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**“Asia Literacy” through research-oriented school-engaged teacher education:
From volunteer Mandarin teaching-assistants to volunteer teacher-researchers**

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A paper presented at the
Australia Teacher Education Association (ATEA) Annual Conference
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Abstract

This paper explores the possibilities for building research-oriented, school-engaged teacher education through the professional learning of volunteer teacher-researchers. Volunteerism in education covers a broad spectrum of people and activities ranging from working in school canteens to supporting language and literacy programs. This paper reports on the professional learning of volunteer Mandarin teaching assistants as they develop into volunteer teacher-researchers. Situating this study in relation to Australian National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program, this paper draws on concepts from ‘Asia literacy’ for its theoretical framework. A review of the research literature points to a need to value volunteers’ contributions to teaching experience as a way of promoting volunteerism in schools. Elements of the research method for the study reported here include the project’s focus, the participants and their selection, and ethical protocols. The analysis of evidence explores the transition through the work-integrated professional learning of these volunteer teacher-researchers, tracking their development through a collection of 28 documents. The discussion section uses the concept of ‘Asia literacy’ to analyse the value of this research-oriented, school-engaged teacher education program.

Key words: Asia literacy, Mandarin teaching, research-oriented, school-engaged teacher education, volunteer teaching assistants

Introduction

Volunteerism plays an important role in schools, in particular supporting student learning in areas of numeracy, literacy and language education. However, the lack of education and training for volunteer teaching assistants so they can improve student learning and improve their own capabilities as volunteers is a key problem. This paper reports on the impact of teacher education researchers on the education and training of volunteer Mandarin teaching assistants through evidence of improvements in their capabilities as volunteer teacher-researchers. This paper argues that these volunteers benefit from the integration their work experiences as volunteers in schools with their university-based research education. The research literature on volunteerism in schools includes studies of the impact of volunteers on students' test results and the need to value volunteers' contributions to student learning so as to increase volunteerism in schools. Details of the methods used in this study include research questions, the focus of the study, the participants and their selection, and research ethics. Evidence of the volunteers' professional learning drawn from an analysis of their initial research proposals, their conference abstracts, proposals for confirmation of candidature, and self-reports on progress. Conceptually, this study is framed in terms of Singh's (2005; 2001) ideas on 'Asia literacy'.

Conceptualising Asia literacy

The term 'Asia literacy' has been refined over the years to sanction selected economic, cultural and social interpretations and approaches across different countries (Pang, 2005). To begin even the term 'Asia' has to be treated with caution, because it names 'a multitudinous variety of cultures, languages, histories, politics and societies' (Singh, 1996, p. 154). Singh (2001; 1999; see also Singh & Miller, 1995) has developed a conceptual framework for understanding current developments in Asia literacy in Australia. Our research focus is China, in particular the city of Ningbo and its intellectual connections with Sydney (Australia). Key features of Singh's (1995; 1996) Asia literacy framework are:

1. linking of education and production;
2. promoting work-related learning;
3. engagement with China's intellectual projects;

4. the Asian dimension to the Australian identity;
5. that 'China' is a career for Chinese;
6. the limitations of Australia's policy infrastructure.

According to Singh (1995, p. 599) *Asia literacy links the humanistic and material dimensions of education and production*. Thus, Asia literacy is a vehicle for increasing the study of Mandarin and Chinese culture(s) in schools; providing China with Australians who are interested in its languages, sciences and arts, improving the availability of Chinese texts for Australians, and producing more Australian scholars specialising in Chinese studies. Asia literacy also means studying targeted Mandarin and Chinese culture(s) as facilitating the expansion of Australian industry and trade, as much as a mechanism for coming to terms with, and making a national response to China due to its disparate connections via colonialism, 'hot' and 'cold' wars, and multinational trade. These two dimensions of Asia literacy supplement, and reinforce each other.

Australia is an Asian country, at least economically in terms of international trade. Singh (1995) argues that *Asia literacy promotes work-related learning*, in particular the work/life trajectories of Australian students. It was 1994 when the Council of Australian Governments launched its strategy "to make the rising generation of Australian workers and citizens 'Asia literature' in the hope of boosting Australia's economic performance in international competition and [in] providing school-leavers with new employment opportunities" (Singh, 1996, p. 153). Because Australia's foreseeable economic prospects depends on its established relations with China, Australian students are being taught selected languages and cultures in order to prepare themselves socially, cultural and economically for a work/life in this region. Asia literacy provides students with knowledge of Mandarin and Chinese culture(s) that is expected to be able to be out to economic use in their working lives, thereby enhancing their well-being and that of the nation.

For Singh (1995, p. 608) *Asia literacy engages the complex and dynamic intellectual projects of China*, questioning China's representation as one-dimensional and static. Asia literacy provides the opportunity for Australian students to engage Chinese people and their knowledge, opening the way for Australians to the rich and diverse intellectual heritage of China. Thus, Asia literacy entails gaining access to Chinese knowledge through Chinese voices which provide different Chinese

perspectives. This is an opportunity for Australian students to gain access to the meanings Chinese assign to the social, economic and cultural dimensions of their lives, as well as their judgements of interpretations made of these by others, including Australians. China's intellectual projects are constitutive of Australian education. There is a relationship between Australia's trade interests in China and Australia's educational pursuits with regard to Asia literacy.

Asia literacy is also linked to the Australian national identity and its imaginings of China and perceptions of the place of Chinese within Australia. Singh (2005) explains that Asia literacy is integral to Australia's desire to renegotiate its identity with China, as it redraws the world map to focus on Australia's place in Asia. Thus, Asia literacy can expect to confront some problems as it seeks to effect changes in the relationship between Australia and Asia. For instance, Singh (1996) argues that Australian Orientalism has tended to position Chinese peoples as exotic and inferior subjects for domination, while asserting an absolute difference between Australia and Asia, dividing Australia from Asia and creating a sense of confrontation between the two. Ironically, in the mid-1990s Rudd (1995, pp. 25-26) argued that Australian "xenophobia," "unbridled white supremacist" and "racial hostility" towards Asians was of historical interest only. The ensuing White Nation movement led by Pauline Hanson mocked this claim to anti-Asian racism being a relic of White Australia's past.

Singh (1995, p. 602) observed another feature of *Asia literacy*, namely that it is *unlikely to deliver more than short term benefits*. This is because the massive efforts needed to incorporate Asia literacy in Australian schools faces the limitations of the nation's policy infrastructure. For example, the Howard Government's term in office (1996-2006) was shaped by issues of race. Henderson (2008, p. 188) reports that the "One Nation phenomenon and Howard's tactics served to undermine further public attitudes towards the value of learning Asian languages in Australia." In May 2002 the Howard Government withdrew the Commonwealth's fifty per cent contribution which secured the sustainability of the National Asian Language and Studies in Australian Schools program, five years before its scheduled review. Henderson (2008, p. 190) contends that the Howard Government's "cultural myopia" in this regard expressed "the ongoing discomfort of sections of Australian society with the cultural shifts required to embed Asian languages [and cultural studies] as part of the knowledge economy." The defunding of the NALSAS strategy was, Peng (2005, p.

179) argues in “direct contrast to Australia’s billion-dollar international education links with China, Korea, Japan, Indonesia and other Asian countries from where the industry diligently sources its students.”

There are vocational interests informing Asia literacy, with the promise of “job for young adults “with commercial and technical skills allied with strong language skills and knowledge of Asia” (Singh, 1996, p. 160). However, “Asia is not only a career for Australians, but it is also *a career for Asia’s own intellectuals*” (Singh, 1996, p. 161). They can make a career out of transmitting, interpreting and debating representations of China. The expansion of studies of Mandarin and Chinese culture(s) provides employment growth for people from the target countries. Teachers are now required “to provide knowledge of Asian languages and cultures that [Australian] students need to pursue career opportunities that are related to Australian society’s economic interests in Asia” (Singh, 1996, p. 161). In times long past Australia addressed its shortage of skilled teachers by recruiting from Anglo-phone nations. Rudd (1994, p. 127) identified the “problems of language teacher competence and supply” as a key policy challenge. Again in 2009 attention has turned to China for recruiting teachers for its Asia literacy strategy. For those Chinese fluent in their Mandarin and English, that is for those with bilingual proficiency they gain access to the international labour market.

Recognising the importance of Asian languages to young Australians, the Rudd Australian Government has committed funding of \$62.4 million over 2008–11 for the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program. NALSSP has been established to increase opportunities for school students to become familiar with the languages and cultures of our Asian neighbours, namely China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). The aspirational target for the NALSSP is that, by 2020, at least 12 per cent of Australian students will exit Year 12 with a fluency in one of the target Asian languages (Mandarin, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean) sufficient for engaging in trade and commerce in Asia and/or university study. There are three key result areas for NALSSP, namely flexible delivery and pathways in design and delivery of language programs by strengthening strategic partnerships and networks; increasing teacher supply and support, and stimulating student demand (DEEWR, 2009, p.2). The aims of the volunteer program reported in the paper are to stimulate student demand and to

build international strategic partnerships, and increase teacher supply. The term volunteer was once associated with religious do-gooders. As the review of the research literature shows, this no longer characterises the situation today.

Volunteerism in schools

Volunteerism in schools covers a broad spectrum of people and activities including second language programs especially for English. ‘The word volunteer ... meaning willingness or inclination ... means to give, bestow, or perform without being asked’ (Wu & Carter, 2001; pp. 16-17). Clark (1996, p. 1) argues that “giving of oneself has long been a way to build civic-mindedness and learn about the world beyond one’s backyard’. However, while some research has suggested education and training for volunteers working with students, there has been little research documenting volunteers’ development as a result of such professional learning.

Baker, Gersten and Keating (2000) conducted a two year longitudinal evaluation of the volunteer tutoring program, *Start Making a Reader Today* (SMART), which engaged community volunteers actively and positively involved in their local schools. The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of the SMART volunteer tutoring program on the reading abilities of students deemed ‘at risk’ of failure. It was found that this volunteer program improved the reading abilities of students: “On most measures of reading, the performance of students in SMART was statistically higher than was the performance of students in a randomly assigned, matched comparison sample” (Baker, Gersten & Keating, 2000, p. 507). Even so, the study also found that the high turnover of volunteers meant that intensive tutor training may not a good use of fiscal resources. This surprising claim given, no accounting was made of the volunteers’ work or its value given its reported success. This led to the questionable suggestion that ‘accelerated reading outcomes can be achieved by volunteers with minimal formal training, using their own judgment and instincts on how to support literacy development’ (Baker, Gersten & Keating, 2000, p. 510).

Munoz (2000) investigated parental volunteerism in kindergarten to assess its impact on the reading and mathematics tests of these very young children. Noting that parental involvement is an important factor in student success, this study examined differences in student learning in reading and mathematics in relation to levels of

parental volunteerism in kindergarten. It was found that parental volunteerism in kindergarten raised reading test scores, but did not have an impact on mathematics scores. Munoz (2000) suggests that further research could explore the effectiveness of social and school-based interventions using different methodological procedures.

While the impact of volunteers on student learning provides one focus for research, the decline in volunteering in education has arisen as a cause for concern. Buck (2002, p. 271) observes that ‘in education, volunteering is often poorly valued, and it is taken for granted’. This a decline in volunteerism is perhaps not surprising. He found that “there appears to be no appreciation for engaging in volunteer work related to education, because there does not appear to be anything of value to the potential volunteer” (Buck, 2002, p. 272). In terms of rewards he suggested that individuals in the USA “expect at least some sort of positive recognition or some manifestation of appreciation for work done, whether it is paid for or volunteered’ (Buck, 2002, p. 272). Given that the motivation to volunteer is not wholly usually intrinsic, the decline in volunteering may be reversed by sensible expressions of appreciation by educators and educational institutions value volunteerism”.

This concern about the decline in volunteering in schools has led to research into the education and training needs of volunteers. In the USA, university graduates often work as volunteers teaching at-risk students. Fenzel and Flippen (2006) studied the effect of employing such volunteer teachers in eleven (N=11) private urban middle schools that educate at-risk children. A key question is how effective can volunteers be “when they have had little or no previous teaching experience or training” (Fenzel & Flippen, 2006, p. 4). To examine the effectiveness of volunteers’ contributions to positive learning outcomes for at-risk students, observations of classes; interviews with teachers, administrators, and students; surveys and standardised tests were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. It was found that the volunteers “needed to spend class time disciplining students to a greater extent than did experienced teachers and they reported a lower level of satisfaction with the quality of their teaching” (Fenzel & Flippen, 2006, p. 13). The interviews with teachers and administrators also revealed that the most frequently cited difficulty faced by volunteers was the management of student behaviour in the classroom. However, principals reported that the benefits that volunteers brought to the school included

high levels of motivation to help students, high energy levels, and a strong commitment to work long hours.

The results of this study have implications for the effective use of volunteers to help educate students who require high quality instruction in order to improve their academic skills and become reengaged in the learning process. Fenzel and Flippen (2006) recommend that volunteers might better be used as aids or tutors, and assuming that they can be given classroom teaching responsibilities is questionable. The failure to prepare, support and mentor volunteers to become effective instructors can have “negative effects on student learning and may undermine the confidence of the volunteers” (Fenzel & Flippen, 2006, p. 20). They recommend that teacher educators might participate in the training of volunteers to increase their effectiveness.

Wu and Carter (2001) studied *The Adult Education Program in English as a Second Language* in New Jersey to build a model for the professional learning of volunteers. To answer the research question what makes the volunteer program work, Wu and Carter (2001) surveyed seventy-eight ($N=78$) volunteers in the Adult ESL Program. They found that ‘while volunteers do not receive a lot of training, they do stay with the program for long periods of time. This probably has a lot to do with the amount of rewards given to volunteer ... many people who start out volunteering in the program end up teaching ESL’ (Wu & Carter, 2001, p. 18). In terms of motivation, it was found that these volunteers have a desire to help others, to know people of diverse cultures, foster intercultural communication, to enhance cultural understanding, to exchange or share languages, and to obtain teaching experience. This study reports that the volunteers had a major impact on the effectiveness of the Adult Education program in ESL. Wu and Carter (2001) suggested five ways to improve volunteer programs in adult ESL education, namely encouraging professionalism, appointing a director, supervising the volunteers, creating a friendly atmosphere and flexible scheduling.

The literature on volunteerism in education is dominated by settings in the USA and the issues investigated focus on the impact of volunteers on students’ test results. Research points to a need to value volunteers’ contributions to teaching and learning, and to find ways to promote increased engagement in volunteerism in schools. The lack of education and training for volunteers to improve student learning and enhance the capabilities of volunteers has arisen as a key problem. This paper explores the

progress made by teacher education researchers in the education and training of volunteer in terms of the increasing effectiveness of seven volunteer Mandarin teaching assistants as volunteer teacher-researchers. The next section provides details of the research methods used in this study.

Research Method

This section provides details of this study's research questions, the focus of the study, the participants and their selection, and research ethics.

Research questions

The research question guiding this study is how seven young university graduates from Ningbo (China) developed from volunteer Mandarin teaching assistants into volunteer teacher-researchers in Australia? These question aims to explore their professional learning process through work-integrated research education. To this end, case study method of data collection and analysis was considered especially appropriate for this investigation (Yin, 2009). To answer the process of professional learning, document collection and analysis provided a necessary research method. The important document associated with the development process included the volunteer's initial research proposals, their abstracts for College of Arts Conference Presentation, their detail proposals for Confirmation of Candidatures, and their self-reports to NMEB. These documents analysed with findings represented tables provide a detailed description of major themes of this evidence. This suggests four contributory questions:

1. what are the prospects for work-integrated learning in research-oriented, school-engaged teacher education?
2. is it possible for the volunteers to expose Australian schools students and the educational research community to the dynamism of China's intellectual heritage?
3. will volunteering to teach Chinese language and culture provide a career for opportunity for university graduates from China?

4. how is the volunteers research education linked to Australian imaginings of research education and perceptions of the place of international students from Asia in Australian higher education?

Focus of study

In March 2007, Western Sydney Region (WSR) of New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau (NMEB) of China to build a partnership in education. The NSW DET agreed to promote and expand the study of Mandarin and Chinese culture in WSR public schools. The NMEB agreed to support the teaching of Chinese in WSR by assisting in the provision and/or development of Mandarin teaching and learning resources and other support related to Chinese language learning in schools. In accordance with the MOU, for each of five years (2008-12) the NMEB will select up to ten Chinese volunteer teachers to work as volunteers in WSR, helping to stimulate students' interest in learning Mandarin. At the same time, the University of Western Sydney (UWS) agreed to provide a research education program that focuses specifically on the volunteers professional learning through their work in schools. This program leads to the degree of Master of Education (Honours) for the Chinese volunteer teacher-researchers.

The participants and their selection

The participants of this study are first cohort of seven volunteer Mandarin teacher assistants who were selected by Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau of China (NMEB). The seven recruits who volunteered to stimulate students' interest in Mandarin and Chinese culture in public schools of WSR NSW DET, also volunteered to participate in this study. Unlike volunteers' studies in the literature, the volunteers are studying at the University of Western Sydney as full time international high degree research students. The volunteers' work experiences in schools are the central focus of their research. Their professional experiences as volunteers, provides the focus for group training activities.

Research ethics

After receiving ethic approve from the UWS Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC 08/083), a Letter of Invitation for Core Participants and Consent Form was provided to seven volunteers. All the volumeters consent to participate in the project. For reasons for confidentiality, pseudonyms have been given to each of the volunteers. We have chosen the names for the seven colours of the rainbow; in Pinyin these are: 1. Hong (red); 2. Cheng (orange); 3. Huang (Yellow); 4. Lu (Green); 5. Qing (blue) ; 6. Dian (indigo); 7. Zi (violet).

The volunteers' professional learning

In this section, an analysis of evidence related to the volunteers' professional learning is presented. The evidence is drawn from an analysis of their initial research proposals, their abstracts for a College Research Conference, their proposals for Confirmation of Candidature, and their self-reports on progress.

Initial research proposals

In the early months of 2008, when seven volunteers applied to study at the UWS for the Master of Education (Honours) degree, they were required to write a research proposal to express their preliminary ideas about their research intentions. Table 1 summaries key features of their proposals, including the title of the proposals, their research focus, research methods and literature review.

Table 1
Volunteers' first research proposals

<i>Student Name</i>	<i>Title of proposal</i>	<i>Research Focus</i>	<i>Research methods</i>	<i>Literature Review</i>
<i>Hong</i>	Comparative study of education system between Sydney and Ningbo	Discover the advantages and disadvantages of the education system in Ningbo and in Sydney; to bring mutual benefits	Questionnaire to collect data, and analyse the information	None
<i>Cheng</i>	Popularising	Explore current situation of	Questionnaire and	None

	Mandarin and Chinese culture in Australia	Mandarin teaching in Australia & strategies for students to learn more about the Chinese culture through learning the Chinese language using teaching methods suitable for working with Australian students	interviews	
<i>Huang</i>	The impact of Chinese language teaching on Australian students	Discover how Chinese teaching influences Australia students; how they respond to current Chinese language teaching, and how they study and practice Chinese language in their daily life	Case study and survey	None
<i>Lu</i>	Comparison of the teacher education system in Ningbo and Shanghai	Comparison of strength and weakness of Ningbo city with Shanghai; find solutions to improve teaching practice	Internet, telephone and reading relevant books	None
<i>Qing</i>	None	Compare the differences of educational systems and teaching methods between Australia and China	None	None
<i>Dian</i>	Pragmatic errors in cross-cultural communication	Discover what are the causes of pragmatic errors	None	None
<i>Zi</i>	No	Investigate the importance of Chinese language teaching in Australia	Observation	None

The titles of the proposals indicate that most of volunteers did not have clear idea about their research topics before leaving China. Two volunteers, Qing and Zi did not give any specific topics for their proposals. Qing's proposal had very broad aims, namely to compare the differences between the educational systems and teaching methods of Australia and China; to investigate the teaching process used by volunteers; to find effective ways to teach Mandarin, and to communicate with Australian teachers and exchange ideas. Five volunteers had very broad topics. Lu's proposal indicated that she wanted to compare the teacher education system for teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Ningbo and Shanghai. This was because Shanghai is the leading city in China for the teaching and promotion of foreign languages, while Ningbo in this sense is a developing city, and this Shanghai may serve as a good example for training teachers in Ningbo. However, this research proposal was not related to their projected learning, teaching and research experience in Australia.

In terms of research focus, most of the students were interested in comparative cultural studies of education. For example, Hong intended to do comparative study of education system between Sydney and Ningbo. The rationale underlining her

proposed study was due to challenges in China's education system and her desire to contribute the reform of test-driven education in Ningbo. Many Chinese students are tired of the excessive examinations which undermine their interest in studying, and weaken their self-confidence.

In terms of research methods, there existed differences among the seven volunteers. Four proposals revealed little knowledge of research methodology. In contrast, three contained some general ideas about research methods. However, none of students explained the reasons why they chose particular research methods. Further, none of the students included a review of the research literature or in-text citations in their proposals.

Abstracts for College Research Conference

After the volunteers had been in Australia for three months, they were required to attend the College of Arts' annual Research Conference. To do so they had prepared abstracts for papers that explained their proposed studies. Table 2 summarises key features of the volunteers' abstracts they submitted for the College Research Conference. In contrast with Table 1, it can be seen that they had made considerable progress in reframing their research topic, narrowing and contextualising their research focus, including a literature review and associated citations and reference. All the students had chosen a specific topic for their study and most of them now proposed to research their experience as volunteer teachers. The focus was now narrowing to researching their understanding and improving their teaching practice in Australian schools.

Table 2
The abstracts for College Research Conference

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Lit rev</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Research Design</i>
<i>Hong</i>	Transferability of Chinese teaching strategies and resources between China and Australia	Yes	Evaluate the teaching strategies and learning resources used in Australian high schools and compare them with those employed in Chinese high schools.	Year 7 and Year 8 students and teachers in Australian high schools will be interviewed to determine the suitability of the teaching and learning resources used; Chinese students and teachers in China will also be interviewed.
<i>Cheng</i>	Collaborative group work in the context of	Yes	Investigate the effects of collaborative group work on L2 learners.	Different types of group work will be tested in the classroom to see their effects on learning; data

	teaching Mandarin as a second language			consists of observation and students' feedback; analysis will compare the data with reflection on own learning experience in China
<i>Huang</i>	L2 teaching in China and NSW: A comparative study	Yes	Comparison of teaching principles and methodologies for second language learning in China and NSW	Document analysis including syllabuses and teaching resource ; key concepts to be analysed include the role of conversation and listening
<i>Lu</i>	A bilingual L2 teacher teaching bilingually	Yes	Document own experiences in terms of own development as an educator;	Data set will include reflective journals, classroom observations, lesson plans.
<i>Qing</i>	Environmental attitudes of primary students: The role of environmental education programs and worldviews	Yes	This research will indicate if explicit environmental education programs influence the environmental attitudes held by primary students and will attempt to relate this to their developing worldviews.	Year 5 and 6 students and teachers will be surveyed using the New Ecological Paradigm; interviews of students and teachers will also be conducted to probe understandings about environments
<i>Dian</i>	A comparative study of nonverbal signals used in Australian and Chinese schools	Yes	An examination of the impact of two kinds of nonverbal behaviours, focusing on three major categories of behaviour.	Data will consist of the researcher's personal narrative about teachers' use of nonverbal behaviours; and interviews with teachers and students
<i>Zi</i>	Teaching and learning relationships: A cross-cultural analysis from the perspective of a VTR in NSW	Yes	Teaching and learning relationships for effective education in Chinese language and culture.	Curriculum documents will be compared; accompanied by classroom observations; the analysis will focus on the teacher's imaginative practice and appreciative inquiry.

The key changes evident in the volunteers' capabilities to undertake a literature review and develop a research design. At this stage, all volunteers used a literature review to introduce the background to their research problems and provided justifications to their research design.

Proposal for Confirmation of Candidature

After six months of working-integrated research education in Australia the volunteers reached a milestone in their education to be become teacher-researchers, namely the submission of a detailed research for confirmation of candidature. By then they had written proposal of five to ten thousands words which included research questions, literature review and research design. Table 3 summarises the major content related to the proposal they had prepared for their confirmation of candidature.

By this stage in their professional learning, there was evidence of change in the students' refinement of their research questions and research design. Their research questions were more focused on understanding their own teaching practices. For example, Hong had changed her research focus from evaluating the teaching strategies and learning resources in Australian high schools and comparing these with those employed in Chinese high schools, to an investigation of students' engagement in her second language classes. Her research questions now addressed the issue of how to promote students' engagement in learning Mandarin in her own classes.

In terms of research design, most of these volunteer teacher-researchers adopted qualitative approaches to their studies. Only Qing mentioned a preference to use both qualitative and quantitative methods including interviews, questionnaire and field notes to collect and analyse data. All of the students indicated that they would use self-reflective journals as one of the methods to generate data. Two of the students Chen and Lu also proposed to undertake a self-study to explore their development from volunteer Mandarin teaching assistants to volunteer teacher-researchers.

The feedback from the panel charged with reviewing the research proposals indicate that all of them have successfully passed their Confirmation of Candidature (CoC). The panels judged the major strengths of their CoC proposals as including the well-structured proposals, valuable literature reviews, sound research designs, and significant of the research projects. Further, the panels suggested that future work should focus on polishing research designs including more details about how to collect and analyse data.

Table 3
Confirmation of Candidature Proposal

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title of proposal</i>	<i>Research questions</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Panel comments</i>
<i>Hong</i>	Student Engagement in L2 Classroom	Are students engaged in learning Mandarin in my classes? How to promote student engagement?	Action research use of interviews and field notes to collect data	The proposal was well structured; there is a need to detail clearly the analysis of the interview data
<i>Cheng</i>	Second language teacher's identity	Does my identity change during teaching, and if so, how does it change? Why does it change, to what can this change be attributed? How does my	Self-study using autobiography, self-reflective journals, work samples, interviews and observation to	The panel liked the way that the proposal located a gap in the current research; suggested an auto-ethnographic study

		identity change, influences my Mandarin teaching?	collect data	using an interpretive narrative style
<i>Huang</i>	A comparative study on the development of communicative language teaching (CLT) in China and Australia	What is the place of CLT in English teaching in Zhejiang and in Mandarin teaching in NSW in policies? How does this compare with my experience?	A comparative study of both policy and practice by using document analysis and autobiography to collect data	Congratulated her on the work achieved so far. The panel suggested a shift methodology from autobiography to auto-ethnography.
<i>Lu</i>	A self-study of a bilingual L2 teacher teaching bilingually	What is it like to be a bilingual teacher (L2) (Mandarin) in an L1 (English) classroom environment where the L1 is my L2?	Self-study using autobiographical writing, reflection journal, interview/survey & students' work samples	Needs to be more detailed & explicit about how the data will be analysed; need to valid record data about teaching
<i>Qing</i>	The place of environmental education in teaching Mandarin in Australian schools	How can environmental education be included in Chinese language teaching? Which language activities promote students' environmental interests?	Both qualitative & quantitative methods are used; data to be collected from interviews, field notes and questionnaire	Proposal was well structured & well written. More work needs to be done on how the interview data is to be analysed
<i>Dian</i>	A proximal introduction to the zone of my professional development	How do internalisation and mediation tools impact on the novice teacher's learning?	Self-study using reflection, observation and questionnaire to collect data	Clear structure for the proposal; should clear about the focus of her development
<i>Zi</i>	A study of appreciative pedagogies (AP) & their place in language class	Can evidence of AP be seen in teaching through my reflections & observation in NSW classrooms?	Appreciative inquiry using reflective journal, observation, & interviews	Proposal was well structured; need ensure project continues to be manageable

Self-reports on progress

After they successfully defend their proposals at their CoC, the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau asked volunteers to report their work-integrated research education work in Australia. Table 4 summarises the major themes emerging from the open coding of their reports which included report focus, major achievements, major difficulties and attributions to achievement.

Table 4
Self-reports on progress

<i>Name</i>	<i>Report</i>	<i>Major achievements</i>	<i>Major difficulties</i>	<i>Attributions to</i>
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	<i>focus</i>			<i>achievement</i>
<i>Hong</i>	Mandarin teaching	Design teaching resources and using culture difference to engage students to learn	How to promote students' interests in Mandarin learning	International cooperation on the programme
<i>Cheng</i>	Major Changes	Understanding Australian language and culture	3 days teaching workload & finding research topic	Team work
<i>Huang</i>	Training, teaching & research	Understanding the difference in teaching between China and Australia; improving teaching skills and related teaching to research	How to teach junior high school students	Link teaching with research and supervisor panel
<i>Lu</i>	Teaching, research & life	Understanding teaching in Australia; developing research skills; improved living skills	Too much work for teaching & research	Supporting from all parties especially Supervisory panel
<i>Qing</i>	Life, training, teaching	Improving living skills, understanding teaching; learning self-reflection	Too much work load for teaching & research	Supporting from all parts, esp. DET & supervisory Panel
<i>Dian</i>	Life, teaching & research	Improving survival living skills, developing research skills successful Confirmation of Candidature	Too much work load for research	Team work
<i>Zi</i>	Life, research, training & teaching	Understanding research and teaching in Australian; improving skills for life survival	No background in research	Supporting from DET, and supervisory panel

The volunteers' self-reports focused on their teaching, research and the interrelationship between them. Four of the students also comments on their life experiences in Australia. All of the students reported that the most important achievement for their six months in Australia was growing understanding of Australian teaching in schools and university. Most of the volunteers also mentioned improvement in their teaching, research and living skills as major achievements. In terms of major difficulties, most of them indicated that the workload for teaching and research was very high due in part to most of them not having the contextual knowledge required for research and teaching in Australia. From Table 4, it can be seen that most volunteers attributed their achievement to the strong link between their work as volunteer teaching assistants and their research project, as well as the support they received from all parties especially their supervisory team.

For a group of young women from China working in Australian schools, volunteerism is more than comforting pleasure of doing well. As has been found, like many volunteers they too motivated by 'a combination of selflessness and self-

interest' (Clark, 1996, p. 3). As one of seven volunteers, Qing indicated the reasons motivate her to be a volunteer Mandarin teacher:

First, I would like to take this opportunity to get further education in Australia. Australia has the world class educational systems, and the University of Western Sydney is well-known for its education program. Thus, I chose the Master of Education (Honours) as I believe that I can learn the professional teaching and research skills through this program. Secondly, I want to be qualified to work as a volunteer Mandarin teacher. Chinese teaching is one of my major missions in Australia. By learning its courses, I can become a professional teacher accepted in Australia and China and other places as I will have learned some new teaching methods that different from what I had learned in China. Finally, there is a large demand of bilingual teachers in two countries. With the Chinese cultural background and English learning experience, I hope that I can improve my English and teaching skills in a country where English is the official language (Qing's self-reflective report).

Qing's motivation to be a volunteer combined her selflessness and self-interest'. Other volunteers have similar ideas, as Lu indicated:

As a Chinese undergraduate, I feel so honoured to be given this excellent opportunity to serve as a volunteer teaching Chinese to Australian students ... Australia enjoys great reputation throughout the world for its outstanding quality of education, so getting further study in educational field in Australia and then devoting all my efforts to the teaching of foreign languages in China is my long-cherished dream. (Lu's self-reflective report).

Lu's comments highlight the importance of professional work-integrated education and training for the effective intellectual engagement of volunteer teachers. We know that the failure to prepare, support, and mentor volunteers to "become effective instructors can have negative effects on student learning and may undermine the confidence of the volunteers" (Fenzel & Flippen, 2006, p. 20). This volunteer program has benefited from the provision of a structured program of work-integrated research education and teacher training; the appointment of a DET coordinator, a research director, a program manager, a team of supervisors and school-based mentors for the volunteers. This has created a friendly atmosphere to enable the flexible scheduling of school and university-based education. The seven volunteers' experience lends support to the idea of combining professional training with their volunteer teaching practice. As Lu indicated that:

Experiencing a different life for teaching and studying in Western Sydney is of great fun for me. This wonderful journey also provides me with lots of opportunities to learn to teach ... my experience as a research student at University of Western Sydney is also fantastic, from which I have learned a lot about teaching and education. I am really enjoying the time now. (Lu's self-reflective report)

All the other volunteers shared Lu's appreciated of their teaching experiences and research studying practice in Australia, as Zi indicates:

Flicking through my reflective journals, I have seen my growth since I arrived in Australia. First and foremost, I have taken on more responsibility. My life has taken on a new journey combing the task of integrating mandarin teaching in Western Sydney Region schools with studying for a Master of education (honours) at University of Western Sydney ... I have chosen a kind "appreciative philosophy" as the framework for researching my teaching experience. When I am expecting to do is cultivating a pleasant and supporting learning atmosphere for the kids. I hope the students walk away from my Mandarin classroom with great hope, enthusiasm and optimism when they walk in. (Zi's self-reflective report)

Zi's experience echoed by Huang who reported that:

The experience of being a Volunteer Teacher Research (VTR) has helped me significantly with my professional (as a teacher) and academic development (as a researcher) ... My teaching experience is the essential source for my research which focuses on a comparative study of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China and Australia. In my teaching, I was trying to use CLT approach in my class. My reflections on my own teaching are key database for analysis. Meanwhile, through my reflections on each class, I can keep finding, I can address to, my problems and this gradually helps me improve my teaching. Therefore, being a VTR, I am engaged in my teaching and research and both keep supporting each other which make my thesis have more practical value. (Huang's self-reflective report)

Asian literacy and volunteerism: Crossing teacher education's borders

ROSETE is promoting *work-integrated learning*, in particular the work/life trajectories of Australian students. Through ROSETE the volunteer teacher researchers develop their knowledge of teaching and research, along with developing advanced academic English, skills that will be of economic use in their working lives, thereby likely to enhance the well-being China. Because China's economic prospects depends on its trading relations with countries such as Australia ROSETE is helping to prepare these volunteers for socially, culturally and economically productive work and life.

Through ROSETE the volunteer teacher researchers *expose Australian schools students and the educational research community to the dynamism of China's intellectual heritage*. Australian school students and educators have the opportunity to engage these Chinese volunteers and their knowledge. They gain access to Chinese

knowledge and perspectives through the voices of these Chinese volunteers. These volunteers have made China and its intellectual projects constitutive of Australian education and its economic, cultural and social aspirations for engagement with Asia. Australian interests in learning Mandarin from these volunteers is related Australia's interests in trading with China.

The vocational benefit of the ROSETE program is that it enhances the employment prospects for young Chinese university graduates with strong English language and research skills. That is, China, Chinese language and culture provides *a career for opportunity for university graduates from China*. They can make a career out of teaching about China, and researching about their teaching. The role of ROSETE in stimulating studies of Mandarin and Chinese culture(s) in Western Sydney aims to enhance the employment opportunities of these MED (Hons) graduates when they return to Ningbo (China). In addition, the volunteer teachers stimulate the interest of Australian students in Mandarin and Chinese culture, as these school students consider opportunities for career opportunities related to Australian society's economic interests in the Chinese speaking world.

This volunteer program is a vehicle for increasing the study of Mandarin and Chinese culture(s) in Western Sydney schools. These volunteers have demonstrated their willingness to bestow knowledge of "Asia literacy" specifically Mandarin and Chinese culture on students in Western Sydney.

The work of ROSETE in providing these volunteers with a research education is *linked to Australian imaginings of research education and perceptions of the place of international students from Asia in Australian higher education*. What research education means for these volunteers is integral to changes in research education in Australian higher education and its changing relations with international students. Thus, ROSETE can expect to confront some problems as it seeks to effect pedagogical changes in research education borne of these changing relationships. For instance, the literature on international students from Asia tends to position them as deficient, while asserting the quality of Australian higher education, sustaining an unreconciled confrontation between the two.

Given the history of Australia's punctuated developments in Asia literacy, ROSETE is unlikely to deliver benefits beyond two or more electoral cycles. The massive efforts needed to institutionalise the teaching of Mandarin and Chinese

culture in Western Sydney schools faces the existing limitations in Australia's policy infrastructure. There is no reason not to expect that a future Government will not undermine public confidence in the value of learning Mandarin and disinvest in this Asia literacy. For the moment the immediate sustainability of ROSETE is ensured by the Asia Asian Language and Studies in Australian Schools program of which it is a part, the positioning of international students as volunteer teacher researchers, as much as the substantial contributions of the strategic partners, including the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, and the Ningbo Municipal Education Bureau. ROSETE, as a volunteer program is working to stimulate student demand and to build international strategic partnerships, and increase teacher supply.

Conclusion

Volunteerism is playing an important role in Western Sydney schools, in stimulating student demand for learning Mandarin and studying Chinese culture. Typically volunteers are not provided with the necessary education and training. This paper reported on the research-oriented, school-engaged teacher education (ROSETE) program which is improving the capabilities of volunteer Mandarin teaching assistants. Their teacher education research program is impacting on these volunteer Mandarin teaching assistants leading to improvements in their capabilities as volunteer teacher-researchers. In particular, these volunteer teacher-researchers are benefitting from work-integrated learning that links their volunteerism in schools with their university-based research education. Together, the volunteers and the partner organisations are contributing to Australia's Asia literacy endeavours through linking of education and production; promoting work-related learning; engaging China's intellectual projects, and making China' is a career for Chinese volunteers.

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Author note

Professor Michael Singh is the Research Director for the ROSETE program and was responsible for the conceptualisation, design and crafting of this paper. Dr Da Cheng Zhao is the Coordinator for the ROSETE program and was responsible for the initial review of the research literature, data collection and data analysis.

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