive. They were interested in this and took notes of the meaning of the colours. (21/11/08, Teaching skills/methods)

By knowing the meaning of different colours in Chinese opera, learning colours made more sense to the students rather than memorising the names of colours:

The lessons were well prepared. There were different Chinese cultural perspectives embedded with Chinese language. Students were engaged in the lesson. They enjoyed the lesson. (Co-VTR’s comments).

To sum up, this story line matches most elements of my past concepts about learning or teaching an L2—being aware of a supportive learning environment,
focusing on communication (maximising target language use) and teaching knowledge that is meaningful to students. Two understandings not mentioned in my past experiences of learning an L2 were balancing the use of four language skills, and L2 learning as cultural learning.

7.4 Story line 10: English speaking that concerns me

Story line 10 deals with the language issues that concerned me while teaching in Australia. As an L2 teacher I was confused and frustrated by my perception that my spoken English skills were poor. I could not access the world of Mandarin teaching or construct my teaching identity until I solved the language problem, which concerned me. Repositioning myself as an L2-user built my confidence and helped me to identify as a teacher. The different ways I use English became teaching resources rather than obstacles.

English is a foreign language to me, but the first language of most of my students. I needed to teach my first language, Mandarin, in my second language, English, to students who are beginners in learning Mandarin. My students, colleagues and teachers in Australia identify me as a Mandarin speaker.

Language as an identifier has shaped my time in Australia. My teaching was influenced by language problems, and communication with students and local teachers and language factors, have impacted my research. Resolving language problems helped make sense of my personal and professional life in Australia, especially as they relate to identity, and was significant in this study.
7.4.1 Native standard and need to improve

At the beginning of my journey in Australia, because I was so concerned with my spoken English, I tried to read information I had copied from the Internet to the students about a traditional Chinese event:

Because I of my deficient spoken English, today I prepared a draft paper (script) so that I could sit and read the information to the students. However, this was really a mess. Because I wanted to explain the culture part clearly in English, I copied an explanation from the Internet. When I started reading, I could not recognise many words. I was so embarrassed. I could not pronounce correctly many words that I could previously say. I had a mental block in speaking English. Then one student said that ‘that is not my language’, which made the situation even worse for me. I felt sad. How could I improve my ability to speak English? I want to speak English fluently and express my thoughts or ideas clearly as an English speaker. I do not want students to say that to me again. (15/08/08, Language)

I thought information written by English speakers would be more native and better than what I could say. However, as I read it, I was too nervous to pronounce correctly some words that I was familiar with, and this caused me to question my ability. I was further frustrated by the student’s comment. I thought the students would accept me better if I had native competence in English.

The class teacher noticed that my concern about my pronunciation when I was teaching was making me hesitant.

But otherwise your use of English has improved a lot. Although at times you might hesitate a bit to say a certain thing. Probably it’s because of pronunciation. You might be just thinking you pronounced them wrongly or something … it’s just about not being confident of
your pronunciation that much, but it’s still good (Class teacher interview).

In another lesson, I realised my weakness in speaking English because students could not understand my words, the way I spoke English, no matter which words or expressions. It was very different from how the students spoke.

Today I prepared an activity for the kids to learn the story of the Moon Festival. I wrote the story and split it into different parts and wanted students to work on this story. However, I did not consider that they were only Yr 8 kids. Even though they could speak fluently, they could not necessarily recognise difficult words. Many words used in the story were too long, complex, and academic for them. They could not understand my language, even though I was speaking in English. It was my mistake not to consider their real situation and forgot my language was not ‘real’ and hard for students to understand. These words I used were so far from their life. (12/09/08, Language)

I thought the English I was using was not the one that English speakers, at least my students, used. This led to a communication barrier in teaching.

The classroom teacher acknowledged that English fluency plays an important role in teaching:

Knowing our students, they do respond more to people who can speak fluently in English. They respond a bit more. So at times … if you hesitate a bit, you are not that confident, students … might not respond as well. You know they might all … get a little bit confused. So … you, I think are generally good: they’re able to understand you; you’re able to understand them. You can interact with them about anything. But like I said only just sometimes, it’s just pronunciation like with … certain words you say differently. But that’s, that’s like a big point, big plug point in teaching: the more fluently you speak in English, the better the kids will just accept you (Classroom teacher
I wanted to learn the real English of daily conversation that was accepted and recognised by English speakers. I went to an English class in university for learning real English. However, I was disappointed because it was not what I wanted.

Today I attended a workshop on oral communication. It was not so useful. It was not what I expected. I prefer the English lesson that Australian kids have. It was suitable for improving daily conversation and learning ‘real’ English. But the resources I got from this workshop were not useful for learning ‘real’ English because most of them are about presentation skills and academic words. (10/09/08, Language)

Because I wanted to communicate in a real or native way with my students and other English speakers, I wanted to learn the native and daily way of English speaking, not bookish or academic English that I learned in my past life.

An incident in a primary school library strengthened my feeling that my English was far from normal English speakers’ lives. When I read a children’s book, I did not know many words:

Today we [co-VTR and me] went to library at the Public School. We found many useful resources for teaching English—many coloured big books. There were many words for teaching kindergarten kids that we did not even know. We learned English from books and in a formal way. Although we know academic vocabulary and have no problem in a lecture or seminar … we are totally unfamiliar with words and sentence used daily. We may also have problems in a discussion group with English background speakers. They talk very fast—although it is normal for them—and use many words, sentences, or expressions that we do not know. It might be difficult for us to
engage in the process without knowing the ‘real’ language. (17/09/08 Language)

To teach effectively, I asked for help at a DET training session to learn some classroom English to deal with classroom management:

For instance, what am I supposed to say if students get naughty? What am I supposed to say if I want to stop them and get them back to work? What am I supposed to say if I want to limit their practice or activity time? I want to learn what English teachers say exactly when these situations happen, not only “stop” or “be quiet”. (18/08/08, Language)

I tried to imitate other teachers’ words and language use. This indicates that I set up a native English standard for myself and wanted to be more native-like and imitate the native speaking model. However, the adoption of a native-speaker standard leads to negative self-perceptions. I recognised this. I had no confidence in my ability and I felt nervous, embarrassed and frustrated in class because I was worried about my English:

I want to talk with students about their daily lives before teaching so that I can understand more about them. However, when I talked with them, I was worried about the following lesson and my English speaking so I did not listen carefully and often lost attention. (14/10/08, Language)

I felt depressed and lacked confidence when teaching, severely influencing my identity as a teacher. Before my role as a Mandarin teacher, I questioned my existence as an English speaker. I wanted to gain native competence in spoken English to feel eligible to teach English speakers. I treated native speakerness or ability as the key to teaching in Australia.
Language issues often concerned me as I taught, and motivated me to improve my poor English:

My teaching was so rushed. I could not explain what I wanted to teach completely and clearly. Each time when I felt this, it made me recognise that my English was too poor to give clear instructions or understand students talking. My super poor English needs to be improved as soon as possible. (13/08/08, Language)

Because I considered English proficiency was my problem I took any opportunity to learn English.

Today I went to Taronga zoo with kindergarten kids. It was fun and tiring. I learned a lot of new words for animals. I still could not understand kids’ talk well because they spoke quickly and vaguely. But I think I learned more about their language. I could understand them better and communicate with them. (03/09/08 Language)

Keeping on learning English made me feel closer to the world of the students and gave me a sense of being more eligible to be a teacher in Australia.

My teaching job in Australia gave me opportunities to force myself to fight to communicate with others using my poor English. I could not hide myself as I did in the UK (Chapter 3):

When I lived in UK, I was so unconfident about my language that I was afraid to talk to English speakers. I had a mental barrier about communicating with others. I hid myself in room for a whole day. However, in Australia, I have to talk to people everyday because of my volunteer job. Although I feel that my English is a disaster, I still need to surmount this feeling and tell myself that you have to speak to others and try to improve your language. As time goes by, I am gradually not scared of communicating with others even though my English is still poor. I try my best to present my ideas and improve
my language but it takes time. I should not be so worried about this.  
(12/09/08, Language)

Even though I thought my English was a disaster, I pushed myself to use it and keep learning it. All the time I comforted myself, it takes time to improve and I have to try my best. Contradicting this, I lacked confidence that I would be an excellent English speaker in the future:

I met a teacher whose English was excellent. She came to Australia 20 year ago to learn language and business. She said if I could stay for 20 years, my English would also be excellent. I sincerely doubt this. (30/09/08, Language)

This example shows that I did not believe that I would achieve the same level as the teacher did. I thought it would be an everlasting process for me to learn and improve my English.

7.4.2 L2 user/multilinguals

The concept of L2 user community enabled me to reconstruct my identity and see myself as a legitimate L2 user. Repositioning my identity as an L2 user led me to see my own competence differently:

She [Pavlenko] reminds me that placing myself differently can impact substantially on my feelings and teaching. I felt uncomfortable in teaching because I placed myself … as a non-native English speaker rather than a bilingual Mandarin teacher … I was essentially different from English speakers and could not become them. I have my own advantages and unique mind and ways of using language. Why couldn’t I see my advantages, but always focused on my weakness. If I believed in my ability as an L2 user, I could have my own way and advantages of teaching, and not be trapped by narrow language concern. (19/09/08, Language)
I started to rethink my situation: I had artificially put myself in a weak position when I was teaching and communicating with others. I did not believe in my own ability. I had already assumed my position as a non-qualified English speaker so I could not be a good teacher. I created the pressure or stress by questioning my ability. The result of re-positioning myself, in relation to language use communities, was substantial and impacted on my feelings and teaching.

The dichotomy of L2 teacher identity can result in negative self-perceptions. Reimagining oneself as an L2 user/multilingual can relieve these. In my case, it allowed me to view my competence positively and build confidence. This was an important turning point for me. I started to see myself from a different perspective and changed my teaching as well:

I taught them Chinese calligraphy, including knowledge of four treasures of study and how to use them. At first, I tried to read the information … as I did before. However, I found students lost attention and did not listen to me. So I put down the paper and taught them by myself. Although it was hard, I thought I should try. I am the one who uses language to help me communicate. I should not let the language control me anymore. Actually the result was not as bad as I thought and I was also not as nervous and frustrated as I had expected. (05/12/08, Language)

I began to rely more on my own ability and self-belief. My first attempt was not bad and my feelings were not negative, as before.

In a team-teaching lesson with the co-VTR, we were laughing because of our
language use. This time I did not feel stupid or frustrated; instead, I thought it was funny and felt closer to students:

One thing happened that made us so embarrassed. When we were demonstrating bargaining, WT wanted to explain what we were talking about. She said, “I am asking can you be any cheaper?” Everyone was silent for a while and then the whole class exploded with laughter. Our faces turned red. But it was OK. I just felt funny and again noticed the cultural difference: this expression in Chinese is absolutely fine and right, but in English it was ambiguous and easy to be misunderstood. But it was still fun to make everybody happy, which made me feel closer to the students. (25/06/09, Languages)

I was not bothered by this, but utilised this opportunity to show students the cultural difference in expression. I did not worry that students looked down upon me but felt closer to students because of this: we laughed together and students viewed me as a person rather than a distant teacher.

7.4.3 Different selves/L2 mask

Some of my reflections also show evidence of feeling like a different person when I used different languages:

When students said ‘dao’ clearly and correctly, I appreciated their first good try and wanted to encourage them. However, I found that I could only say ‘good’ and ‘great’. I found that I could not give students immediate and suitable (English & Aussie like) comments, such as fantastic, brilliant, fabulous when they did what I told them, because it was hard for me to express these words that were too emotional for me … I felt strange and uncomfortable when I spoke like this although I knew it was a normal expression for English speakers … I struggle with those kinds of words, sentences, or expressions. But I should use them to diversify my comments … so that I could make students understand my appreciation. (03/02/09,
In this example, I could not give students appropriate comments because of the cultural difference in expression between Chinese and English, and also because of the emotionality of English. It was not natural for me to use these words. I was faking. I understand this way of expression is what I have to accept and adapt to teach and communicate in English. I struggled to find a balance between picking up the native-like ways of expression and being myself.

The classroom teacher often suggested I stop students being noisy or calling out by asking them to raise their hands to answer questions:

When students talk over you while you are teaching it is a good idea to stop and get their attention back. (04/05/09 Classroom teacher comments)

It is a good idea to pause and let them raise hands. (26/05/09 Classroom teacher comments)

Although I knew what I had to do, I often could not respond to students’ calling out. My reasoning told me I should stop students calling out, rather than answering them, so as to establish a regular teaching rule. But before I figured out the solution, my mouth always acted faster:

Another problem of this class was that students did not raise their hands when they wanted to answer questions. They just called out as I was speaking. Also, they did not put their hands up when they wanted to ask questions.

However, although I realised that this was a problem, my reaction was quite subconscious and ‘stupid’. When I heard students calling out, I responded. Every time after I had answered students’ questions,
I felt vexed: “Why could not you wait for just a second and think about your reaction, you idiot!” After I responded to their questions immediately several times, students began to call out more often and the class became a little messy and disorderly.

I felt very unhappy and frustrated about this situation. Even though I had realised this situation, I could not help myself when I heard students’ voices. Next class I had to pay attention to this situation and stop them calling out before I answered them.

Another reason for this problem might be: English is not my first language. When I respond to students, my sub-consciousness might be quicker than my rationality because my rationality needed to think about this situation and translate the message. That is why my mouth was always faster than my mind. I always think that if I could use Mandarin to deal with classroom management, my performance in teaching would be much better. (03/02/09, Language)

I think the reason for my behaviour was my using an L2. Because English was not my first language, there was a time difference between my receiving the message and responding. I needed time to understand the information and then think about the words or expressions to answer or respond.

Your language use is pretty good. Mandarin is just fine. But with English I think there are times between … you need a little bit of time to work out the translation. You know what it is in Chinese and what it would be in English. Those are the time for you hesitate a little bit. You need a little bit of extra time, like anyone, because it’s not your first language. (Classroom teacher interview)

Every time I heard someone talking to me in English, as a conditioned reflex, I would first respond with some words like ‘yes?’ or ‘well’ to gain some space and time for myself to assimilate the received information and think about the answer. I was hesitating within the time difference. Therefore, language proficiency was an obstacle for me in teaching. As I said in the reflection— if I
could use Mandarin to deal with classroom management, my teaching would be much better, which means using English shows a different me. When I was using my L2, I was separated from the original me and lived in another world.

The third example is about the strange feeling I had as I gave a presentation in Mandarin, which I seldom did:

Today I made a presentation for the Ningbo Delegation, who came to Australia to give us scholarships. My presentation was in Chinese. Since university I have not given a presentation in Chinese. I was used to doing English presentations and using English expression in the presentation. But this time, in order to show our respects, we decided to give a Chinese presentation.

Then I found a strange thing. I had grown used to using some emotional words in English, such as appreciate, amazing, fantastic, dear, sincere, and so forth. I was used to expressing my thoughts. However, when I had to say similar things in Chinese, I felt really strange and awkward. Why did I feel this way? Then I realised, in Chinese culture, people are not used to expressing feelings like this. We feel uncomfortable saying, “I love you”, “I miss you”, or offering praise publicly. Some words that are common in English made me feel weird in Chinese.

As I understand, when people are learning a foreign language, it is inevitable for them to learn about and adapt to the related culture. I have learned English for a long time. But before I went to Australia to teach I did not feel this because I did not actually use this language when I was in China, even though I studied at an English-speaking university. However, when I started teach here, I had to use English and learn how to speak or use it in an English way. I gradually got used to these expressions and thought it was common to hear emotional words as I mentioned before.

When I was saying those words and expressing in an English way, I did not treat myself as the same person who speaks Mandarin. As I was talking in English, I set up a different scene for myself, so that I could behave or even think in a more English way. So I could express
this in English but I felt strange expressing it in Mandarin. (22/09/09, Language)

As the original self, I would never speak like this, using emotional words and expression. But in English, I did not treat myself as the same person who speaks Mandarin. As I was talking in English, I put myself in a different place, so that I could behave or even think in a more English way. Using English was more like performing to me, so that I just behaved like an English speaker or did what an English speaker would do. I was wearing a mask when I spoke in English.

Although Pavlenko (2006) argues bilinguals experience different selves when they use different languages, I do not think it is a negative. It does not mean the emotions or feelings I expressed were not real. It means that when I use English, I give myself a right or reason to express feelings in this way, a way that I would not use when speaking Mandarin. The same feelings would be expressed in a different way. The notion of different selves when using different languages supports the L2 user identity construction from another perspective … I never experienced a different self when I was learning English rather than using it. As I used this language, realising I was an L2 user and constructing an L2 user identity, I started to experience a different self when using different languages.

To sum up, this story line describes how language issues influenced the development of my identity as an L2 teacher. I used to apply the native standard to my English speaking, questioning my eligibility to teach Mandarin
to native English speakers. While I was seeking to speak English as fluently as natives, regardless of my own situation, I felt depressed because I thought I had failed. The turning point happened as I realised the importance of self-positioning: I am an L2 user, rather than a failed English speaker who tried to enter the native-speaker community. I have my unique ways of using language. I do not have to be the same as a native speaker, which would place me in a passive position. Re-positioning myself as an L2 user built my confidence to teach Mandarin in English. Negative feelings were relieved and the difference of language use between the students and myself could even have been a resource for teaching rather than an obstacle. I also displayed my sense of being a different person, as I spoke L2.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter finishes display of the story lines showing how my teacher identity was constructed. Story line 7 describes change in my conception of who is responsible for ineffective teaching. Like many other factors in teaching, my Chinese background initially influenced this. As a result of my attitude change about student learning, my sense of being a teacher was enhanced as I realised my responsibility for teaching and student achievement. Story line 8 displays my teacher sense and my teaching commitment. Story line 9 describes my L2 teacher identity construction through my understanding of L2 teaching. Story line 10 deals with the language issues, which caused difficulty in establishing a teacher identity. My confidence as a Mandarin teacher developed as I reconstructed my identity as an L2 user instead of a non-native English speaker. The next chapter discusses data with a literature review, revealing the
findings of this study. Then the implications and limitations of this study are discussed, before the conclusion.
Chapter 8

Discussion of findings

8. Introduction

This study aimed to answer the question: How is my identity as a second language (L2) teacher constructed, negotiated and developed through teaching, studying, and living in Australia? As a self-study it used 10 story lines derived from four different data sources to explore my journey of learning to become an L2 teacher. Constructing each story line from data collected over time was a valuable exercise, enabling me to show Vazquez’ (2000) three steps in identity shifting: realisation, imitation, internalisation and the creation of a functional identity. Although this identity shifting model was established for L2 learning, it fits in my study.

8.1 Discussion

Each story line drew on one or more of the nine categories that emerged from my reflective journal entries. This discussion, framed around these nine categories, demonstrates the learning process and identifies the findings of the study.

8.1.1 Teaching skills/methods

This category is evident in seven story lines. It was important for me in terms of constructing my teacher identity. I came to teach with skills/methods learned
as a school student in China. In Australia, I learned or adapted skills/methods as I encountered problems, interacted with students, observed others’ lessons, asked advice or sought comments from professionals, or in discussion with my co-VTR.

As I gained more skills/methods, my sense of being a teacher increased. For instance, I learned to motivate student learning in various ways, such as choosing topics that interested students, or that involved technology, giving students choices/opportunities, designing games/competitions and establishing a supportive learning (Story line 3).

8.1.2 Teaching concepts

Similar to teaching skills/methods, my past educational experiences influenced my teaching concepts, as mentioned in half the story lines. My teacher identity formed as I struggled with the existing concepts I developed as a student in China and through my Australian teaching experiences. For example, I had a negative attitude to rote learning, which I hated when I was at school, until students responded positively to memorising and reinforcement. On advice from a supervisor I reconsidered my choice of teaching methods (Story line 5). My identity as a teacher developed as I reformed my concepts of using teaching methods. I had more sense of being a teacher because I rationally analysed my teaching after considering it from one situation, and adapted my use of teaching concepts.

‘Communities of practice’ is a social perspective of learning that views
learning as the result of social participation, embedded in daily experiences through interaction with others and the world (Wenger, 1998, 2000). Development of my teacher identity with regard to teaching skills/methods and concepts was a result of my interaction with students, class teachers, co-VTR, and other professionals while engaging in teaching. Through collaboratively reflective learning in a community of practice, my teacher identity was constructed as I learned ‘to think, talk, and act the way professional teachers do’ (Hung, 2008, p. 48). My learning about teaching happened within the process rather than as a result of direct instruction. For instance, in DET training I learned the importance of keeping student interest on the learning target, but I did not keep it in mind until I met a problem when handing out the lyrics to teach a Chinese song (Story line 3); I was told about the necessity to keep a distance from students and to be serious about setting rules, but I did not take it to heart until my teacher authority was challenged by students at the aquarium (Story line 5). Through interacting with others and my teaching world, I learned from experiences. If I did not experience it on my own, learning did not actually happen. According to Pennington’s (2002) understanding of professional teacher identity, my sense of being a teacher developed as I put knowledge into action/practice.

8.1.3 Teaching commitment

This category appears in only one story line of which it was the topic. My teaching commitment is greatly influenced by my past educational experiences in China. The job of being a teacher has a special and important meaning in Chinese society. For me, teachers are supposed to be devoted and responsible.
My teaching experiences reinforced my teaching commitment through my sense of achievement and satisfaction about student learning. According to Chiou (2007), I constructed my teacher identity: I understood the meaning and significance of this occupation.

8.1.4 Teacher role vs other roles

Like teaching concepts, this category went across five story lines. My Chinese identity gave me access to seeing the difference between Chinese and Australian education (Story lines 1 and 2). My sense of being a teacher was increased as I changed my teaching from the results and knowledge driven model I had grown up with, to a process and development focus typical of Australia (Story line 2). This was not easy, because my self-identity conflicted with the need to adopt a teacher-identity. My identity as teacher built up when I thought from a teacher’s rather than an individual’s perspective (Story line 5).

My role as a VTR affected my ability to become a “real” teacher. I felt most teachers as well as schools did not define my professional identity as a teacher, but a learner or student who did not belong to the school and came to observe rather than teach. I did not want to be defined according to my social identity (Pennington, 2002) as a “Chinese” teacher or a student who lacked power and authority, which made me feel that I was a long way from being a member of the “real” teacher community (Story line 5). My sense of being a teacher increased as I was defined according to my professional identity, such as being invited into a school forum and to participate in multicultural day.
8.1.5 Awareness of consistent learning

One of the categories that emerged from my reflective diary was about my personal and professional learning, as mentioned in two story lines. According to Graham and Phelps (2003), it is important for a novice teacher to understand their identity as ‘a lifelong learner’ (p. 1) or an ‘expert learner’ (p. 10), who constantly reflects on his/her teaching as a source of learning. My teacher identity was built up as I kept reflecting on my teaching, becoming aware of my teaching weaknesses (Story line 6) and taking actions, such as learning from others’ teaching and DET training (Story line 9), to improve.

8.1.6 Responsibility for student achievement and attitude about student learning

These two categories fall across three story lines and contribute to the construction of my teacher identity. Initially, as a teacher, I had no sense of being responsible for student achievement. I attributed my ineffective teaching to the students and the context, creating a negative attitude to student learning. As I realised my responsibility for student learning and ineffective teaching, I changed my attitudes about student learning and constructed my teacher identity (Story line 7).

8.1.7 Facing setbacks

All learning processes include progress and setbacks. The way that my developing teacher identity influenced the confidence with which I faced setbacks or tough situations is revealed in three story lines. As I learned more
about and became used to teaching, my belief in my ability when facing troubles was strengthened (Story line 6). According to Moran and Hoy (2001), teacher efficacy, that is, their abilities to bring about desired learning outcomes, contributes to teachers’ persistence, enthusiasm, commitment, instructional behaviour and students’ learning outcomes. Facing setbacks, teaching commitment, responsibility for student achievement and attitudes about student learning all demonstrate my teacher identity construction in terms of increased teacher efficacy.

8.1.8 Language

Even though language appears in one story line, it underpins all the other categories as my ability to teach in an L2 influenced many of my thoughts and actions. Studies of language teachers commonly assume a division between native and non-native speaking teachers (Moussu & Llurda, 2008), exploring the differences such as identity, behaviour and advantages for language teaching (Lourie, 2005; Benke & Medgyes; 2005; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). These studies assume that native language teachers are monolingual, while non-native language teacher are bilingual.

My situation challenges the assumption. I need to be bilingual, since English is the dominant communication language at school. However, if my identity is examined from different perspectives the situation is complex. Students and other teachers view me as a foreign language (Mandarin) speaker. Comments such as “it’s not your language” and “the students sometimes don’t understand the way you say some words” reinforce this perception. Initially my
perspective was that I am a speaker of Mandarin and English attempting to enter the native-English speaking community because the dominant communication language in my class is English. The complex nature of these two positions can be represented in a matrix (Table 8.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Me</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Language use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>L1</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Target language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>L1</td>
<td>Communicative language (common language)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My identity and the effectiveness of my teaching are influenced by the way others construct my identity. I found this very troubling, and was critical of the dichotomy approach to studying language teachers because of:

its lack of contextualization, on the grounds that it disregards the interdependence between language teaching and the local context where it takes place … individuals who could not easily be categorized as either native speakers or non-native speakers, as they themselves have problems in stating whether they belonged to one group or another. (Moussu & Llurda, 2008, p. 317)

Cook (2005) diverges from the dichotomy, introducing an identity for people who can use more than one language, namely, L2 user/multilinguals. Pavlenko (2003) extends this concept by raising three communities for L2 speakers: a native-speaker community, a non-native/L2 learner community, and an L2 user/multilingual community. Until I read Pavlenko’s (2003) article, my experience as a student and teacher in Australia was predominantly negative because of the frustration I felt in attempting to belong to the native-speaker
community. Her theory was so significant to me that I marked it as a turning point in my experience. Discussion and interpretation in the following section are framed by Pavlenko’s (2003) identity model for L2 speakers, to answer the third contributory research question:

As a second language teacher how will being positioned as, and/or taking the position of a native speaker and/or non-native speaker influence development of my teacher identity?

According to Pavlenko’s (2003) three imagined communities for L2 speakers, each community has specific characteristics, which provide clues for examining and analysing my experiences of developing a teacher identity while teaching and studying in Australia, in terms of language use. Evidence from my reflections can be matched to these three different communities.

8.1.8.1 Native-speaker community

Characteristically, individuals who identify as native speakers exhibit a high standard of skill, fluency and competence. Individuals attempting to enter this community attempt to acquire a native-like competence. There are many examples of myself struggling to enter the English native-speaker community, especially at the beginning of my journey in Australia. However, according to Pavlenko (2003), the adoption of a native-speaker standard leads to negative self-perceptions, and my story also recognised this—I worried about speaking “non-native” English and thus I had no confidence and questioned my eligibility to teach Mandarin to Australian students.
8.1.8.2 Non-native speaker/L2 learner community

People in this imagined community realise the native-speaker community is unreachable but still make it the ultimate goal. Therefore, they treat language learning as a never-ending process (Pavlenko, 2003). My awareness of pursuing native English through consistent learning indicates the way I positioned myself as a non-native speaker who needs to keep learning English. For some time this self-perception drove me, even though I believed the goal was unattainable.

8.1.8.3 Non-L2 user community

According to the dichotomy of language teachers’ identity, Pavlenko (2003) first raised two different imagined communities for L2 speakers: native speaker and non-native speaker/L2 learner community (NSC & NNSC). She described different features for these two communities: people who aim to enter the native-speaker community focus on native language competence, while people who imagine themselves to be in a non-native speaker/L2 learner community treat language learning as a never ending process to achieve native language ability.

I do not deny the possibility that people in different imagined communities would behave distinctively as characterised. However, my experiences indicate that distinguishing between these two communities is not clear. People defining themselves in a NNSC aim to enter the NSC by gaining native language ability although it is unachievable. So, it is not surprising that NNSC-positioned people pursue native ‘speakerness’ (Pavlenko, 2003). L2 speakers investing in
NSC show behaviours characterised in NNSC as acceptable, because they need a learning process to achieve the goal of being native-like.

Evidence in my reflections also indicates this argument: I wanted to learn ‘real’ English as well as to keep learning and improving my English proficiency. There was not a specific day when I suddenly changed my self-defined position from native NSC to NNSC. I did not simply define myself as a person who aimed at NSC or NNSC. My identity could not be categorised in either of these two communities, because I showed characteristics of both communities. Since the evidence shows that, in my case, there is no clear separation between these two communities, it is possible to identify a new community: the non-L2 user community (pursuing native speakerness or considering language learning as a never ending process).

Characteristically defining myself as a non-L2 user, meant I had no confidence when teaching because I doubted my role as teacher if I could not speak good English, meaning native-like English. I tried to acquire the ‘real’ English that was acceptable to my students. I never believed in my own ability to be an English speaker and a Mandarin teacher. Then, reading about the concept of L2 user changed my mind and my feelings.

8.1.8.4 L2 user/multilingual community

From my experience and evidence, rather than distinguishing my position between native or non-native speaker, I established a difference between non-L2 user and L2 user. Before I repositioned myself as an L2 user, I lacked
confidence in my spoken English ability, which negatively influenced my teaching. Initially, I aimed to achieve native-like competence in spoken English and treated English learning as an everlasting process. However, as I reconstructed my identity as an L2 user, I started to build confidence in English use as well as teaching. Rather than putting myself in a weak position, I was aware of my unique advantages. I could make fun with students because of my language use and reasonably analyse my situation and teaching method. From this perspective I was an able and capable person who could choose which language to use. My focus was not native standard anymore. Instead, I tried to explore my own ability and advantages in using an L2.

8.2 Tracking identity change over time

According to Wenger (2000), three modes of belonging indicate the process of identity formation. Engagement was the basis for most of my identity construction, since I learned ‘what [I] can do as a teacher and how the world responds to [my] actions’ (Wenger, 2000, p. 228). Imagination was the basis of the language-related construction of teacher identity. While I imagined myself as a member of the native-speaker community I could not identify as a teacher. After the turning point I succeeded in imagining myself as an L2 user of the teacher community. Alignment was important in two aspects. The first, related to language use. The second related to re-aligning my thinking about student motivation, commitment, outcomes and achievement from the Eastern values that I learned in childhood to the western values inherent in Australian schools.

Although the change of my self-perceived identity from non-L2 user to L2 user
was clear, some feelings or behaviours as a non-L2 user still persisted. The identity shift process was not straightforward, exclusive, and unreturnable. According to the self-reflections (Table 7.2), the turning point happened on 19 September 2008, when I read Pavlenko (2003)’s concepts of three imagined communities for L2 speakers.

If the identity change or construction process was straightforward, exclusive and unreturnable, my behaviours and feelings before and after the turning point would be distinguishable: before the turning point, I would have behaved and thought in a non-L2 user way, while after the turning point, I should fit into the L2 user identity. However, as a human being, sometimes my feelings and behaviours were not controlled or absolute.

Before reading Pavlenko’s (2003) article, my thinking or behaviour as an L2 user also existed. I wanted to express my meaning clearly in my own words, not speaking as well as native speakers do.

When I stood in front of the class. My mind was a blank. My whole body felt worried and hurried. As soon as students became noisy, I wanted to finish my talking quickly and I worried that they were bored or impatient. So I was in a hurry and could not think of anything. I really needed to practise how to speak slowly and clearly in my own words, rather than in a rush or hurry. The important thing is to express my meaning clearly, without trying to speak as quickly and fluently as others do because normally I can do it. But as soon as I get into a rush or hurry, I mess everything up. (15/08/08, Language)

I believed that ‘I can do it’. I thought I was just too nervous to express ideas clearly in my own words and in my own way. In this example I tried to find
myself a suitable and comfortable position as an L2 user, although I did not
know it. The difference is that before reading Pavlenko’s article, my behaviour
or thinking lacked awareness. After reading her article, I consciously relocated
my position and eased my teaching difficulties.

People feel insecure about their state when they encounter changes. Facing a
changed and different environment or context, people are confused about the
questions “who am I?” and “what can I do?”. In order to solve the identity
crisis, it is important for individuals to change as well to construct their new
identities according to the context. Identity construction is getting to know
about self and answering the question “who am I”. It is a process of self-
recognition, self acceptance, self-understanding, and self-affirmation (You,
2005). In my case, I faced the change of a new environment in Australia. I felt
uncomfortable with the idea that I was a non-native English speaker and I
could not teach well if I could not speak good English. So I wanted a new
position to fulfil the process of self-recognition, self acceptance, self-
understanding and self-affirmation.

The process of my identity construction as an L2 user was not linear. Some-
times, I fell back into the non-L2 user community because, after the
turning point, my behaviour or thinking that fell into the non-L2 user
community, did not disappear immediately. A chronological tabulation entry
about language issues in my reflective journal (Appendix 11) shows that after
the turning point, I kept showing characteristics of a non-L2 user. This table is
represented graphically in Figure 8.1.
Figure 8.1: Graphic representation of my shift in thinking about the language community I belonged to.

Key:

1 = non-L2 user

2 = turning point

3 = L2 user

Figure 8.1 shows that before the turning point 19 September 2008, all reflections except one are categorised into non-L2 user community while, after the turning point, many of the reflections illustrated characteristics of L2 user, although there were still a number that fell into the non-L2 user category. My identity change from non-user to L2 user was not straightforward. It was a trend of curvilinear increase/wave.

An example of reverting after the turning point occurred when I took the children into the playground to play some Chinese games. The students misbehaved, depressing me and forcing me to question my ability to speak English again:
I started to think that language was a big barrier for my teaching. I think that when I was explaining the game rules, it was my ‘poor’ oral English that stopped the students from understanding, so they lost attention … English proficiency and fluency is really a big problem for my teaching. (11/03/09, Language)

Although I understood I had to get away from the negative feelings about my English ability and be confident, I could not help feeling depressed and hurt when I faced difficulties in dealing with discipline problems. The classroom teacher said she could see my developing confidence; but she could also see sometimes, even after a year of teaching, I was hesitant and struggled:

You are able to interact well with them. And your English has improved as well. So you are able to talk to them and they all understand you … Just at times you hesitate a bit. You take a bit of extra time to sort of explain things or maybe just translate it to Chinese. But you do not lack confidence. You are confident. You can talk to anyone in English and be able to … explain everything. (Classroom teacher interview)

My teacher identity is influenced by the language factors. As I repositioned myself as an L2 user, I gradually built confidence in teaching and identifying as a teacher. Therefore, story line 10 helps resolve the main research question in terms of how I deal with being positioned as, and/or taking the position of a native speaker, non-native speaker, or L2 user to construct my identity as an L2 teacher in Australia.

8.3 Findings

This study confirms the literature in many ways. The process I underwent complied with Vazquez’s (2000) three-step identity shifting process. Since
learning occurred at my work site and in the process of doing my work, this study conforms to Wenger’s (1998, 2000) apprenticeship model and the notion of a community of practice. Data demonstrates that information taught in a direct instruction classroom was not meaningful and thus learned, until I encountered the same situation in my teaching. Finally, Pavlenko’s (2003) imagined communities of language users spoke to me. Her arguments helped me to make sense of my teaching and my frustrations. I understood why I was constantly battling to join a community that was beyond my reach.

However, findings from this study diverge in important ways from previous research. The shift of identity that occurred was not linear. First, there were many doubts and many recursions. Second, the clear delineation of language user groups that Pavlenko describes did not occur. The data show that at times I belonged to two different communities at once. The following section discusses why these differences may have occurred, and their significance to the education community.

Pavlenko (2003) challenges the socially constructed dichotomy of NS/NNS and argues for the linguistic construction of three imagined communities. Based on Wenger (1998)’s modes of belonging, Pavlenko (2003) claimed the power of imagination in locating self and others to seek future possibility. Thus, her model of three imagined communities explores how pre-service teachers ‘imagine their linguistic and professional memberships’ (p. 254). In her study, she made a clear line between each community:

If one cannot join a native speaker community, one has no choice but to adopt one of the two remaining identity options offered by
the dominant discourse of native-speakerness: “non-native speaker” or “L2 learner”. (p. 259)

To her, students who failed to enter into the NSC would choose either NNSC or L2 user community. Pavlenko’s (2003) study was conducted in a TESOL program with students learning to be English teachers. The evidence she collected was students’ linguistic autobiographies. In contrast, my study was contextualised in my particular teaching and learning situation over several months. However, my experience challenges this dichotomous classification because the line between NSC and NNSC was blurred. At the same time, I could adopt native speakerness as well as treating myself as a non-native English speaker. Thus, in my situation, characterising myself both as non-L2 user and yet as being within an L2 user community makes more sense. This provides teachers and teacher educators an opportunity to view linguistic communities from another perspective.

As Vazquez (2000) describes, learning L2 is related to identity shift:

    Along this process, the initial identity … slowly evolves toward a second identity which enables the language learner to ultimately become a better speaker of a given L2. It is not a sudden transformation, nor is it a process by which the L2 learner loses his or her first identity. It is a gradual process that draws the L2 learner closer to the identity that is associated with the language that he or she is learning, an identity that is going to allow the learner to communicate fully in the second language. (p. 6)

Although Vazquez might not be talking about the exact same thing as my experience shows, I was in an identity shifting process which allowed me to positively position myself as an L2 user to better communicate in my L2.
However, as a person, subjective and emotional feelings are complex. Hence my identity shifting from failed L2 speaker to a legitimate L2 user was recursive rather than linear. This informs educators about the complex minds of students. It is important to situate theories or models according to circumstances.

8.4 Implications

This study is a self-study contextualised in the ROSETE program. As part of a broader research project, the experiences of a VTR from China who has undertaken the task of teaching Mandarin to students in school settings in Australia are informative. It informs future VTRs and other stakeholders in this program about the influence of reflective learning in building teacher identity and the importance of teacher identity construction for teacher preparation.

This study contributes to the communities of practice and informs teacher educators about the importance of learning through engaging and participation. In addition, this study has made an important and original contribution to the knowledge on language and culture in education involving internationally mobile teachers in intercultural and global contexts. It informs in-service and pre-service L2 teachers, L2 learners and L2 teacher educators about the importance of self-positioning and repositioning for the legitimate purposes of using and teaching a language. Language teachers who teach L1 in L2, L2 in L2 and L2 in L1 can benefit from this study of how to legitimate their own and students’ language speaking from different positioning.
Moreover, this study examines teacher identity from a new path, which is presented in the first-person voice and enriches the teacher identity research area by means of a self-study. This manner presents sensitive account of my experiences. The self-reflections are themselves powerful expressions and representations of the discursive space I inhabit, one fraught with ambivalence, challenges and difficulties. That is the particular strength of the thesis. It expands the inspiration and provides new possibilities for future research in this area.

This study challenges the accepted linear model of identity shifting proposed by Pavlenko (2003). The discussion contributes a further dimension to the existing body of knowledge. The publication of the findings would inform the field of the development of second language teacher identity as well as teacher identity in general, and hopefully stimulate further work.

8.5 Limitations and further research

First, this is a small-scale study, which sits in a particular context. It is constructed mainly on my own reflections, supported by three other sources of data. The use of other resources was not in evidence to a large extent. The findings are contextually situated in my own case. Second, although the study provides evidence of a social perspective of learning as those between me and other teachers, there is no close follow through of the practices in terms of continuous classroom transcripts of actual actions following expert recommendation. Third, writing in English which is my second language may have some influences to the indigenous expressiveness and nuance which
writing in my first language would have afforded. To make the thesis readable to a Western audience, I have already translated and edited some voices. There might be other voices lost in the process of my translation of the reflections into acceptable English. Writing my self-narratives in Mandarin would have maximized my repertoire of linguistic and cultural resources most importantly, my way of being in Mandarin, useful for comparative purposes.

8.6 Conclusion

This is a narrative self-study of a teacher who is positioned as a novice teacher of the target language Mandarin in a dominant English speaking context, one where English is used as a language of instruction and management. The strength of the study lies in its close attention to detail and context to help the reader understand how culture, language power and ideology frames the identity of a second language teacher of Mandarin in terms of a classroom context in Australia.

There are three major findings in this study. First, learning to teach cannot be taught directly but comes with participation in doing and interaction with others and the world. This study clearly documents my experiences as I gradually developed the skills associated with effective teaching whilst analysing and interpreting those experiences through the work of established researchers in the field.

Second, positioning and repositioning as a legitimate L2 user are influential to language teaching and learning. I submitted myself to the position of being the
L2 user of English when I could have positioned myself as the native speaker of Mandarin teaching Mandarin to Australian English speakers. In this position, I used English to fulfil a wide range of functions in the classroom such as language of classroom instruction and management and language of informal interaction.

Third, the identity shifting process was not linear but recursive, which indicates the complexity of individuals. This study provides a multilayered and nuanced inter-cultural and language study in education which addresses the challenges of identity for novice teachers who have to inter-culturally negotiate their identity at the intersections of the global, national and institutional. Issues of language and culture in education involving complex issues of negotiation of power, accommodation and appropriation as well as cultural crossings and cultural loss need to be discussed and the thesis has provided intimate understanding of the tension involved in such crossings especially to the marginalised and the disempowered.
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Appendices
Appendix 1

University of Western Sydney Human Ethics Approval

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Subject: HREC Approval H6826
Date: Thursday, 9 April 2009 12:04 PM
From: Kay Buckley <K.BUCKLEY@uws.edu.au>
To: Marilyn Kell <M.Kell@uws.edu.au>,<16601752@student.uws.edu.au>

Notification of Approval

Email on behalf of the UWS Human Research Ethics Committee

Dear Marilyn and Ye

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

TITLE: Narrative self study of a second language teacher's identity

Student: Ye Li

The Protocol Number for this project is H6826. Please ensure that this number is quoted in all relevant correspondence and on all information sheets, consent forms and other project documentation.

Please note the following:
1) The approval will expire on 31 December 2009. If you require an extension of approval beyond this period, please ensure that you notify the Human Ethics Officer (humanethics@uws.edu.au <mailto:humanethics@uws.edu.au>) prior to this date.

2) Please ensure that you notify the Human Ethics Officer of any
future change to the research methodology, recruitment procedure, set of participants or research team.

3) If anything unexpected should occur while carrying out the research, please submit an Adverse Event Form to the Human Ethics Officer. This can be found at http://www.uws.edu.au/research/ors/ethics/human_ethics <http://www.uws.edu.au/research/ors/ethics/human_ethics>

4) Once the project has been completed, a report on its ethical aspects must be submitted to the Human Ethics Officer. This can also be found at http://www.uws.edu.au/research/ors/ethics/human_ethics <http://www.uws.edu.au/research/ors/ethics/human_ethics>

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

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

Kay Buckley
Human Ethics Officer
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797, Penrith Sth DC NSW 1797
Tel: 02 47 360 883
Appendix 2

State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP) Approval

Miss Ye Li
K.2.25 School of Education
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797
PENRITH SOUTH DC NSW 1797

Dear Miss Ye Li

SERAP number: 2009-011

I refer to your application to conduct in NSW government schools (Western Sydney Region) a research project entitled *Narrative self-study of a second language teacher’s identity*.

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

Your approval will remain valid until 31 December 2009.

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

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

- School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time.
- The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering data must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school’s convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the research Approvals Officer before publication proceeds.

Yours sincerely

K/L

Kerrie Ikin
School Education Director, The Hills
Western Sydney Region Education Research Manager

20 May 2009

NSW Department of Education & Training
Western Sydney Region Building T3C, Nirimba Education Precinct, Eastern Road, Quakers Hill NSW 2763 T 9288 7611 F 9288 7635
www.det.nsw.edu.au
Appendix 3

Dialogue Sheet (Students)

Project Title: Narrative self-study of a second language teacher's identity
Who is carrying out the study?
Li Ye

What is the study about?
Teachers often learn about themselves as teacher from what their students think. This year you have been writing in a journal at the end of each lesson. For this study I would like to use comments written in your journals in Terms 2 and 3 to help me find out what you think about me as a second language teacher. Your comments over 20 weeks will be analysed to show how I am developing as a teacher. I will only use journal entries from those students whose parents/caregiver’s have consented to their participation in this study. As you have all chosen a secret name, I will not be able to identify any of you and people who read my thesis or any publications from this study will not know who you are.

What does the study involve?
You will need to continue writing honest comments during journal writing time at the end of each lesson.

How much time will the study take?
This study will be conducted in terms 2 and 3. You will need to write for 10 minutes at the end of every lesson that I teach.

Will the study benefit me?
Research is important. Research in schools helps us to understand who students and teachers think. As research participants, this study will help you to understand how important student feedback is to teachers.

Will the study have any discomforts?
No. This study will not ask you to do anything that you are not already doing. As you know, I do not require you to write more than you are capable and those of you who enjoy drawing pictures and cartoons can continue to do so.

How is this study being paid for?
No one is paying for this study. That means that no one can tell me what I will find in my research. The University of Western Sydney provides me with an office and computer studies.

Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?
My supervisors, particularly my principal supervisor Dr Marilyn Kell, will be guiding me in the data analysis process. She will know the data but will not know who you are. My results will be published in a thesis that will be lodged electronically in the University of Western Sydney library, so that other students and researchers can read it. I hope to go to a conference and tell other researchers about this study. Later in the year there will be a forum held by the schools in western Sydney where all the teachers from China in this program will share their findings. I will try and have the results of this study published in an academic journal.

What if I have a concern?
You should talk to your parent or caregiver. You may also talk to me. If you want to talk to someone who knows the project but does not know you, you may talk to my supervisor, Dr Marilyn Kell. You may email her at m.kell@uws.edu.au.

**Can I withdraw from the study?**
Yes, you can withdraw from this study at any time. You do not have to give a reason. I will remove any of your comments from the report.

**Ask the students if they have any further questions before commencement.**
Appendix 4

Information Sheet (Parents/Caregivers)

Project Title: Narrative self-study of a second language teacher's identity

Who is carrying out the study?
Li Ye

Your child is invited to participate in a study conducted by Li Ye, a student in the Centre for Educational Research, and will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Hons) at the University of Western Sydney under the supervision of Dr Marilyn Kell, lecturer in Special Education.

What is the study about?
This study is about my development as a second language teacher. I was born and grew up in China. Mandarin is my first language. Teaching Mandarin in an Australian high school classroom is a very interesting experience for me. I want to investigate how I learn to think about myself as a teacher while I teach in an Australian school.

What does the study involve?
Teachers often learn about themselves as teacher from what their students think. This year students in my classes have been writing in a journal which I collect at the end of each lesson. For this study I would like to use comments written in their journals by the students in Terms 2 and 3 to help me find out what they think about me as a second language teacher. After collecting the journals I will look at the journals and photocopy pages I need to keep for analysis. The quality of the students’ comments over time will be analysed to show how I am developing as a teacher. Your child has selected a name or symbol which identifies his/her journal. This is so that no one, apart from your child can identified either in the course of the research, the ensuing thesis or any subsequent publications. You are being asked to give consent for me to access and use your son/daughter’s journal.

How much time will the study take?
The study will be conducted over 20 weeks. Students spend about 10 minutes writing in their journals each lesson that I teach. Journals will be:

Children not participating in the study will be writing their journal as usual during the time the research is being carried out.

Will the study benefit me?
This study will give students the opportunity to participate in university research and the result will indicate to them the value of student feedback to teachers.
Will the study have any discomforts?
No. The journals will be viewed as a pool of data. The students, their school or its location will not be identified in either the resulting thesis or any subsequent publications.

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

Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?
All aspects of the study, including results, will be confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. Results of the study will be in a Master of Education (Hons) thesis which will be lodged electronically with the University of Western Sydney library. Results of the study, maintaining confidentiality, may be published in appropriate academic journals or presented at conferences and forums.

Can I withdraw my child from the study?
Your child’s participation in the study is entirely voluntary; you are not obliged to consent. You may withdraw your child from the study at any time. All written and audio records of your child’s participation will be destroyed.

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

What if I require further information?
When you have read this information, Li Ye will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have at a meeting of parent on [date and time to be advised]. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact me
Li Ye: 16601752@uws.edu.au
or my supervisor
Dr Marilyn Kell: m.kell@uws.edu.au

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

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel 02-4736 0083 Fax 02-4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Appendix 5

Participant Consent Form (Students’ Parents/Caregivers)
Appendix 6

Participant Information (Teachers/VTR)

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Narrative self-study of a second language teacher's identity

Who is carrying out the study?
Li Ye

This information sheet is for a co-Volunteer Teacher Researcher and the classroom teacher.

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

What is the study about?
The purpose is to investigate the development of a novice second language (L2) teacher’s identity from the perspective of her unique teaching experiences. The main focus of this research is the L2 teacher’s self-perception or intrinsic feelings and emotions which can indicate the construction, negotiation, and changes of identity. The study investigates the identity learning process, as I teach Mandarin at a local high school, supported by a consideration of my living and learning experiences in Australia and China. The study will use Self-study as the central methodology, conducted as a narrative inquiry.

What does the study involve?
In this study I am seeking to find out your views on my development as a second language teacher. The study involves analysis of my reflective journal triangulated with students’ classroom journals, lesson observation feedback and one or two interviews with the classroom teacher and a co-Volunteer Teacher Researcher. Feedback on your observations of my teaching are primary source data. You will be asked to complete an observation checklist up to 6 lessons. Interviews will be used for data triangulation. You will be asked some open-ended questions in an interview that will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.

How much time will the study take?
The study will be conducted over 20 weeks. Lesson observation will take place on up to 6 occasions. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes and will be conducted at a mutually agreeable time and place.

Will the study benefit me?
This study will inform you of the influence of an L2 teacher’s identity on the strategies used in second language.
classrooms and will benefit you as you work with "teachers" who are in similar situations/contexts to the researcher.

**Will the study involve any discomfort for me?**

No. The lesson observations and the types of questions you will be asked in the interviews are typical of the professional judgements that you would normally make in the course of your work and will focus on the researcher. While the interview will take some of your free time, the researcher will allow you to choose the time and place it will be conducted.

**How is this study being paid for?**

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

**Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?**

All aspects of the study, including results, will be confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. Results of the study will be in a Master of Education (Honours) thesis which will be lodged electronically with the University of Western Sydney library. Results of the study, maintaining confidentiality, will be presented at a Department of Education and Training (Western Sydney Region) forum and may be published in appropriate academic journals or presented at conferences.

**Can I withdraw from the study?**

Participation is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate, you can withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any consequences.

**Can I tell other people about the study?**

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

**What if I require further information?**

When you have read this information, Li Ye will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact me.

Li Ye: 16601752@uws.edu.au
or my supervisor
Dr Marilyn Kell: m.kell@uws.edu.au

**What if I have a complaint?**

This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is [enter approval number].

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel 02-4736 0083 Fax 02-4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Appendix 7

Participant Consent Form (Teachers/VTR)

Project Title: Narrative self-study of a second language teacher's identity

I, __________________________, consent to participate in the research project titled Narrative self-study of a second language teacher's identity.

I acknowledge that:

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

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

I consent to providing notes on observations of up to six of the researcher's lessons and participating in a digital audio recorded interview at a mutually agreed time and place.

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

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

Signed: ______________________

Name: ______________________

Date: ______________________
Appendix 8

Participant Information (School Principal)

Project Title: Narrative self-study of a second language teacher’s identity

Who is carrying out the study?
Li Ye

This information sheet is for the school Principal.

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

What is the study about?
I have been teaching voluntarily at your school since July 2002 as part of an innovative collaboration between NSW DET (Western Sydney region), University of Western Sydney and Ningbo Municipal Council. Another aspect of this collaboration is the completion of a Master of Education (Hons). This, in part, involves a research study. I have decided to investigate the development of my identity as a multilingual teacher. Using a self-study methodology, analyses the teaching strategies and techniques I employ based on three imagined professional and linguistic communities (Pavlenko, 2003). This statement is to inform you of the research I wish to conduct at your school, particularly the time frame and what I am asking of participants.

What does the study involve?
The study involves
a) The Year 8 Mandarin class.
It is important that the students know about the research project and the possibility of their participation in it. The most efficient means of doing this is to have someone read a statement to the students in class. If I read this to the students, I will be deemed to have breached ethics. So, I would like the Year 8 Mandarin teacher to read it to them at the end of a lesson. This will be done on a day that I am at the school and can answer student questions in a time when they are in class, such as morning tea or lunch time. If this is not a satisfactory arrangement I am happy to work with you to initiate this study in a manner that is least disruptive to the class in particular and the school as a whole.

All this year the students in this class have been writing journal notes about the lessons I have been teaching. I would like to use entries they make in Terms 2 & 3. Students have already chosen code names for their journals. They enjoy writing notes to me and I enjoy reciprocating. I will analyse journal entries to find the students’ perspectives on my teaching. For example, I may think that I am teaching from a multilingual position but students may have regarded it as a native speaker position. Over time the tone of their messages should indicate whether students view me as a stranger or whether we share in a community of learners. I will discuss the study
with the class, but, as these students are minors, they will need parental consent to participate. Information sheets and consent form with return envelopes will be posted to the parents/caregivers of every student in the class. I will supply the forms and stamped envelopes but I would like the addressing to be carried out by school administrative staff. This reduces the risk that I will have access to information that is not necessary for this study. Some parents might like to meet me and to seek further information about the study. I would like to negotiate with you and the class teacher a time that may be suitable for this that aligns with current school plans.

b) The Mandarin teacher will be asked to observe up to 3 of my lessons in Terms 2 & 3. She will be given a checklist for this purpose and will be asked for her feedback after each lesson which I will record in my reflective diary. She will also be asked to participate in a 30-minute interview that will be digitally recorded. The classroom teacher's participation does not require her to alter her work patterns as she is currently in the classroom when I teach and gives me regular feedback. Participation in the study requires her to focus on factors that are indicative of me working in one or more linguistic communities.

c) In order to gain insight into my use of linguistic strategies in the classroom I will ask my co-VTR to observe my teaching in lessons that we co-teach. As with the Mandarin teacher she will be given an observation schedule and will be asked to participate in an interview. Once again, this participation should not interfere with the teachers' normal teaching practice.

How much time will the study take?
The study will be conducted over 17 weeks. The observations will each take approximately 20-40 minutes and will be conducted at my normal teaching time in the Year 8 class. Interviews will be arranged at a mutually agreeable time and place. The Mandarin teacher may choose to do this at a time when she would normally give me feedback. I am able to arrange a time to interview the co-VTR outside school hours.

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

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

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

Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?
All aspects of the study, including results, will be confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. Results of the study will be in a Master of Education (Hons) thesis which will be lodged electronically with the University of Western Sydney library. Results of the study, maintaining confidentiality, may be published in appropriate academic journals or presented at conferences and will be presented at a DET forum in late 2009.

Can I withdraw from the study?
Participation is entirely voluntary. Prospective participants are not obliged to be involved and, if they do participate, can withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any consequences.
Can I tell other people about the study?
Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the chief investigator’s contact details. They can contact the chief investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain an information sheet.

What if I require further information?
When you have read this information, Jingjing Weng will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact me
Jingjing Weng: 16601689@uws.edu.au
or my supervisor
Dr Marilyn Kell: m.kell@uws.edu.au

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

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel 02-4736 0083 Fax 02-4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Appendix 9

Indicative Open-Ended Questions for Interview (Teacher/VTR)

1. Please comment on my interactions with students.

2. Please comment on my use of English and Mandarin, particularly code switching, when I teach.

3. Please comment on the development of my professional attitude and behaviour.

4. Please comment on the way my teaching skills are developing.

5. In my time at this school I would like to feel that students and staff identify me as a teacher, not a visitor. Can you comment on how students and staff identify me?
Appendix 10

Classroom Observation Schedule

A narrative self-study of second language teacher identity

Class observation schedule

Date __________

Below is a series of questions, please read them carefully and, as I teach circle the number on the 5-point scale that best rates my performance on each item. 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest.

Teacher Talk

Part 1: Social relations

Construction of social relationships between teacher and students (refers to the way I speak to the class, direct confrontation, and use of ‘we/us’ to give instructions)

a) Rate my use of class instructions to

i. require silence  1 2 3 4 5

ii. speak clearly  1 2 3 4 5

iii. direct student(s) to start now 1 2 3 4 5

iv. announce class procedures 1 2 3 4 5

b) Rate my use of direct confrontation that

i. explicitly assigns a negative attribute or action to the student(s) 1 2 3 4 5

ii. adopts a threatening tone 1 2 3 4 5
iii. uses demeaning irony

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**c) Rate my use of solidarity strategies to construct myself as part of an in-group to which students also belong**

i. Using ‘we/us’ to give instructions

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ii. Requesting co-operation

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iii. Using 1st person (I hope, I’d like you to)

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iv. Expressing self-opinion

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d) Rate my overall construction of social relationships in the classroom

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**Part 2: construction of linguistic knowledge** (This refers to corrective feedback and informative acts to declare linguistic rules).

The next two relate to categorical knowledge, which is the view that students will learn Mandarin as a result of applying strict, invariable rules.

a) Rate my use of corrective feedback

i. Accept act

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ii. Evaluate act

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b) Rate my use of informative acts, such as my ability to provide examples of

i. objective facts

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ii. obligatory choices 1 2 3 4 5

iii. one-to-one translations 1 2 3 4 5

between English and Mandarin.

The next questions refer to non-categorical knowledge, which is the view that language use is variable and the students will learn Mandarin as a result of their point of view or preference.

c) Rate my use of informative acts that provide the students with different patterns of usage and options for using Mandarin according to the context and the student preference

i. Patterns of usage 1 2 3 4 5

ii. Multiple choices 1 2 3 4 5

iii. Personal point of view 1 2 3 4 5

d) Rate my overall use of strategies to construct linguistic knowledge in the classroom.

Self Identity

To what degree do you think students see me as:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Mandarin teacher</td>
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<td>a Volunteer or casual teacher without teacher authority</td>
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<td>a non-native English speaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>a casual teacher who does not have power to control the classroom discipline or student behaviour.</td>
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<tr>
<td>a native Mandarin speaker</td>
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<td>an inexperienced language teacher who can be cheated or tricked so that they can do the thing they want such as play, talk, or go to toilet</td>
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<tr>
<td>a teacher of Mandarin to speakers of English</td>
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<td>a bilingual teacher who can better understand L2 learners’ language learning process, difficulties, and feelings as a result of similar language learning experiences.</td>
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<td>a bilingual teacher who is more tolerant to L2 learners’ pronunciation and ways of using language because the similar experiences and knows how to deal with language learning problems.</td>
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<td>a language teacher who illustrates a real example of becoming a bilingual and demonstrates that learning and using a second language is achievable and useful both to themselves and to others</td>
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<td>a native Mandarin speaker who exerts pressure on their L2 learning because of she adopt native speaker standards</td>
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**Work Identity**

a) Rate my intrinsic motivation and high standards in relation to Mandarin

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Reason: _____________________________________________________
(e.g. lesson preparation)

b) Rate my sense of the value of learning Mandarin and a positive attitude towards use of Mandarin in classroom instruction

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Reason: _____________________________________________________
c) Rate my positive attitude towards teaching at PHS

Reason:

Language use in the classroom

Part 1: English use

a) Rate the degree of my use of English during the lesson

b) Rate the aim of using English

i. Classroom discipline management

ii. Teaching new knowledge

iii. Interaction with students

iv. Explanation of language meanings

v. Correction or evaluation

vi. Instructions

vii. Task management, including games and different activities
c) When I using English, I behave as

i. I am a non-native English speaker.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   I cannot speak English natively and fluently.
   I feel unconfident.

ii. I cannot manage the discipline because  
    1 2 3 4 5  
    I cannot speak English fluently

iii. I do not care about my English fluency and nativeness. I am confident about my teaching  
    1 2 3 4 5

iv. my teaching is so affected by my English proficiency  
    1 2 3 4 5

v. when students make fun of my language or cannot understand me well I am frustrated and feel like baby talking  
    1 2 3 4 5

vi. I have my own way of English using. I can make students understand me with my English speaking.  
    1 2 3 4 5

Others: ____________________________

Part 2: Mandarin use

a) Rate the degree of my use of Mandarin during the lesson  
   1 2 3 4 5

b) Rate the aim of using Mandarin
i. Regular greeting with students  
   1 2 3 4 5

ii. Teaching new knowledge  
   1 2 3 4 5

iii. Interaction with students  
   1 2 3 4 5

iv. Classroom discipline management  
   1 2 3 4 5

v. Correction or evaluation  
   1 2 3 4 5
   (e.g. right/good in Mandarin)

vi. Instructions  
   1 2 3 4 5

vii. Explanation of language meanings  
   1 2 3 4 5

viii. Task management, including games  
   1 2 3 4 5
   and different activities

Others: ________________________________

c) When I using Mandarin, I behave as

i. a native Mandarin speaker.  
   1 2 3 4 5
   I use the native standards of Mandarin speaking when students are learning Mandarin

ii. a language teacher who behave more  
    1 2 3 4 5
    confidently when using Mandarin which
can make me feel comfortable

iii. feeling frustrated when I cannot make students understand me 1 2 3 4 5

iv. getting away of the embarrassment when my English speaking is not good enough 2 3 4 5

Others: ___________________________

Part 3: code-switching
Sometimes, I will switch from one language to another.

Rate the reasons of my code-switching

i. One-to-one relation between the target language and the students’ L1 forms 1 2 3 4 5

ii. Reduce the repetitive of using only the target language to speed up the teaching process and avoid misunderstanding 1 2 3 4 5

iii. Seeking for comfort and confidence when I am in a difficult situation, such as embarrassment 1 2 3 4 5

iv. To keep the interaction going on when speakers encounter communication breakdown as a result of lacking knowledge of one language 1 2 3 4 5

v. It is a communication strategy used when speakers language face difficulty in 1 2 3 4 5
communicating with sole language

vi. To give complex instructions in task-based activities
Appendix 11

Dates of Reflections about Language Issues and their Relationship to Non-L2 User and L2 User Communities

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