

# **An innovative approach to teaching Chinese to beginner teachers**

**Jane Medwell, Katherine Richardson,  
Li Li and Song Min**

# Introduction

- Our roles
- Chinese is having a “moment”
- This presentation reports a study of an innovative programme to train primary teachers of Chinese
- The project aimed to teach Chinese language and culture to trainee primary teachers as well as modelling a primary languages pedagogy which would fit with accepted practice in the English primary school.

# Background to PL teacher training

- The “language crisis” in England (CILT 2007) GCSE down from 78% in 2001 (CILT, 2011) to 40% in 2011 (DfE, 2012)
- The English curricular context – we nearly had Primary languages (PL) for all in 2010 but await a curriculum now. (We can only admire Scotland’s commitment and investment)
- Development of primary languages - most schools did PL until 2011 but some have dropped it
- Growth of Chinese (CBI survey, 16% state schools 40% increase in the uptake of Mandarin GCSE between 2003 and 2001)

# PL teacher supply and training

- Cable et al (2010) included the finding that schools had an expectation that training for teachers will become an integral part of initial (pre-service) teacher education
- Optimum position would be for class teachers in the primary school to do language teaching as an integrated, high status part of the primary curriculum (Muijs, 2012; Powell et al, 2000; Driscoll, 2004a and 2004b,).
- Given the national qualification rate in languages, this is a challenge - hence the Warwick PGCE programme

# PL training for all generalist Primary PGCE

- Primary Languages lecture programme
- PL pedagogy seminars
- **20 hours language and culture training (French, Spanish, Chinese)**
- A transition visit to a secondary school, involving discussion and observation with an MFL co-ordinator.
- A PL conference day for trainees and local teachers
- A PL training task involving auditing, discussion, planning, teaching and assessing
- Trainees observed teaching PL

# Goals of the project

- The 20 hours language training aimed to teach Chinese language and culture to trainee primary teachers as well as exposing them to a primary languages pedagogy which would fit with accepted practice in the English primary school.
- The trainee teachers were learning Chinese (putonghua) ab initio
- ***The programme was taught co-operatively by specialist language teacher and a teacher who is a native speaker (putonghua).***

# The myth of the native speaker

- Language issues- dialects/ languages; assumptions about Chinese heritage speakers; language, transliteration and character form may all be different for different speakers. Native speakers may feel like “imposters” (Bernat, 2009)
- Teacher knowledge - can be conceptualised in many ways (Ben-Peretz, 2010)
- Shulman (1986): content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values and their philosophical and historical grounds (Shulman, 1986)
- Connelly, Clandinin and He,.(1997).Teachers’ Personal Practical Knowledge and Professional Knowledge

# The myth of the native speaker

- Teacher beliefs: Kagan (1992) and Pajares (1992) put teacher belief at the heart of teaching languages- beliefs about language and language learning and beliefs about pedagogy. Studies show teacher beliefs affect teachers' teaching (Sato & Kleinsasser,1999).
- Teachers' own learning experiences, which have been found to be a strong influence on EFL teaching even after training.
- Being Chinese and having learnt in a Confucius heritage culture (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996) - a culture of learning which values rote learning and collective effort rather than individual responsibility for the learning. Use of memorizing and rote learning is the Chinese students' main learning method (Ballard&Clanchy,1991).



# The project- as part of primary training

- All trainees study PL- 8 lectures, six pedagogy workshops and 20 hours of language teaching
- **20 hours Chinese language and culture taught jointly by Language Specialist Teacher (LST) and Native Speaker Teachers(NST) well as web based resources**
- Native speakers did the MA Teaching Foreign Languages Pedagogy module and attended lectures and pedagogy workshops
- Language teaching expert learnt Chinese for a year

# The research approach

We adopted an 'exploratory interpretive paradigm' (Borg, 1999) using detailed field notes (Wolfinger, 2002)

- observations of sessions
- unstructured and semi-structured interviews to narrow our research focus after observing emergent themes.

A holistic picture of teacher behaviour to explore 'the personally defined purposes, intentions, and goals' that lie beneath (Borg, 2002).

# Data

- 1. Planning and review meetings (8), observed, noted and reviewed with participants**
- 2. Language teaching sessions observed (8) fieldnotes**
  - seating/activity charts
  - activities (as well as interaction types)
  - language used
  - verbal and non-verbal interaction
- 3. Semi structured interviews about 1 and 2**
  - Review of planning meetings and teaching sessions
  - Opinions on successes and omissions (why?)

Student data is not addressed in this session

# Questions

**How do an expert language specialist teacher (LST) and native speaker teacher (NST) work together to deliver Chinese foreign language (CFL) training for PGCE Primary students?**

As we proceeded we focused on:

- How do both teachers use and understand teaching activities to address the curriculum?
- How do both teachers use and conceptualise target language in their teaching.
- What areas of difference can be identified in the understandings and practices of the co-teaching teachers?

# Key issues identified

- **Communication and co-teaching as culturally situated**
- **Co-teachers training each other**
- **Differential use of target language**
- **Homework**
- **Practice**
- **The role of intercultural understanding**

As the programme developed division of teaching tasks became very blurred- ELT using target language and NST teaching practice activities.

# Co-teaching and communication as culturally situated

- NSTs had no experience of planning or teaching together with another teacher
- There were cultural issues surrounding discussing practice and the practices of colleagues
- As trust was established opinions were expressed, often obliquely but most clearly in response to direct questions.
  - “Chinese children might expect...”
  - “In the country.....”
  - “It was very enjoyable for the children....”

# Co-teachers - co-training

- Early planning sessions divided the teaching of activities more rigidly than later sessions and this was reflected in the teaching pattern
- As sessions proceeded NS Teachers taught the LS Teacher vocabulary for the sessions and LS Teacher began to use it flexibly through the sessions- but there are issues about TL.
- As sessions proceeded LS Teachers taught the NS Teacher unfamiliar activities for the sessions - telling stories, group activities, flashcards, games and songs. The NS teacher practised doing these with the class.
- NS teachers were unfamiliar with assessment practices and found this challenging.
- NS teachers found the modelling of pedagogy unfamiliar.

# Patterns of target language use

- NS and LE teachers agreed the importance of using TL and modelling this to trainees, based on their discussion of post-CLT pedagogy.
- NS Teachers struggled to use a limited vocabulary which the trainees could access and translated into English. NST reflected that “this happens in English classes in China, in my experience. It is for efficiency because it saves time to use for learning.”
- NST found the use of TL for behaviour management, praise and positive correction challenging but this was also a pedagogy issue.



# Categories of target language use

- opening and closing (ni hao, zuo zuo, register in TL etc)
- warm-up (i.e., revision games in the TL, tone practice, date etc)
- instructions (i.e., directing students to complete an activity usually procedural as this is very early language)
- explanation (limited because of the ab ignition status but extensive use of modelling and cued listening. Very visual use of language in this. In the cultural activities key vocab was used, listening tasks eg seating arrangement, eating etiquette. Did not want to compromise the cognitive content. There are not many cognates, either
- checking comprehension (making sure students understand) in TL and gesture but queries often used English. This was very limited because of the ab ignition status

# Patterns of target language use

- timekeeping used TL for time checks but the NS Teacher found this difficult to adjust to (managing the time for each activity)
- praise used by both but NST felt this was heavily over used.
- elicitation (asking students for answers) NST commented on the use of individual answers and lolly sticks as a terrible loss of face “in China all the children answer at once....”)

# Patterns of target language use

- answering students' questions (NST was surprised by the content of questions)
- correction (pointing out student error) The positive tenor of correction was seen as different by the NST)
- giving objectives (code switching in ab initio classes. Focus on key vocabulary)
- behaviour management- largely the management of student talk and excitement. This was a new issue for NST, as was modelling primary strategies such as counting down.

# Homework

- The NS teachers did not think that trainees were doing appropriate homework
- “Chinese children would not understand why this is a good thing..”
- “It is a fun thing but takes a lot of time..”
- “It is not really working at language..”
- This issue was related both to practice and cultural objectives



# Practice- memorisation as the LLS of choice

- The LS Teacher saw class activities as involving practice of key vocabulary and patterns in context.
- The NS speakers did not see enough practice and said that too much partner and group work used a lot of time.
- Until the 2<sup>nd</sup> week, the NS teachers did not realise trainees did not expect to extensively prepare and revise lesson materials.
- Both teachers agreed this issue raised a question over PL in primary schools as practice is not compatible with the culture of primary schools.

# Intercultural Understanding

- NST and LST teachers had very different aspirations and understanding of activities used to teach intercultural understanding.
- LST teacher felt that “we need to model the sort of activities trainees can use in school to put language in context”
- NST saw “very fun activities” which “are interesting to the children and make them want to learn language”
- NS teachers commented that “Chinese children do not expect as fun things in class. They work hard” and “fun things take a lot of time”.



# Summary- in the context of a highly successful programme

- The NS Teacher and LE Teacher worked well together, coaching and supporting each other .
- We are looking at the “folk pedagogy” of teaching (Olson and Bruner, 1996)
- Full discussion of objectives and pedagogy takes many weeks and raises conflicts with both teachers’ experiences.
- The input of the NS teacher raised issues about what counts as “work” and “practice” which may need to be considered across PL.
- Despite agreement on the desirability of TL use, NS teachers prioritise understanding and fast compliance above use of TL.
- Intercultural understanding has very different meanings for NS and LE teachers, which raise issues for the whole of PL.