An investigation into appreciative approaches to pedagogy:
The perspective of a volunteer teacher researcher in language classrooms
in NSW public schools

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Declaration

I declare that except where due acknowledgement has been made, this research thesis 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 Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

Xijun Mao
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Author’s Publications


Mao, X. (Nov, 2009). The power of appreciative inquiry, from the perspective of a Chinese volunteer researcher. Presented at the University of Western Sydney Bankstown, College of ARTS conference.
Abstract

Through discussions of personal learning and through observations of classroom practice this thesis seeks to document the use of appreciative pedagogy and appreciative approaches to pedagogy in the LOTE (Languages other than English) classroom. The thesis draws on Cooperider and Srivasta's (1987) appreciative inquiry, Yballe and O'Connor's (2000) appreciative pedagogy and a broader self-identified category of ‘appreciate approaches’ to identify and inquire into the efficacy of a range of educational practices that work ‘appreciatively’. In the process Cooperider and Srivasta's 4-D cycle, comprising ‘discovery’, ‘dream’, ‘design’ and ‘destiny’, is used to make the appreciative approach accessible and as a tool to ‘appreciate’ the data gathered in the process. The model is also subject to critical evaluation and re-design. It is therefore both subject matter and research method.

The thesis draws on data collected through reflective journals, document analysis, classroom observation and most importantly, interviews with selected language teachers in Australia (NSW Met-West region) and China (Zheijang province). My principal research question is: Can Appreciative Inquiry AI be used to inquire into, inform and extend teaching and learning in western Sydney schools? My subsidiary question is: How might this work be relevant to future teaching practices in NSW and China? This project is therefore a pursuit of effective teaching and learning through the lens of appreciation. It is undertaken in an attempt to enrich understanding of individual and collective pedagogical practices in language classrooms in Australia and China through reference to the power of an appreciative perspective and the use of an appreciative approach.
Preface

The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.
(William James, 1842-1910)

A Chinese story from Xingzhi Tao that reflects 'appreciative teaching'

著名教育家陶行知先生任育才学校校长时，有一次，他发现一个男同学拾起一块砖头砸另一个同学，他及时制止了，要这个学生到他办公室去。这个男同学到了陶先生的办公室，陶先生掏出第一颗糖：‘这是给你的，因为你很尊重我，听从了我的话。’然后掏出第二颗糖给这个学生：‘第二颗糖给你，因为你很守时，准时到了我的办公室。’当这个同学深感意外之时，陶先生掏出第三颗糖，说：‘据我了解，是一个男同学欺负一个女同学，你才拿砖头砸人的，这应该奖励你的正义感。’这时，这个同学声泪俱下：‘校长，我知道错了 . . . . .’陶先生打断了学生的话，掏出第四颗糖：‘你敢于承认错误，这是我奖励给你的第四颗糖，我的糖果完了，我们的谈话也就结束了。

http://teacherblog.xajdfx.com/user1/75/archives/2008/3013.html

Note: Xingzhi Tao is a great Chinese educationalist. He has spared no effort through his life to make an indelible contribution to the causes of education, liberation and democracy. Most importantly, he founded the theory of ‘Life Education’, laying the spiritual foundation for the reform and development of Chinese people’s education. Guo Moruo, a Chinese scholar and one of the leading writers of the twentieth century, praised Xingzhi Tao: ‘Two thousand years ago, we had Confucius, and now two thousand years later, we have Xingzhi Tao.’ A learned and respectable paragon for teachers, Tao is deservedly a ‘giant’ in China’s modern history of education.

Translation of this story:
‘Four candies’
One day, a principal saw a student throw mud at others. He immediately stopped this behaviour and asked the student to come to see him after class.

After class, when the principal came back to his office, he found the student waiting for him. He took out one candy and gave it to the student, saying ‘This is for you because of your punctuality while I was late’. The child received the candy doubtfully. Then Xingzhi Tao took out another candy and put it on his hands. He said ‘This is for you because when I asked you to stop throwing mud, you immediately followed my instruction and this means you respect me!’ After that, he gave the child a third candy, saying ‘I have investigated the issue. You were throwing mud at others because they bullied some girls. This is showing your integrity. You own the courage to fight bad people.’ This time, the student burst into crying: ‘I was wrong. They are not my enemies, they are my classmates.’ Xingzhi Tao smiled pleasantly and at the same time he took out the fourth candy and rewarded him: ‘You deserve this because you recognize your mistake and bravely accept it.’

‘That is all my candies and our talk is now over!’ said that principal.

I feel this story is enlightening. I believe people in society expect others to appreciate them for their study, work and good character.

How about our students? They need their teachers’ and parents’ appreciation.

Learning to appreciate is to learn a kind of attitude. Learning to listen is a supplement to appreciation. We should not only support our students’ good character, but be able to appreciate their mistakes and faults as well.

One person once mentioned that ‘there is no rubbish in this world, only resources to be put in the wrong place’. In the same way, ‘no person has a bad character, only a character that is displayed in the wrong way!’ For teachers, it tends to be easier to show appreciation to good students, as their strengths can be easily identified, while with backward students, teachers need great patience to discover those ‘glittering aspects’.
If teachers are unable to appreciate kids from the bottom of their heart, it is difficult to help students’ good character to be fully displayed. It is important for teachers to affirm students’ progress, be it big or small. Teachers have the best opportunities to enable students to have more possibilities for success. More importantly, students can gradually learn to appreciate themselves, trying to make their merits and virtues visible and tangible. As teachers, it is worthwhile to cultivate students’ confidence in learning!
Chapter 1
An introduction to appreciative approaches to pedagogy

Appreciative pedagogy is a very meaningful subject to teachers or researchers. Judging from my experience, I find it effective in teaching practice. I apply this approach unconsciously but so frequently that it has become an essential part of my teaching practice. (15th June 2009, email interview with Chinese teacher Bamboo)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

To begin this thesis I would like to introduce myself. I am a Chinese student studying at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) in a Master of Education (Honours) program. At the same time I am engaged in teaching Mandarin in local public schools in the Great Western Sydney region as a Volunteer Teacher Researcher (VTR).

I am here as a result of a memorandum of understanding between the Ningbo Municipal Educational Bureau (NMEB), the Western Sydney Region (WSR) of the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), and the University of Western Sydney (UWS). All partners recognise the importance of language and intercultural learning in education and the role of postgraduate study in developing future leaders in education (Singh & Zhao, 2008). I greatly value the opportunity provided by these organizations. Both my learning and my future employment prospects will be enhanced by my involvement and I will also be contributing to better relationships between China and Australia.

The hope of becoming a bilingual teacher and having a chance to promote Chinese language learning led me to apply to join this program most enthusiastically. Fortunately, I was selected and able to embark on the journey of working, studying and learning in Australia. Early in my research I came to recognise that despite the many differences between China and Australia—mostly in language and culture—people in both nations value education and respond to sound and supportive
As both a volunteer teacher and an educational researcher, I am constantly finding overlaps between my personal goals and values, my school teaching practice and my university research project. This is how it is meant to be. The best research resonates in all aspects of the researcher’s life. I hope the interest and enthusiasm I bring to this research emerges clearly and the subject matter is communicated effectively in the thesis that follows.

In this first chapter I begin my path of investigation into and reflection upon appreciative learning through reference to perceptions of ‘赏识教育’—shǎng shíjiào yù—Appreciative Education and Appreciative Inquiry (AI), I discuss my earlier learning experience and my subsequent teaching and learning experience in Australia. I then briefly introduce my study of syllabus around this area. This is followed by an introduction to the significance of this research project and a discussion of the organization of the thesis.

1.1.1 Rationale: The Emotional Odyssey

When I arrived in Australia I was asked to write diary reflections upon my ongoing learning and teaching here. Doing so, I recalled earlier English language learning experiences in China and remembered my Chinese English teachers’ constant support for and appreciation of me. This has been engraved in my mind.

I embarked on the journey of learning English when I was a junior school student. I had great fun learning English. At that time our teacher gave me timely and positive feedback on my studies. I appreciated this a great deal. In senior high school, I came across my ideal English teacher. He had and, I think, still has a magical power to ‘spot my strengths’ in spite of my perception of myself as an ordinary student. Still today, I remember his comment: ‘you have very good English foundations, keep going!’ Interestingly, I put much more effort into learning English from then on. This teacher’s appreciation of me and my appreciation of the teacher roused my
interest and motivation for learning. It became apparent to me that when I appreciate a teacher, I tend to learn the subject better. Previously, I had developed the habit of underestimating myself. It was my teacher’s timely appreciation that helped me foster confidence in myself and a greater curiosity in learning English. When asked to imagine a research project here in Australia, I recalled this encouragement and wondered if it might form the focus of an effective research project.

Previously, in China, I had encountered Hong Zhou’s (2000) concept of ‘赏识教育’—shǎnghǎo shìjiào yù, which can be translated as ‘appreciative education’. He is the principal advocate of the movement for ‘appreciative education’ in China. This movement, which has a different history to the movement in the west, has had some influence China-wide, but it is not widely acknowledged in formal educational settings. Its principal site of application is the family, and while a relatively recent movement, it is strongly based in traditional Confucian values. There is a traditional saying from Confucius: ‘Everything has its beauty, not everyone sees it’. This is represented in the Chinese characters 只要去探索, 美无处不在- Zhǐ yào qù tān suǒ, měi wú chù bù zài. Another saying from the Analects advocates that it is not the failure of others to appreciate your abilities that should trouble you, but rather your failure to appreciate theirs. All these Chinese sayings pursue the essence of appreciation and argue the necessity of upholding it.

Hong Zhou spent 20 years exploring his appreciative approach to family education by helping his deaf daughter to become a medical doctor in the USA. He is regarded as an ‘appreciative father’. This appreciative family education follows the tenet of parents fully trusting in their children’s capability. Parents are encouraged to appreciate, hug, kiss and praise their children, even if all other people look down upon their kids. In terms of attitudes and practices in education, Hong Zhou (2000) argued the need for encouragement, understanding and tolerance!

There are significant differences between Hong Zhou’s appreciative approach and the terms Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Appreciative Pedagogy (AP), as theorized
and enacted in the west. I discuss these in more detail later, as well as numerous variations on the appreciative theme. Here it is important to note that similar principles underlie both approaches to appreciation and education.

When I met my principal supervisor at UWS for the first time, to discuss my research interests, we talked about some of my memories of my own learning experiences. He suggested I have a look at the journal Appreciative Inquiry. I looked at this, reflected on my personal encounters in China, and decided to focus my research in this area. Some time later, when I began my work as a volunteer teacher and was teaching in School A, a science teacher shared a story of an ‘unforgettable teaching experience’. Unforgettable experiences are a prominent feature of appreciative inquiry. She called this story ‘the A+ story’. I saw it then as a revelation of the unconscious use of appreciative education techniques, for the unconscious use of such approaches is a subject matter of this thesis. This is the story:

There was once a teacher called Anna. She signed her abbreviated name and date onto students’ workbooks after she checked their homework. There was one boy who was often naughty in her class. When she returned his work book to him he looked at his book and came to the front of the class and said to her excitedly: ‘I have got A+, thanks a lot Miss!’ And he showed the book to Anna again. Anna’s signature resembles A+! In response, Anna said ‘Oh, you really have done a good job; keep up your good effort!’ Amazingly the boy started to change his attitude and was rarely naughty in future lessons. He started to concentrate on his work and gradually improve his grades (Personal communication, August 20, 2008).

I was taken by this story. It suggested to me that with just a little positive encouragement, a teacher can have a positive influence upon students. A first step is to find one positive quality that the student has and then consciously focus on this. The story confirmed to me the benefits of appropriate and timely appreciation. It is a wonderful anecdote and when I was told it, it reinforced my interest in the topic of ‘appreciation and learning’. It also confirmed my own experience as both a student and a volunteer teacher. In my own teaching practice in schools in Australia, I have found I have been greatly influenced by my supervising teachers. Their appreciation of me has been very encouraging, and has helped me develop as an educator. The following unsolicited email from a supervising teacher, which arrived
after my first lesson in a new school, had a very significant effect upon me at a crucial time.

You have been a breath of fresh air in the classroom. You have the most caring nature and truly show love and compassion towards the children. You definitely have the right personality to be an amazing teacher! (28th March 2009).

These are really precious observations. They encourage me to strive towards excellence in my teaching. They suggest to me that my additional work is well worth the effort. My sense of achievement and enjoyment increased as a direct consequence of this teacher’s spontaneous expression of appreciation to me.

Keeping the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Appreciative Pedagogy (AP) in mind, I started to review language curriculum documents both in China and Australia. From my initial study of the syllabus documents used in China (Zhe Jiang province) and Australia (NSW) I found that the NSW Chinese 7-10 syllabus makes no direct mention of the teaching and learning relationships required for effective education in Chinese (Mandarin) language and culture. By contrast, the Chinese criteria for teaching of English require teachers to pay attention to students’ emotions, to rouse their interest in learning and to help them foster confidence in their achievement in English learning. It may be that these curriculum documents are not seen as needing to detail how the learning process is constructed. However, this did not diminish my surprise that the relationships that underpin the learning process are not featured more prominently in such important documents.

Based on my English learning experiences, I recognise that, even if formal syllabus documents make no mention of the importance of teacher-student relationships in learning, the onus is still on teachers to go to great lengths to elicit and stimulate students’ interest and enjoyment in their subject. This includes creating satisfying classroom relationships. These not only make the learning environment a more enjoyable place to work, but they can also lead to more fruitful learning experiences for both teachers and students.

1.1.1.1 The Project
The research project reported in this thesis explores the use of appreciative methodologies in Mandarin language teaching and learning. It does this through a study of the models of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) developed by Cooperrider and Srivatsva (1987), and Appreciative Pedagogy, developed by Yballe and O’Connor (2000). In addition it looks at less formal teaching and learning relationships that work with appreciative principles: for instance, those enumerated through models of empathic intelligence (Arnold, 2005); multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983); sensual wisdom (Pryer, 2007); holistic learning (Miller, 1988); ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihaly, 1999) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991).

The research evidence was gathered to assist reflection upon my experience as a visiting Chinese student-volunteer. I also reflected upon the teaching practices and philosophies of selected language teachers in China (Chinese teachers of English) and Australia (Australian teachers of Mandarin). The basis of selection of these teachers was my perception of their use of appreciative approaches in their teaching. These teachers were interviewed and their ‘peak experiences’ discussed in accordance with Appreciative Inquiry methodologies. Classes conducted by several Australian teachers of Languages other than English (LOTE) were also observed and discussed. The observations and discussions focused on the teachers’ approach to encouraging and appreciating students. It did not seek to document student responses. The focus of the study was on teachers’ ‘appreciative’ practice and their conscious awareness, or otherwise, of this way of working. The data gathering and analysis processes were informed by AI philosophy and inquiry. This means that while appreciative inquiry is the subject matter, it also strongly informs the method of inquiry and the interpretation of data. This is consistent with the understanding of appreciative processes developed by key scholars in the field, most particularly Cooperrider & Srivatsva (1987).

The mechanics of an appreciative approach are accessible and based on good sense. However, it is argued that while the basic skill-set appears to be straightforward, awareness of the theoretical underpinnings of the practice, as discussed in this thesis and as developed by many of the scholars referred to here, significantly enhances the activity of working appreciatively.
1.1.2 Research Questions

The 4-D model of appreciative inquiry, constructed by Cooperrider and Srivatsva (1987) has been used to develop an overview of the appreciative research process. The concepts of DISCOVERY, DREAM, DESIGN and DESTINY are used by Cooperrider and Srivatsva to differentiate and drive different stages of the research process. In this respect, this research project has been approached through the following six questions:

1. What are AP and AI?
2. Is work in AP or AI relevant to effective language teaching? If so, why and how?
3. Can evidence of appreciative approaches resembling AP/AI be seen in teaching through observations of and reflections upon teaching in NSW classrooms?
4. Can AI be an effective tool to enrich teaching and learning in western Sydney schools?
5. How might this work be relevant to future teaching practices in NSW and China?

Appreciative inquiry work practices are used in a variety of areas but most commonly in organizational management (Yballe & O’Connor, 2000). It is noteworthy that AI literature does not deal extensively with AI in primary, secondary or tertiary education. For this reason, I believe an applied study of AI in the language classroom would inject vitality into AI theory. In addition, a study of current literature reveals a lack of detailed discussion of how to analyse data through appreciative inquiry. My decision to use the 4-D cycle to drive different stages of the data analysis in this project will therefore enrich knowledge of the applications of appreciative inquiry in research practice.

As a Volunteer Teacher Researcher (VTR), the AI mind-set was of considerable importance to me in my attempts to understand the relationship between teaching and learning. It is for that reason that I believe this study has value beyond my own needs. The study has practical significance for all educators who are attempting to
enhance teaching and learning relationships. This project contributes to knowledge of the effective application of the syllabus through appreciative classroom practices. It offers an ‘appreciative framework’ which values a variety of ‘appreciative approaches’. It builds strengths from the integration of ‘TL’—transformative learning, ‘EI’—empathic intelligence, ‘II’—interpersonal intelligence, and other appreciative approaches. These concepts are defined more thoroughly in the next chapters. In addition, the project offers another way of interpreting classroom practice. All these applications have the potential to contribute in a significant way to developments in the classroom. As such, they should be of interest and of benefit to a wide variety of educationalists: classroom teachers, school administrators, teacher educators, education students and theorists working in the field of pedagogy.

The significance of this project can therefore be considered from two perspectives respectively: its relevance to teaching practice in NSW government schools and its contribution to patterns and practices in educational research in NSW, China, and beyond. As far as NSW government schools are concerned, this work documents the use of specific pedagogical practices: those marked by the use of ‘appreciative approaches’ in the LOTE classroom. This study identifies such practices in order to understand their dynamics further. It brings these practices to greater awareness among language teachers, particularly those working with Mandarin. From this base the work contributes to further development of effective approaches to teaching. While it was undertaken in NSW, it is hoped that the research can contribute to developments in pedagogical practice in both Australia and China.

Through the extension of discourse around ‘appreciation’, the project provides educators, especially language educators, with a methodology and a vocabulary through which to analyse and write about specific experiences of teaching and learning.

This project is consistent with the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) goals and strategies and Australian national goals for schooling. To be specific, it meets the needs of the NSW DET strategy: **support continuous improvement in teacher quality** by providing teachers with an ‘appreciative’ method for the analysis of their experiences. The project also supports the national
goal of setting high expectations for achievement. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA) (2008), which supersedes the Adelaide Declaration (1999), is especially relevant to this project. The Melbourne Declaration says ‘All young Australians need to become successful learners; confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.’ Appreciative inquiry and pedagogy work toward this goal.

Appreciative pedagogy emphasizes the importance of identifying and consciously working through strong relationship-based teaching practices. This form of teacher self-awareness contributes to high levels of achievement among teachers and this is, almost invariably, reflected in students’ accomplishments.

1.1.3 The Thesis and its Outline

The goal of the research was to gain greater understanding of the appreciative approaches used by experienced language teachers. The argument advanced in this thesis unfolds in the following section.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature about AP/AI. It gives a more comprehensive description of AP/AI and makes reference to leading theorists in each area. It offers some insights into the historical development of this approach. In this chapter I also introduce my use of the term ‘appreciative approaches’ to describe a range of identified educational strategies that work with appreciative principles, without necessarily following the structured pathways identified in AI/AP theory. These approaches are discussed for their significance, which lies in part in their embellishment of understandings and applications of ‘appreciation’ in the building of social, emotional and intellectual relationships. Building on these insights, this chapter explores the value of these approaches in pedagogical terms. The extent of work of this kind requires that a focused review be undertaken, with attention drawn to principal sources in the field. This review of ‘appreciative approaches’ not only contributes to understanding the structure of appreciative pedagogies but also assists in the process of identifying themes that aid the process of data analysis.
Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the research project reported in this thesis. An explanation for and justification of the specific research gathering tools is provided, and core research activities are described. This leads to discussion of the methodological approach that underlies and informs the specific research practices that were used in this study. Importantly, this chapter situates, justifies and details the use of ‘Appreciative Inquiry’ as a research tool to drive the various stages of this project. It describes how the central ideas of the 4-D cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny, serve as the threads that connect major elements of this project. This use of AI as a methodology for inquiring into appreciative approaches to pedagogy is consistent with established practice and this is discussed in this part of the thesis as well. This chapter also introduces the research data collection and analysis processes. Tables and illustrations are used to help to explain the evidence generated for this thesis. Issues of ethics are addressed and details of the ethics approval process are provided.

Chapter 4 focuses on analysis of the data. Encounters with teachers working in LOTE classes, particularly Mandarin teaching classes in primary and secondary schools in the Western Sydney Region, are central to the analysis presented here. While classes in these schools were observed the focus was on the teacher’s experiences, in particular that experience which involved working with an appreciative approach. ‘Peak’ and ‘compelling’ stories of teaching experiences were gathered during interviews following observations. The interviews with teachers were analysed, to deepen understanding of appreciative teaching practices. A second group of language teachers, those teaching English in China, were also interviewed. These teachers were interviewed by email from Australia. In this chapter their teaching practices are analysed in relation to the aforementioned theories. A discussion of the position of AI/AP in the language-teaching context is undertaken.

Chapter 5 comprises an analysis of evidence generated through my reflective journals. It is designed to make sense of appreciative inquiry at a personal level. This chapter helps record my personal achievement and my development as an educator during my residence in Australia.
Chapter 6 seeks out answers to the aforementioned research questions. It arrives at a conclusion and offers final comments upon the research. This chapter also makes some recommendations for further research, arising from this research, relevant to educational practice in Australia, and more specifically western Sydney and China (Zhe Jiang province).
Chapter 2
Appreciative inquiry and pedagogies in educational contexts:
A literature review

2.1 INTRODUCTION
This chapter provides a detailed introduction to appreciative inquiry (AI),
appreciative pedagogy (AP) and what I am calling ‘appreciative approaches’. The
main research question that is addressed relates to the particular qualities of AI and
AP. It is important to have a sound understanding of ‘appreciation’ from Chinese
and western perspectives, before getting into the areas of AI and AP, and this is
provided in this section. Furthermore, this chapter investigates the relationship
between appreciative approaches to pedagogy and effective teaching and learning.

2.2.1 Key Terms

2.2.1.1 ‘Appreciation’
An understanding of appreciation is offered from two perspectives. The issue of
‘what is appreciation’ is approached firstly from a Chinese and secondly from a
Western way of understanding. The Chinese phrase for ‘appreciation’ is 賞識 (shǎ
ng shí), 賞 means: appreciate the worth of; think highly of; esteem; award; praise;
‘respect’ as in ancient language. This character is equivalent to ‘尚’. 識 means
recognize and acknowledge.” (online dictionary: Dict.cn).

From the Western perspective, let us look at the general concept of ‘appreciation’
before we look at AI, AP and appreciative approaches.

Kolb (1984) states, ‘Appreciation is a process of affirmation. Unlike criticism, which
is based on scepticism and doubts, appreciation is based on belief, trust, and
conviction. And from this affirmative embrace flows a deeper fullness and richness of experience’ (cited by James, n.d.).

Others offer similar descriptions. Generally two meanings arise: (a) to increase the value in something of worth, and (b) to understand and perceive, epistemologically, what exists in one’s environment, to feel grateful for what ‘is’ in one’s experience (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). It is the second meaning that is to the fore in this thesis.

2.2.1.2 Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

The notion of appreciative inquiry builds on the second understanding of ‘appreciation’ while extending it through its association with ‘inquiry’ to suggest an inquiry into the acquisition of knowledge through an appreciative attitude, approach or methodology.

The available literature suggests it is difficult to provide a single definition of AI, because of the variety of ways this inquiry method has been approached and employed. While situating the approach in the field of organizational development, Whitneey and Trosten-Bloom (2003) argue that this inquiry method is distinctive in three significant ways: it is fully affirmative, it is inquiry-based, and it is improvisational. This suggests ‘appreciation’ is a subject matter that can be investigated, as well as a flexible way of undertaking an investigation. It also suggests a third aspect: appreciation is a process for the affirmation of appreciative practices and the encouragement of those who work in this way. This research project interweaves all three ways of understanding appreciation. It argues that AI can be understood as a process, a theory, a research tool, a methodology and a philosophical attitude.

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) are acknowledged as pioneers of AI. They describe AI as a philosophy of knowing, a methodology for managing change and an approach to leadership and human development. They describe AI as a change management process which holds the potential for inspired and positive change, and involves a collaborative search for the strengths, passions and life-giving forces
that are found in every individual, team and organization. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) provide the following ‘practice-oriented’ definition:

Appreciative inquiry is the cooperative search for the best in people, the organization, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives a system ‘life’ when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capability to heighten positive potential. It mobilises inquiry through crafting an ‘unconditional positive question’ often involving hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. In AI, intervention gives way to imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis there is discovery, dream and design. AI assumes that every living system has untapped, rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link this ‘positive change core’ directly to any change agenda, and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized. (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, p. 10)

Bushe’s (2001) definition of AI complements this understanding, arguing that ‘AI is both a process and an ‘appreciative mind-set” (2001, p.2). Bushe says AI concentrates on the strengths and positives in situations. It arises via a set of questions designed to generate positive potential and trigger higher experiences. It is a methodology for influencing positive change within a group or organization.

The process used to generate the power of Appreciative Inquiry is described by Cooperrider and Srivastva as the 4-D cycle. They argue that AI works by concentrating attention on its most positive potential, its ‘positive core’. This sets the stages for transformation and sustainability. This positive core is made up of ‘strengths’, ‘goals’, and ‘achievements’ (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). I believe that in the classroom context, this can be extended and focused through reference to ‘hope’, ‘positive expectations’ and satisfying teaching and learning relationships.

The 4-D cycle begins with ‘affirmative topics’. These topics guide the cycle through Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny (see Figure 2.1). The image below, developed by Whitneey and Trosten-Bloom, depicts the 4-D cycle.
The authors expand on the quote with the following notes.

1. Discover the ‘best of what is’—inquire about what is working well
2. Dream ‘What might be’—discuss the possibilities for improvement
3. Design ‘what could be’—design the changes to be implemented
4. Create a Destiny based on ‘what will be’ and let stakeholders participate in the creation of this destiny (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 6).

As indicated in the above, the actual starting point of the appreciative inquiry is choosing a topic to be investigated. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) point out that, in the discovery stage, the ‘appreciative interview’ is an essential tool in the appreciative inquiry. It is both transformative and appreciative.

Appreciative inquiry would not be appreciative inquiry without appreciative interviews. Without appreciative interviews there is no inquiry, no openness to learn, and little potential for transformation. There is only an appreciative perspective (2003, p. 14).

Appreciative interviews gather the data that allows appreciative understanding to arise and to lead to change. This is why interviews form such a substantial part of this research project.

The dream stage is an energizing exploration of a more valuable future. It is both practical and generative. The design stage is the process of drawing on discoveries and dreams to select between design strategies. It is the phase during which propositions and strategies can be developed that are compelling and affirmative. The destiny stage informs a set of inspired actions and improvisations. It supports ongoing learning and innovation. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom say: ‘in this phase,
many organizations begin the appreciative inquiry 4-D cycle anew. The result of
destiny is generally an extensive array of changes throughout the organization’

This cyclical nature of the AI process points to the iterative nature of AI. It is not a
linear process that starts and then stops when it is completed (Whitney & Trosten-
Bloom, 2003). While going through the four stages of appreciative inquiry, people
are engaged in appreciative, transformative and compelling reflections. This creates
effects as well as gathering data. The inquiry process actually contributes to
outcomes. The special nature of the destiny process enables the appreciative inquiry
process to be ongoing. And fitting in with AI principles and ideas, changes can be
sustained when the AI process is initiated.

AI is an invitation to shift from a deficit-based approach to change to a positive
approach to change. In this regard, Raymond and Hall (2008) offer an interesting
distinction between AI and ‘problem-solving’ approaches to working with change
(see Table 2.0.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Problem Solving</th>
<th>Appreciative Inquiry (AI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assumption</strong></td>
<td>An organization is a problem to be solved</td>
<td>An organization is a mystery to be embraced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Starting point</strong></td>
<td>Identification of a problem</td>
<td>Exploration of the organization’s ‘positive core’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach</strong></td>
<td>Analyze source of problem and develop potential problems</td>
<td>Explore the best of ‘what is’, envision ‘what might be’, dialogue ‘what should be’, sustain ‘what will be’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finishing point</strong></td>
<td>Development of an action plan to ‘treat’ problem</td>
<td>Co-construction of a positive vision for future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Derived from Raymond & Hall, 2008 p.283).

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) also make comments about the different
effectiveness of ‘AI’ and ‘problem-solving’ approaches.
With appreciative inquiry, the focus of attention is on positive potential—the best of what has been what is, and what might be. It is a process of positive change. . . . In our experience, deficit-based change can work—it has for years, just not as effectively as positive change (2003, p. 16).

The most frequent criticism of appreciative inquiry is in relation to attitudes and actions towards problems. Critics would misunderstand if they assumed AI practitioners were trying to ignore problems. But it is important to be clear that:

We are not trying to deny or ignore problems. What we are saying is that if you want to transform a situation, a relationship, an organization, or community, focusing on strengths is much more effective than focusing on problems (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 18).

Michael (2005) offers a similar understanding:

Some critics are concerned that AI glosses over problems, asserting that change can not happen unless they are solved. But AI practitioners do not believe that it turns a blind eye to the negative and difficult experiences that are a part of all organizational experiences. To them, opting to use AI is to choose a starting point from which to work, rather than to choose some naive and idealistic end point at which you will arrive (2005, p. 223).

2.2.1.3 Appreciative Pedagogy (AP)

Yballe and O’Connor (2000) introduced the term ‘appreciative pedagogy’ to describe their adaptation of AI to the classroom. According to Yballe and O’Connor, ‘AP enacts in the learning endeavour AI’s basic beliefs, values and social inquiry process’ (2000, p. 476). It can be elaborated in the following way.

First, ‘AP trusts in, celebrates and deliberately seeks out students’ experiences of success and moments of high energy and great pride’. Second, in AP, ‘there is a belief in the profound connection between positive vision and positive action in the classroom’. The primary task of AP is the generation of positive understanding as a requisite for energizing positive action. AP actively seeks to discover and celebrate students’ experiences of success because of a basic belief that such experience can be a compelling basis for positive visions of future possibility (Yballe and O’Connor, 2000, pp. 476-477).
2.2.1.4 Appreciative Approaches

Appreciative approaches are understood as a set of effective educational practices that work through appreciation. In this thesis, the reader will come across a number of different terms that refer to educational processes that work with appreciative approaches. These include ‘transformative learning’, ‘empathic intelligence’, ‘emotional literacy’, ‘emotional intelligence’, ‘interpersonal intelligence’, ‘flow’, ‘holistic learning’ and ‘sensual wisdom’. I am using the term ‘appreciative approaches’ to identify functional similarities between these terms.

2.3 LITERATURE SUMMARY

The section that follows comprises a literature study around appreciative inquiry, appreciative pedagogy and appreciative approaches.

The following themes have been selected for this literature review: appreciative inquiry, appreciative pedagogy, appreciative approaches and the relationship between teachers’ attitudes and students’ achievement. As discussed earlier, this thesis reports on an investigation into the efficacy of AP in the language classroom. Appreciative pedagogy emerges as the most important theme in this regard and is discussed in the context of a variety of other ways of working appreciatively.

2.3.1 Understanding the Power of AI/AP in Teaching and Learning Relationships

Emotion is a key factor in the construction of satisfying teaching and learning relationships. Affirmation is one way of working with emotion to positively influence students’ achievements and behaviour. Wilson says: ‘When you positively influence a student’s state of mind, you change their brains temporarily and help them make optimistic associations with learning as well as change their behaviour and learning’ (Wilson, 2004, p. 11). Jensen (2009) concurs with this, arguing that teachers’ expectations dramatically influence students’ performance. A teacher with positive expectations can offer a positive and compelling vision of a student’s future. In arguing this point, Jensen tells the story of Robert Rosenthal.
In regard to high expectations, years ago Robert Rosenthal gave an intelligence test to all students at the beginning of the school year and randomly selected 20 percent of the students. He told the teachers that these students showed unusual potential for intellectual growth and might ‘bloom’ in academic performance by the end of the year (remember, they were randomly selected). At year’s end, he retested all of the students. Those labeled as ‘intelligent’ demonstrated significantly greater increases in the final tests than the other, non-elected children (2009, p. 11).

This experiment indicates that teachers’ high expectations may enhance the chances of students experiencing success. Teachers’ positive expectations provide students with continuous reassurance that they can succeed, especially those students who have low expectations of themselves and readily accept failure. It suggests also that most students actively try to meet their teachers’ expectations.

Jensen (2009) also provides four practical strategies for helping students achieve a positive outlook:

1. Give students time to reach positive goals and share successes. Create a climate of ‘good things happen there’. Acknowledge when small goals are reached.

2. Overtly and explicitly communicate your high expectations to students. These high teacher expectations—what you think of your’ students’ potential—are essential for best performance.

3. Be sure to use role-modeling. When students see and hear you have positive expectations about the future, it becomes contagious. Share studies about other students who have graduated and succeeded.


Jensen’s strategies help identify four important areas worthy of consideration when conducting appreciative pedagogy: acknowledge and celebrate success; have high expectations of students; be a good role model and cultivate a positive mentality.

2.3.2 Constructing the Foundations

It is important to look beyond attitudes and towards classroom practice. Gill (1993),
quoting Dewey, argues that ‘real learning’ occurs when students are positively altered by classroom learning experiences. ‘The central problem of an education based upon experience is the need to select the kind of experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences’ (cited in Gill 1993, p. 21). This kind of experience will promote future rewarding and creative experiences. There are many ways of fostering and sustaining students’ positive learning experiences. Here the principle of ‘continuity’ and the principle of ‘interaction’ merit discussion. The former says that the learning process is continuous; the closure of one learning cycle naturally opens up into the beginning of a fresh one and education should consist of a continual repetition of such cycles (Gill, 1993). The 4-D cycle in AI works with the ‘principle of continuity’. With respect to the latter principle—the principle of ‘interaction’—for Dewey, the main task of the ‘knower’ is to create the learning environment in such a way as to accommodate and extend students’ needs and desires. According to this view, the educational process revolves around knowing and reshaping, in the hope of facilitating learners’ ability to realize further learning. In this respect the work of Dewey—which has in so many ways had a profound influence upon Western approaches to education—laid the foundations for appreciative pedagogy.

2.3.3 Appreciative Transformative Learning: TL+ AI

As argued by Mezirow (1991), transformative learning (TL) is based on the idea that we construct meaning through experience, perception—including self-perception—and socialization. This suggests that the construction of meaning is an interpretive process. Mezirow (1991) contends that TL produces substantive changes in an individual’s thinking and behaviour.

Cranton and Wright (2008) describe transformative learning as a process whereby individuals involved in critical self-reflection arrive at revised perspectives, values, beliefs and assumptions. This leads to a new way for those individuals to perceive themselves and the world around them. According to Cranton and Wright, ‘our experience is filtered through our meaning perspectives and habits of mind’ (2008, p. 34). Our expectations of prior learning serve as habits of selective perception.
Changes to these habits can be prompted by a variety of things. We might understand ourselves better because we go into a new environment and are required or inspired to think differently, or we may change because we are engaged in an interaction with others who assist us to think in another way. Most importantly, transformative learning involves self-understanding. It is a form of learning concerned with how people change the way they think about themselves. Such learning is deep and personal.

Transformative learning describes a large range of experience because there are many ways of arriving at transformation. Appreciative inquiry is one way. Davis (2005) perceives appreciative inquiry as a process for transformational learning. He regards AI as relevant to the transformative learning of both individuals and groups. This is because the process is structured around an inquiry method that looks for positives and strengths that already exist, rather than looking for shortcomings. In traditional transformative learning, many practices focus on critical reflection while in AI, they are all generated by a process of appreciative reflection or appreciative consideration. This is a significant difference. It is based on the principle that ‘positive emotions demonstrate one of the benefits of an appreciative approach to transformative learning’ (Davis, 2005, p. 355).

Donovan (2007) works with the idea of appreciative transformative learning (ATL). This draws strength from a union between TL and AI. He argues that there are a number of similarities that can be identified between TL and AI. For instance, stories and anecdotes are central to both TL and AI. In both, the meaning-making process is enhanced by personal encounters in life experience. Donovan (2007) believes that AI can be used to enrich transformative learning theory. This suggests that AP can also be enriched through reference to transformative learning theory.

### 2.3.4 Empathic Intelligence

Appreciative Pedagogy (AP) is a way of working with empathic intelligence. Arnold (2005) proposes empathic intelligence as a theory of relatedness. One of her central arguments in Empathic intelligence: Teaching, learning, relating, is that learning can be enhanced by educative processes that recognize how thoughts and
feelings can work together to promote both intellectual and emotional maturity. Arnold argues that students’ learning is effective when educators are attuned to students’ thinking and feeling processes. Therefore teaching and learning processes need to go beyond transmitting knowledge. Students’ feelings have to be given due attention. Empathic intelligence like AP, attaches much importance to feelings. It is my assumption as a researcher that once teachers fully understand appreciative techniques, they will try to cultivate their students empathically through effective use of sensing and feeling in the classroom environment.

Arnold argues that the skills, attitudes and abilities of emotional intelligence can contribute to deeply effective teaching and learning. She asserts that those students and teachers who strive for empathic intelligence and transformative experiences will be stimulated by this approach. A consequence of this is a sense of satisfaction accompanied by a sense of anticipation of future learning (Arnold, 2005). Arnold’s explanation of empathic intelligence concurs with and extends attitudes found within Goleman (1995).

2.3.5 Emotional Literacy/Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman (1995) defines emotional intelligence as ‘the ability to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control and delay gratification, to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and hope’ (1995, p. 34). He identifies four domains of emotional intelligence:

1. knowing one’s emotions
2. managing emotions
3. recognizing emotions in others
4. handling relationships . . . the art of relationship is, in large part, skill in managing emotions in others . . . these are the abilities that undergird popularity, leadership, and interpersonal effectiveness (1995, pp. 43-44).

Day (2004) has extended Goleman’s work by arguing that ‘emotional literacy means understanding and being able to apply emotional intelligence and is essential to success in life’ (p. 98). Sherwood (2008) further develops the concept of emotional literacy in the book: Emotional Literacy: the heart of classroom
management. She argues that “The process of educating and empowering children to identify and change debilitating feeling into life-supportive feelings is “emotional literacy”” (p. vi). The focus of Sherwood’s study is on the emotional life of the teacher in relationships with children in the classroom, in the context of creating and maintaining a classroom ‘with heart’ through the facilitation of emotional literacy. To Sherwood, the teacher is the ‘heart’ of the classroom. ‘It is the teacher’s heart that provides the great heart space, the emotional umbrella for the children’s hearts to gather in a protected and safe environment’ (2008, p. 137). She encourages educators to bring love, care and warmth into the classroom, as these factors are so effective in influencing and transforming students’ understanding. This notion of considering emotions as the heart of learning embodies aspects of appreciative pedagogy. AP also seeks to arouse these thoughts. The sense of connectedness arising from such considerations is at the core of Ap.

2.3.6 Interpersonal Intelligence

Howard Gardner (1983) developed a theory of multiple intelligences. In his book, Frames of Mind, he named seven core intelligences: ‘linguistic’, ‘logical-mathematical’, ‘spatial’, ‘bodily kinesthetic’, ‘musical’, ‘intrapersonal’ and ‘interpersonal intelligence’. This thesis focuses only on interpersonal intelligence, as it draws on the values that underpin the concepts of AI and AP. The bottom line for implementing interpersonal intelligence is a deep interest in others. Interpersonal intelligence relates to interaction with people. According to Gardner:

The core capacity here is the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals and, in particular among their moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions. . . . In an advanced form interpersonal knowledge permits a skilled adult to read the intentions and desires—even when these have been hidden—of many other individuals and, potentially, to act upon this knowledge—for example, by influencing a group of disparate individuals to behave along desired lines (Gardner 1985, p. 239).

When put in the language of teaching and learning, interpersonal intelligence deals mainly with teacher-student relationships. Teachers with this kind of intelligence typically seek understanding in and through the emotions of students. This approach facilitates communication. Similarly, within AP, teachers have to be
mindful and to understand students so as to spot their individual strengths. Being positive and appreciative can contribute to greatly improved interpersonal relationships. Likewise, interpersonal intelligence enables appreciative approaches to be practised with greater awareness, to greater effect.

2.3.7 Flow: Optimal Experience

Csikszentmihalyi’s most significant contribution to psychology is the concept of ‘flow’. He uses the term ‘optimal experience’ to describe intense engagement and/or complete absorption in a flowing task. He notes that fulfillment seems to reach its optimum under conditions of intense involvement. The concept of flow has been embraced by researchers studying optimal experiences, such as those working with AI.

Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p. 90) propose that ‘fostering positive experience is especially important (in particular, in formal schooling at all levels)’. Csikszentmihalyi’s (1999) book: Flow: The psychologies of optimal experience describes the characteristics of flow but nowhere does he directly tell us how to acquire flow. Seligman (2002), in his book: Authentic happiness: using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment is more direct in discussing methodologies. Seligman (2002, p. 28) offers ideas on how to positively and effectively educate a child in happiness. He works with appreciative principles, without necessarily describing his work in these terms.

My purpose in raising my daughter was to nurture this precocious strength she had displayed and help her to mould her life around it. Such strength, fully grown, would be a buffer against her weakness and against the storms of life that would inevitably come her way. Raising children, I knew now, was far more than just fixing what was wrong with them. It was about identifying and amplifying their strengths and virtues, and helping them find the niche where they can live these positive traits to the fullest (Seligman, 2002, p. 28).

This epiphany from Seligman (2002) concurs with ideas within AI, which emphasise the importance of seeking out the positive experience of people, not just trying to overcome problems. Like AI, it uses a narrative discourse around ‘good experiences’, ‘feel good’ stories and anecdotes about best learning practices. This kind of appreciative and positive mindset encourages people to focus on the
strengths, achievements and potentials of others.

2.3.8 Holistic Learning

The ideas of ‘connection’ and ‘inclusion’ central to holistic theories of learning work with appreciation. John P. Miller (1988) proposes that ‘holistic education is based on three basic principles: balance, inclusion and connection’ (p. 6). Holistic education involves exploring and making connections. Its focus is on relationships. Miller stresses that connections and relationships are the main vehicles for realizing a student’s true learning potential. The student is not and should not be reduced to a set of learning competencies or thinking skills but should be seen as a whole being. The teacher working from this position uses creative problem solving, cooperative learning and the arts to encourage students to make various types of connections. These connections make learning personally and socially meaningful to the student. There are significant overlaps between this approach and formal appreciative approaches.

2.3.9 Sensual Wisdom

Appreciative Pedagogy is a way of working with ‘sensual wisdom’. Pryer (2007) uses this term in her description of the experiences of a group of Canadian practicum teachers. She talks about these student teachers discovering the importance of relationships in teaching and learning. Pryer says that ‘sensual wisdom is a profound manner of acting in and with the world, is a relational practice located in the space between knowing and not knowing, believing and doubting, certainty and uncertainty, questioning and answering’ (2007, p. 1). It is wisdom, or understanding, gathered through sensual or emotional responses. In some respects, the experience and the sensual wisdom of the practicum teachers Pryer talks about are similar to my experience as a volunteer teacher researcher (VTR). In this project, I reflect on my memories of working as a student volunteer in western Sydney schools. My own ‘sensual wisdom’ was central to this process. It provided me with insights into crucial junctures in my development as a VTR. There were some moments when as a VTR I moved forward very carefully, with a strong awareness of students’ feelings. My exploration of appreciation has also been an exploration of the role of sensual, emotional ways of knowing and their
relationship to a full understanding of my own learning and my own approach to teaching. For this reason I describe teaching with sensual wisdom as an appreciative teaching practice.

2.4 APPRECIATIVE PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE

With regard to classroom settings, appreciative inquiry provides an opportunity for educators and students to reflect upon and become engaged in a positive discussion about what they know, around what works for learners and what they can do to help create more effective learning opportunities in the classroom. The AI perspective encourages teachers to have an abiding respect for students’ strengths. This is crucial for the development of a sense of positive possibility and can contribute to a student’s optimal learning experience. Teaching requires more than professional knowledge, more than pure intellect. It can be argued therefore that an effective appreciative teacher is one who has a great variety of ways of showing appreciation to students and the abilities to discover new possibilities for learning among students. What is needed is not a blind adherence to one way of dealing with appreciation but the conviction that a wise approach is the one which matches best to potentials displayed by a student or group of students. This is not just an approach but also a learned skill, perhaps even an acquired talent. It is nevertheless, accessible as a consequence of insight, application and understanding.

A review of literature reveals that research into the use of AI/AP in the classroom is limited, especially in the area of language teaching and beginning language teachers. Nevertheless, the following articles are worthy of discussion.

The most significant article, which was also made mention of earlier, is by Yballe and O’Connor (2000). They offer four useful suggestions to those seeking to use AP in the classroom. These can be summarized as:

First, focus on extolling the peak experiences of students. Thus, even when the students bring up problems, guide their attention to what worked in problematic situations—appreciating the problem. Second, tap into key forces and factors that help make this peak experience happen; this can be understood as a metaphor for
making magic. Third, identify the skills and know-how needed to repeat successful episodes. Fourth, encourage students to focus on developing the skills and acquiring the knowledge critical to success. In these ways, we can have a ‘hemitropic effect’, that is, energise and orient student behaviour toward the realization of the ideal (Yballe & O’Connor, 2000, pp. 480-481).

A second article is by Bentkowski and Yamaga (2005), titled Exploring appreciative inquiry in education. This article describes a study conducted in an ESL classroom and discusses the practice of using AI in such a classroom, instead of traditional problem solving approaches. Bentkowski and Yamaga undertook the study through reference to students’ performance. They used an initial survey consisting of AI questions, and attempted to distill the peak experience of students’ past learning to guide them towards a brighter future. The second survey was constructed with non-appreciative questions. The results suggested that the students’ study scores were based on the way that they perceived themselves. It was concluded that ‘AI improves self-esteem, builds self-confidence, motivates and empowers individuals toward better performance’ (Bentkowski & Yamaga, 2005, p. 45).

After this literature study around appreciative inquiry, appreciative pedagogy and the construction of appreciative approaches, the chapter that follows outlines the theoretical framework for the study of appreciative approaches in the language classroom.
Chapter 3

Research Design for Appreciative Inquiry

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is designed to provide an account of the research methods and design of the investigation reported in this thesis. Each element in the research process is explained and justified. Much attention is given to the research design, which flexibly incorporates the idea of appreciative inquiry into the research process. This chapter concludes with the procedures of data collection and analysis, including the application of ethical procedures.

The main research questions to be addressed in this study are:

1. Can evidence of appreciative approaches resembling AP/AI be seen in teaching through observations of and reflections upon teaching in NSW classrooms?
2. Can AI be an effective tool to enrich teaching and learning in western Sydney schools?
3. How might this work be relevant to future teaching practices in NSW and China?

This study is to be situated in:

1. a study of literature on appreciative inquiry
2. a specific literature focus on appreciative pedagogy
3. a broad literature study of what are termed ‘appreciative approaches’ through reference to understandings of transformative learning, empathic intelligence, emotional intelligence, holistic curriculum, sensual wisdom and more
With research data being collected through:

- reflective journals
- document analysis
- classroom observations
- Interviews with selected language teachers in Australia
- Email interviews with selected Chinese teachers of English in China

With research data being analysed through:

- Cooperrider and Srivasta’s (1987) model of appreciative inquiry, in application of their ‘4-D’ cycle—Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. (This means that the appreciative approaches to teaching are systematically identified and valued through Cooperrider and Srivasta’s appreciative research methodology.)

3.2 BACKGROUND

During 2008-2009, I worked as a volunteer teacher researcher in a western Sydney school community. This consisted of Secondary School A, Secondary School B, Primary School C, Primary School D, Primary School E and Primary School F (coded to preserve anonymity). In each school, I worked with a supervising teacher and my purpose was to stimulate the interests of school students in Mandarin learning. In NSW schools, almost each term is ten weeks in duration. I was required to go to these schools at least one day (often more) a week to promote the learning of Mandarin. The study reported in this thesis focused on this period of my teaching and learning in western Sydney schools.

3.3 RESEARCH PROCESS

Recent studies (e.g. Michael, 2005) have highlighted the use of AI interview tools
for field research. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) actively encourage the adaptation of AI approaches to specific locations, processes and research questions. Encouraged by these suggestions, this project uses the 4-D cycle both to conduct research and to analyse research data. In the table that follows (Table 3.1), adapted from Raymond and Hall, I use the 4 stages of the 4-D cycle to discuss the focus and purpose of each stage as well as how I will be working with each of these stages in this specific project.

### Table 3.0.1 Application of the 4-D cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Application in this specific project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discovery</strong></td>
<td>Explores what is effective and successful in current practice, and what contributes to effectiveness</td>
<td>Opens the way to building a better future and considering new possibilities by dislodging existing deficit constructions</td>
<td>Establishment of terms, definition of boundaries of the inquiry. Student volunteer-researcher’s observations of the use of ‘appreciation’ as a tool for teaching and learning. Reflections upon the position of ‘appreciation’ in the formal curriculum documents used by language teachers in NSW and China. A study of literature documenting the use of appreciative approaches in education. Interviews, via an appreciative methodology, with selected language teachers in NSW and China on their use of appreciative approaches in the classroom (whether or not they identify their practice in these terms or not), followed by discussion of interview materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dream</strong></td>
<td>Thinks about ideals and aspirations. Discusses how to take forward and develop the best of what exists</td>
<td>Liberates organizational members from the constraining power of existing constructions and offers positive guiding images of the future</td>
<td>Consideration of the relevance, effectiveness and possible future use of appreciative approaches in China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Application in this specific project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design</strong></td>
<td>Dialoguing and co-constructing ‘what should be’</td>
<td>Creates an inclusive and supportive environment that will encourage the use of dialogue to think about ways of achieving ideals. Encourages participants to challenge the status quo as well as the common assumptions underlying the existing design of their organization. Finds common ground by sharing discoveries and possibilities, discussing and debating, and finally reaching a shared ideal or vision.</td>
<td><strong>Focus</strong> Encourages dialogue Encourages dialogue so that personal conversations evolve into organizational discourse and individual ideals become cooperative or shared visions for the future. <strong>Purpose</strong> Consideration of future Consideration of future classroom practices, based on the principles of appreciative approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destiny</strong></td>
<td>Innovating and sustaining ‘what will be’</td>
<td>Invites participants to construct the future through innovation and action. Includes ever-broadening circles of participants to join in conversation.</td>
<td>Allows organizational members to live in the systems they have designed in ways that translate their ideals into reality and their beliefs into practice. The transformative process: How teaching and learning relationships change teacher, student and society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Raymond & Hall, 2008 p.285)

### 3.4 Research Methods

This section describes research tools chosen for this project: reflective journals, document analysis, classroom observation and interviews. The evidence gathered with these tools will then be situated in the 4-D cycle and analysed accordingly.

#### 3.4.1 Reflective journal

Reflection was a key task in this research project. Reflection is a process of turning experience into learning. Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985, p. 19) describe it as one of ‘those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations’. Boud
(2001) argues that reflection is a vital attribute of all effective practitioners, no matter which area they operate in. Researchers must be able to reflect on their ongoing experiences and learn from them.

In my specific situation, a reflective journal was employed to observe and enhance my understanding and to extend and enrich my teaching and learning. It was a tool I used to contemplate the efficacy of my teaching. It provided opportunities for me to consider possibilities for improvement. It was a tool for both cultural and educational learning.

The extracts from my reflective journals that I analyse in this thesis focus on thoughts and emotions at various stages of my study. My emotional responses to classroom experiences are referenced in this analysis, as well as my observations of the emotions that arose in the classroom. This evidence is considered in relation to effective and inclusive teaching and learning relationships, in accordance with the understanding that stands behind models of appreciative inquiry and appreciative pedagogy.

Donovan (2007) has observed that AI theorists increasingly call for the incorporation of reflection and reflective practices within AI processes. I used that understanding of AI as a tool in my reflection. In this respect, my learning as a teacher volunteer was one area of interest, the learning of the students was another and the learning of the teachers I worked with, a third.

During my first term in Secondary School A, I observed many Mandarin classes. These were delivered by an Australian-born, Chinese-trained Mandarin teacher. I have called this teacher Sunflower. During each lesson I would observe, then reflect upon her teaching. After each lesson I would write a brief reflection or report in my journal, focusing particularly on her work in building rapport with students, acknowledging students’ achievements and showing timely appreciation of their progress. In my second term, I was placed in Secondary School B. Here I had a chance to sit in language classes delivered by three highly experienced teachers: teachers Jacaranda, Rose and Lavender. I went to School B two days a week and had many chances to watch lessons delivered by these teachers.
In my observations of classes I focused on the teachers’ skills in arousing students’ interests and energy in class. After each class I would think about their teaching strategies as well as approaches that I could use in my own teaching. As to my own teaching, either before or after each lesson, I used the journal to reflect on my teaching plans and teaching performance. Through reflecting in this way, I was and am, able to think about improvements in my own work. The supervising teachers’ feedback helped me to refine this. The reflective journal was and is an essential tool for recording my thoughts about classroom practice. It became a tool that I used to improve my effectiveness as a teacher and to record processes I could later draw on as a researcher.

N.B.: All participants in this report are coded by the names of plants, to preserve anonymity: they are teacher Sunflower (from School A), teacher Jacaranda, teacher Rose, teacher Lavender (From School B) and teacher Cedar (who contributed to the initial methodology training I received through DET, who teaches in a northern Sydney school and is a long standing member of the Chinese Teachers Association in NSW.) These pseudonyms also reflect my impressions of their characters. All five are experienced LOTE teachers who are teaching one or more of Mandarin, German, Italian, French and Japanese to both junior and senior classes.

3.4.2 Document Analysis

Documents collected and analysed during this project were used to complement the data being collected in other ways. There are copious documents relevant to this study. The documents I chose to refer to were:

- current syllabus documents
- Course documents from School A and School B
- Document materials supplied to during the VTR language training program by the NSW Department of Education (DET)

First of all, I had to engage with and respond to the NSW Chinese language
syllabus 7-10 and the HSC Chinese language syllabus. In addition, I referred to the primary and secondary school English syllabus in Zhe Jiang Province, China (where I am from and will return to). My analysis of the documents sought to extract relevance to my inquiry into appreciative teaching and learning relationships.

An understanding of syllabus requirements helped inform the specific and detailed research I undertook in each school I was working in. This was of enormous importance for extending and deepening my understanding of individual school teaching and learning practices. It was also helpful to my thinking about school cultures and communities. This is the environment that houses appreciation. For instance, in School B, I was impressed by the school’s motto: ‘Courage, fortitude and truth’. In my view this is a powerful statement suggestive of a caring, tolerant, optimistic and supportive learning environment. In addition, the School B Staff Handbook (2008) states that the school endeavours to create a learning environment ‘in which students, staff and community are jointly involved in fostering students’ respect for the worth and dignity of themselves and others and encouraging students to progress at a rate commensurate with individual ability’. I was impressed by the appreciative mindset suggested here, and again in the following extract from the same publication.

If your students believe that you sincerely care and are interested in them they are more likely to be co-operative and positive in the classroom. This enables you to develop rapport with your students. It allows you to see students in a different light. (p.6).

This quotation conveys some of the ideas that stand behind appreciative pedagogy.

In summary, for this research project, document analysis was especially helpful, but important considerations have to be kept in mind:

Some documents may have been deliberately written for research, most have not; some are written by researchers for researchers, but, again, most are not. Indeed, most have been written for a purpose, agenda, an audience other than researchers, and this raises questions about their reliability and validity. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 201)

In approaching document research, I sought to ensure that the documents were
analysed in their context, in order to understand their significance at that time.

3.4.3 Methodology training

Prior to beginning teaching in NSW schools, language methodology training was initiated by NSW DET for myself and my six student colleagues from Ningbo. Not only did this provide me with access to Australian official websites, where various valuable documents were held, it also enabled me to experience many kinds of teaching, all delivered by experts. My memories of those teachers are strong. I jotted down many of the teaching anecdotes that were explained in each class. Some teachers’ touching emotional classroom encounters have been engraved in my mind. I kept notes on their teaching and my learning in my reflective journals.

Following the methodology training I was able to visit, observe and work in active school settings. Classroom observation provides a first-hand experience of teaching and learning practices in a classroom. There are two different but interrelated approaches to classroom observation: quantitative observation and qualitative observation. This project used qualitative observation, ‘which involves observing all relevant phenomena and taking extensive field notes without specifying in advance exactly what is to be observed.’ (Johnson & Christensen, 2008 p. 212).

When I conducted my observations, I imagined three issues most worthy of consideration. First, it was not necessary for me to look at everything. I concentrated on those matters that were most relevant to my research questions. Second, a good memory is required for effective observation. Observation was most effective when the researcher could edit and write up notes as soon as possible after class, while memories were fresh.

Johnson and Christensen (2008) argue that during the conduct of qualitative observation, there are four forms of observation techniques, namely: ‘complete participant’, ‘participant-as-observer’, ‘observer-as-participant’ and ‘complete observer’. The participant-as-observer and the observer-as-participant are regarded as the most useful types. I agree with this perspective in relation to this project. I would observe and learn from the supervising teachers’ work in class. During the
research process, after ethics clearance, I developed detailed field notes on how specific language teachers would build rapport with students, sense their needs of care and appreciate their achievement.

In terms of observation by others, I invited the supervising teacher who accompanied me and with whom I worked when teaching Mandarin, to provide feedback on my teaching. The key evidence I sought related to my way of working appreciatively. The supervising teachers’ observations of my own teaching experiences provided valuable data to this study and will be referred to periodically.

3.4.4 Interviews

In this study, semi-structured face-to-face and email interviews were employed to investigate the efficacy of the use of appreciative approaches in the classroom. I interviewed selected language teachers in Australia (Western Sydney) and China (Zhejiang Province). I spoke directly with the Australian-based teachers and interviewed the Chinese-based teachers by email.

Kvale (1996) describes a semi-structured interview as neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire, but employing qualities of both. To conduct such interviews, I chose certain themes as my focus. This influenced how the interviews progressed. These interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewees, then analysed at a later date. The process of analysis is discussed later in this chapter. The research questions around which the interviews were structured were:

1. Is work in AP or AI relevant to effective language teaching? (If so, why and how);
2. Can evidence of appreciative approaches resembling AP/AI be seen in teaching in NSW classrooms and Chinese classrooms?

The interviews were conducted using appreciative methodologies. AI has been used effectively in conducting research into organizational change, professional development, leadership transition, nursing, tourism and more (Raymond, 2008).
It is a principle that AI interview questions should not only be ‘affirmative’ but ‘generative’. Within AI, generative questions are situated within interviews. They frequently use conversational dialogues. The use of generative questions is designed to elicit stories that help build a comprehensive relationship between the individuals involved (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). These philosophical perspectives and working principles were helpful to me as I undertook my interviews.

The purpose of my appreciative interviews was to obtain relevant descriptions of teachers’ understanding and interpretations of language teaching practices. An ‘appreciative’ research interview can be an enriching experience for the interviewee, and may assist him or her to develop new insights into his or her own situation. This is a valuable by-product of the process.

The selection of participants in this part of the project is guided by advice from Cooperrider et al. (2003, p. 35), who argue that ‘an important criterion in selecting participants is their ability to bring viewpoints and experiences from many different levels and from many different perspectives’ (Cooperrider et al., 2003). In this project, there were two groups of participants, ‘Australian-based teachers of Chinese’ and ‘Chinese-based teachers of English’. The following criteria were used in selecting potential participants:

1. All needed to be experienced teachers willing to participate in the research.
2. Each of the Chinese teachers of English needed to be teachers whose work I had experienced in my earlier study and valued for its appreciative qualities.
3. Each of the Australian teachers of LOTE needed to be teachers whose work I had observed and seen to employ appreciative approaches.
4. I made it clear to all participants that that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. I provided them in advance with the guiding questions to be asked, so that their consent could be further informed.
With respect to the semi-structured email interviews, the two selected Chinese teachers of English in China were my favorite English teachers. Both exerted an especially positive influence on me and my language learning. My personal knowledge of their teaching ensured me their relevance to this study. Clearly, they were not chosen as representative of all teachers in China. The basis of the interview was their use of appreciative approaches in language teaching, not their representative status. While the email interviews required more structure than the face-to-face interviews, similar questions were used to guide both processes.

In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews face to face with four experienced Australian language educators. These were educators with whom I had worked or whom I had seen working. As with the teachers in China, they were not chosen as representatives of all teachers in NSW.

Cooperrider and Srivatsva (1987) provide a template for the questions that a researcher may want to ask in an appreciative inquiry into appreciative practice. I was aware that my questions would be asked in different contexts and in relation to different activities, because they were situated in education. For this reason I adapted these questions to suit my research orientation. My guiding interview questions were as follows:

1. Do you think a teacher’s expectations and attitudes have significant influence on students’ performances and learning? Can you think of any example from your own teaching experiences that demonstrate this?
2. During your teaching career, could you pick out some examples of your most unforgettable teaching experiences and share them with me?
3. According to your understanding, which of your personal qualities and teaching strategies have contributed to these unforgettable experiences?

A fundamental principle of AI is ‘the positive principle’. It is based on the idea that asking positive questions leads to positive change. Michael (2005, p. 226) argues that an appreciative approach can often yield a more nuanced understanding of the positives of the experience. This makes AI a subtle and effective tool. Using AI in the interviews meant that I approached these interviews from an appreciative
perspective. Therefore, it was essential for me to design an appreciative interview protocol so as to encourage the interviewees to share their favorite memories and peak experiences.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The preferred way to collect data in appreciative inquiry is through interviews. However, little is ever mentioned about how to effectively analyse the data gathered by this means. I think data analysis is of considerable importance in any research project. Therefore, this section addresses the issue of qualitative data analysis.

Following the data collection process, each interview was written up into a different file. The files were subjected to detailed content analysis. Thematic categories were nominated and interview data were categorised accordingly. After extensive work, it became apparent that the four categories identified by Cooperrider and Srivatsva were both effective and appropriate containers for this information. This emergent characteristic determined the decision to use the 4D categories to structure the report.

3.5.1 Data analysis using Cooperrider and Srivatsva’s 4D cycle

**Discovery**: Here I identified the positive, successful, compelling teaching and learning experiences (referred to as ‘peak experiences’ in AP) in the data. The evidentiary archive comprised literature, reflective journals, teaching observations, interview data and conversations with teachers after observations.

**Dream**: Here I looked into the experiences and arrived at important themes or concepts within the evidence.

**Design**: Here I sifted through the themes or concepts. This has been described as the crystallizing process by Chinyowa (2006). It is a process of structuring and organising in search of recurring elements.

**Destiny**: This process involved me in formulating emerging propositions and
arguments.

In summary, this study was aimed at facilitating an understanding of teachers’ appreciative approaches to pedagogy in a language classroom context. It employed an innovative methodology—appreciative inquiry—to design the research process. Data was also interpreted and confirmed through this approach. Chapters 4 and 5 provide the details of the application of this design.
Chapter 4
Research Practice: Collation and Analysis of Collected Data

4.1 BACKGROUND

In order to develop a greater understanding of the ways in which appreciative approaches can be used by school teachers, a focused research project was conceived. As suggested earlier, a decision was made to use appreciative inquiry to investigate appreciative approaches to pedagogy. Semi-structured interviews constructed through reference to appreciative models were imagined as the most appropriate major research tool. For this reason, ethics clearance was sought and obtained through the University of Western Sydney via the National Ethics Application Form (NEAF) and the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), via the State Education Research Approvals Process (SERAP). Consent forms were signed by all NSW-based interviewees (and principals of their schools, where appropriate).

Five interviews were arranged with Sydney-based Chinese language teachers, all of whom are employed in the public school sector of the NSW Department of Education and Training. These interviews were held between June and July of 2009. Four were conducted in the school offices of the teachers and one in the home of a teacher (on the weekend, because of unavailability during regular working hours).

In the thesis proposal, a plan to interview four language teachers was mentioned. Appointments were made with those language teachers. One teacher I was going to interview had booked an American holiday. She was helpful, in recommending another language teacher in the same school. I accepted this suggestion. She suggested also that when she came back from America, if it was not too late for me, I could interview her. Hence there were five interviews.

All the participants were very passionate in the interviews and all offered valuable insights into appreciative approaches to pedagogy.
In addition, I conducted two semi-structured email interviews with two Chinese teachers of English. I found some difficulty with these interviews. As the teachers were busy, they could not guarantee prompt replies. Later on, I found literature that argued appreciative inquiry is improvisational. Email interviews cannot best represent this nature. However, email was the most appropriate way for me to communicate with those teachers. These two were my English teachers in China. Chinese people pay much attention to ‘guanxi’, a Chinese word that means the valuing of relationships with those with whom one is familiar. Accordingly, they are most unlikely to refuse you upfront, no matter how busy they are. And it was not convenient for me to go to China to undertake the interview. Therefore I had to settle for an email interview process. Although the answers from these two teachers were not detailed, they did offer a number of ideas about appreciative approaches to pedagogy. Their location in China and their experience of teaching in China makes the contribution of these two especially important to this project.

4.2 RESEARCH SETTINGS

Day (2007) asserts that ‘the school workplace is a physical setting, a formal organization. It is also a social and psychological setting in which teachers construct a sense of practice, of professional efficacy, and of professional community’ (p. 156).

Each of the teachers interviewed works in such settings. Here I want to describe these settings.

Western Sydney School A: This is a sports high school. Students who come to this school are either from the local district or are seeking an education with a strong sports focus. Most of the students who enroll are active people and mostly they are quite good at sports. In 2007, Mandarin teaching first started at this school. Since then the Mandarin program has been expanded due to student response, the Mandarin teacher’s responsibility and creativity in teaching, and the principal’s keen interest in developing Mandarin classes. There are compulsory lessons for all Year 7 and 8 students for 100 hours. There are also Year 9 and Year 10 elective Mandarin classes. In this class, only one student was of Chinese background. The teacher’s hard work can be reflected by her way of cultivating students’ interest in Mandarin learning.
Western Sydney School B: This secondary school has developed strong international relationships (America, Germany, France, Italy, China and Japan). German, Italian and French classes are fully developed here. There is no formal Mandarin class now, but it will be introduced next year. Two days a week, the Year 7 students ‘taste’ Mandarin lessons (along with lessons in other languages). These lay a foundation for them to choose which language to learn in Year 8. At School B, there is a strong relationship with two local primary schools. On each Tuesday afternoon students from those primary schools come over to ‘taste’ Mandarin lessons. School B provided me with a chance to teach them Mandarin. Therefore, my desire was to let them know about China and Chinese and to cultivate their interest. In the interview, teacher Jacaranda commented that:

We are very proud of the primary program. And it has been good in a lot of ways because the students who come here from those schools, in Year 7 already know some teachers; they feel a little bit more comfortable when they come here. And I think also students of that age are very appreciative of learning the language. They have a lot of enthusiasm, they came to observe, they came to perform, and they came to show off (teacher Jacaranda, personal communication, July 27 2009).

4.3 INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS

In this thesis, all participants are named after the name of a plant to preserve anonymity. The participants are teacher Sunflower, teacher Cedar, teacher Rose, teacher Lavender, teacher Jacaranda, teacher Pine and teacher Bamboo (Cedar, Pine and Bamboo are Chinese trees. I use a tree’s name to code male teachers and flowers to code female teachers). There is also an image to describe each participant. This image was generated from the ‘Wordle’ software. I put each interview summary into ‘Wordle’, which generates an image that shows patterns of language used by the interviewees. It offers us a brief impression of these teachers’ words before I discuss their interview in detail.

Teacher Sunflower is female. She is an Australian-born Mandarin teacher. Sunflower is a language and English teacher in School A. She did an undergraduate degree in Chinese studies for four years in Canberra. She did a graduate diploma and studied teaching methodology for language at primary and secondary school level. She has
taught in primary and secondary schools and has more than 12 years’ teaching experience.

When I arrived in Sydney, I was first assigned to School A, to work and learn from this teacher. I worked there for two terms, between August 2008 and October 2008, then from August 2009 to October 2009. Most of the time from August 2008 to October 2008, I observed Sunflower’s lessons, though sometimes I team-taught with her in her Mandarin classes. In August 2009—October 2009, I did more teaching practice.

If you are passionate and interested in your teaching area, then the students will naturally also grow a passion and an interest for it (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3, 2009).

Figure 4.1 Image of Teacher Sunflower from interview summary

Teacher Cedar is a male teacher. He is a Chinese-born Mandarin teacher, a long standing member of the Chinese Teachers Association in NSW and a high school Mandarin teacher with more than 9 years’ teaching experience. He was also one of the lecturers for the Methodology training for Volunteer teachers from Ningbo in 2008.

Education is the process to help someone to find out his or her own interest and ability . . . there is no losers in my class. Everyone is either the winner or the learner . . . everything has two answers, but pick up the positive answer (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25, 2009).
Teacher Rose is a female LOTE teacher (teaching German, French, Italian and Japanese) in School B, with more than 30 years’ teaching experience. In November 2009 I transferred to School B. I had many chances to sit in her class to observe her way of teaching.

One negative comment to someone negates or delays seven positives. Everybody should smile at part of the lesson . . . I think in languages we are lucky because we are interacting on a personal level (teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009).

Teacher Lavender is a LOTE teacher (teaching Italian, German, French and Japanese) in School B with 2 years’ teaching experience. I also observed her class.

If you love what you do, the students will start loving you . . . If you do not feel appreciated in the classroom or if you do not feel safe and well, you do not learn (teacher Lavender, personal communication, June 23 2009).
Teacher Jacaranda is a female secondary school language teacher in School B. She teaches Italian, German, French and Japanese and has nearly 30 years' teaching experience. She has worked in three different high schools, has been working in School B for nearly 20 years, and has only one year to go before retirement. During the interview she said she appreciates the chance to work in different school environments because this provides her with a better insight into and understanding of students. She said she loves getting involved in lots of different things in school: not just teaching language but also sport and musicals. She is a musician and plays the piano well.

She was my supervising teacher in School B and she accompanied me to teach primary school students Mandarin each Tuesday afternoon. Normally when I was not teaching, I would sit in her classroom, to learn from her.

Encouragement is more important than anything else; you have got to say ‘yes, you can do this.’ And try to be positive all the time. That is very important. Do not let them say I can not (teacher Jacaranda, personal communication, July 27 2009).
Teacher Pine was my high school English teacher in China. He has more than 10 years’ teaching experience. We have kept in contact with each other since I graduated.

Teacher Bamboo was my University supervisor at Zhejiang Wanli University in Ningbo, China. He has more than 20 years’ teaching experience in English.

### 4.3.1 My Memorable Learning Experience in China

When I think back to my own school experience, I invariably recall a favorite teacher of English. If I analyse why I remember that particular person or setting, it will always be related to something special that teacher did to make me feel better about myself. Two special teachers I encountered in my English learning journey gave me the greatest gift a teacher can give. They helped me develop an appreciation of my own strengths.

I offer the following stories for several reasons. To identify myself in relation to appreciative approaches to pedagogy, to tell of personal peak experiences of learning, to position myself in the inquiry as both researcher and participant and to offer significant cultural insights into my learning.

**Teacher Pine: My high school English teacher**

If I were asked to describe my high school English teacher, teacher Pine, in a word, it would be ‘magnetic’. His lessons drew my total attention. Not only did I enjoy his classes but I gained good grades as a result of his teaching. In retrospect, teacher Pine did incredibly well in his English teaching. I cannot detail his ‘methods of teaching’ because of the great variety of methods he used. What I valued most of all was his passion for education and his boundless energy. More importantly, he contributed to my confidence in English learning. Now I would like to share some of my stories of learning experiences through teacher Pine with you.

I remember the day when we had our first English class in senior high school. After
he briefly introduced himself, teacher Pine immediately asked us to do an English dictation. I was astonished by this way of teaching. (Before, I had never met a teacher who would not spend the whole first lesson talking about himself and his classroom management.) I had not met a teacher with such an unpredictable approach. Luckily, I successfully finished the dictation but I heard many students complain about it. Maybe they found it too difficult for them to do. Also I gained a favorable impression of this teacher when I found his remarks in my exercise book. They read, ‘You have a good English foundation, and must keep going, trying to generate your potential’. I was deeply encouraged by teacher Pine as I was used to underestimating myself and I lacked confidence in my ability. Previously, I had not had an easy time at school. I felt that I did not receive due attention in class and I came to think of myself as a ‘backward’ student. I found myself caught in a vicious circle. I tended to keep silent in class because I underestimated myself, and this hindered my development. Hence, further silence. With teacher Pine’s encouragement, my sense of wonder for English was inspired. I was motivated to strive to perform better. In my spare time, I would unconsciously allocate a lot of time to English study. After class, I would always pose questions to teacher Pine. Each time, I would receive satisfying answers from him. This would happen during the recess time and before the next lesson and it would require teacher Pine to give up his free time to answer my questions patiently. This was one way my enthusiasm for the English learning journey was sustained.

I remember teacher Pine having a skilful way of creating an effective learning atmosphere. We all know that students are often tired in the afternoon lessons. It is, therefore, difficult for teachers to rouse students’ active participation. But it seems that teacher Pine could read our minds. He would ask ‘Are you tired’ to greet students, instead of mechanically saying ‘good afternoon’ to start the lesson. Using ‘are you tired’ is a more enthusiastic way of engaging students’ responses and attention.

Teacher Pine seemed to have a way of maximizing our effort in learning. He seemed to try his best in his class because of his trust and understanding of us. One scenario occurs in my mind: The following is my recollection of a class involving a discussion of ‘who is your idol?’
T: LeiFeng is my idol. Because he was ready to help others. What about you?
S1: Jay is my idol. Because his songs are popular with us.
S2: I appreciate my father. Because he is . . .
S3: . . . . .

The discussion kept going smoothly. All of a sudden, one student burst out ‘My idol is Hitler because he was determined to do anything. I need a determined heart to study English.’ This was an unexpected answer. I was waiting for teacher Pine’s response. Would he criticize this boy? I found teacher Pine did not correct my classmate’s viewpoints but confirmed the originality of this boy’s thinking with a smile. This was not the response I expected. More heated discussion unfolded and students felt free to express themselves without fear of criticism. In my later talk with teacher Pine, I found that he sought to create a stress-free classroom. He said we should not need to worry about being negated or ridiculed in his class, no matter what the point of view (It is noteworthy that teacher Pine did not encourage the student to expand on his ideas about Hitler.)

My interest in English learning kept being sustained because of his wonderful lessons and his personable character. He has his own way of teaching. He does not just mechanically follow the textbooks. All students need someone who genuinely believes in them like teacher Pine. I find I respond with stronger efforts when I receive specific messages from a person that I respect and admire. Teacher Pine built on my strengths by making specific comments on my work. When I feel appreciated, my learning arises more readily.

Teacher Bamboo was my supervisor at University. He was my supervisor for thesis writing. He is courteous and affable. From him, I learnt not only expertise in doing research, but I learned to get into the habit of conquering emotional difficulties. Writing a thesis is not a difficult task once we have identified our priorities and have the desire to complete it. It is Teacher Bamboo who first helped me gain enormous enjoyment from research and thesis writing.

The first time we met was in his office. Six students were gathered together to talk about our research interests. We were required to take turns to introduce our ideas.
The other students were fluent, talking about their interests, and some of them had even already selected specific topics. When it came to my turn, I was a bit nervous, hesitant and silent. I really had no idea what I was going to research. I had no such experience and no particular interests. I chose to be frank and to ask for my teachers’ candid suggestions. Teacher Bamboo patiently listened to my worries and asked me to reflect on my English learning experiences. ‘Are there any particular sections (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) that you were interested in investigating?’ I told him I had more confidence in grammar in high school. I always helped my friends to solve their grammatical problems and in the university I was selected as a mentor for freshmen students. During that time, I also helped tutor in grammar. Teacher Bamboo nodded with an appreciative smile. He went to his bookcase and took out two books and asked me to look at them. He told me that writing a thesis is not as overwhelming as some initially think. As long as you have identified your research interest, you will derive lots of fun and satisfaction from the process. It requires personal attachment, enthusiasm and a positive attitude to the thesis. ‘Take your time to read these two books and come over to me to talk about your ideas.’ In this way, I came across the topic of ‘dynamic meaning of verbs, nouns, prepositions and adjectives’. Then we narrowed this down to an ‘in-depth analysis of the prepositional dynamic meaning’. He encouraged me to keep my effort and interest in this topic. He identified this topic as innovative and worthy of exploration. He reckoned me as independent in my learning. It is natural to encounter many setbacks in the thesis journey, for instance, the scarceness of resources, emotional resistance to writing, procrastination and so on. But the engenderment of a sense of wonder, stamina and a focused attitude will be beneficial for lifelong learning.

Teacher Bamboo taught me to have a belief in myself, my interests and personal character. He enabled me to connect the thesis writing task with my pursuit of personal values. This increased the rigor of my writing.

I am indebted to his help, which assisted me both academically and personally. He helped me recognise my potential to do a thesis. Indeed, now I am braver and more confident in pursuing what I want and what I value.
4.3.3 My Memorable Learning Experience in Australia

My work in Australia required me to undertake a dual task, to study for a Master of Education (honors) degree at UWS and to work as a Mandarin volunteer teacher researcher in western Sydney schools. In the past year, I have got into the habit of keeping a reflective journal. (This was initially required by the teachers). Now the journal entries reflect back to me significant personal changes and phases of my development over this period of time. I feel that I have formulated a more optimistic and positive attitude through my supervisors’ associations with me at UWS. My favorite motto, which guides my development here is ‘our journey is not about where we have been BUT where we are going . . . ’

I think that thesis writing requires an emotional attachment. In the initial stage of thesis writing, I found there were many times that anxiety was triggered because of personal and academic performance expectations. There were times when completing writing demands seemed to be hard to achieve. There were many times when I felt unhappy with myself, when I seemed always to procrastinate. It is a misconception that if you have the ideas, the writing will flow onto the page. I felt that whatever planning takes place, life has the capacity to wash away such plans. However, my teachers’ constant help and associations with me helped soothe the weight of these negatives.

David: my principal supervisor

With my principal supervisor I tend to have a sense of belonging. I feel like talking with him about my thesis not only because he always has insightful suggestions but also because he is such a good listener. No matter how confused and fussy I was he would insist on listening to me patiently. His effective ways of approaching my questions reinforced my interest and provided me with stimulus for continuing my research. I really appreciate two of his sayings. Both bring insights to me as well. ‘A book, like a person “becomes”, rather than “is”.’ This relates to the learning transformation of students. Plus, he mentioned that ‘we make our world for ourselves by living it’. This suggests that the way we actually encounter the world is what is most important. The world itself is not a given. It is actually a consequence of how
we interact with it. So if I interact with the world in a positive, enthusiastic way, the world will be different to what it will be if I approach with a depressed attitude. No doubt, I would be in pursuit of a positive attitude to embrace all the chances and challenges in life.

Constructing a harmonious relationship with a supervisor is conducive to enhancing interest and confidence in realizing the research. I aspired to meet both my expectations and the expectations of my supervisor. I was looking forward to producing a good thesis, no matter how painstaking and time-consuming the process may be. This ‘appreciative’ relationship is highly beneficial to me.

Dr Zhao: one of my supervisory panel members

Learning is an emotional encounter. Creating a good relationship with students can’t become a burden. It is designed for belonging, expectation and mutual appreciation. It happens in the classroom and it can happen beyond the classroom. Dr Zhao is a good example of a teacher who teaches a lot outside of the classroom. Talking about respect and care is so easy, but practicing it requires patience, perseverance and tolerance. Dr Zhao has got into the habit of being ready to help whenever he is available. My gratitude and appreciation for him keeps growing. I am moved by his responsibility and warm-heartedness. What he has done has already exceeded what he is supposed to do.

Dr Zhao is a good educator, not only because of his kindness, but also his ability to inspire and encourage others. He told us that our learning and teaching process can be compared to a long journey. We need the engine, the compass and the pack. First of all, we should make full use of the compass to position ourselves, never to overvalue nor devalue ourselves, and then to be vigorous in advancing, bravely and optimistically. Our thesis requires one fundamental thing—passion. Without passion for what we are doing, our thesis will be nothing but a burden. We can regard this journey as a positive challenge, full of opportunities to be grasped and experience to be lived out.

I have a great respect for Dr Zhao, not only for his achievement but for his
passion for working and studying and his firm belief in being a good educator. ‘Everybody should have his own story, when we look back upon the past days, we should have many memories to ponder over.’ He told me this. I have got into the habit of developing my reflective skill as I am told that ‘a daily noting of your thoughts, insights and lateral moments may eventually bear fruit’. I study and work with an appreciative and optimistic mindset because of the influences of these teachers and many positive experiences. Learning arises whenever and wherever we are well taught by those we value. One insightful quote from Dr Zhao:

Progress will not follow a straight upward trend. There will be progressive periods and periods of regression. It is not just what we learn now, how we feel about what we learn counts in the long run (4th Sep, 2009).

4.4 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

4.4.1 Introduction

This section unfolds with an analysis of some important education documents (refer to Table 4.1 p. 69) from China and Australia. It investigates the position of the theme of ‘appreciation’ in the documents, which could offer insight and discusses how these documents relate this to teaching and learning. The discussion of these documents introduces the more practical discussion of the enactment and understanding of ‘appreciative education’ in China and Australia.

This investigation of appreciative practices in language teaching involves a number of steps. The first step is as mentioned, studying a number of formal documents from Chinese and Western authorities. Then I am going to seek out teachers’ specific appreciative approaches to education through teaching observations, personal encounters, reflections and interviews with teachers. The interviews are a priority because teachers not only deliver curriculum, they also interpret, define and refine it. It is what teachers think, what teachers believe and what teachers do in the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get. This recognition is the driving force behind this appreciative inquiry into appreciative approaches to pedagogy.
In the section that follows, this study investigates the position of appreciative pedagogy (AP) through the lenses of documents required for effective education both in Australia (Western Sydney Region) and China (Zhejiang province). (Please note, I have translated the relevant Chinese documents myself.)

Table 4.0.1 Documents to Be Studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>China (Zhejiang prov.)</th>
<th>New Curriculum for Standard English In High School (高中英语新课程标准)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This is a new standard of English for English study. It follows the outlines and main spirit of the Reformed Curriculum for Basic Education (Trial Version) from the National Ministry of Education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Australia (NSW: Western Sydney Region) | 1. K-10 Chinese Mandatory and elective courses from NSW Board of Studies  
  2. Melbourne Declaration on educational goals for young Australians  
  3. National statements for engaging young Australians with Asia in Australian schools  
  4. Quality teaching language program  
  5. Various NSW school publications on teaching and learning (primarily documents produced within secondary Schools A & B) |

The document study focuses on information about teaching and learning relationships and suggestions for the effective cultivation of an appreciative learning environment in which students are both intellectually and emotionally prepared for effective learning.

4.4.2 Chinese Perspective: New Curriculum for Standard English in High School
In the introduction to this document, the importance of the focus being developed in the new curriculum is discussed. In China, particularly in high school, English is a compulsory subject. Through English language learning, students can not only be emotionally and intellectually extended but English language study can also create opportunities for international travel, exchange and employment. This new document is intended to refresh previous teaching and learning modes that were seen to overemphasize the importance of grammatical explanation and transmission and the expansion of vocabulary at the expense of communication. The new document focuses on cultivating students’ ability to put language to flexible use. Teachers are advised to conduct teaching with a focus on students’ learning interests, prior learning experiences and cognitive capability. The document embraces the educational pathways that help teaching to be enacted in a practice and experience-orientated setting requiring full participation, cooperative and communicative learning.

In the introduction, the document prioritizes the essential aspects of this educational reform. First, it refers to the desire to establish a new educational approach to make language learning popular, accessible, and valued and a significant priority. Second, it refers to the desire to design a flexible educational achievement system to serve various regions and to work with the different stages of learning of students. This system will play a guiding role in English teaching. Furthermore, it makes the assessment of learning an integral part of teaching through an open-minded and multi-cultural education system. Lastly, it identifies new English learning resources and enriches existing resources, thus ensuring revitalized practices in language teaching.

Under the title of ‘内容标准 - content criteria’ (p. 15), the document makes reference to the issue of ‘情感态度’(emotional attitude). This reference is consistent with much that is discussed in appreciative pedagogy.

‘情感态度指兴趣，动机，自信，意志和合作精神等影响学生学习过程和学识和国际视野。保持积极的学习态度是英语学习成功的关键。在高中
阶段，建立较强的自信心，形成克服困难的意志，乐于与他人合作，养成和谐与健康的国际视野。'

Translation:

Emotional attitudes refer to the interest, motivation, confidence, desire, cooperation and attitudes that help students constitute their learning. The key to success in English learning is sustaining a positive learning attitude. In this primary stage of English acquisition, we need to foster confidence, cultivate the character of being indomitable and cooperative. Plus, develop a healthy and harmonious international outlook.

There are other parts of the document that deal with concepts consistent with ‘appreciative inquiry’. In the table that follows I include extracts from the curriculum document (pp. 2-3) along with an English translation of the extract. Subsequently, I relate these extracts to appreciative pedagogy themes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Main document contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Emphasize the importance of constructing a platform for development | 中文: 高中英语课程应根据高中生的认知特点和学习发展需要,在进一步发展学生基本语言运用能力的同时,着重提高学生用英语获取信息,处理信息、分析和解决问题的能力;逐步培养学生用英语进行思维和表达能力;为学生进一步学习和发展创造必要的条件。  
(Translation) The English courses are designed to follow students' cognitive learning habits and satisfy their needs. On the basis of developing students' basic language application skills, we need to enhance students' ability to acquire process, analyze and solve problems. It is intended to progressively mould students' thinking and the expressive skills that are fundamental to further study and improvement. |
| 2. Provide multiple choices to meet individual learning needs | 中文: 高中阶段的英语课程要有利于学生个性和潜能的发  
(Trans:) The courses need to cater for students' development: to ignite their potential and respect the individual's style. |
| 3. Optimize students' learning style and enhance their self-study ability | 中文: 高中英语课程的设计与实施有利于学生优化英语学习方式,使他们通过观察,体验,探索等积极主动的方法,充分发挥自己的学习潜能,形成有效的学习策略,提高自主学习的能力,要有利于学生学会运用多种媒体和信息资源,拓宽学习渠道,形成具有个性的学习方法和风格。  
(Trans.) The intention behind the design of the courses is to make students' learning style optimal and beneficial. Students can adopt positive and active methods of learning, for instance, through observation, experience and exploration. This enables students to use their initiative in study. Their learning style and methods can be |
extended and developed by broadening learning channels through media and other sources that are available.

4. Care about students’ emotions and improve human character (关注学生情感，提高人文素养)

高中英语课程关注学生的情感，使学生在英语学习的过程中，提高独立思考和判断的能力，发展与人沟通和合作的能力，增进跨文化理解和跨文化交际的能力，树立正确的人生观，世界观和价值观，增强社会责任感，提高人文素养。

Teachers are encouraged to pay close attention to students’ emotional development. In the process of students’ English learning, their independent thinking, judgment, communicative and cooperative ability can be enhanced.

The fourth part of this document, which deals with teaching suggestions, contains the following insightful suggestions (pp. 20-22).

‘关注学生的情感，营造轻松，民主，和谐的教学氛围-学生只有对自己，对英语，对英语学习以及英语文化有积极的情感，才能保持英语学习的动力并取得成绩。消极的情感不仅会影响学生英语学习的效果，而且会影响学生的全面发展和长远发展 . . . . . . 因此，在高中英语教学中教师特别关注学生的情感，对学生平等相待，尊重每个学生，尤其要关注性格内向或学习有困难的学生，积极鼓励他们在学习中努力尝试。教师要创设各种合作学习的活动，促进学生相互学习，互相帮助，体验集体荣誉感和成就感，发展合作精神，建立融洽的师生交流渠道，努力营造宽松、民主、和谐的教学氛围。’

(Trans.) Pay attention to students’ emotions and create a relaxed, fair and harmonious teaching atmosphere. Only when students can keep a positive attitude towards English, English study and English culture can they sustain their learning interest and realize satisfactory achievement. Negative feelings will not only exert adverse influence on students’ studies, but they will also impede their all-round and long-term development . . . Therefore, teachers of English in high school should particularly attend to students’ emotions and feelings, treat students fairly and respect each one of them. As to those students who are introverted and who need help, teachers should encourage them to be brave and to try hard in their study. Teachers need to arrange all kinds of learning activities to promote students’ mutual study and achievement. The teacher ought to help them cultivate a sense of unity and achievement and

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cooperative ability. The teacher should aim to create a harmonious teacher-student relationship and strive to keep a fair, relaxed and friendly teaching and learning environment.

教师要转变在教学中的角色，不应仅仅只是知识的传授者，还应成为学生学习的促进者、指导者、组织者、帮助者、参与者和合作者。教室要具备开发课程资源的能力，创造性地完成教学任务。

Teachers need to modify their role in teaching. They should not only be the knowledge transmitter but also the learning facilitator, organizer, participant and cooperator. Teachers should have the ability to develop teaching resources and accomplish each task creatively. (Source: pp. 37-39).

Under the category of suggestions for assessment for learning, I found the following ideas that reflect an appreciative philosophy:

注重形成性评价对学生发展的作用通过评价使学生在英语学习过程中不断体验进步与成功，认识自我，建立自信，调整学习策略，促进学生综合语言运用能力的全面发展。激励学生学习，帮助学生及时而有效地调整自己的学习过程，使学生获得成就感，增强自信，培养合作精神。教师要根据评价结果与学生进行不同形式的交流，充分肯定学生的进步，鼓励学生自我反思和自我提高。(Source: pp. 37-39)

We need to acknowledge the importance of assessment in terms of students' learning development. With effective assessment, students can experience progress and achievement in English-study processes. This can help students understand themselves, develop personal confidence, adjust their learning strategies and realize comprehensive development in the application of language skills. Teachers need to inspire students to work hard. They need to offer timely help to students and effectively process their own learning, providing them with a sense of achievement, strengthened confidence and cooperative learning habits. Moreover, teachers need to affirm students’ progress in different ways, including encouraging them to develop self-reflective skills.

4.4.3 Discussion

The new syllabus emphasizes the importance of cultivating a sense of respect and understanding towards students. It encourages teachers to develop students’ good
character, for instance a sense of respect and understanding. The advocacy of ‘情感态度’– qíng gǎn tài dù (emotional attitude) suggests that there is a recognized practice whereby teachers can rouse students’ learning interests through the way they approach students’ emotions.

Teachers are therefore encouraged to learn to make full use of students’ emotional attachment to cultivate students’ learning interest, enhance their learning motivation, modify their learning attitudes and foster confidence in learning.

To cultivate students’ positive emotional attitudes, the document encourages teachers to do the following:

a. Ignite students’ learning motivation. In English teaching, teachers need to stimulate students’ internal motivation.

b. Create a harmonious teaching and learning relationship. This helps teachers appreciate students’ emotional attitudes.

Accordingly, teachers are advised to develop multiple approaches to meet individual learning needs, optimize students’ learning style, enhance their study ability and care about students’ emotions and individuality.

Generally speaking, this part of the document points to the importance of paying attention to students’ positive emotional development. This will help ignite students’ learning potential, sustain their learning interests and foster confidence in their learning.

Although this syllabus does not directly name the concept ‘appreciation’, it is pointed to in various ways. For instance, it suggests teachers need to respect students’ individual learning habits and differences and optimize students’ individual learning styles. This is consistent with an appreciative approach to pedagogy. While the terminology most consistently employed in western discussions of appreciative approaches to learning is not used in this document, many of the values, attitudes and approaches prioritized therein are prioritized also
4.4.4 Western Perspective

4.4.4.1 Introduction

The following three formal documents have been reviewed to study the position of ‘appreciative pedagogy’ in the language classroom in New South Wales, Australia from the perspective of a Mandarin volunteer teacher researcher (VTR).

1. NSW Board of Studies K-10 Chinese mandatory and elective courses.
2. Melbourne Declaration on educational goals for young Australians.
3. National statements for engaging young Australians with Asia in Australian schools.

Effective research into language teachers’ use of ‘appreciative approaches’ requires an awareness of the general context of Chinese language teaching in NSW. For example, in K-10 Chinese language teaching in NSW there is no standard textbook for teachers to refer to. All teachers are required to follow the guidelines in the syllabus to conduct their teaching (rather than general teaching programs, which are the responsibility of individual schools). This context is discussed further through reference to the above documents.

4.4.4.2 K-10 Chinese Mandatory and elective courses

The Chinese K-10 syllabus works in accordance with the K-10 curriculum framework set by the NSW Board of Studies. This syllabus is designed to ‘enable students to develop communication skills, focus on languages systems and gain insight into the relationship between language and culture, leading to lifelong personal educational and vocational benefits’ (p. 11) This syllabus takes into account the diverse needs of all students. It identifies essential knowledge,
understanding, skills, values and attitudes. It enunciates clear standards of what students are expected to know and be able to do in K-10. Plus, it contains advice to assist teachers to program students' learning.

In this syllabus, I found some statements that necessitate the importance of caring about students’ emotional growth. These are facilitated through a study of listed educational opportunities and a set of broad learning outcomes. But the document does not detail the processes whereby teachers can achieve these goals. On page 5 of the Introduction, reference is made to ‘educational opportunities’. These should:

1. Engage and challenge students to maximize their individual talents and capabilities for lifelong learning.
2. Enable all students to develop positive self-concepts and their capacity to establish and maintain safe, healthy and rewarding lives.
3. Encourage and enable all students to enjoy learning and to be self-motivated, reflective and competent learners.

In the section headed Learning Outcomes the document says that students should ‘work collaboratively to achieve individual and collective goals . . . understand and appreciate the . . . worlds, contexts’.

To be specific: to understand and appreciate the physical, biological and technological world and make responsible and informed decisions in relation to their world; understand and appreciate social, cultural, geographical and historical contexts . . . develop a system of personal values (p. 5).

To me, these claims emphasize the importance of learning to understand and appreciate the context of learning. This delivers an expectation of being able to understand and appreciate. I interpret this as a suggestion that students should be encouraged to gradually develop their own personal values and beliefs (in themselves and in society).

In this document, I can identify mention of three practices that require teachers to reflect students’ learning needs and priorities. These are the need to ‘monitor students’ progress’, ‘respect students with special needs’ and ‘respect students’ differences’.
To those students with special educational needs, there is advice for teachers to develop specific support for them and to help teachers and parents plan together to ensure that syllabus outcomes and content reflect their learning needs and priorities. This demonstrates a careful consideration of special needs students’ competencies and learning requirements. It suggests also that all students are respected.

Within the section on accessing life skills, outcomes and content in Years 7-10, it is mentioned that ‘clear time frames and strategies to monitor progress, relevant to the age of the student, need to be identified. Collaborative plans should be made for future needs’ (p. 7). This also helps teachers to reflect upon and develop a need-based assessment system for students. It encourages teachers to develop opportunities to help students demonstrate their achievement.

In Chinese language classes, teachers are confronted with a diverse range of learners, from those with little or no experience of the language to fluent language speakers. Teachers are required to cater for these diverse needs, but how can they achieve this?

The syllabus encourages language teachers to seek out examples of best practice and to apply contemporary pedagogical approaches (without detailing what those approaches might be). This investigation of appreciative approaches to pedagogy is of this kind.

It is clear that it is not the function of the NSW Board of Studies K-10 syllabus to describe in specific terms how teachers should enact their pedagogy. Such documents have a content and outcomes focus and place less emphasis upon process. Nevertheless, such documents can limit or expand opportunities for teachers to develop and enact various approaches to pedagogy.

The documents from Zheijiang province and NSW are different in structure and content but both are referred to for their importance as framing devices for the more significant aspect of this study, which is the study of the practice of a set of individual language teachers, in China and Australia. The analysis above is intended to point to areas within these documents that facilitate opportunities for
appreciative approaches.

The next two documents discussed are broad discussion papers, drawn from larger Australian studies of teaching and learning, that look to general attitudes and understandings associated with learning, rather than content and outcomes.

4.4.4.3 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians

In this document, clear goals are identified whereby all young Australians can become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. To be specific, successful learners are motivated to reach their full potential; have a sense of optimism about their lives and future; be enterprising, show initiative, use their creative abilities and develop personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, empathy and respect for others.

These clear goals require teachers to adopt effective strategies to achieve this. Teachers ought to hold high expectations for students’ achievements and try to promote a culture of excellence in schools that helps explore and build on students’ gifts and talents. An appreciative approach is implied here. The Melbourne Declaration (2008) says that:

Excellent teachers have the capacity to transform the lives of students and to inspire and nurture their development . . . school principals and other school leaders play a critical role in supporting and fostering quality teaching through coaching and mentoring teachers to find the best way to facilitate learning and by promoting a culture of high expectations in schools. (p. ix)

Appreciative pedagogy has all these priorities and it depends on the practices of individual teachers in appreciative systems to achieve this.

4.4.4.4 National statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools

This is a national policy statement that supports the ‘Adelaide Declaration on National goals for schooling in the Twenty-First Century’. This document discusses
relationships with Asia through education, making it especially relevant to this study.

In the section on ‘Harmonious Australia’, it is mentioned that ‘Australian society is strongly committed to ‘promoting diversity, understanding and tolerance in all areas of Endeavour’. It encourages all citizens to build on mutual respect, understanding, and empathy for each other. Clearly, a harmonious atmosphere within a diverse culture requires a sense of ‘appreciation’.

In the section on ‘Creative Australia’, there is a proposition that ‘an understanding and appreciation of the traditional and contemporary cultures of Asia is playing an important role in the continual evolution of Australian cultural life’. The importance of ‘appreciation and understanding’ is noted here.

The following is also worth mentioning: ‘in the early years of schooling, learning experiences about Asia should be designed to stimulate interest, awareness and psychological comfort with cultural contrasts and comparisons’. This will lay the foundations for students to accept a new culture through appropriate learning experiences. This brief statement opens grounds for a much more discussion. It is one that recognizes appreciation as a pre-condition for effective language learning and cultural understanding. It is a discussion also suggested by Dr Lesley Harborn in an untitled presentation at the University of Sydney (April 3, 2009).

Harborn argued that in language teaching, we should think deeply about intercultural status. Intercultural language learning is not simply a new method of ‘embedding’ language. Teachers need to be aware of both the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of learners. They should always be ready to go on the journey of learning with students and to understand that the change in understanding of behaviour leads also to a change that is not always comfortable and students needs time adapting, accepting and appreciating their learning.

The Adelaide Declaration has links to other national priorities. For instance, it supports a range of other priorities endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).
Under the title of ‘Civics and citizenship education’, the Adelaide Declaration (2001) claims that ‘the key to civic harmony will be respecting and valuing diversity’. This further emphasizes the importance of cultivating an ‘appreciative-mindset’ (p. 16).

The document argues that programs of professional learning need to incorporate three aspects: the practical implementation of new approaches; assistance with the adoption of new teaching and learning approaches and the capacity of teachers to develop positive and mutually beneficial relationships.

New learning will be about creating a kind of person better adapted to the kind of world we live in now and the world of the near future. (Adelaide Declaration, 2001, p. 18).

This acknowledges the great importance of appropriate education. New learning will be about creating a kind of person more than the mastery of a subject. There are many pathways to this goal. An appreciative approach to pedagogy is one way. Better application of this strategy would exert transformative influences upon both teachers and students. The comment that teachers shall give priority to developing the skills to achieve mutual relationships with the families of their students is very relevant also. Appreciative inquiry can generate an understanding of the role of positive connections with other people in the development of sound and sustainable communities.

4.4.4.5 Quality Teaching Language Program

This document was developed by Dr James Ladwig and Professor Jennifer Gore from the University of Newcastle in consultation with and on behalf of the NSW Department of Education and Training. It is a discussion paper that will be used as a reference point to focus attention on and provide consistent messages about pedagogy across schools and within the department. It constructs a model which aims to improve teaching practice and hence student learning outcomes. Teachers can also use the model as a self-reflective tool to help them to understand, analyse
and focus their own teaching practices for improved student learning.

Ladwig and Gore (2009) argue that quality teaching involves three dimensions of pedagogy: intellectual quality, quality learning environment and significance. The focus on the ‘quality learning environment’ relates most directly to appreciative approaches, even if the term ‘appreciation’ is not directly used.

Quality learning environment refers to ‘pedagogy that creates classrooms where students and teachers work productively in an environment clearly focused on learning. Such pedagogy sets high and explicit expectations and develops positive relationships between teachers and students and among students’.

**Table 4.0.3 Quality Learning Environment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explicit quality criteria</th>
<th>Students will be notified of the quality of work expected. They will be able to check their work against a predetermined set of criteria.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>A variety of teaching strategies will involve students in the course, arousing their curiosity and sustaining their interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Students will be encouraged to do their best and be rewarded for risk-taking in their learning. Activities targeting high order thinking provide a serious intellectual challenge to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>The classroom is a place of mutual respect and each student is positively supported in their learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ self-regulation</td>
<td>Students will be expected to take responsibility for their own learning and behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student direction</td>
<td>Students will be given some opportunity to choose how they want to complete a task, all types of task they will complete and the time required to complete them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explicit quality criteria not only require teachers to designate what students are to do to complete a task but also clarify for all students what the teacher expects, in terms of the completion of tasks. These criteria are used by teachers to assess students’ work and to provide feedback regarding students’ development. This helps contribute to teachers’ specific appreciation of students’ development.
Engagement can be identified when students display sustained interest and attentiveness, show enthusiasm for the work, take the initiative to raise questions or take the work seriously. This engagement can be achieved by teachers’ appreciative practices. This requires teachers to show appreciation for and understanding of individual students’ learning habits. For instance, students’ behaviour which may typically be considered evidence of low engagement (e.g. a student gazing out the window or a student doodling on a page) may be known by the teacher to demonstrate student’s engagement. Therefore, teachers who are familiar with individual students may be the best judges of student engagement.

It is suggested that teachers challenge students and build success by appropriately structuring learning, e.g. scaffolding for students who need more support, and designing open-ended tasks that enable a range of responses or a variety of pathways. This shows appreciation of individual students’ success; plus, they provide teachers with more ways to identify students’ achievement.

High expectations: teachers who view intelligence as dynamic and fluid rather than static and unchanging will maintain high expectations of students. They will encourage students to aim high rather than to merely get by. Mckown’s (2008) research has shown that teacher’ expectations for students tend to be self-fulfilling. It advises teachers to always treat students as enthusiastic learners. It is suggested that teachers shall identify the prior learning of students and monitor their progress in order to support the development of appropriately challenging work for all students. In this way, teachers can help students achieve success and then guide this in an appropriate direction. This is also a goal of appreciative pedagogy.

Social support in a language classroom context mainly involves the construction of a supportive learning environment for students. Classrooms high in social support are characterized by comments and actions that encourage and value effort, participation and the expression of personal views in the pursuit of learning. Teachers have the responsibility for setting the tone in the classroom by creating and maintaining a mutually respectful environment. It is suggested teachers model language and behaviour that demonstrate respect for others’ ideas, opinions and work, and that use strategies and structures that allow students to contribute and
collaborate; for instance, developing class rules in a collaborative fashion. What is important is to design flexible learning tasks that will allow all students to experience success and celebrate success in appropriate ways. This concurs with the elements within appreciative pedagogy that encourage teachers to celebrate, trust in and deliberately seek out students’ experiences of success, moments of high energy and great pride. It is arguable that learning will be more fruitful in an atmosphere that is both supportive of students and supportive of their learning.

4.5 APPRECIATIVE FORMAT: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS—4-D CYCLE

This 4-D cycle integrates the ‘appreciating’ and ‘inquiry’ process. The 4-D cycle can be understood more vividly by using these analogies (see Figure 4.6).

Image of the binoculars: these symbolize the action of amplifying. Focusing on strengths provides the energy and sense of wonder to discover—this is the Discovery stage.

Image of the dandelion: this symbolizes the action of exploring. The dandelion flies in the direction the wind blows. We have considerable freedom here to imagine considerable alternatives. The direction we choose or the way we think about this affects the direction of the dandelion—this is the Dream stage.
Image of tools (time, barometer): This symbolizes the action of planning—this is the design stage. It is a stage of constant planning and preparing for action. For instance, in the classroom, the teachers constantly revise their lesson plans to take into account both classes' and students' individual characters and needs.

Image of seeds: this symbolizes the beginning of a new cycle. If we sow good things, we will receive good things! In this stage, we need to plant positive seeds of appreciation in order to receive a good harvest! The destiny stage suggests that which is delivered through transformative action and understanding.

4.5.1 Introduction

In this section, the interview analysis is structured around the 4-D cycle: discovery, dream, design and destiny.

In the discovery stage, I focus on teachers’ narratives about their ‘unforgettable’ teaching experiences. In the dream stage, I introduce teachers’ understanding of and views about their role as a teacher. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the design stage. In this stage, teachers’ approaches to pedagogy in the language classroom are sought out and discussed. Lots of themes and sub-themes are identified and discussed in this section. The last stage is the destiny stage. Compared with other stages, this is the most difficult one to discuss, in relation to this project. Feedback in response to destiny was not invited specifically but some insights did emerge.

Importantly, this process of extended inquiry and analysis encouraged me to think deeply my own personal learning while teaching in schools in Australia and how this too might be informed or understood better through reference to the 4-D cycle. A discussion centred on this follows in Chapter 5.

4.5.2 Discovery stage

Discover: ‘what gives life?’ Appreciating the best of what is.

I interpret this stage as the process of identifying the best of a teacher’s experience: the most unforgettable, positive and joyful experiences. The discovery process, in
Cooperrider & Srivastva’s analysis, is a source of positive stories. Carter (2006, p. 55) points out that ‘there is no recipe for the novice AI researcher to follow to “bake the perfect AI cake”’. It requires the researchers’ prompting skills and their immediately appreciative responses to elicit the participants’ stories. Also, the researcher’s respectful and careful listening qualities are required. In the context of this research these stories are about the classroom experience. Here I am highlighting stories that teachers have told me about their most positive experiences in the classroom. In interviews these were invited through the term ‘“unforgettable” experiences’.

Liebling et al. (2001, p. 164) comment that ‘the elicitation of stories helps to build a comprehensive view of each individual’s world “as they recognize and experience it”’. In the section that follows I summarise the response of each teacher with reference to the interview data.

Teacher Sunflower talks about her ‘unforgettable’ experience of teaching Mandarin from two perspectives respectively, within the classroom and outside the classroom on excursions or trips. In terms of the classroom, her ‘unforgettable experience’ emerges from what I see as insightful and inspired applications of language pedagogy. She described three examples very vividly. Firstly, she described the use of games (specifically, playing hikisack and a board race game) She thinks these games really appeal to students because they allow them to practise listening and speaking and at the same time to move. This is especially valued by Sunflower, because it fits the learning style of the sports students she teaches at School A. I explain the games more extensively in the ‘Design’ stage.

Secondly, she talks about excursions. Teacher Sunflower made special mention of an excursion in which she took Year 7 and 8 students to a local shopping centre, and a Two-Dollar shop which is owned by a lady from Shanghai, China. She says that her students enjoy being given the chance to experiment with their learned language in a real-world setting. Furthermore, the excursion meets a syllabus requirement, to build relationships between school and language communities. Teacher Sunflower says:

I ask the students to bring two dollars each and they have to pick one product and then they have to initiate, maintain and conclude a shopping conversation with the shopkeeper. And the students love it because they get to talk to a real Chinese person who is not set up in a contrived way to only give them a
positive response. It is a risk, it is a very big risk taken in a real-life situation. It requires them to try their very best rather than just make a half effort. They have to try their best because they are talking to a native speaker. They are talking to someone they do not know. I am very passionate about language learning being relevant and applicable in real life. There is no point in learning a language if you do not intend trying to use it (3rd June, interview with teacher Sunflower).

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to go on the excursion to the Chinese shopping centre during my work as a VTR. Following the excursion I wrote the following in my journal.

This is my first day at a new school in a new term. I go to the Shopping Paradise-Chinese shop with Year 7 students and this teacher. The students are already excited and are waiting for us in the front office. We had fun exploring this shop and practised bargaining with shopkeeper. And we bought all sorts of things from stationery to Chinese tools. It was a fun day out and a good chance to practise language and experience a bit of Chinese culture. (3rd Aug 2009)

Teacher Sunflower said,
I am always encouraging my students in class to learn to how to greet someone in Chinese and also to try to ask ‘how are you’? and some other basic questions. I will say they should talk with someone on a train because lots of them travel by a train and I say remember your manners and say ‘Nin hao’ not ‘Ni hao’. I coach them on how to have a basic conversation with a Chinese person. I tell my students about my experiences of travelling and studying in China and I hope this promotes their interest in possibly following the same footsteps. (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3 2009)

Teacher Sunflower’s discussion of her ‘unforgettable teaching experiences’ are around her appreciation of making Chinese language relevant to students’ lives and letting them experience and practice this in an authentic context.

Teacher Cedar

Teacher Cedar started by talking to me about the development of his teaching processes. He really appreciated the opportunity to be appointed as a teacher in a Saturday language school. This provided him with training opportunities, resources and support. Another thing that proved very useful for his early teaching was being a member of the Chinese Teachers’ Association. Teacher Cedar said the early stage of his teaching was a process of getting to know colleagues, accumulating materials and
settling into teaching and learning. He said:

When teachers start teaching, you need probably three or four drawers of things. You just do not know what the best is, what is going to work in your class for the students so you need lots of things (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009).

It took him almost three years to find his strength in teaching. He made the following point when he talked about his enjoyment of teaching:

The best enjoyment, the pure enjoyment of teaching is, I suppose if you want to do a job well, you have to like it. From the third, fourth year onwards, I started to fully enjoy my work. This is not to say before that I was not enjoying it before, I was enjoying it but I was too busy to have the time to taste the enjoyment. The best enjoyment for me is when I have something new that can be used in classroom and I can see the difference (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009).

Teacher Cedar appreciates the learning process associated with being a professional teacher. He enjoys the ongoing accumulation of experience.

Teacher Rose

This teacher is very enthusiastic. When I asked her to describe her enjoyment of teaching, her first response was that there was too much to talk about. Then she said that she enjoys teaching in different ways. The following is her detailed response to a question about her excitement and satisfaction in teaching.

If I go to a classroom with students who I don’t know, I am particularly challenged to manage the class and have a good lesson with them, a lesson in which they actually learn something. They might actually learn 10 words, or with another class learn 50 words or more. But the fact is that they remained in their seat, they engaged with me, they did their activities, whether it is repeating the words or writing a few things down or trying to do a worksheet. I feel really happy because I feel I have helped them concentrate for 50 minutes rather than for 3.

At the same time, when I was teaching Year 12 and at the end of HSC, the end of their school, they finished, and they told me they loved the subject and they came back to say ‘I am going to do French in university Miss.’ Oh, how exciting! That has probably happened three times in my life. I do not teach Year 12 every year but I know three kids who have done languages, I think, well, that is really good. Another came to say ‘Miss I can not wait to go on with German’. You know, if you can help them do things beyond the world, beyond the suburbs they are living in, that is really very rewarding. (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009).
When asked about one ‘unforgettable experience’, teacher Rose’s initial response was that it is too hard to pick out a single one. I think this is probably due to her rich teaching experience and that there are too many experiences to talk about. She seems to be to be a teacher who encourages students’ to be positive all the time.

Teacher Lavender

Before this teacher talked about her ‘unforgettable experience’, she acknowledged the difficult process of starting teaching. She said she had to learn everything from the beginning. But since she has become used to this, everything is now easier. She says:

I found I have learnt much so far in these two years, just standing in front of the thirty students who do not want to listen and making them to listen is an experience on its own and not just to make them listen but to teach them something as well has been absolutely great. At the beginning, it did not work but now it is really good (teacher Lavender, personal communication, June 23 2009).

Great enjoyment comes to this teacher when she sees students trying hard. And the best experience for her is when she notices students taking her assessment seriously. The students’ gratitude and appreciation of her is an impetus for her work. She appreciates students’ active participation. She says that:

When students say ‘thank you,’ that is really a big deal and when you see them the next lesson and you just quickly revise what we have covered then you see they still, they capture it, this is the best teaching. That is actually the best experience. It means that they were there last lesson, they were actively participating and they understand it or if you have students asking extra questions, it is always great. . . . This enjoyment shows probably half a year later, when you actually see how much you have taught them and it is a little thing when you see them come really, really early to your class just after the bell goes. Some of the students, they might not tell you they love your subject, your class, but they will be always be on time, it says a lot. You do not have to be told that, you can feel that. You can see that by their actions (teacher Lavender, personal communication, June 23 2009).

I understand this teacher’s appreciation for her students’ gratitude to her, as I have
encountered it during my own work in her school. The date of the interview with this teacher was also this teacher’s birthday and I did not realize it until I found some gifts and letters on her work desk. No wonder I had seen so many students asking ‘Is Miss . . . here now?’ Later, she told me that she did not have a class with students that day but they still took the time to come to the staff room to say ‘happy birthday’. This meant a lot to her. She also showed me the students’ exquisite self-made birthday card. I see her as a young teacher with a strongly appreciative approach, which is rewarded with strong student appreciation.

Teacher Jacaranda

I asked this teacher to recall a time when she felt most proud and satisfied in the classroom. She says she is very proud when she can help students (refugees in particular, there are a growing number at her school) realize their potential and their abilities. It does not matter whether they can learn to speak the language fluently or not. What really matters to her is the challenge of helping them realize their abilities. Jacaranda argues that sometimes this proud experience can be very basic:

One is: When one of the students all of a sudden says ‘yes, I understand it. I understand it, Miss’. Another is: When you have year 12 students who have finally had their exams and you see their good results. Those are very proud moments because you have done the best that you can, so that is just one thing. I am proud when I have set students a task, for example, maybe a presentation in front of their class, and they do a really good job (teacher Jacaranda, personal communication, July 27 2009).

This teacher tries to stimulate students to learn cooperatively and positively. She tries to impart social skills to her students as well as deliver knowledge. The following is what she said in response to the question, ‘what does she value most in the classroom?’

I always tell them how lucky we are that we have so many people from all different countries in one classroom. I think it is wonderful. It is as if the entire world is learning together. This is a way of appreciating everyone else’s culture. It is a good way to try to stimulate a bit of tolerance for everyone’s different religion or whatever. It is more than just teaching the language, it is teaching a lot of social skills. (teacher Jacaranda, personal communication, July 27 2009)
When asked to describe one ‘unforgettable experience’, she actually shared two specific ones with me.

Sometimes, you will have students in your class and they tell you ‘I do not understand why I have to do this because I will never go to France or Germany’ and I will say ‘Yes, you will!’ and you know, three or five years later, there will be the knock on the door and there will be the student and they will say ‘Hi, Miss, guess where I have been’ and they have been to France or Germany. That is a really positive experience to me. Very exciting! When I see that it is very exciting! And that does happen a lot here. I have kids who have gone and worked in countries overseas and learned the language. We had students a couple of years ago who did very well with French in HSC and who did eventually decided to go to university to study French (teacher Jacaranda, personal communication, July 27 2009).

This teacher finds it exciting to inspire students to learn through encouragement. She is very approachable and able to handle relationships with a variety of sorts of students very well. The following is an extract from my journal:

In Period 4 teacher Jacaranda’s class, I found one student (A) was not naughty at this time. She was involved in talking with the teacher and seemed to have great fun. Before, she was fed up with school. The teacher was patient with her. It is amazing that in today’s class, Student A would ask questions related to the course and ask for paper to take notes. This time, to me, she was lovely and my initial image of her as naughty, lazy and unfriendly has gone. After class, I told this teacher about my findings. She said that student A’s family situation is bad. Her parents have been divorced and nobody really cares about her. It is miserable. So the teacher is especially tolerant with her as she understands that in school, she needs teachers and friends who care, otherwise, there is no place that gives her a sense of belonging. (November, 2009)

This teacher values students’ appreciation of her. In her office, I saw many students’ thank you cards and letters.

Two Chinese teachers of English: Teacher Pine and Teacher Bamboo

As to the two Chinese teachers, I conducted email interviews with them. The following are their responses to the invitation to write down an ‘unforgettable experience’.

Teacher Pine: When asked to share one of his ‘unforgettable teaching experiences’
with me in the email, Chinese teacher Pine responded by commenting on my work as a student.

Your own example proves that interest and perseverance are what it takes to succeed. You kept asking me so many questions; sometimes I was at my wits’ end. But I finally managed them well due to my responsibility to you and my career. Thus, I found your joy of learning through solving problem after problem. This kept you in high spirits and now you have succeeded (1st June 2009, email interview with Chinese teacher Pine).

This teacher was my high school English teacher. He helped to develop my interest in the English language. At the time he taught me, almost every day, after class, I would ask him to help solve some English difficulties. Gradually, I got into the habit of doing probing English exercises. I really liked to have English discussions with this teacher. Each time we spoke I would receive a satisfying answer and I was really grateful for his patience and appreciation of my efforts.

Teacher Bamboo told the following story in his email response to my invitation to him to describe an ‘unforgettable teaching experience’.

One of the most unforgettable experiences in my teaching has been aroused by the topic of food safety in China. The students gave me a lot of examples of food that is poisoned because businessmen expect it will lead to get higher profit (such as the infant milk powder with melamine). The students discussed the harm of many chemical additives and their expectations on food safety. This impressed me deeply. (15th June 2009, email interview with teacher Bamboo)

This teacher was my thesis supervisor in Zhejiang Wanli University for my Undergraduate Degree. He is a modest and tolerant teacher. This teacher’s example demonstrates his great openness to students’ ideas. He encourages students to open their horizons and look beyond the immediate curriculum into the society in which they will be applying their learning in the future.

4.5.3 Dream Stage

Dream: ‘what might be?’ (What is the world calling for?) Envision what might be?

Boyd et al. (2007, p. 1029) say: ‘The dream phase alters the focus of inquiry from
discovering existent strengths to a consideration of how these strengths can be leveraged’. In the ‘dream’ section I present teachers’ responses to the invitation to look beyond their immediate experience to consider the possibilities of education. This is the potential that teachers ‘dream’ (imagine, value, appreciate) in teaching, for themselves, for students and for society in general. Inevitably, this has an effect upon how they approach teaching and how they construct relationships with students day by day. One might imagine, the greater the capacity of a teacher to ‘dream’ a strong, positive and coherent future through education, the greater their capacity to appreciate qualities in their students that will contribute to this outcome.

‘According to your understanding, which of your personal qualities have contributed to those “unforgettable experiences” or enjoyment and satisfaction in teaching’ as mentioned in the ‘discovery’ stage? This question calls up personal relationships to sustaining educational experiences. These suggest the potential of education. Beyond the formal questions, further relevant information has been drawn from improvised questions.

Teacher Sunflower argues that a teacher’s love, passion and enthusiasm are extremely important in teaching. She values the ‘love’ of what she is doing and the ability to let students feel that enjoyment through her showing her appreciation of them. Most particularly, she seeks to find ways to give low-ability students more confidence. She told me that through doing this she ensures that students with low ability are still valued in the classroom.

In the interview, she told me ‘a teacher’s passion and enthusiasm will influence students’ learning’, and she told me a story to illustrate this idea (N.B.: She teaches both English and Mandarin in that school).

Recently, I had a student teacher, teaching my Year 9 English class. And her passion was not for English. She had a very difficult time in the class although all the class are all very well-behaved. They are a very intelligent class. And a large part of the reason for her having difficulties was that she was not interested in the content. And the students immediately sensed her lack of interest and their interest turned off. My class did not like the teacher. It was a completely negative experience for them. Largely it was because she did not like the topic herself and she was not passionate at all. It is really sad.
This teacher ‘dreams’ the absolute importance of passion and enthusiasm to drive students’ learning. The practicum teacher’s lack of interest and passion led to a negative teaching experience for the class. In August 2009 I had several chances to sit in this teacher’s English class with the same group of students mentioned above. One girl who sat beside me told me that the students had a party to celebrate the practicum teacher’s departure. Their learning morale came back with their regular teacher’s return. Therefore, it is arguable that a teacher’s attitude—this could also be talked of as their dream for learning—plays a key role in engaging students with their study.

Teacher Sunflower also emphasizes the importance of being creative and using humour in teaching. She insists that creative and humorous teaching comes from a good understanding of the topic and a willingness to use creative associations in teaching in language classroom. This understanding is a consequence of a dream of what might be (in appreciative terms). For example she would use funny stories to teach Chinese characters or to teach pronunciation with Chinese radicals and English idioms. She appreciates that her sense of humour helps her to maintain a good rapport with her students. Only a teacher with a strong imaginative investment in her students’ possibilities can approach her work in this way. This teacher’s creative approach to supporting students’ learning affirms her ‘dream’ of what a good teacher should be. She says:

A good teacher will notice whether students are progressing or not. If there is no progress, [a good teacher] will evaluate [her] teaching and adjust it. And a good teacher notices whether the individual student is having difficulty in particular areas and will seek strategies to either appeal to their learning or support them in a much more in-depth manner. Teachers are people. In Australia we have a saying that teachers are born. They are not made, so I think a good teacher is someone who naturally loves their topic and loves finding a way to help every single person love their topic as well (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3 2009).

All these understandings and beliefs of what a teacher’s role should be help guide her teaching practice.
In the classroom, she values the importance of creating a positive, caring and safe language learning environment. She seeks to achieve this by establishing rules to promote students’ positive behaviour at the beginning of a course and she seeks also to consciously perform as a good role model. This attitude relates to the ‘dream’ of what might be. In her class, she says, she tries to encourage each student to learn their new language without ‘putting others down’. Effectively, she seeks to, and expects others to, use praise to encourage students to ‘have a go’ in class. She insists on the importance of not just making this a rule but trying to support the rule in a way that is sensitive to students’ progress. She adds that, in the classroom, she is willing to make a fool of herself in the front, sometimes even being an ‘absolute clown’ in the classroom. She believes this helps students to feel they are in a comfortable classroom environment.

It is very important as a language teacher to establish a safe environment so that the students feel able to experiment. Sometimes, they can know words very very well but not be willing to try something in a new way, with a new sentence but if you have established an environment with good humour, goodwill and cooperation, then they will be happy to think that ‘oh, maybe I can use this term in a new way and try it out’ and the other students will encourage them. If everybody is encouraging each other, that is a very positive, fruitful environment for language learning (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3 2009).

This is a powerful enactment of a dream of what might be in education. This teacher imagines that students need teachers’ encouragement and protection in trying out new learning. She is trying to construct and maintain a collaborative and safe teaching and learning environment for them. She believes that experiences help teachers to get to know students and pick out their ‘uniqueness’. Therefore, it is arguable that being able to effectively show your ‘appreciation’ of students also requires growing teaching experience, growing recognition of differences between students and a rich sense of students’ potential.

This teacher is very positive about the strengths she can bring into the classroom. As an Australian-born non-native Chinese speaker involved in Chinese teaching, she can appreciate the difficulty that students like her might encounter. She knows this because it is her experience. This enables her to understand how students might best be able to overcome these difficulties. This enables her to work as a bridge between
different cultural interests. For instance, she can use students’ language learning to assist in the better understanding of their native language: their familiar culture. She can help students to associate something they know with something they are learning in a new way. This works with her vision of making culture as a facilitator, not just for the students but also for the world.

Teacher Cedar: Teacher Cedar thinks he is a cheerful person and always happy and always positive. Central to his idea of ‘what might be’ in education is the importance of upholding a positive outlook in the classroom. He envisages his teaching as not only facilitating students' learning but providing them with more chances to achieve success. He says:

   Everything has two answers, but pick the positive answer. Be hard working, not afraid of having too many things in your head, being organized, prioritize, recognize the importance of the job and get it done gradually. Always look to see if there is any chance to improve, work smarter and do not be afraid of seeing changes. Always think positively and make informed decisions and embrace changes for the better (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009).

He regards himself as affirming and confident and he tries to send this philosophy to those in his classroom. He appreciates teamwork and ‘the grateful spirit’. He says that he always takes advice from other people in his classroom and remembers to pay back the help he has received. And, he says, you do not have to give back to the one who gave to you, just ‘pay it forward’. He says, his vision of ‘pay it forward’ makes teaching special to him. He says, each and every day educators help children learn. They invest energy and time into young children in the hope that someday they too will ‘pay it forward’.

This teacher says that his vision of boy’s and girl’s difference contributes to his way of teaching. He incorporates this understanding of students and their learning styles

1 ‘Pay it forward’: In the movie Pay it Forward, a middle school social studies teacher asks his students to come up with a plan for improving the world. Twelve-year-old Trevor McKinney takes the assignment to heart. He devises a scheme whereby he will do something totally selfless and helpful for three other people. Instead of expecting the recipients to pay him back, Trevor asks each one to ‘pay it forward’ (that is, do likewise for three other individuals.) The movie is touching and this teacher’s talking made me think teachers are so special. They ‘pay it forward’.
in considering how to deliver his teaching. During the interview I asked teacher Cedar to talk more about what he means by the issue of ‘difference between boys and girls’ and the need to ‘deliver promise to students’ (N.B.: Teacher Cedar works in an all girls’ school).

Girls like to have more discussion, they like to talk, they like to share and girls are very sensitive in many ways to what a teacher says. Boys might jump up; they can be angry about what you said then forget it tomorrow. Whether students are boys or girls makes a huge difference when you set up your lesson plans, when you decide what are going to be the learning tools you are going to use a lesson plan designed for boys can not be used without amendment in a girl’s school (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009).

This teacher, like teacher Sunflower, values the importance of being a good role model for students. He says, ‘being a role model’ will not only enable you to pass on your attitudes to the students but will have an impact on their life, support their learning process, help them to change for the better. He insists on ‘delivering his promise’ to students with a vision of this and its far-reaching influence upon students’ lives. He imagines that the way of delivering the promise to students helps construct trusting and positive relationships between students and teachers and also within society. He says:

Now to deliver your promise, well, I suppose you need to deliver your promise to anyone. It is not only for teachers to deliver to students. You need to do it with your friends; you need to do it with your kids even if they are two or four years old. (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009, President of Chinese Teachers’ Association)

This teacher argues that all educators should have their own understanding of what education is and what education should be and all of them should have a philosophy to work through.

Education is the process of helping someone to find out his or her own interest and ability. I don’t think I am a person knowing many things. My job [in the classroom] is to facilitate students’ learning. If they only know what I know, I am aiming too low. I tell my students, all students, never never think if you are at my stage, you will be fine. You should aim much much higher. I probably know a little bit more in the area of how to learn. That is it. Students’ confidence is very very important. In fact, everyone’s confidence is important.
It is important in the sense that confidence needs a purposeful process to build it up and protect it (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009).

He sees the teacher’s role as being a ‘facilitator of discovery’. I interpret much of what he seeks to teach as ‘emotional literacy’.

Teacher Cedar places importance on the need to create a pleasant, collaborative and positive learning environment. He imagines that this environment can be informed physically and psychologically. Physically, he likes to display students’ work samples around the class. Psychologically, he likes to explore how to best understand and extend ‘classroom culture’. He says more opportunities need to be made available to students to perform better in a positive and collaborative environment. He dreams of activating students’ willingness to collaborate and share ideas. He says this is a vital skill in modern society. In class, he encourages students to talk about their understandings and to share their ideas with him. He finds that ‘when students are learning through listening to peers, through struggling with their minds something that is useful and interesting occurs. They will not forget that kind of difficult learning experience.’

He appreciates the value of passing on positive messages to students and getting everyone in the class to understand at the beginning of the term, that: ‘in this class, there is no loser. Everyone is either the winner or the learner’ (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009).

He argues that if you can demonstrate that you care, there is a good chance that students will approach you, they will ask you questions. This means they will have a better chance to learn from you. If they know that you have a passion for what you do and you are pretty good at what you are doing, there is an even better chance for them to get to know you and your subject. He says that building to this level takes time and energy but it is definitely worthwhile in the long run.

Teacher Rose

Teacher Rose sees herself as assertive, confident, energetic, optimistic and happy (in
my experience, she always wears a pleasant expression on her face). She thinks her strong personality enables her to like people, to like talking, to remain energetic all day. She appreciates students’ vitality and the opportunity to interact with young people. She envisions teaching as a ‘big act’. She says, in real life, she is not a very patient person but within the classroom she can remain patient with students all the time. She thinks this is due to her genuine love for young people and her dream of what might be. She encourages students to remain calm, polite and confident in the classroom. These are skills that she imagines students will need all through life. This teacher carries a vision that education is changing and progressing all the time. She says education should not only focus on cognition but also on emotional literacy. She is looking forward to seeing her students grow physically, emotionally and intellectually.

She envisages the learning atmosphere in the language classroom as positive, respectful, friendly and warm. She encourages students to be polite and self-disciplined. She tries to encourage them also to take risks. She values the notion that ‘respect is earned’. Everyone in society needs to learn to earn the respect of others, she says. The key to teaching is to show respect to students. She says this because she believes many students have not been taught effective manners at home. She says it is her responsibility to help students to think positively and feel good about themselves and she believes this will have a positive impact on students’ lives. She affirms the importance of showing ‘appreciation’ to students in class.

I think even if when you just say ‘that sounds really good’, that sort of minimal comment can have a really positive affect. They say one negative comment negates or delays seven positives. Now you do not often say seven positive things to a kid in a class in a lesson, do you? So if you said one negative thing, you have washed out about three lessons of good stuff. That is good to remember. Also a lot of our kids, they come from very negative homes. For some, the only time they hear pleasant things is from you [the teacher].

(teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009)

This teacher imagines that upholding a positive philosophy is important to students. It can stimulate students to look and move beyond their limitations. She insists on being positive to them because of a belief that students can easily sense teachers’ attitudes to them. If you are positive, they will rise up to meet your expectations.
Looking beyond this ‘positive philosophy’, I invited her to talk about her understanding of ‘appreciative pedagogy’. Although she had never heard this term before she was still willing to consider it.

I think that notion of appreciating them as people, appreciating their ability to learn, appreciating maybe some do not have much ability to learn. It is just the core to the structure of teaching. It is pedagogy; it is something most of us all reach awareness of without actually having any label to attach to it. (Teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009)

Teacher Lavender

Teacher Lavender says her humorous, approachable, patient and ‘serious character’ helps contribute to her achievement in teaching. These characteristics contribute to her students’ trust in her. She understands also that humour is welcomed in the classroom as it can help make students comfortable and confident. It is not just a matter of being entertaining. In addition, she values her ‘serious’ character. Being ‘serious’ is she says, ‘you mean what you say’. It is being consistent. (This is similar to teacher Cedar’s idea of delivering on one’s promise). She says that ‘if you love what you do, the students will start loving you’.

Teacher Lavender says teachers’ positive feedback is crucial because feelings are very important in students’ learning. She believes that students can quickly sense teachers’ attitudes and behave accordingly. She insists on the importance of activating students’ willingness to learn because of a belief that learning comes automatically when students want to be in the classroom.

The essence of the classroom-learning atmosphere she is trying to create is respectful and comfortable. Most importantly, she values a classroom environment that allows students feel appreciated and that allows them to make mistakes. From her own learning experience at school, she says ‘if you do not feel safe in the classroom, you do not learn’. For instance, in her classroom, many students are very shy; even if they have the capacity to perform well they sometimes do not have the courage to speak the new language in front of the peers. She says possibilities for students’ better performance are created in a positive learning environment.
During the interview she observed that:

This profession is never the same, every day is different, and every day brings a new experience. Every single teacher learns each single day. [Here] you will experience something you have not experienced before. And I have been here for two years and it does happen almost every day and every week . . . something will come up that you never have done before you have not seen before, you have not heard of before and it keeps your interest going. While in another profession maybe there is a stage you have learnt everything and that is it, there is no moving you know, up or down. Every day is the same. (teacher Lavender, personal communication, June 23 2009)

She appreciates the enjoyment that teaching brings to her. She thinks this is due to the special character of education; it is central to learning, that of her students and herself. This helps her sustain her interest in teaching.

Teacher Jacaranda

Teacher Jacaranda says that her enthusiastic, passionate and confident character enables her to encourage students to do their best. She dreams of bringing her strengths into the classroom to facilitate her teaching. For instance, she is proud of her smile, she thinks this makes students feel content in her class. She also values the possibilities of having experience in the countries of the languages that she teaches. This enables her to impart deeper insights to students.

Students who enter her classroom have different knowledge levels resulting from diverse experiences, backgrounds and cultural values. She says teachers need to care about these individual differences. She makes her classroom visually attractive. She puts up lots of posters, magazines and books about the target country (she teaches Italian, French, Japanese and German). This is one of her ways of promoting positive learning experiences and enthusiasm.

I visited her classroom in November 2008 for the first of many times and the first time I was in the room, my attention was drawn to all those different posters, photos, maps and cultural artifacts. They encouraged me to learn about different cultures and languages. Teacher Jacaranda also sets up classroom rules, which help promote students’ positive behaviour.
When students give an answer, everyone else is listening as well because what that student has to say is important, just like what I have to say is important. You have got to remember whatever you say with the students is important. And that is why they need to listen. For different people, different strategies, different work. You have just got to figure that out. Because every class will be different, every class you teach will be different in your teaching career. You got to try to find, there is no easy answer, and everyone has his or her own way of how to deal with teaching. (teacher Jacaranda, personal communication, July 27 2009)

This teacher explains in detail what she values in her classroom. She emphasizes students need to be good listeners to show respect to other people and to learn from them and beyond the classroom.

Chinese teacher Pine
Chinese teacher Pine in his email response to my question tells me that his loyalty, his enthusiasm for his career and sound professional knowledge help promote his teaching. He is always trying to understand students patiently and help them solve their problems. He said his greatest enjoyment arises when students come to love his subject and love him.

Chinese teacher Bamboo
Chinese teacher Bamboo says that he has high expectations of students’ qualities. He values diligence, high motivation for learning and strong concentration. All these are important to him. When asked about his joy in teaching, he cited a famous Chinese saying:

In China, there is well-known saying about the close teaching and learning relationship between teacher and students. That is, teacher and students can learn from each other day by day. So from my teaching career, I can keep learning new things and defeating new challenges. Another factor that attracts me to a teaching career is the vigour and enthusiasm of this profession. Every day you will meet young faces, which is like fresh air keeping you feeling young and up to date (15th June 2009, email interview with Chinese teacher Bamboo).

This teacher’s deep understanding of the teaching profession keeps him energetic and active. In my experience, he is a modest teacher, always willing to encourage others. In his mind,
Each student is a growing bamboo and in due time they will all become qualified building substance. So I have high expectations of each student. I try to integrate stories of former students into my teaching, hoping that current students can accomplish as much as their predecessors (15th June 2009, email interview with Chinese teacher Bamboo).

When I asked him to talk about his way of encouraging students, he told me that:

Whenever a student has made progress, I won’t spare my appreciation of them. I never abandon any student and I try my best to offer them good opportunities to prove that they are capable, even in a difficult task (15th June 2009, email interview with Chinese teacher Bamboo).

For me, as his former student, I can agree with this. He took the time to help me identify my own strengths and he facilitated my learning with his expertise and gentle encouragement.

Through email, I also asked this teacher to talk about his understanding of ‘appreciative pedagogy’. He told me that though he has not deliberately sought to apply this pedagogical concept in each class, when he reflected on his teaching experience, he felt he did work in this way. He wrote:

Appreciative pedagogy is a very meaningful subject to teachers or researchers. Judging from my experience, I find it effective in teaching practice. I apply this approach unconsciously but so frequently that it has become an essential part in my teaching practice. As a teacher, one inevitably has to require students to finish a task. Undoubtedly students are not simply containers, but affective beings. Encouragement, but not blame or complaints are welcome. Communicating in appreciative ways with students can place a teacher in a good position to initialize his or her teaching activity (15th June 2009, email interview with Chinese teacher Bamboo).

In this ‘dream’ stage, all interviewees have actively talked about their visions of a good learning environment for students and their understanding of what good teaching is. All these insightful understandings of themselves, students, teaching and education, can facilitate the ‘design’ stage, which focuses on teachers’ actions. The teachers’ desire and understanding of their teaching practice helps construct their own teaching practice. What I want to seek out in the following section is the way in which dreams are applied through design. Here, detailed models of effective practice are discussed.
4.5.4 Design Stage

‘What should be’ (the ideal) co-constructing

Carter (2006) argues that the design stage builds on both the discovery and dream stages. It requires participants to make choices, to take the action to design in such a way as to capitalize on strengths and achievements. In this project, the design stage has emerged as the most significant area of discussion. It is the area in which teachers’ practical teaching experience is discussed. For this reason, more attention will be paid to ‘design’ than to the other stages of the AI process. I interpret the design stage as an opportunity to reflect upon actions or performances as a means for the construction of appreciative relationships in a learning environment. Five important themes have emerged from the collected data. Within each theme further subthemes have been identified and they are expanded on in the sections that follow.

The five themes that have emerged are:

1. Engaging with students and developing teaching strategies and programs that sustain students’ interest;
2. Having high expectations of students;
3. Cultivating students’ confidence (in their own abilities);
4. Undertaking classroom management with appreciation;
5. Focusing on appreciative teaching and learning relationships.

1. ‘Engaging with students and developing teaching strategies and programs that sustain students’ interest.’ This theme contains the following subthemes: getting to know the students individually in a class, and developing teaching strategies that sustain students’ interest in classroom learning.

   a. Getting to know the students individually in a class

Of all the interviewees, teacher Cedar was the most expansive on this subject. Teacher Cedar says that there is a need to get to know the students in order to develop useful and interesting teaching strategies for them. ‘You should identify
what your students are interested in.’ What he tries to do is underpin and appreciate issues related to his students’ lives. Teacher Cedar does this by setting up 10-15 minutes at the beginning of each lesson to talk with them and to listen to their stories. He says he first did this while teaching at a Saturday language school. Here he used to teach students with a family interest in Mandarin. Since then, he has begun using this method in his regular classes.

Another good time to get to know students, according to teacher Cedar, is during playground duty. During this time you can have chats with students about their personal experience, rather than formal subject matter. When this kind of relationship is established, the teacher begins to learn more about individual students’ interests. Teacher Cedar believes his teaching and learning processes can help him to guide his students more effectively.

Teacher Sunflower echoes teacher Cedar’s approach. She says there is a need to ‘know the students’ learning abilities well and to adapt teaching content appropriately’. In her high school, she has a group of students who are not academically skilled. For this reason, she sometimes uses strategies more suited to primary students, to teach foreign languages to them. Conversely, when she has been confronted with very intelligent kids in primary school classes, she has sometimes used Year 7 or 8 teaching strategies.

Teacher Rose says that a good understanding of students requires teachers to know something about each student’s family background. She argues that ‘students deserve teachers’ individual understanding’. She emphasizes the importance of understanding and identifying with students and giving them appropriate praise, no matter what their academic skills. Teacher Rose says getting to know students has a mutual benefit: it also allows students to get more familiar with teachers. Mutual respect and mutual understanding contribute to sound pedagogy.

Teacher Lavender says that with effective engagement, ‘teachers and students will strive to meet each other halfway’. For example, Teacher Lavender says when students are doing something ‘not cool’ she will forgive them and encourage them to continue learning, before considering punishment. She emphasizes the need for an
‘appreciative’ approach to classroom discipline. She told a story about one group of students, with whom she had developed a good relationship through careful observation of classroom dynamics. She felt they appreciated her enough to not try to take advantage of this situation. She was very impressed by the way the students took the initiative to behave well and to continue learning on one occasion when she was obviously not feeling well. She felt that was a direct result of her appreciative relationship with these students.

Teacher Jacaranda’s strategy extends to trying to get to know about students’ families. Teacher Jacaranda said that teachers can sometimes ‘contact students’ parents to get to know more about students’, especially if there is a problem. ‘If you take an interest in your students apart from the classroom, they are going to respect you a lot more because they know you appreciate them for who they are “as a person not just as a student” in your class.’ She also points out problems in getting to know students’ families. Each staff member deals with a high number of students and there are ethical constraints around making direct contact with parents.

While the above teachers emphasized the need to find common ground with students, teacher Rose says teachers need also to realize their difference from students. She is particularly aware of this because of her age. She is going to retire soon, while her students are teenagers.

It is tricky as you get older; you are not quite on the same wavelength. They have all these words they use that are very trendy, but we do not use those sorts of words. But I think a little bit of humour goes a long way in the classroom. It is a good thing. If you can (make a joke) and just say ‘turn on your brains’. Someone will laugh. And here we all are, laughing together, I am not laughing at them and they are not laughing at me and I think that is an important thing. (teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009)

I observed this teacher’s work on a number of occasions and I saw her teaching in a way that concurs with the statements above. The following is an excerpt from my reflective journal.

I am interested in the language that teacher uses to interact with students.

‘Oh! Come on! Turn your brain on! I love you best if you can . . . . .’
‘Make a guess! Yeah! Closer! You are on the right track!’
She is very enthusiastic, very encouraging and the students respond well. (21 October 2008)

Teacher Sunflower says if you want a good working relationship with students, you cannot separate your teaching practice from the school culture. Her context is a sports high school. The students are very active. They have what Gardner (1985) would call kinesthetic intelligence. Sunflower thinks carefully about relevant strategies for language learning with this sort of student and tries to incorporate many opportunities for students to learn through moving.

For example, when I am teaching counting one to twenty (in Mandarin), I teach through listening and moving games. I will get them to apply their learning while bouncing a ball, this integrates the rhythm for bouncing a ball with saying the numbers in Chinese. This reinforces the learning. Because the students are sports students, they love playing with balls. Reading games can involve moving as well. There is also a game called ‘board race’ which can be used to revise the students’ reading of Chinese characters. (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3 2009)

I observed this teacher work with a class in this way and wrote the following in my journal entry on 8 August 2008.

Teacher Sunflower starts the unit by teaching vocabulary for directions and the phrases for giving directions and asking directions and they practice that and she gets them to apply that knowledge through using a map. Then she gets them to play a game called ‘light house and sheep’. In that game, they move into an open area in the school canteen, and two students are asked to volunteer, one to be the lighthouse and one to be the sheep. The sheep has a blindfold put on him and the rest of the students are sitting on the floor in between the sheep and the lighthouse. The lighthouse has to give instructions to the sheep on how to move to the other students who are pretending to be rocks. So the sheep have to hear and understand the instructions in Chinese and follow them accurately in order to safely move from one particular room to the other. Students are absorbed in this lesson. After today’s Chinese observation, I decided that if you want to teach Mandarin well, you must understand the kids, and that understanding their culture is the bridge to understanding them. (Reflective journal, 8th August 2008)

It appears that all teachers interviewed for this research agree that getting to know the students is the starting point in showing appreciation. It is fundamental to the process of identifying students’ strengths. These five teachers strive to respect
students’ abilities, interests and differences and to understand each student as a whole person instead of as simply as a member of a class.

b. Develop teaching strategies and programs that sustain all students’ learning interests

Teacher Cedar says there are three areas worthy of consideration here:

First, you have got to maintain what you do is connected to their lives, because by doing so, you make sure their learning is continual, it is not irrelevant, [that is] very, very important. Secondly, you need to cater for students’ individual needs and interests, because interest is always the key. If you maintain that, you will get them into a sustained process [of learning]. Thirdly, you yourself have to be improved. (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009)

This teacher, who in addition to being a language teacher works as president of the Chinese Teachers Association, contributed to the Methodology training that was provided by DET after I arrived in Australia. I made the following journal entry after hearing his presentation.

The speech delivered by this teacher makes great sense to me. He mentioned that when we plan our lessons we should aim to meet the needs of different learning styles. He said we need to focus on the students’ learning process and not just be outcome-oriented. If the students have an effective learning process, the outcome can’t be bad. Getting to know the students is a key process in teaching. There are three aspects we need to notice: the needs and interests of students, students’ prior knowledge, and what has been covered previously. He says that we need to prepare interesting lessons and discuss the cultural significance behind topics. This is what the syllabus talks of as ‘moving between cultures’. He emphasizes the significance of a student’s sense of achievement in class. He says it is fundamental for us to design our lessons to let the students have a sense of achievement. Unconsciously, it can facilitate students’ learning. We should always ask ourselves: have I managed to set different tasks, to help students build students’ learning strengths and to protect their confidence. (1st November 2008 from reflective journals)

To a large extent, the other four teachers concur with these points.

Teacher Sunflower seeks to make her lessons appealing and different and engaging by incorporating Chinese cultural elements into her program and activities, by using creativity in the classroom, by using humour in teaching Chinese characters and by setting up excursions to enable students to have deep learning experiences.
This teacher emphasized the privilege she feels as a result of teaching with so many creative and innovative teachers, especially language teachers, in her teaching career. She said she has adopted ideas from many of them. These have helped her arrive at ideas of her own about creating the best possible classroom experience. She thinks this helps make her teaching appealing to students with different learning styles, different aptitude levels and different attitudes and values.

Teacher Sunflower has a particular interest in learning styles. In the interview, she made a direct reference to Gardner’s work on multiple intelligences and the need to teach to these intelligences. Her understanding of the learning style of her students has encouraged her to incorporate different kinds of activities. She said some classes will be full of learners who learn through moving, some will be full of students who learn visually and some full of students who learn through speaking. While most classes will have a mixture, all will be characterized by a predominance of one sort of learner. Consequently, in each lesson, she tries to vary the learning content to make sure that all learners are able to learn. She holds on to the principle of involving and engaging as many students as possible as she believes that once students are engaged, they will grow passionate about what they are doing.

Teacher Jacaranda also mentioned multiple intelligences in her interview. The principal reason she mentioned them is related to the design of her lessons.

All students are different, some of the students will be interested in a musical approach, some students like to read stuff, some students like to watch stuff, so I think you have got to have varied approaches and to try to read every student that you have got in different ways, to get to know your students really well, you have got to know what makes them tick (teacher Jacaranda, personal communication, July 27, 2009).

Teacher Lavender also emphasized the importance of having varied lessons and exercises in class. She said:

You have to bring a lot to the classroom to show the effectiveness of teaching, sometimes work with auditory skills, and sometimes work with visual skills. [It should be] not just textbook teaching. (teacher Lavender, personal communication, June 23, 2009)

All the teachers who were interviewed built elements of culture into their teaching in
the language classroom. Teacher Sunflower used aspects of Chinese culture. For instance, she would introduce the students to the use of a maobi (writing brush) to write characters in calligraphy. Sometimes she would help students play a Chinese game, ti jianzi (hikisack). She would often teach students how to count from one to twenty by playing ti jianzi. The students would do a listening activity then they would write down the characters for one to twenty in pinyin and English and then they would go outside to practice kicking the Chinese hikisack around the group. As they kicked, they would count aloud in Chinese, so the counting activity of practicing their speaking and moving their bodies helps them to learn.

Teacher Lavender is interested in developing students’ sense of accomplishment in learning foreign languages. For example, she sees great merit in students learning a song in a foreign language or watching a movie and being able to understand it. She encourages students to taste food that they have never tried before and dress in a way that they have never dressed before, all to encourage their learning. All these experiences give rise to cultural understanding alongside language learning. Teacher Lavender believes these help students to learn to appreciate the inter-relationships between language and culture and from that to acknowledge and appreciate cultural difference. She sees this as an important learning experience and argues that it provides a motivational link to effective language learning.

Many teachers discussed the issue of making language ‘real’ to students. Teacher Lavender’s considerations were influenced by the language-learning situation for junior high school students in NSW. She observed that students only have to learn a foreign language for one hundred hours and they are not required to continue with it. So for language teachers, ‘making the language real’ is a motivation for students to continue to study a language. For example, teacher Lavender (who teaches German, French and Italian but not Mandarin) would let kids have German food or French food, so they can actually smell, taste and feel the culture. She says doing this once a year can help kids to remember their language learning experiences.

Teacher Lavender is another advocate of the use of culture to spark students’ enthusiasm. For example, she plans language days in her school. On those days, students are immersed in the target language and culture by eating the food of the
country and playing a range of different cultural and language games. This teacher also pointed to the exchange program operating in her school. The school conducts exchanges with students from Germany, Italy, America, China and Japan. This gives those Australian students who are learning language a valuable incentive. In a most immediate way this ‘makes the language more real’. It requires students to communicate with their visitors in the language they are studying and with local people, if they are fortunate enough to go on an overseas exchange.

Teacher Jacaranda says that effective use of technology (computers in particular) can inspire students’ enthusiasm for language learning. She argues that teachers need to add some modern technology into their lesson to meet their students halfway, because students nowadays are used to sitting in front of their TV or computer and being entertained. Teacher Jacaranda points to another important aspect of engaging: ‘Be a good attention grabber!’ She argues the need to be aware of the students’ classroom mood. When she notices students getting bored, she will change the pace and activity of her class. She will sometimes use different facial expressions, gestures or voices to gain their attention. Being entertaining in language and gestures sometimes make a difference, she says.

Teacher Sunflower in her interview mentioned an aspect of teaching and learning not mentioned by others. This seems to me to be an especially important addition.

Assessment allows you to get to know your students. Assessment also allows you to feed back to those students how they are progressing. It actually allows them to see their own progress and it also helps parents to understand what is it you’re teaching in the program and the students are performing. (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3 2009)

The issue of engagement with students and students’ interests is one of the most common design issues mentioned by interviewees. Often this was linked to teacher wellbeing and morale. When teachers appreciate students’ learning, this in turn feeds back and teachers feel appreciated by students. This directly boosts workplace morale.

2. Having high Expectations of students

All interviewees think it is important for teachers to have high expectations of
students. But ‘high expectation’ is something teachers need to explain for themselves.

Teacher Cedar says that:

A high expectation does not mean, under any circumstances, that a teacher cannot allow flexibility. High expectations means to seek to achieve students’ personal best with the teachers’ support and encouragement. It means high personal expectations and high personal achievement. It is hard to achieve because you really need to know your students’ potential (Teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009).

The most important suggestion made by this teacher is that teachers should ‘never have uniform expectations’ because students deserve a teacher’s individual personal expectations.

This teacher said that to focus on high expectations of students, the teacher needs to have a good record of each student’s performance: their strengths, their organizational skills, communicational skills, any performance that they normally excel at. He says that when a student can be recognized and recognized correctly, confidence can be promoted and this will be reflected in each student’s daily life.

Teacher Rose also has high expectations of her students. She says: ‘I do have high expectations of students. Set it high and they gradually come, not unreasonable but high’ (Teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009).

Teacher Rose said that teachers need to let students know their expectations of them. They need to know the teacher’s level of expectation is high but also that there is a belief that they can work to that standard.

Teacher Sunflower spoke more about her practical experience of having high expectations of students as a means to encourage them to achieve more. She said: ‘I think teachers need to know their students well and know how to reward them in such a way that teachers can encourage their learning both extrinsically and intrinsically’.
I encourage students’ learning extrinsically through the use of lollies or little prizes if we have done a quiz or are playing learning games. However, extrinsic reward should only be used occasionally. It should not be used all the time because students do not value that reward after a while. So to achieve respect for the teacher, to teach the value of learning and also to pursue students’ initiative in learning, you need to develop intrinsic systems for rewarding students as well. That might be a system whereby you use praise in front of the whole class. It depends on the class; you need to be very careful with classes that this would not be appropriate for. Or you can use praise when you mark a students’ book when you notice the student has tried very hard. You can also circulate around the class during the class time, and listen to their practice, and if you notice one student is doing really well on a day, make sure you comment on it. Always notice the little things they are doing extremely well on the day, and pick them out and say ‘well done today, I noticed you!’ This is very, very important. The students’ self-esteem will be raised and there will be a greater willingness to keep trying. So noticing progress, encouraging improvement and also planning your lessons so that the students can see the progress they are making is important. Students should be able to see their learning moving through different stages and to see that they are making progress within a unit and then within a whole year. You can develop their ‘willingness’ because they will want to make progress themselves. They will have a willingness to keep learning. That is an intrinsic form of reward. (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3 2009).

This teacher’s way of encouraging the students is a form of appreciative pedagogy. She uses terms like ‘extrinsic and intrinsic reward’, and ‘praise’ to describe the method of her encouragement because she is not familiar with the terminology of ‘appreciation.’ However, her explanation of her understanding of her practice, based on considerable experience in the classroom, is an argument for the value of an appreciative approach. Moreover, it also talks of different ways of delivering appreciation. This teacher also encourages novice teachers to notice students ‘small progress’ or ‘small achievements’, because these are so easily neglected. She argues that if their progress, no matter how small, can be recognized correctly and promptly, it can initiate a ‘willingness’ to learn more.

Teacher Rose talks of her way of bringing out the best in students differently. She says that:

If you want to encourage a student and get the best out of them, you have got to be enthusiastic, you have got to be passionate about what you are teaching, you have got to have good knowledge of what you are teaching and be confident in your subject area (teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009).
She talks about this from the perspective of LOTE teachers. As mentioned previously, she believes LOTE teachers need to have real-life experiences in the country of the language they teach so that they can make it more ‘real’ to students in the classroom. Teachers can impart more insight into the language and arouse cultural awareness if they can talk about insights they have gained in personal travel.

In summary, the teachers interviewed attach great importance to ‘high expectations of students’. Each, in their own way, believes high expectations allow students to have more possibility of success at school through positive learning experiences.

3. Cultivating students’ confidence (in their own abilities)

Teacher Jacaranda says:

Confidence is a big part in students’ learning. You have students that are not confident and they start playing up, not wanting to work because their attitude is that I cannot do it so I will not even bother. But if you give them confidence and make them feel comfortable, if you make them feel that you are there to help, not to judge, their confidence can be greatly developed. (teacher Jacaranda, personal communication, July 27 2009)

Teacher Rose said she got to know many kids who were from families and communities that do not provide positive role models. Thus, it is hard for students to think positively about themselves. Therefore, she gives herself the responsibility of activating students’ confidence in themselves, believing that this can exert far-reaching influence on their lives.

Teacher Cedar mentions that it is important for teachers to recognize students’ strengths in order to cultivate their confidence. He says identifying students’ strengths is an ongoing process and it needs to be done carefully. This teacher develops a recognition system to help notice students’ progress. He is proud of his documented records of students’ performance. He says that just by looking at his notes, he can quickly tell one student from another.

If you have a recognition system that covers many areas of personal improvement, you have a much better chance to work with the class to improve their confidence (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009).
In his teaching, he sets up areas where students can be recognized for their performance. He says such rewards make a difference to students.

You should never only give awards to students who are good academically—the top students or second top. I have got six out of seven areas that can be rewarded. The student who is always committed, that student does not have to be the first, in fact he can be below average but he deserves the recognition because that person works very hard. You can give awards in areas like personal improvement. For example, ‘Miss Liu, you started from fortieth out of a hundred, but at the end of the year, you became sixth out of a hundred.’ There may be a student who will always be the bottom group; however, that student, in terms of personal improvement, may have improved twenty percent. That student deserves something. (teacher Cedar, personal communication, June 25 2009)

This teacher reinforces the proper way of showing appreciation to students. Accomplishment needs to be clearly recognized, yet recognition also needs to be practiced tactically.

Teacher Rose shared me with her specific way of trying to build students’ confidence in class. This resembles the approach of Cedar. Firstly, she acknowledges students’ progress and ability on a personal level and then she seeks to respect different contributions from different students.

You have to juggle different things in teaching. For instance, in class, you have got clever kids, you have got really slow kids who work part of the time, you have got the lazy kids who get 5 out of 15 while they should get 11, then your comments need to be that these marks are so disappointing when you can be much better than this . . . With those kids who started 5 out of 15, when they have worked very hard then you would try to acknowledge their awesome effort. (teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009).

Secondly, students should be rewarded for undertaking activities properly in class. For example, pair or small group work can be used to reinforce students’ confidence.

You know there is a strategy in doing pair work with speaking skills before you ask students to speak to class. When you get the students to work together, students can build their confidence before having thirty people listen (teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009).
When correcting students’ pronunciation, teacher Rose says, you should appreciate students’ effort then repeat the word or phrase with better pronunciation.

You say that is really good then you repeat it again with a better pronunciation. You do not say that ‘oh, you are a silly person, you have made five mistakes’, you just repeat it, and they hear it correctly. That helps their confidence because the next time when you say, ‘have a go’, they do ‘have a go’ because it does not matter if you are not perfect. That sort of helps develops confidence in a little way (teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009).

Teacher Lavender spoke of her way of helping students develop self-confidence. She summarized this in three words: ‘careful’, ‘conscious’ and ‘continuous’.

a. Identify students’ progress through careful observation and assessment.
b. Praise students consciously.
c. Enact this practice consistently and continuously.

All interviewees acknowledge the importance of showing timely appreciation to students and effectively identifying students’ strengths to foster their confidence in learning and within themselves. They all recognize the powerful role of emotion in learning and how this understanding should be incorporated into the design and delivery of learning. The practice of helping students develop their confidence is envisaged by all teachers as contributing to long-term benefits for students (within and beyond their schooling).

4. Undertaking classroom management with appreciation

From the interview with teacher Sunflower, six particular strategies emerged, in terms of classroom management. These strategies can be interpreted as forms of application of appreciation pedagogy. They are, respectively: setting up class rules to promote students’ positive behaviour; dealing with students’ consequences with sensitivity; using logical consequences in dealing with students’ misbehaviour; using a sense of humour in classroom management and using nonverbal gestures and communication in classroom management and showing appreciation.

Teacher Sunflower affirms the importance of establishing classroom rules when you first meet the students. These should not only be rules that control students’ behaviour but rules that encourage positive behaviour.
There are always rules that control students’ behaviour when it is inappropriate. But the rules can also be used to promote positive behaviour. In our class we are always encouraging each other without putting each other down. We encourage people to have a go and try new things and this we praise. (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3 2009)

Teacher Sunflower argues that teachers need to deal with the consequences of misbehaviour, with sensitivity. She says that there may be a variety of reasons for students’ misbehaviour. So she is prone to measure and vary students’ consequences. Adopting a harsh approach all the time is unacceptable. Picking out the right method to use at the right time can help develop the trust of students. Teacher Sunflower told the following story:

I had a student coming to class and he had been playing football at lunch time on a hot day and it was very, very hot and the student took his drink bottles from his bag half way through the class and had a big noisy drink. And it disrupted everybody because while they are drinking, students want to talk. And that is wrong and I have a rule in my class which is no eating and drinking. And the consequence is that the person has to clean the classroom because they make a mess with their rubbish. However, in that circumstance, I knew the student had been involved in a football game. I went up to him and asked ‘are you feeling hot?’ ‘Yes, so hot, Miss!’ ‘Why are you feeling hot?’ ‘Oh, because I played football all lunch time, Miss!’ Because I can see that there is a health reason why the student is needing to do something that is not actually appropriate then I will not be that harsh, I will say to them, ‘Well, can you go outside to drink, do not drink in my room.’ So I have not changed the rules in my room but I have been sensitive to the situation and to the students. (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3 2009)

Teacher Sunflower also employs a strategy she calls ‘logical consequence’, which she learned while teaching primary school students. It means, the way the teachers address the problem of students is a logical outcome of the students’ behaviour. She says this is a good way for students to learn a lesson from their behaviour.

As mentioned earlier, this teacher emphasizes the role of humour in helping classroom management. She says she enjoys laughing with students and she says students enjoy it also. For instance, her sense of humour and imagination can be reflected by her way of teaching Chinese characters (the Chinese writing system). She tries to build up amusing stories with students to help them to understand Chinese language associations (Refer to Appendix 2).
Teacher Sunflower believes that non-verbal gestures are sometimes very effective in her classroom. Through these she provides immediate feedback to students when she identifies inappropriate behaviour.

Sometimes dealing with inappropriate behaviour with words means you need to stop the whole class, to interrupt what is going on and sometimes, you do not want to interrupt the whole class. So you can use nonverbal gestures; for example, when you point to the students to make them look at the board or you put your finger on your lips or you tap your table to get them to get with their work and concentrate. That is, the things that allow for continuity in a lesson without interrupting the activity. (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3 2009)

This teacher added that your body language says a lot to students. She also said nonverbal gestures can be used to show appreciation.

If you have a very open, very positive character, your smile can be happy and passionate. Your gestures enable students to be interested to become involved. If you have your arms crossed and you have a sort of serious look on your face or your attitude is more of a judgment. So the use of gesture and nonverbal communication is a very big part of a teacher’s response to a class (teacher Sunflower, personal communication, June 3 2009).

Teacher Rose makes similar points to teacher Sunflower around non-verbal gestures. She spoke of correcting students’ misbehaviour in a positive way; identifying individual misbehaviour, not punishing the whole class and developing effective ways of management through change of voice, use of posture and use of physical proximity.

Teacher Rose said it is important, when pointing out problems, always to give students a chance, always give them a way out, a way of correcting the situation without losing face. Teacher Rose says she provides students with opportunities to get beyond their misbehaviour. She spoke of the need to embrace mistakes, and then envisage better actions to get rid of bad habits. Teacher Rose also feels it is important to identify individuals rather than to punish a whole class. She says:

I would never accuse a kid of doing the wrong thing unless I have seen it with my own eyes. No matter how angry you are and how impatient you feel, you must always remain kind, controlled and show respect (teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009).
She believes that teachers need to be good role models for students. She says also that her way of classroom management has changed a lot as she has developed as a teacher. She argues that ‘having a quiet word with a person and getting quite close to them can be very effective’:

When I was a young teacher, I would stand in the front of the room and raise my voice a lot more. Now, particularly in the classroom where there are about eight naughty children not just one or two, if you have got everyone else working, you can go up and just be close to the naughty ones and speak fairly quietly. This can be a very effective tool. (teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009)

This way of helping misbehaving students behave properly reflects her respect for the many students in the class who behave appropriately. Teacher Jacaranda makes two points on this matter. The first one is that she insists on being consistent in her management strategies. The second one is that she shares funny stories with students. She likes to ensure students stay calm in class and says that this allows them to laugh together.

I can be silly in classroom sometimes. You have to laugh at yourself. The kids will laugh along with me sometimes. I think that is OK. If you can see the funny side of things, it is a good thing to laugh with the class and the students. And you have got to pick a moment to tell a joke now and then. They might have their funny stories that they can share with you. I keep trying to make it human, as long as it still keeps discipline. But do not let things get out of control. (teacher Jacaranda, personal communication, July 27 2009)

5. Developing effective teaching and learning relationships

It takes time to develop effective relationships between students and teachers. Teacher Rose says how you present yourself as a person matters a lot. ‘I see myself as an organized person, interested in students and kids. I get lessons well-prepared, I try to make them interesting.’ Teacher Rose has thought a lot about how to use praise in the classroom.

Often the ‘naughty’ ones get praised for doing something vaguely good because they are always so bad, whereas kids who are good all the time do not get any praise. So praise is important in teaching. Every bit of praise you give, well, you cannot always realize the impact it might have. It is really important to do it more and more and more. I should do it more often. We all should do it
When she notices someone has been in trouble, she recognizes they may need special attention:

When I know some students have been in trouble, I will say to them: is everything all right now? Are you all right now? That positive, that personal thing can help to settle them down. I know, some kids when you know they are troubled, you can see them getting stressed. I will say to them, look, settle down now, count to ten, take a breath, and just start over. Give them a bit of time and leave them alone. Do not push them too much (teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009).

Teacher Lavender argues that we need to vary the way of praising students according to their character. She says:

Some girls are very shy, they are just a bit reserved, and they felt uncomfortable to be praised in the front of the whole group. What I might do is just stand beside them and say ‘well done’! (teacher Lavender, personal communication, June 23 2009).

This demonstrates that appreciation can be delivered on a personal level. This can only be done if teachers consider individual students’ characters. This means that teachers need to know students well in order to make the ‘appreciation’ most effective.

Teacher Lavender makes additional points in terms of relationships between students and teachers. First of all, teachers should apply their specific talents as they mingle with students. Secondly, teachers should let students see their human side, while also keeping a professional distance from them. She says:

You cannot be their friend, keep a proper distance, you are the teacher, they are the students but you know, you can interact with them and promote and develop good relationships with them (teacher Lavender, personal communication, June 23 2009).

In conclusion, in this ‘design’ stage—the stage that emerged as the most important during the interviews conducted for this project—I have tried to systematize a range of characteristics and qualities that support the effective design of appreciative pedagogy. I have used the contributions of interviewees to offer practical and
insightful suggestions and tried to provide personal stories of personal experience to back up general comments. These are the sorts of considerations that any educator might think about when attempting to design appreciative learning relationships in an appreciative learning environment.

4.5.5 Destiny Stage

Destiny: Navigate change, ‘how to empower, learn and adjust/improvise’ in an environment of ongoing change.

Referring back to the ‘seed’ analogy, the destiny stage is focused on transformation. It suggests that focusing on current positive experiences and staying positive and appreciative can facilitate a series of new, progressive and sustainable pedagogical experiences. This is an ongoing process, and the effects of the changes identified here can be long lasting. They can have an effect on how education is understood, not simply as a set of classroom relationships but as a means of contributing to the development of society and the social vision that accompanies that consciousness.

This is the most difficult stage of the 4D cycle to discuss. The structure of this project has also made it the most difficult stage to gather information about. Destiny is tightly bound to change. It involves the development of a vision that inspires individuals to move toward an improved individual and collective future. While this invites considerations upon what ‘improved’ actually means it does, nevertheless, have the capacity to identify and stimulate overarching transformative learning experiences (Mezirow 1991). An understanding of long-term transformative change was not directly pursued in this project. Nevertheless, there were some responses to questions that enter into the domain of ‘destiny’ and transformation, that are worth mentioning here.

Teacher Rose, at the beginning of her interview, expressed her love of the teaching profession. She said:

I have always taught French and German and a little bit of Japanese in recent years and this is the profession I love and it has been very good to me and I hope to continue for more years to come (Teacher Rose, personal
Such a statement invites further questioning. Love is an extremely powerful feeling. I did not see it as appropriate to my research, at this stage, to inquire further into teacher Rose's 'love'. However, I did ask Teacher Rose to describe any 'transformative experience' she had encountered as a result of her work with students. My idea that she might have had a 'transformative experience' arose from what she said about the influence she had on her students. She is very honest in saying that teachers do not necessarily see their impact on students in high school. I described to her an incident I had seen in her class, a time when she encouraged a student not to look down when talking with other people. This seemed to help teacher Rose to think about her experiences and then tell me a memorable story.

I remember one boy in Year 11, years ago when I was teaching in Penrith. He was a lovely boy with a dreadful family life but I never knew this until I became his Year Advisor. He was really good at French. But his papers were everywhere and I used to say to him, you’ve got to organize your work, you’ve got to put it in folders, chapter by chapter. Put it in folders so you can study but he was just hopeless. So one time I said to him, ‘why don’t you bring it all and I will help you sort it out!’ so we sat down one lunch time and I bought him a folder and we sat down and tried to put his papers into topics. And so you know, three months later, his work was hopeless again, I had to go back to help him arrange his folders again. Now I do not know whether he did change his habits, but when I went to a unit in another high school, ten years later, I came across him again, ‘You know Miss, I was always that disorganized but now I am falling into the habit of being organized. I do put things in files.’ Oh, I think that is just a little organizational thing helping him. I am happy to have done it. You know, that was a bit of transforming. I do not know, it did create change (teacher Rose, personal communication, June 23 2009).

As this teacher suggests, it is often hard for teachers to see their influence on students. In high school the schedule is so busy and teachers often only see students for 50 minutes each day. Plus, only some students go back to see their teachers after they graduate. (This is a good time for teachers to gauge their impact on students.) But teacher Rose does think that some students do come to appreciate what a teacher has done after they leave school. She does think that teachers can contribute to transformative understandings just as teachers can be transformed by their experience as educators. At the end of the interview, teacher Rose reaffirmed her belief that ‘you have to leave the students with a sense of self-respect and some
acknowledgement of the fact that teachers are working hard for them’. The way she spoke of this suggests it was of considerable importance to her.

Teacher Lavender says it is important to assist students to think deeply, to help them to arrive at individual understanding. She mentioned that when she cast her memories back to high school, she had some horrible teachers but also a teacher who was ‘absolutely fantastic’. She was passionate, thoughtful, appreciative and ‘serious’. The teacher taught her to be appreciative of mistakes, thus making her feel comfortable with her own learning. Teacher Lavender learned it is OK to make mistakes, and this is not the end of the world, but it is important to work on those mistakes and not do them again. This teacher’s influence made teacher Lavender determined to become involved in the teaching profession. Actually, my experience is similar to this teacher. I am greatly motivated to study and to teach because of the appreciation, encouragement and support of my own teachers.

Teacher Jacaranda, like teacher Rose is a very experienced language teacher. Jacaranda has only one year left before retirement. Despite this she still wants to continue her association with education, perhaps through training teachers in some way. In effect, what she wants to do is continue to teach. She wants to do this because of the personal rewards she has encountered in her work with her students. Perhaps in retirement she will begin to think in new ways about who her students might be and what sorts of things she might begin to teach in the next phase of her life.

It is exciting to see those teachers’ persistence and passion for teaching. Their firm belief in education encourages them to strive for better performance, and further appreciative cycles can be imagined growing as a result.

While ‘destiny’ was not specifically addressed in the interviews, nor were a stream of quotes gathered that directly related to destiny, it is valid nonetheless to argue that the depth of consideration and commitment communicated by each and every interviewee suggests much thought has been given to the role of education in the development of the people who will determine the future. The strong emphasis upon respect, commitment and strong value systems suggests that these are considered
integral to that future.

4.6 CONCLUSION

The 4-D cycle has been used as a structuring tool for the analysis of the interview data. In this process, the character of each phase has been described through the evidence drawn from interviews. While the four phases are distinctive it is clear also that the boundaries between phases are not necessarily clear-cut. Some interview data could be relevant to more than one phase. The process of data analysis is highly interpretive. The 4-D cycle serves this process well. The four categories: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny are both compelling containers and powerful images to work through.

The analysis was a consequence also of the enthusiasm of interviewees. All were very cooperative and very keen to discuss their practice. All interviews extended beyond their allocated time. Moreover, I found that by the end of each interview, I had developed a more effective relationship with each participant and that I had learnt a considerable amount. I believe these interviews delivered understanding to both the researcher and the participants. As a result my understanding of appreciative approaches to pedagogy has improved and, I think, the teachers have been prompted to think in new ways about how they approach their work and the language they analyse it through.

In the chapter that follows I discuss the understanding of appreciative inquiry and appreciative pedagogy that I have acquired through this research project.
Chapter 5
A personal relationship to the research

5.1 MY LEARNING DEVELOPMENT, AS INTERPRETED THROUGH THE 4-D CYCLE

My study of and interest in appreciative approaches to pedagogy has prompted me to reflect on and try to relate this form of pedagogy to my own teaching and learning in Australia. This has prompted me to construct what is in effect, an ‘appreciative inquiry cycle’ focused on myself. This means that I am considering the personal narrative of my development as an educator as an integral part of this research. For this purpose, I have reflected on my experience (Schön 1987) and gathered a series of stories, which I have broken down in accordance with the four stages of the ‘appreciative inquiry cycle’. These represent a structured reflective response to my experience of teaching Mandarin in the NSW school system. These four stages, in accordance with the 4-D cycle, are the discovery stage, dream stage, design stage and destiny stage. In Table 5.1 I have identified these stages within the time frame of my teaching in NSW schools.

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<tr>
<th>Stage one</th>
<th>Stage two</th>
<th>Stage three</th>
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<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
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<td>Term Two (Apr 2009-July 2009)</td>
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5.2.1 Stage 1: Discovery stage
Term 3: August 2008-October 2008

I view Term 3 2008 as the period in which my discovery stage was initiated. When I arrived in Australia, I was provided with language methodology training by DET from 28th July to 27th October. This training helped me get to know the NSW
educational system and many of its policies. Most importantly, I began learning the
rudiments of classroom teaching and classroom management. Several experienced
curriculum coordinators and language lecturers contributed to this program
(including teacher Cedar). They shared stories of their teaching experience with my
fellow students and me and this helped me imagine how I might approach teaching.
Practical teaching observations of Chinese teachers’ Mandarin lessons were also
made available. This training occurred concurrently with the beginning part of my
teaching practice in western Sydney schools. In these schools, all principals provided
support and guidance for me. I was provided with supervising teachers at each school
and these teachers helped me to get used to working in Australian schools. Teacher
Sunflower in School A was my first supervising teacher. She eased the transition into
teaching for me by providing timely advice and ongoing support and guidance. My
classroom observations of teacher Sunflower helped me to alleviate many of my
trepidations about teaching. She tried to demonstrate effective teaching strategies to
me and tried to teach me to work collaboratively, to maintain confidence and to
manage my time efficiently. As a result my understanding of the Australian
classroom and Australian students began to grow rapidly. This is indicated in my
journal entries.

Each student in her class has got a Chinese name. When she helped each
student choose their names, she would consider each student’s character and
hobbies so as to give each student an ideal name that embodies a symbolic
meaning. She uses the Chinese way to begin her class and marks the roll
according to their Chinese names. She tries to enable the students to
experience genuine Chinese culture. This is welcomed in the classroom. When
looking at a student’s Chinese book, I can tell they really value this name. On
the top of their page, it is the teacher’s given name card, detailing the pinyin
[Chinese pronunciation system] and hanzi [Chinese writing system] and
symbolic meanings behind their names. Below it is their signature of their

Early in my teaching, my mood was strongly influenced by my students’
performance. I love teaching most when I feel they are interested in what I am
teaching. Then I can stay happy and energetic all the time. My early worries about
teaching were that I did not have quick enough responses to student misbehaviour
and that I lacked humour as a teacher.

Now my problem is that as Chinese teacher volunteer, I am a bit perplexed.
When I am doing teaching observations, I am still not clear about the essential parts of observations. For me, I am a bit slow to respond, how can I improve my responses? (30th July 2008)

I am confronted with some problems: for instance, when I throw a question to the kids, almost all of them would want to have a go, all hands up and some of them are yelling as well! I would be hesitant to choose the students, as I do not know which one I should choose. In that situation, I just said: stopping yelling! Everybody together (8th Aug, 2008)!

I discovered that because of my lack of an effective teaching language at this stage, I tended to lack confidence. I felt unsure of my teaching skills and myself. And classroom management was a big concern for me. This was a classroom environment I had never experienced before. In the Chinese classroom, students are well behaved and teachers spend most of the time conducting the lesson. Here, teachers seem to spend most of their time calming students down.

Coupled with initial teaching observations, the methodology training helped me gradually get ready for effective teaching. The first lesson I learned was the need to design interesting activities to maintain effective learning for language learners. Lecturers mentioned the importance of incorporating listening, speaking, reading and writing into the lesson. They said that the teacher can activate students’ learning curiosity and participation by tactically applying these activities. For instance, at the initial part of the class, one lecturer said she usually asked students to get out language books and copy words down. This helped students calm down. In the process of teaching, you need to keep swapping activities according to students’ responses. I found that the prerequisite for this is that you have a repertoire of teaching skills and adequate teaching preparation.

The second lesson I learned is that you need to respect and work with Australian students’ learning habits. For instance, if the teacher wants to assign homework for students to accomplish, it is necessary to let students to write down the due date in their diary five minutes before the class is over. I found this way is common in Australian classrooms.

The third lesson I learned is that we need to use students’ background knowledge as a hook to get their interest. It was said by one lecturer that ‘to have another language is
to possess a second soul’ (Journal entry 8th September, 2008). It is the language teacher’s task to stimulate the development of that soul. For example, in teaching Mandarin to Australian students, it is important to deliver language through reference to our personal culture just as it is important to teach language by treating the students as an individual person, not as simply another student in another class. I noted in my journal that one lecturer said ‘what a language imparts is partly personal culture and the teacher’s personality and preferences have an impact on the content and the context of the preparation of the lesson and the students’ (22nd September, 2009).

The last important lesson is that effective teaching involves a communicative approach. I discovered that it is my passion, enthusiasm and effective communication that enables my teaching to be appreciated. It is not so much communication itself but the understanding of the importance of this way of presentation, plus personal skills, that enables this approach to be successful. In the following journal notes, I commented on the communicative skills of the main language lecturer.

She seems to be a lovely, passionate teacher even before she begins her class, I have told myself that I will love her lesson. Her lesson reaffirms my interest! Today she demonstrates a German lesson that works with a communicative approach. She has prepared a basket of attractive fruits. Then she begins a lesson that focuses on the fruits. She is so cool that she pretends to be a teacher who only knows German. She uses body language to convey the meaning. I think it is a good teaching strategy as it fully invites our participation and we have to turn our brains on all the time, otherwise we are unable to follow the lesson. Each time I guess the exact meaning of the German word, I am excited and have more stimulation to guess more, more accurately! How pleasant is it to see this teacher’s nodding and smiling! (11th Aug 2008)

In conclusion, during this discovery stage, I was introduced to—I began to discover—the Australian classroom, students and teachers. It is so different to China. I keep those differences in my mind, respect the differences and share those interesting and enlightening ones with my students and teachers. I found that classroom management is the highest concern for teachers here. For us, as volunteer teachers, we have always got supervising teachers to help us manage the class, but it would be more effective if we were able to handle these concerns by ourselves.

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At this stage, I did not teach much, but these early experiences led me to appreciate my supervising teacher and language lecturers’ encouragement and enthusiasm. When I actually started teaching, my strengths and weaknesses were on show to students and teachers. I was lucky that my supervising teachers always seemed able to seek out and appreciate my strengths; for instance, my caring character, diligence and modesty in teaching. This helped me to sustain the belief that I can progress in my teaching. The appreciation I have received helps me maintain my positive energy and my pleasure in teaching and learning. As to my teaching, in the next stage I began to apply what I had discovered, in another school.

5.2.2 Stage 2: Dream stage

Term 4  
(October 2008-Dec 2008)

The new term began and I embarked on a new journey in the process of teaching and learning. I was required to engage with new teachers and students in new schools. To some extent, this was a new chance for me to develop myself as I had to socialize with new people and to familiarize myself with new teaching environments.

At this stage, I dreamed of thinking and working as a teacher applying an appreciative approach. Because of the limitations in working in each school for a relatively short period of time, the effectiveness of my ways of teaching with appreciation needed to be tested through the lens of my development as a teacher and researcher. Accordingly, in the section that follows I employ appreciative inquiry as an observational tool through which I can seek to identify students’ strengths and to support their learning. As a teacher I wanted to let my students feel appreciated, even if only for this short period in the Mandarin classroom.

In practice, what I tried to do was help students to see and value their strengths and their progress, assuming this would in turn encourage them to try to achieve more. Importantly, the practice of working with AI does not ignore problems. Instead it acknowledges and remoulds these problems through the lens of appreciation, to change them for better in the design stage.
I envision that as a teacher, if you want students to be appreciated in the classroom, you need to be able to understand students’ different needs and motivations. Working with appreciative inquiry can help teachers have more positive perceptions of students as individuals. This will, in turn, promote more harmonious teaching and learning relationships. Jablon (1999) in his book of The Power of Observation discusses the teachers’ powerful influence on students’ lives.

Children have an uncanny ability to tune into how you feel about them. They sense your feelings in the way you hold them, the expression on your face, and your tone of voice. . . . Because you play such an important role in their lives, they care about how your feel and they want your approval. Like the ripples caused when you throw a stone into a pond, your feelings about individual children have a far-reaching influence that touches children’s developing sense of self, their impressions of and interactions with one another, and even how their parents view you and them. (1999, p. 17)

A teacher’s appreciative work should explore more opportunities for students to experiment and to touch success. In practice, I would like to describe three memorable episodes drawn from my teaching in School B. These stories give an indication of my dream and my subsequent efforts to work with appreciative inquiry.

Episode 1:
In the first period of working with this new group of students, I am teaching them to make a Chinese booklet made from an A4 paper. My intention is to get to know them as much as I can. I ask them to put their name, birthdays, hobbies and interest in learning Mandarin into the booklet. Another use of this booklet is to take notes, and it is easier for them to carry and practise their language learning with a small booklet. I asked them to do some decorations for the cover of their booklets. (See below: Reproduced with permission.)
Some of the kids have already handed in their self-prepared booklet. I have carefully checked each booklet and written my comments in response. Different kids have different strengths: some are good at drawing, others at learning, making friends and sports. I was impressed by one girl’s work showing: my birthday is on 4th November, which is exactly today. I regret to say that I collected their booklets after class and I was unable to make a timely response to this girl. Although I missed the chance to send my best wishes to the girl I changed my teaching plan for the next lesson. Before introducing my new topic, I taught the kids to sing ‘happy birthday to you’ in Chinese. I also asked is it anybody’s birthday today? And another girl responded that her birthday was also yesterday! I sent two beautiful flowers made by myself to the girls, then taught the whole class to sing the Chinese song ‘祝你生日快乐’- zhu ni sheng ri kuai le which means Happy Birthday to You! Since I sensed the kid’s need to share her birthday, I wanted to create a comfortable atmosphere for her and the whole class. The class enjoyed learning the song. The two girls were attentive and especially active in my new topic. To be honest, I do not know whether this deed would give the students a deep impression. I did not care about this. What I really care about is that they enjoyed the lesson and it helped me bring in the relatedness between my students and myself. (11th Nov. 2008)

Episode 2:

In the afternoon, I had a Mandarin lesson for Year 6 students. Firstly, I taught them to sing the song ‘Looking for a Friend’ in Mandarin. The kids are talented and picked up the song quickly. Then I asked the kids to sing the song and choose a student to perform with. After the kids found a friend, I encouraged them to talk with their chosen friends using the greeting words we had learnt before. I encouraged the students to try and not to be worried about forgetting the words because ‘we are all learning’, ‘we need always to refresh our memories’.

After that we moved to a new topic and I prepared a guessing game for the kids to practice sentence structure. This game is designed to engage
with each student. After the class, the teacher provided me with some written feedback: ‘The teacher had her lesson very well planned. There were very clear instructions and explanations of the lesson content. She was very enthusiastic which resulted in having very engaged students. Very good use of the board and flash cards as well.’ I am really happy to have her encouragement. Actually, I feel I am making improvements in my teaching. I attach so much importance to the construction of relationships and believe it is crucially important. We should not only cultivate good relationships with students but with the supervising teacher as well. After that lesson, Teacher Lavender told me that I have done a good job with my teaching as when she walked around the corridor, she heard the students laughing and being attentive as well. She asked me what I have done with the kids and how I managed to let kids have fun in lessons. She said she is boring and unable to make kids enjoy the lessons. Teacher Lavender is a kind and modest teacher, and she can easily draw out other people’s merits. Her love and generosity are magically and unconsciously infectious. This teacher’s comments of my lesson led me to have more confidence and energy in my teaching. (25\textsuperscript{th} Nov 2008)

**Episode 3:**

I realized my teaching was greatly influenced by my supervising teacher’s appreciation of and engagement with my lesson. Before, I did not realize, this until I experienced a supervising teacher with a different character.

In the past few weeks, a female teacher took the kids, and I can really feel the close and warm relationship between these kids and this teacher. She was good and also involved in my class. When seeing her smile and nodding and her efforts to learn with the kids, I am really delighted and this doubles my pleasure in and passion for teaching. But today the kids were taken by a serious old man (a casual teacher, I think). I had not met this man before and I found this teacher was silent in my class and looking especially serious. While I am having great fun with the kids, from his face, I can only see seriousness. This creates a sense of distance from me. If another casual teacher were not here to provide me with positive feedback, I would begin to doubt myself to think am I doing something wrong. After the class, this serious teacher did come to me to thank me for my lesson. At that time, a sense of pleasure came from the bottom of my heart. Because of today’s episode, I came to realize that, when we are teaching, we should also be aware of the fact that our supervising teacher also plays an important role in our teaching. I firmly believe that emotions are contagious.

In summary, when I am consciously working with appreciation, I care more about students’ feelings. When I feel appreciated, I can have more belief in my ability to work better and achieve more. In Mandarin teaching, what I really want to achieve is a positive language learning experience for students. For this reason, I
will continue to study and work with appreciative pedagogy. My way of dealing with challenges appreciatively in the classroom is indicated in the next stage, the design stage.

5.2.3 Stage 3: Design stage

In this period, which I am referring to as the design stage, I was engaged in Mandarin teaching in four different primary schools, for five weeks in each school. Compared with other stages, here I got much more practical teaching experience. Keeping the idea of appreciative inquiry and pedagogy in mind, in this period I sought to structure my work in ways that would allow me to maintain an appreciative mentality and to embrace all challenges.

Here, I want to focus on my ‘appreciative responses’ to those unexpected problems in the classroom. I have mentioned that personality, culture and feelings influence what a teacher observes and practices in the classroom. This leads to the recognition that the so-called ‘unexpected problems’ can arise because of cultural difference. However, if you can stay appreciative of that difference, you will be better able to get to know more about students and then have a more positive relationship with them. The ‘problems’ themselves, I was not afraid of. The key seemed to be the kind of attitude and action I was going to respond with and through. In practice I discovered that sometimes only a slight change in perspective can enable you to encounter success—that change in perspective occurs through the appreciative mindset. In the following stories, I explore how an appreciative mindset assisted me in my teaching.

Today with class 6C’s, I felt a bit upset because of my inadequate preparations. Early in the morning, Nerina (one of the classroom teachers who used to give me a lift from my home to school) came to pick me up as usual, but we were stuck in the traffic because of an accident. We were running really late, almost 35 minutes later than usual. I rushed to the copy room, eager to copy all the sheets I needed before the bell. I had lessons in the first two periods consecutively. Then followed by period 3, 4 and 5. I needed to spend almost half an hour for copying things because of the five classes. What makes things worse is that too many teachers were queuing there. Teachers seemed to be especially busy. When the bell goes, I asked the administrative lady to do the rest of the copying for me.
as I had no other choices. I had to go to the classroom now; otherwise the kids might be unsettled.

In 6C I had a casual teacher with me. I quickly told the teacher that I would teach the kids calligraphy and would use ink at the end of the lesson. I asked her to help me find some containers for holding the ink. The teacher spared no effort in getting some trays.

Everything seemed to be going smoothly. Today’s topic was numbers. I handed out the worksheets about numbers and then did a ‘listening quiz’—asking the kids to follow my instructions to draw a number man. When I was saying the numbers I would use Mandarin instead of English. I designed this activity, in the hope of letting the kids reinforce their memories about words. The kids did an excellent job, with good manners. Their drawing of the number man was impressive. Then I moved on to the task of the introduction of the Chinese four treasures of study, which include the Chinese writing brush, ink, paper and ink stone. I brought the writing brush to let the kids feel it. Plus, I let them to touch the new brush and a used brush, to let them feel the difference. They all seemed to be happy to experience this. I encouraged them to have a go in expressing their opinions and their curiosity about the ‘writing brush’. Many of them put forward brilliant ideas. Then, I separated the 30 kids into five groups, each had a chance to write a Chinese character on the board, using the brush with water, then they could trace the character in chalk. The kids liked it. They thought it is awesome. Everybody took turns to write a character. We still had 10 more minutes. I asked all students go back to their seat. Then I put some ink with water in the tray. This time, I wanted them to write a character on the paper in ink. They were expected to take turns to dip the ink. At last, I found that several people still did not finish trying when the time was up. But I had to go to next door to continue the lesson with another group of students, without a rest. So I turned to the casual teacher for help. I asked her to give the kids five more minutes to do the writing, and when they finished, they ought to clean the brushes and leave them in the container.

Period 2
Then I rushed to another class. It is a mixed Year 4 and 5 class. They are close to me, very polite and cute. Quickly reviewing the greetings, I taught the kids to do a paper folding to make a crab. Suddenly the casual teacher came in and interrupted me, saying the ink was leaking on the floor. Seeing the teacher’s unhappy face, I said to my self. ‘Terrible thing has happened, I have made trouble as I have given too much extra work to this casual teacher.’ She borrowed detergent from another teacher and rushed out of the room. Since this happened, I felt upset and guilty. When I was designing the lesson at home, to be honest, I have already considered this question. But with 30 students in the room, I was unable to ensure that everything would progress as I had imagined. I told myself, forget about this in class. Leave it until recess time to resolve. I knew that it would be so unfair to for me to bring my upset mood to these lovely kids. If I kept concentrating on the previous scenario, I should be
responsible for this class. I know all kinds of moods are infectious. I did
not want my students to be unhappy. This is the last thing I want. Each
time I tried my best to let the kids enjoy the lesson. For me, their smiling
faces are the most worthwhile reward for my teaching.

When introducing the writing brushes to this class, I unexpectedly
mentioned the nibs of the brushes were normally made of some animal’s
hair, for instance rabbit’s hair, horse’s hair . . . . As I let the kids touch the
brushes, one kid responded that ‘it really feels like pet’s hair’, which
required me to explain more. While this explanation was pouring out, I
recognized that I had a mistake again. The kids in Australia are afraid of
rabbits. Because years ago, there was rabbit disaster. There is a totally
different culture in China, rabbit is regarded as a cute and gentle pet. One
student was scared and quickly flicked a question: ‘is this made of dead
rabbit’s hair, no, no, no I do not want to touch this, I will get the disease!’
In response, I told them do not be scared. Nowadays, when we bought the
brush from shops, it is almost certainly artificially made material. Do not
panic. The kids were quickly relieved.

Period 3
Year 5-6 J is an excellent class. They are keen to learn a new language. I
can sense that they enjoy my lesson because they can keep concentrating
during the whole period.

After the bell goes, I said nothing and quickly drew a big, old number
man on the board. In this way, I attracted the attention of all the kids.
Within seconds, they are so quiet with eyes focusing on what am I
drawing. I let them guess about what I am drawing. Somebody says, wow,
it is a human body; they are numbers, it is a head . . . . to those who
responded with numbers, I can tell they had done numbers before. When I
make the inquiry, some of them have learned Japanese before, and one did
calligraphy. In this way, I am introducing the new topic for this class—the
numbers. After teaching them the pronunciation of these numbers, I asked
kids to point out the tricky ones, that I would repeat to them more times to
help them remember.

Then we play the game ‘shoot the spaceship’ to help memorize these
numbers. Students are required to work in pairs to design five spaceships
on a grid. Each spaceship is positioned in coordinates. They are going to
shoot those spaceships by making guesses in Mandarin. I had already
printed the instructions on a sheet. Before I speculated all kids would
know how to play. But Kimberley, an active girl in this class, was not sure
about how to play this. So I quickly drew a grid on the board to clarify
how to play it. Maybe these kids do not always do pair work, because
they asked me who they are going to work with. To make things easier, I
just said, work with desk-mates. Almost ten minutes passed before I
noticed that two girls had started arguing. I came to their desk, knowing
their problem is that one student said another student is so uncooperative.
One blamed the other for laziness for not taking the notes down, and one
blamed the other for not being helpful . . . .it was really bad to see those
two girls becoming unhappy. So I signaled, time is up. Then we moved onto another guessing game, in the hope of making students be more inclusive. It turned out to be pretty good. I saw those two kids smile again. A kind of sweetness was coming from the bottom of my heart.

Period 4:
I come to Year 6 H’s class. They are friendly and enthusiastic. When I opened the door, they started greeting to me excitedly. But they were suddenly stopped by a sharp voice. I realized that it was that casual teacher, Andrea. She was still unhappy. I came to say sorry to her. She replied with ‘that is OK’ in a careless way.

I then focus my attention on those kids. Their smiling and friendly faces quickly dispelled my concerns. This is the only class I taught with a smart board. I showed them ppt presentation to start a new topic: greetings. They have a good memory. After going through the new words and sentence structures, we move on to a role-play. Most of them are eager to present a short role-play with their partners.

In the middle of the lesson, Andrea comes over to take some photos. It must be Mrs Holburn—an enthusiastic and admirable teacher who asked her to do this. Before she told me they would record some important events that happened to the Year 6 kids. I am especially happy when I found Andrea starting to be interested in this lesson. As when I am practicing the Chinese language with the kids, I found she also would help correct some kids’ pronunciation. In that case, she is also learning. Five minutes before the bell goes, she started to remind me about the time that she greeted me in Mandarin: saying ‘ni hao Mao’ unconsciously. I think she is nice. As long as we understand each other, there is nothing unpleasant in this room.

Period 5
This is the last period. In Year 5 W’s class. It is a diligent class. Students work really hard. In the class, the kids always have questions that they are curious to ask me. I try my best to answer patiently. Bradley showed me his precious present: the sheep skull, which is from his grandpa. Such a cute boy!

After today’s lesson, Christie gave me a wonderful, impressive present. My portrait made by her. Good girl. I like staying with the kids, which brings me endless fun. It is a fuel for my progress in teaching. (25th March, 2009)

I have experienced five different classroom environments and the specific appreciative approaches required, and performed differently in each. As noted in my journal, I encountered some problems: the worry of traffic jams, the pressure of lining up for the copying for five classes, the casual teacher’s ‘unhappy’ face, the student’s first ‘scared’ face because of culture difference . . . If I peer into the
problems, there would be more and more. But if I focus on the process and students’ achievements as a result of my teaching, the picture is different. The teacher’s ‘unhappy’ face was because of her frankness, which could be proved from her involvement in my lesson in period 4. One student’s ‘scared’ face is because of the different understandings of ‘rabbits’ from country to country. I did not realize the difference in the teaching preparation but I was pleased to be able to respond quickly to her worries. AI practitioners do not focus their eyes on the ‘problems’, but that does not mean they ignore the problems. They respect these problems because people can learn lessons from them.

I found I have grown so much and gained so much confidence in teaching. This is supported by evidence in my journals and my classroom teacher’s feedback. I also realize that I have developed deeper understandings of myself, in particular my potential, and also my students. What is most valuable for me is the continual study and practice of appreciative pedagogy, and ongoing reflection upon this process, which is guiding me in my teaching.

It is evident from my Mandarin teaching experience that all my teaching processes are associated with the design stage. The effective teaching program is the product of the design stage. At this stage, usually teachers have a lot to talk about because they have more teaching practice and experience when they grow to be at this stage.

5.2.4 Stage 4: Destiny stage

Term 3
(August 2009-October 2009)

This is the most important and interesting stage in the 4-D cycle. Do not be puzzled by the literal meaning of ‘destiny’. It is not the real ending. This stage can be understood, in part, as the new starting point for the beginning of a new cycle. From my personal experience, it is interesting to see that my own teaching practice in Australia is a complete appreciative cycle. (Refer to Figure 5.2) When I go back to China to hunt for a job, I will enter a new cycle initiated by my Australian teaching experience.
In the final stage of my teaching in NSW, I returned to School A. Here I had a unique opportunity to think about my progress.

When I came back to this school, my supervising teacher was so excited to see my growth as a teacher. Trying to provide chances to help me grow further, she let me take over her roll call class on those days I came to school. Also, at the beginning of each Mandarin class, I practiced marking the roll and making sure students were calm and ready to begin their lessons. I found that I was not nervous anymore and felt I was fit for the task in a way I was not at the beginning, when I had no teaching experience at all. Also I was drawn into planning the Mandarin program for the elective Mandarin class in Year 9 and Year 10. I learnt a lot from this process. The experienced language teachers were trying to select and cut down the activities that the novice teachers, from my experience were trying to extend. It reminded me of what Michael—one of my academic supervisors—said once in a group meeting: ‘the undergraduate students are trying to count up the words, while the masters and doctors are trying to count down the words, which is the difference’. It conveys a similar meaning. When you are up to a new and higher stage, you have different kinds of requirements and different goals to pursue.

At School A I also got the chance to write the Mandarin program for Year 8 classes by myself. My supervising teacher always encouraged me to achieve more. As the
famous Chinese saying goes: ‘学无止境 : xué wú zhǐ jìng: There is no ending in learning.’ Through this process, I have experienced a professional teacher’s challenges, including the frequent interruptions caused by the school organization. I am grateful for my supervising teacher’s advice: ‘It is natural to meet new challenges in the course of teaching, which in turn encourage us to reflect and progress. We should embrace them with appreciation’ (Journal entry 20\textsuperscript{th} July, 2009). This teacher’s words encourage me to think more about the appreciative mindset. It is an ongoing pursuit that is easier to realize if we have appreciative people around us.

Another critical moment I want to mention here is the arrival of 10 new volunteers from China to undertake the same program as me. My supervising teacher arranged for me to teach a lesson for them to observe instead of herself, because she wanted to let them see my growth and so I could share my experiences with them. For me, this was an opportunity but also a big challenge. It seems that opportunity and challenge go hand in hand. The supervising teacher helped me plan the lesson. We decided to try to present different kinds of skills to the novices. Before the lesson, I thought I would be very nervous but when I stood in the front of the classroom, delivering the lesson, it seemed so natural to me. I was not afraid of all. After the lesson, I received positive responses from my supervising teacher and received positive feedback emails from my methodology training teacher, who had arranged for the novices to come to this school for the observation lesson. To be honest, it was a big achievement for me. Upholding ‘appreciation’ helped me to explore opportunities for me to experience and celebrate success.

Through teachers’ encouragement and my practice, I have found that teaching is a profession that always brings you new experience, new challenges and excitement. This is what ‘destiny’ embodies; at the destiny stage, we can not only identify our great success from the past but also have firm belief and hopes for a bright future. Destiny is the springboard for success and appreciation.

In summary, in this chapter, I have interpreted various teaching and personal learning experiences through reference to the 4-D cycle. Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny processes are gradually becoming integrated into my thinking about my
teaching and learning. I am now accustomed to looking at so much of my experience in this innovative way. As a Chinese teacher volunteer, working in a foreign language classroom environment, I have greatly benefited from engagement with appreciative approaches to pedagogy, which enable me to appreciate my own ongoing learning and accumulation process. In Chapter 6, I return to the main research questions and offer some discussion of where this research might lead.
Chapter 6

Conclusion and implications: Looking into the future

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter I address the main research questions and discuss some of the implications contained in this project.

6.2 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research questions proposed were:

1. Can evidence of appreciative approaches resembling AP/AI be seen in teaching through observations of and reflections upon teaching in NSW classrooms?
2. Can AI be an effective tool to enrich teaching and learning in western Sydney schools?
3. How might this work be relevant to future teaching practices in NSW and China?

Responses to research questions:

Question 1. Appreciative approaches resembling AP/AI were identified in observations of the work of specific language teachers (teacher Sunflower, teacher Cedar, teacher Rose, teacher Lavender and teacher Jacaranda) and through reflections on my own teaching practice.

The language teachers were identified through the Mandarin teaching program I have been involved in. I was invited to visit these teachers’ classes on a regular basis and these visits, plus the interviews I conducted, helped me to arrive at a systematic understanding of their approach to lessons. None of the participants directly mentioned the terms ‘appreciative inquiry’ or ‘appreciative pedagogy’ as these were not terms they were familiar with or accustomed to using. But when I reflected on their work through the lens of my study of theories around appreciative inquiry and appreciative pedagogy it was clear to me that their work was resonant with
understandings contained in this theorizing. For instance, as discussed in the design stage (Chapter 4), five themes emerged from teachers’ interviews that demonstrate how these teachers design their teaching to work through appreciation. These themes were:

1. Engaging with students and developing teaching strategies and programs that sustain students’ interest;
2. Having high expectations of students;
3. Cultivating students’ confidence (in their own abilities);
4. Undertaking classroom management with appreciation;
5. Focusing on appreciative teaching and learning relationships.

All participants mentioned the importance of focusing on students’ learning interests and habits to facilitate their learning. For instance, teacher Sunflower used Chinese culture very effectively to spark students’ learning interest. Teacher Cedar talked at length about the importance of high expectations of students and how this requires teachers to develop a sound understanding of their students. He commented that high expectations go beyond random expectation. They involve encouraging students to realize their personal strength and achievement, and are an important part of teaching because they can inspire students to learn. In this respect, teachers’ expectations and attitudes and students’ confidence are closely related. It is interesting also to find that the element of appreciation can be discussed in relation to classroom management. In the interviews all teachers gave priority to classroom management issues. This surprised me somewhat because in Chinese classrooms, from my experience, teachers do not need to worry about classroom management. In Australia it would seem that an appreciative approach can contribute to effective classroom management. Of most significance is the understanding, mentioned by most at various points in the interviews, that an appreciative learning environment is highly appropriate to the language classroom; that the learning of another language is enhanced by strategies that enable students to identify with their learning emotionally as well as intellectually. Further, that the teacher is a major factor in the construction of that emotional learning relationship. This is important in teaching language but it is important also because of the manner in which an appreciative approach can exert long term influence on a student’s life.
Question 2. This research project did not prove that appreciative inquiry can be used as an effective tool to get students better grades, but it did indicate that appreciative approaches can enrich teaching and learning. The complexity and variety of the learning strategies used by the teachers interviewed attests to this richness.

As a researcher into appreciative inquiry, a teacher and a student learning about how to work appreciatively, I can extend my discussion to argue that my own personal development as a teacher demonstrates how an appreciative approach enriches teaching and learning. My journal documents a growing understanding of my self as a volunteer, teacher and researcher. This tells me that the significance of conducting this project includes but goes beyond, personal understanding and personal achievement. All the teachers involved in this project reported enthusiasm for and insight arising from the discussion of appreciative approaches to pedagogy that I introduced them to. Most teachers recognised also that ‘appreciation’ is more than an approach, it is an understanding that has the effect of transforming practice.

The appreciative interviews engaged and energized all the participants from the start by asking about positive ‘unforgettable teaching experience’. They were designed to have this effect. The participants were encouraged to tell their stories of their successes alongside their understanding of effective teaching. This made the research process an opportunity for interviewees to reflect upon their professional practice. The interviews therefore did more than provide research data. They stimulated interviewees to think broadly about a new set of concepts and to consider them in relation to their own understanding and practice. This is one by-product of the research. Another is the understanding that an essential element of the appreciative inquiry model in the language classroom is the ethic of appreciating one’s self, whether teacher or student. Because you cannot practice the ethic of appreciative teaching if you, yourself are not appreciative. Therefore, self-appreciation, which can be thought of also as positive self-dialogue (Henderson, 1992), exerts considerable impact on our confidence and energy for teaching.
Question 3. My response to this question, following the research, is quite general. I am not in a position to determine how this approach might be used in Australia or China in the future. What I can say however is that my prospective destiny is to be a teacher working with appreciative pedagogy.

My engagement with this project has led me to a deeper understanding of myself as a teacher, researcher and volunteer. The consequence of this study is not distant and detached, but practical and real. I can see it and situate it in my own experience just as I can see it and situate it in the experience of others. I envisage that the study and practice of working with appreciative approaches to pedagogy would contribute to my becoming a very effective (and appreciative) teacher in China. Through the research I have become increasingly convinced of the value, efficacy and values of appreciative inquiry. And I see myself as engaged in a series of 4-D cycles as I continue to explore my self, my work and my environment. All these experiences are connected and helpful to me. Most important of all, I have already found a teaching philosophy to orientate myself. This is a necessary part of being an effective teacher. It suggests that more extensive considerations on this work will be beneficial to me, to other teachers and to students in China and Australia.

As regards the specific work of teaching Mandarin in language classrooms in western Sydney, I hope this project goes some way towards encouraging teachers to work with and also to understand how they may already be working with appreciative approaches to pedagogy in the classroom. I hope that it provides chances for many teachers to reflect upon their own teaching practice, through appreciation. Many might find magical moments in teaching that encourage them to value themselves and their work more effectively. This is especially the case with practicum and prospective teachers who, I believe, can benefit considerably from an appreciative perspective. This can help sustain their teaching interest and enthusiasm, under considerable pressure. Upholding a positive vision and appreciative mindset will open up more opportunities for success and have a cumulative effect on the people involved.

6.3 IMPLICATIONS

Like most research, this project has its limits. It is bound by time, place and
circumstance. The project is of a small scale and limited by the need to undertake it within one and half years. (And a large part of those one and a half years has been taken up by the need to understand research and teaching in Australia and this new Australian culture that is so different to that I am familiar with.) In addition, all interviews were conducted within one hour. All teachers felt constrained by this limit, and while many stretched the time limit, most would also have liked to stretch it further. In addition, the research was conducted in only two secondary schools: both government, co-educational and located in the western suburbs of Sydney. There could be more, and a greater variety of research sites involved. The project was limited also by a lack of research funds. This limited the possibility of having face to face interviews with the two participants in China. More extensive responses from these two teachers could have been beneficial.

However, there is much in this research that might be of value to future researchers. The exploration and application of appreciative inquiry prove the effectiveness of this methodology. The practice of applying this model to education, and language education in particular, might stimulate other researchers’ interests. The use of the 4-D cycle as a tool of data analysis is also something that future researchers may seek to experiment with.

Additionally, some interesting follow-up questions have emerged through this research. If I take this research further, the key issue I will be investigating is: Is it possible to sustain a career in teaching for a long time without working appreciatively? I think this would be a very important question and one that many educators would be interested in.
REFERENCES


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Mitchell_High_School_Staff_Handbook. (2008). Created by DET UserT:\SASS\Admin


Appendix 1. Ethics Approval

Subject: HREC Approval H6797
Date: Friday, 20 March 2009 4:14 PM
From: Kay Buckley <K.BUCKLEY@uws.edu.au>
To: David Wright <david.wright@uws.edu.au>,
<16601723@student.uws.edu.au>
Conversation: HREC Approval H6797

Notification of Approval

Email on behalf of the UWS Human Research Ethics Committee

Dear David and Xijun

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

TITLE: Inquiry into appreciative pedagogy in the language classroom

Masters of Education (Honours) Candidate: Xijun Mao

The Protocol Number for this project is H6797. 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) 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

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

Finally, please contact the Human Ethics Officer, Kay Buckley on (02) 4736 0883 or at 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
Miss Xijun Mao
K 2.2B School of Education
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1997
PENRITH SOUTH DC NSW 1797

Dear Miss Xijun Mao

SERAP number: 2008 – 307

I refer to your application to conduct in NSW government schools (Western Sydney Region) a research project entitled "Inquiring into Appreciative Pedagogy in the Language classroom."

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 2008.

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

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 methods 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 Approval Officer before publication proceeds.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

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

18 May 2009

NSW Department of Education & Training
Western Sydney Region Building TMC, Princes Highway, Eastern Road, Quakers Hill NSW 2763 T 02 9688 7900 F 02 9688 7635
www.education.nsw.au
Appendix 2. Word Association Drawings of Teacher Sunflower’s work
运动

运 = long jump
动 = high jump

云力 = high jump
云力 = high jump

打 → ？

looks like a thumb-tack or nail, which you hit.
网球网 =

king radical — only the king had time to play ball in ancient China
Appendix 3: Pseudonyms of selected language teachers:
I have coded the teachers’ pseudonyms as plants name because during my interaction with these teachers, I got to know them through their favorite flowers and each time when I think of these plants I unconsciously think of these teachers, also because of symbolic meanings associated with these plants. For instance, teacher Sunflower is a very generous and optimistic teacher, very gentle and I gave a sunflower paper folding to her when I taught her students to do the paper folding. In this way I also got to know that teacher Sunflower likes sunflower very much. As regards teacher Jacaranda, I coded her as this flower because I got to know this flower from her. She shared her stories of participating in the Jacaranda festival and this impressed me greatly. To Teacher Rose and Lavender, I coded them as these flowers because of my impressions of their characters during my interaction with them. Teacher Rose is quite an energetic person and who likes bright color while teacher Lavender is a gentle, quite and generous teacher. To the two Chinese men teachers, I named them as teachers Cedar and Bamboo because of the influence of Chinese culture. In China we usually we are accustomed to using flowers to describe women teacher while using plants to describe men. We tended to think of men as stronger. I have worked with this traditional way of understanding rather than sought to investigate and critique gender and stereotypes.

Appendix 4: Explanation of choice of syllabus documents?
All syllabus documents are central to the project. They are;
• K-12 Modern Languages – Chinese syllabus.
• The English language syllabus in Zhejiang province.
These are the documents that I taught from, and that guided my English language learning.

Appendix 5: Recording and analysis of classroom observations
This process involved the following steps:
• Notation of key words during classes I observed plus detailed journal entries immediately after the class.
• Detailed journal entries immediately after the class in classes I taught. These journal entries were guided by central questions around the why, where, how and what of ‘appreciation’. They recorded classroom activities through key questions around roles played and relationships that were constructed.

Appendix 6: What counted to be positive, successful, compelling teaching and learning experience?
Positive, successful, compelling teaching and learning experience were
• Experiences in which student were fully absorbed in the lesson,
The teacher’s appreciation of students’ abilities and efforts were shown to students.

The students’ appreciation of the teachers abilities and efforts were shown to the teacher.

Lessons in which an empathic and appreciative teacher-student relationship developed.

My observations were based on how I saw the lesson, though were often the confirmed in discussion with teachers.

Central to my observations were the appreciative tools of: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny.

Appendix 7: Data analysis method
Data analysis revolved around ‘appreciation’ and was conducted through reference to the 4-D model of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. Key words and phrases were noted and qualities arising within relationships observed while in the classroom as observer and/or teacher.