THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL BELIEFS AND PEDAGOGY: A STUDY OF
AN ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAM AT A PRIVATE LOCAL
EDUCATIONAL LEARNING CENTER IN MACAU, SAR

A doctoral thesis presented
by
Luis Miguel Dos Santos
to
The Graduate School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in the field of
Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts

June 2015
Abstract

Research on teachers’ professional development has examined teachers’ education, beliefs and behaviors. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how personal belief system theory is connected with teacher perceptions of pedagogy and classroom environments in a private adult learning facility for English learning in Macau, China. The participants in this study were classroom teachers in a learning community who believed in collaborating to create environments for best practices. Two main research questions guided this study: 1) What is the relationships between teachers’ personal belief systems and their classroom practice; and 2) How do teachers’ educational experiences as K-12 affect their pedagogy at adult English language learning programs? Three types of data collection methods were employed: interview, classroom observation, and field note markings. The findings of this study described teachers’ utilizing their personal belief systems to engage their students through interactive teaching strategies, which was counter-intuitive for both teachers and students who had been taught with Eastern teaching styles. This research study contributes to the personal belief system theory and broadens the understanding of the perspectives and concepts of English teaching and supervising. The beliefs of teachers influenced their understanding about teaching, as well as their classroom practices.

Keywords: English language teaching and learning, personal belief system, teachers’ professional development
Acknowledgements

This doctoral dissertation represents a very long journey and the efforts of a large group of people. Fortunately, I met with many friends, peers, mentors, co-workers, faculty members and even people who dislike me.

First, I would like to use this opportunity to thank you to my family. I would like to thank my late mother Pui Lin Cheong, my father Alberto Dos Santos, my sister Liliana Dos Santos and her family for their love and support throughout my life. Without the support from my family, I do not think I could have completed this challenging degree. One decade ago, my parents decided to send me to the United States for education but I was unwilling to come. However, without this turning point, I would not have the opportunity to finish this degree. Their decision and support made it possible for me to conduct and successfully complete this doctoral degree.

I would like to send my sincere thank you to Dr. Kimberly Nolan for her guidance and assistant throughout my doctoral program. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Joseph McNabb for his meaningful assistance and detailed feedback for this study. At the beginning of the program, Dr. McNabb introduced me to how to become a professional educator in higher education. The tuition of both Dr. Nolan and Dr. McNabb continues to impact my way to work as an educator. A special thank you must be sent to Dr. Kelly Conn and Dr. Leslie Hitch who came to Hong Kong for the summer residency and tutorial. I still remember that we discussed the
contemporary higher education situations and how to handle low-enrollment programs in higher education institutions. It could have been just general talks to someone else. However, the outcomes of these discussions changed my views about education for a lifetime.

My appreciation to Dr. Joan Dolamore and Dr. Pamela Arons at Lasell College, where I completed my first master’s degree in management. Also, Dr. Joan Dolamore is my third reader as well. I appreciate all her efforts for this doctorate thesis as well as lectures during my master’s degree. Moreover, special thanks are extended to Dr. Jane Evison, who was my third master’s degree dissertation supervisor at The University of Nottingham. Dr. Evison provided me the flexibility to finish my master’s dissertation while completing this challenging doctoral dissertation. Studying multiple postgraduate degrees at the same time is very challenging, but the positive suggestions and encouragements from Dr. Evison were keys to my progress.

I was fortunate to have been engaged with a group of supportive classmates throughout this doctoral study, our first EdD cohort in Hong Kong: Holly Chung, Rebecca Ong, Benz Choklap, Edith Leung, Forrest Chan, David Best and Daya Choy. Daya Choy is a very special person to me. She is not only a classmate, but a mentor, peer, and friend. We share academic concerns, writing suggestions and even personal problems. Their support and life-long friendship are one of the most important gifts in my life.
Last but not least, I must send my sincere thanks to Dr. Lo who supported me throughout these years. Within these years, I have moved to another location, and I have changed several working positions. Unstable situations occurred but we are still in touch. Thank you for your understanding about my unbearable temper. It is very difficult working full-time and completing three postgraduate degrees at the same time. It is impossible to complete all these degrees without the support of my family and love ones. I am glad that I have had the opportunity to enjoy all these experiences in my 20s.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. 2

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................. 3

Table of Contents ..................................................................................................... 6

List of Tables ............................................................................................................. 8

List of Figures ........................................................................................................... 8

Chapter One: Introduction ......................................................................................... 9
  Statement of the Problem and Its Significance ....................................................... 9
  Brief Summary of Research Questions ................................................................. 11
  Theoretical Framework .......................................................................................... 12
  Personal Belief System ........................................................................................... 12
  Summary of Paper Contents and Organization ...................................................... 19

Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................... 21
  Teachers’ Beliefs ................................................................................................... 21
  Relationship between Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices ......................................... 26
  Changes in Teachers’ Beliefs .................................................................................. 30
  Summary and Research Gap ................................................................................... 34

Chapter Three: Methodology ..................................................................................... 36
  Interpretivism ......................................................................................................... 36
  Research Design ..................................................................................................... 37
  Participants .............................................................................................................. 39
  Participant Recruitment and Research Site Access .............................................. 40
  Protection of Human Subjects ............................................................................... 40
  Data Collection ....................................................................................................... 41
  Data Storage ............................................................................................................ 48
  Data Analysis .......................................................................................................... 48
  Validity and Credibility .......................................................................................... 50
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 52

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis ....................................................................... 54
  Student Purpose and Self-Direction ...................................................................... 56
  Instruction Tailored to Student Needs ................................................................... 62
Teachers as Life-long Learners.................................................................69
Importance of Caring and Support..........................................................73
Dislike for Eastern Teaching Styles..........................................................79
Preference for Interactive Teaching Methods..........................................84
Conclusion ..................................................................................................91

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implication for Practice ....................................96
Student Purpose and Self-Direction............................................................98
Tailoring Instruction to Meet Student Needs..............................................101
Teachers as Life-Long Learners ...............................................................104
Importance of Caring and Support............................................................105
Dislike for Eastern Teaching Styles...........................................................107
Preference for Interactive Teaching Methods..........................................108
Limitations ...............................................................................................108
Implications for Practice ..........................................................................110
Recommendations for Future Research ....................................................113
Conclusion ..................................................................................................114

References ................................................................................................117

Appendix A: Teacher Interview Protocol Adapted from Seidman .......................125

Appendix B: Example of a Diagram Referencing the Setting of an English Language Learning Classroom .................................................................127

Appendix C: Northeastern University IRB Approval ........................................128

Appendix D: Recruitment Letter ................................................................129

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form ........................................................130
List of Tables

Table 1. Identification of Recurring Themes ................................................................. 55

List of Figures

Figure 1. Personal Belief System (PBS) adapted from Kindsvatter et. al., 1996.......................... 14

Figure 2. Conceptual framework of teacher cognition (Borg, 1997, 2003).................................. 31

Figure 3. General Inductive Approach by Thomas (2006) ..................................................... 50
Chapter One—Introduction:

Statement of the Problem and Its Significance

The problem statement in this study addresses four issues. First, English teachers’ personal beliefs about language teaching and learning may influence their current classroom practice. For example, teachers may have personal beliefs about their teaching philosophy, teaching goals, their understanding of their role as teachers, and previous learning experiences. Students’ learning in any learning environment is influenced by a comprehensive mix of variables. These variables may include how teachers instruct or what their pedagogical style is. Both students and teachers entering the classroom have varying personalities, personal beliefs, personal preferences, and personal learning styles which could positively or negatively influence the learning environment. Therefore, if teachers are able to share their sources of personal beliefs and receive feedback about language teaching and learning, their current classrooms will benefit from an improved learning environment.

Second, research about English teaching (Davies & Pearse, 2000) has shown that it is helpful for teachers to express their understanding of classroom practices. This is because listening to their peers’ feedback may encourage teachers to share their own teaching experiences. Such shared ideas may eventually be implemented by the teaching staff. Teachers are thus able to absorb empirical knowledge about English teaching and learning, which they can apply to their classroom practices.

Third, Macau, where the researcher lives and works, is a special administrative region governed by China. Macau is a major international tourist city known primarily for resorts, gambling, fine dining, and shopping. It is also a cultural center where the Portuguese culture meets the Chinese culture. Every year, Eastern and Western cultural scenic spots attract a large
group of visitors who enjoy the historical heritages (Cheng, 1999). However, there is a problematic trend in regard to Macau residents’ achievement in English language usage. According to Young (2006), English comprehensive skills are gradually decreasing in this decade. More important overall in an international hospitality-oriented city, many working professionals are unable to use normal English language to communicate with visitors.

During the late 1900s, a larger population of immigrants entered the Portuguese Colonial Macau than in any period in its history (Bray & Hui, 1989; Porter, 1993; Cheng, 1999; Edmonds, 1999). Currently, many of these immigrants are turning middle age. Therefore, there are three major groups in Macau: adult native Macau residents, young Macau-born residents, and immigrants. The government indicates that a large number of middle-aged adults entering hospitality industries as career switchers have had little or no prior education of English. As a result, Macau has a large number of adult residents who are unable to communicate with travelers in English at all.

A large number of Macau residents cannot communicate in English. In order to gain promotions in the hospitality industry, many residents enroll in different types of English language learning programs. Recent data from the government indicated more than 72% of Macau residents are in the workforce (Overall Labour Force Participation Rate, 2013). In addition, recent data from the government also indicated only 1.9% of Macau residents are currently unemployed (Overall Unemployed Rate, 2013). To assist these groups of adult learners and their family members to attain a higher socioeconomic level, adult English language learning programs have been established. Currently, many types of organizations provide English language learning programs for adults, such as the Direcção dos Serviços de Educação e
Juventude (Department of Education and Juvenile Service), known as DSEJ, private local educational learning centers, higher education institutions, and community centers.

Last, there is little qualitative research on teachers’ personal beliefs about teaching the English language in Macau, particularly in the field of adult learning. Therefore, it is important to study the behaviors of teachers involved in adult English language learning programs. More importantly, this research provides the opportunity for teachers at an adult learning program to understand how their personal beliefs may influence their classroom practice.

In conclusion, this research is beneficial for teacher leaders, school administrators, and current English language teachers, educators and learners. Significantly, this research about teachers’ personal beliefs can help both school administrators and teacher leaders to understand teachers’ personal beliefs about language teaching and learning. This helps them to design teachers’ professional development plans. This research also provides the opportunity for teachers to understand their personal beliefs and how these beliefs influence their practice, and more importantly, how the result of this research can help them to develop better classroom practice. Also, if teachers have the chance to share their personal beliefs through interviews, they may eventually examine their own unexamined personal beliefs and practices. Lastly, after teachers re-think their teaching practices, their teaching practices are more likely to be improved.

In order to explore the teachers’ personal belief system (PBS) about their English language teaching in the Macau context, two research questions were explored in this research.

**Brief Summary of Research Questions**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the personal beliefs of five teachers at an adult English language learning program in a private local educational learning center. The researcher also explored the pedagogies that the teachers are using to instruct and the relationship
between the personal beliefs and the pedagogy of the teachers. The following are the research questions of this study:

1) What is the relationships between teachers’ personal belief systems and their classroom practice?

2) How do teachers’ educational experiences as K-12 students affect their pedagogy at adult English language learning programs?

In order to answer these research questions, the researcher gathered data including two interviews (i.e. pre-observation and post-observation), observations, and field note markings to explore five participants’ personal beliefs. Chapter Three provides a detailed explanation of how to the information was obtained.

**Theoretical Framework**

Personal beliefs of individuals can be influenced by various sources, including personal experiences, education, and understanding of concepts. Many studies have indicate that teachers’ teaching strategies and behaviors can be influenced by their previous experiences as learners. The goal of this research study is to understand the relationship between the personal beliefs and the pedagogy of teachers at an adult English language learning center for second language speakers. This study employ a theoretical framework that is heavily reliant upon personal belief system theory (PBS) by Kindsvatter, Wilen & Ishler (1996), which describes the two aspects of beliefs systems (the intuitive and the rational) upon which behavior is based.

**Personal Belief System**

It is important to identify teachers’ personal beliefs and teachers’ pedagogies to identify the best ways to provide students with the greatest opportunity of learning. Tattó & Coupland (2003) define belief as a sense or principle held by a group of people, as well as persuasion based
on supported evidence which impacts behaviors as a social phenomenon. Educators stress the need to encourage foreign language teachers to enhance their teaching and learning strategies. However, teachers always express that there are gray areas in improving their current pedagogies. The most powerful influences on the enhancement of teaching and learning are instructors’ understanding of own teaching practices and of the foundations of teaching and learning.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to understand the relationship between personal beliefs and teaching pedagogies of teachers at a local educational learning center in Macau. In order to better understand the relationship, the personal belief system (PBS) theoretical framework will focus on the personal belief system of teachers. The personal belief system framework was developed by Kindsvatter et al. (1996); they suggest that teachers’ PBS may impact their teaching behaviors, teaching styles, and pedagogies in classroom practice. This information is important for policy makers, teachers, school leadership, and teacher educators who wish to develop effective and feasible strategies targeting the development of teaching and learning.

The importance of understanding the relationship between personal beliefs and teaching pedagogies is very much related to, and supported by, the personal belief system (PBS) developed by Kindsvatter et. al (1996). It focuses on how teachers’ personal beliefs and personal experiences impact their teaching behaviors, teaching styles, and pedagogies. The personal belief system is relevant to understanding the relationship between personal beliefs and pedagogies in an adult English language learning program as well. As noted by Kindsvatter et. al (1996), “generalized information, attitudes, and assumptions” (p. 13) are three of the key elements that impact the decision making processes and directions of teaching. The personal
belief system theoretical framework serves as the lens to view the research problems and how personal beliefs impact teachers’ pedagogies.

The personal belief system (PBS) theory is a two-tiered approach for a structural backbone for theoretical concepts in this particular research. The personal belief system theory includes two bases, 1) the intuitive and 2) the rational. Further, they divide two bases into two separate beliefs systems, which are 1) unexamined beliefs and 2) informed beliefs. The below is a figure of the personal belief system by Kindsvatter et. al (1996).

![Figure 1. Personal Belief System (PBS) adapted from (Kindsvatter, et. al. 1996)]

**Intuitive based.** Based on PBS theory, there are three major components to understand unexamined beliefs, including experience-based impression, traditional practices, and personal needs.

**Experience-based impression.** In the experience-based perspective toward unexamined beliefs, Kindsvatte, et. al. (1996) argue that teachers’ service experiences usually direct what are deemed appropriate or useful exercises in their classroom. The authors conducted an interview with a teacher with 10 years of experience addressing a classroom situation; this teacher stated that the first and most important thing before entering the classroom would be catching the
attention of all students. In fact, such behaviors may not be ideal in all types of classrooms. However, teachers may assume that such behavior is the most proper pedagogy based on their previous experiences. Kindsvatter et. al (1996) suggest that regardless of status, in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, junior teachers, and students teachers be made aware of information about personal beliefs which may influence their current or future teaching practices. Their previous experiences as teachers or students may also direct the individual’s teaching pedagogies.

*Traditional practice.* Kindsvatter et. al (1996) observe that traditional practices can be different from culture to culture or from setting to setting. General practices and exercises that are used by large numbers of teachers and educational institutions tend to have their origins in traditional wisdom. For instance, in a semester-based school, mid-December is always the ending date of the fall semester. Another example—when school principals step on the stage of the auditorium, they typically deliver a long speech in front of everybody in the school. Therefore, teachers should have their own teaching styles, teaching curriculum and teaching pedagogies within their own cultures and school settings. When junior teachers and pre-service teachers enter the school, they can observe what veteran teachers do. Also, they can learn from veteran teachers’ experiences and combine them with their own understanding in order to create their own teaching pedagogies (Dornyei & Malderez, 1997). Teachers in an adult foreign language learning program may believe that memorizing and dictating vocabulary are the primary strategies to study foreign language based on their own experiences or traditional practices of studying language. Therefore, teachers may fail to develop their own teaching strategies and practices.
**Personal needs.** Personal needs might include classroom management and teachers’ expectations of students. Kindsvatter et. al (1996) suggest that personal-related and mental-health needs impact the perception and behaviors of teachers. Dornyei (2011) found that teachers like to arrange interactive activities with foreign language learners as pair-mates. Teachers expect to have good classroom management and expectations for their own class in order to achieve their teaching goals. For instance, in a library class, all students should be silent and returned all assigned books into the correct place. In addition, in a physical education class, all students should be lined up in order to have direct and orderly control.

**Rational bases.** Beside the intuitive bases and the three unexamined components, there are six components within the rational bases for the informed beliefs system, including pedagogical principles, constructivist approaches, teacher effectiveness practices, research findings, scholarly contributions, and examined practices.

**Pedagogical principles.** In fact, pedagogical principles are hard to define in classrooms. One teacher’s definitions are not the same as the next’s. Some teachers believe punishment is a ways of teaching, some believe assignments and homework, and some believe interactions between peers. In fact, previous experiences as K-12 students could shape the pedagogical principles of English teachers. It is important for teachers to define what kinds of pedagogical principles they employ in order to develop activities for foreign language teaching (Davies & Pearse, 2000). However, regardless of the types of principle, teachers’ pedagogical principles are influenced by their personal beliefs (Kindsvatter et. al, 1996).

**Constructivist approaches.** Kindsvatter et. al (1996) state that the basis if the constructivist approach is treating students as meaning creators. The definitions and examples of constructivist approaches are different from teacher to teaches. However, for foreign language
teachers, students’ meaning could come from their personal beliefs. For example, some teachers believe punishments, assignments and interactions can be ways of learning. If one foreign language teacher believes interaction is the way to learn a foreign language, it could be because of his/her positive experiences of learning foreign language during K-16 schooling (Nunan, 1991).

**Teacher effectiveness practices.** What are the common techniques for foreign language teachers? Teachers may observe from other experienced teachers at their workplace, may draw on previous learning experiences, and may learn from books (Davies & Pearse, 2000). For foreign language teachers, techniques from their own past teachers could be the key (Kindsvatter et. al, 1996). For example, if foreign language teachers engaged with interaction as their learning strategies during their K-12 experiences, these foreign language teachers are more likely to use interaction as their practices.

**Research findings.** Kindsvatter et. al (1996) describe research findings as “discoveries through systematic methods of research into content of education, instructional approaches, and learning effectiveness” (p.16). Research findings may be more difficult for foreign language teachers to experience. In general, experienced teachers usually read articles about teaching enhancements in order to open their minds to new ideas. According to Avalos (2011), junior foreign language teachers may not have enough teaching experience and time to access and integrate research findings to their practices. Experienced teachers can discuss and share teaching and learning experiences with junior foreign language teachers in order to discover effective practices of foreign language teaching. If the discussions and new teaching enhancements are meaningful and useful for teachers, they may accept and continue to change
their practices. Because the discussions, enhancements and experiences must be understood, they can be defined as an informed beliefs system.

**Scholarly contribution.** Kindsvatter et. al (1996) cited examples of teachers’ scholarly contribution to academia: essays, models, theories, and judgments. However, it could be difficult for junior foreign language teachers to produce such high-level informed knowledge in the field. At least 5 years of education-related experiences is recommended. It does not necessarily mean that foreign language teachers do not have the abilities to write scholarly articles the field (Avalos, 2011), but they should play a very positive and active role in the field and have very clear ideas about what the topics are.

**Examined practice.** Kindsvatter et. al (1996) recommend that examined practices serve as a foundation for teachers to try different new teaching practices in order to provide best practices to students. Foreign language teachers should try to exercise several new practices and reflect about them. For instance, when a large segment of foreign language students in a class are unable to absorb a grammatical structure, foreign language teachers could create some new activities targeting the problems in order to improve the learning outcomes. It is very difficult to change teachers’ practices unless the teachers acknowledge their weaknesses. This concept could be understand as an informed beliefs system because foreign language teachers must understand their practices in order to write reflections.

In conclusion, Kindsvatter et. al (1996) mention several teachers’ beliefs in general. There are unexamined beliefs which teachers develop without awareness and understandings. On the other hand, there are informed beliefs which teachers develop based on their current experiences. Many personal beliefs and sub-beliefs of foreign language teachers were identified in solidifying the theoretical framework of the current study, but all of these ideas are related. In
fact, these beliefs are some of the key elements which influence classroom practices. Therefore, foreign language teachers should learn and understand how their personal beliefs can affect their practices. In many cases, personal beliefs are difficult to define and express in front of someone because they are not physical objects. Foreign language teachers at adult educational learning environments should understand their current teaching practices and previous learning experiences as learners in order to develop proper pedagogies for students. If all teachers can understand their beliefs, they can build comfortable learning environments that respect each other’s needs as well. Students can also enjoy the benefits of new, meaningful and suitable pedagogies along their foreign language learning voyage.

In sum, PBS is appropriate for this research. In a study done by Kagan (1992), the author found that the PBS framework can enhance understanding of the implications of teachers’ personal beliefs and how to improve their teaching pedagogies, styles, and practices. When teachers are able to understand the relationship between their personal beliefs and teaching pedagogies, they should be empowered to provide positive engagements to enhance students’ learning outcomes. This is an important concept when researching how personal beliefs impact teaching pedagogies, because understanding the how and why teachers behave in certain ways is the key when discussing pedagogies.

**Summary of Paper Contents and Organization**

This doctoral dissertation explores the relationship between personal beliefs and pedagogy for teachers at an adult English language learning program in a private local educational learning center. A theoretical framework: personal belief system (PBS) theory by Kindsvatter et. al (1996) was chosen to serve as a lens through which to view the problem of practice. The review of literature (Chapter Two) outlines information about teachers’ beliefs,
relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practice, and changes in teachers’ beliefs. The various considerations made in designing the study for the protection of human subjects and practical aspects of the research can be found in Chapter Three. Interpretation of the study’s findings and discussions of how informed data analysis could become recommendations for teachers to improve their current practices are provided in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter begins with the concept of teachers’ beliefs, followed by a review of studies exploring teachers’ beliefs using different methodologies. Then, the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ classroom practices is discussed, after which is discussed factors influencing teachers’ beliefs with a particular emphasis upon professional development courses. A summary and the identification of relevant research gaps follow.

Teachers’ Beliefs

Terminology

The concept of teachers’ beliefs has been associated with different labels. Borg (2003) offers a list of relevant terms associated with similar concepts. These terms include personal pedagogical systems (Borg, 1998), teacher cognition (Borg, 2003, 2006), pedagogical knowledge (Gatbonton, 1999) and personal theories (Sendan & Roberts, 1998).

These different terms may be used to describe similar concepts, and different concepts could be referred to by the same term (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987), which inevitably leads to confusion, as pointed out by Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding & Cuthbert (1988). For example, teacher cognition was used to describe “what teachers know, believe, and think” (Borg, 2003, p. 85), which might be interpreted as consisting of three key elements, namely, knowledge, beliefs and thoughts.

To some researchers (e.g. Gatbonton, 1999; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992), these three elements could be, or at least should be, distinguished. For example, Gatbonton’s (1999) pedagogical knowledge has been used to describe the knowledge of a teacher that informs his/her practice in classrooms. Further, Pajares (1992) advocates that teachers’ beliefs should not only
be conceptualized differently from the concept of knowledge, but should also be the focus of educational research on its own.

On the other hand, the concepts of beliefs and knowledge might not be as distinguishable as one might intuitively think. Researchers, such as Grossman, Wilson & Shulman (1989), Verloop, Van Driel & Meijer (2001) and Woods (1996), failed to completely separate teachers’ knowledge and beliefs. For instance, when looking into subject matter knowledge of teachers, Grossman et al. concluded that the borderline between knowledge and beliefs, if there is any, is “blurry at best” (p. 31). Indeed, Verloop et al. point out that such concepts as knowledge and beliefs are indeed “inextricably intertwined” (p. 446) in a teacher’s mind.

As a result, more recent research (e.g. Nishino, 2012) uses the terms teachers’ belief and teacher cognition almost interchangeably. In the light of this trend, the present study uses teachers’ beliefs in the same sense as Borg’s (2003, p. 85) teacher cognition to describe “what teachers know, believe and think.”

**Exploring Teachers’ Beliefs**

One approach to exploring teachers’ beliefs is to use self-report questionnaires such as Allen’s (2002) Foreign Language Education Questionnaire (FLEQ), Sato & Kleinsasser’s (1999) Foreign Language Attitude Survey for Teachers (FLAST), and Horwitz’s (1985) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). For example, Horwitz’s (1985) BALLI was originally designed to understand learners’ beliefs, but has been adopted to investigate what teachers believe about language learning in general (e.g. Kern, 1995; Peacock, 1999, 2001). Peacock (1999), who focused on teachers’ belief as one aspect of the study (i.e. as one of a set of research questions), administered BALLI to 45 teachers of English in a university in Hong Kong. The author asked the teachers to rate 28 statements, which among the 34 questions in the original
BALLI are relevant only to teachers, on a five point Likert-scale where participants could choose from “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.” These statements address five aspects of language learning: the nature of language learning, the difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, pronunciation, and language learning strategies. Examples of these statements include: “It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language;” and “It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country” (Peacock, 1999, p.252). The teachers’ responses were taken to reflect what teachers believed in. Comparing the responses of the teacher participants and those of the student participants from the same university, Peacock was able to conclude that beliefs of teachers and those of learners could be different. Specifically, the learners reported that they believed that both grammar and vocabulary were important, while only a small percentage of the teachers believed the same.

One of the key strengths of this methodology (i.e. use of self-report questionnaires) may be its ability to survey a relatively large number of participants in the sample, making statistical analyses an option for researchers. In Peacock (1999), for example, 45 teachers and 202 learners were surveyed. However, one limitation of this methodology could be that the pre-set questions are often open to individual interpretation by the participants, leaving relatively little room for clarification when ambiguity arises. Also, there could be a lack of flexibility in eliciting more in-depth responses from the participants. Indeed, Peacock supplemented this quantitative approach with qualitative interviews, but they were only conducted with the learner participants.

Another approach to teachers’ belief is conducting interviews. Interviews may be structured (i.e. all participants are asked the same questions in the same wordings and order), or they may be semi-structured (i.e. the interviews are guided only by a general theme, rather than
specifically worded questions in a particular order). For example, Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) developed a standard interview protocol for their interviews with 10 high school teachers of Japanese in 10 Australian state schools (9 females and 1 male; 9 native Australian English speakers and 1 native Japanese speakers; years of teaching experience: 0.75 – 13). Through 12 major interview questions, the authors attempted to explore the teachers’ beliefs about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), specifically how CLT was understood, how textbooks were used, what role grammar played and what communicative activities were included in class. The interviews were recorded and transcribed as descriptive data for qualitative analysis (i.e. identification, comparison and classification of common concepts and trends). From these descriptive data, the authors were able to identify four main conceptions, for example, about CLT that were held by the teacher participants: CLT meant learning to communicate in a second language; speaking and listening were the foci of CLT; little grammar teaching was involved; and many activities needed to be included.

Similarly, Kim (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 native English-speaking teachers of proficiency courses in a Korean university (2 females and 6 males; age range: 30 – 52; mean number of years of teaching in Korea: 5.3). The author attempted to explore these teachers’ beliefs about learning and teaching English in Korea. Specifically, the author was interested in the teachers’ beliefs about learning and teaching, the sources of these beliefs, as well as the role of teachers. The transcribed data were first cross-checked by the interviewees before being analyzed qualitatively.

Kim described the data analysis as following the procedure in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in that the author first read the transcripts without a pre-set coding scheme. Relevant concepts were labeled in verbatim to avoid confusion and misinterpretations. Then,
these labels were first categorized into broad categories, such as “learning experience” (Kim, 2011, p. 129). Item in each of these categories were then further grouped into subcategories, such as “be responsible” (Kim, 2011, p. 129). This is the stage, according to the author, when a “storyline” would emerge to help the researcher understand the account of the teachers’ beliefs. A validation of interpretation procedure, where peers of the author (i.e. master’s and doctoral students) cross-checked and verified the categorization, was also in place to avoid subjective bias. From the analysis, the author interpreted that the teacher participants believed the key to success in language learning was students’ active participation. Also, the analysis led the author to argue that the teachers’ beliefs were closely associated with the teachers’ own language learning experience.

In terms of methodological considerations, conducting interviews allows researchers to follow up any issue they deem worth pursuing during the course of interview. Therefore, more in-depth responses could be expected. However, unlike using questionnaires, the number of participants in studies using this qualitative approach is often limited. For example, beliefs of eight teachers were explored in Kim, which may cast doubts on the representation and significance of the findings in that the beliefs held by this sample of participants may not necessarily represent the beliefs of a larger population.

Indeed, using the two discussed self-report instruments (i.e. questionnaires and interviews) in research in teachers’ beliefs may also need caution. First, in terms of theoretical implications, Borg (2003) casts doubts on the usefulness of studying teachers’ beliefs without references to authentic classroom practices. Indeed, one of the many motivations in this research is to explain practices (Grotjahn, 1991) because there is a general impression that teachers’ beliefs could be a basis for actions (Borg, 2011), and that beliefs provide guidance for teachers’
decision making (Arnett & Turnbull, 2008). Therefore, studying the mental aspects of a teacher in an isolated manner may not be ideal.

Further, in terms of methodology, both self-report instruments rely heavily upon the honesty of the teachers concerned. Researchers need to accept the limitation that that the participants may not be telling the truth when they report their beliefs. Even if the participants were honest, there would still be a risk that the teachers are not consciously aware of what they actually believe in. Also, the teachers’ accounts may not be entirely accurate. For example, Basturkmen (2012) reviewed 13 doctoral theses, three journal articles and a book chapter, identified through searching four electronic data bases. The author investigated the extent of correspondence between teachers’ stated beliefs and practices. The researcher found that such correspondence was mainly reported in studies involving experienced teachers and planned instruction. In other words, teachers stated beliefs are not always a “very reliable guide to the reality” (Pajae, 1992, p. 326), perhaps especially in the case of novice teachers (e.g. Fung and Chow, 2002) and in unplanned situations (e.g. Basturkmen, Loewen and Eillis, 2004). In the light of this limitation of self-report instruments, it may be important for researchers to look into real classroom situations for the sake of maximizing theoretical implications and triangulating the data in methodological terms.

**Relationship between Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices**

As discussed briefly, teachers’ beliefs could be a factor influencing classroom practices. But, there could also be incongruence between the teachers’ stated beliefs and classroom practices. The relationship between the two has been studied in the area of grammar teaching by Basturkmen et al. (2004). The researchers focused on teachers’ beliefs and practices related to incidental focus on form (i.e. drawing students’ attention to grammatical forms during
communicative language activities). The authors investigated three male native English-speaking teachers in a private language school in Auckland, New Zealand, whose students had a mean age of 22 and came mostly (>75%) from such Asian countries as Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan. Two of the teachers had 11 and 15 years of teaching experience, while one teacher had only one year of teaching experience. Also, all three of them had received related teacher training prior to the study.

The researchers used both self-report and observational methodologies. The self-report instruments included in-depth interviews, cued responses scenarios (i.e. participants were given a hypothetical scenario to comment on), and stimulated recalls (i.e. participants were presented extracts of the recorded and transcribed lessons of their own lessons, and were asked to verbalize their thoughts during the captured moments in class). The self-report data were analyzed qualitatively to identify recurring themes. For class observations, a researcher observed naturally occurring lessons as a non-participant. From the observational data, target practices (i.e. instances of incidental focus on form) were identified, classified and coded, before a frequency and duration count. The two sets of data (i.e. self-report and observational data) were analyzed independently by different researchers before being compared against each other.

Results were inconclusive in that there seemed to be degrees of both congruence and incongruence. On one hand, for instance, the stated beliefs of one teacher concerning the importance of attending to target grammatical structures were reflected by the higher percentage of focus on form in the teacher’s lessons. On the other hand, focus on form was often not prompted by misunderstandings in communication as stated in the self-report data by the teachers. The authors attempted to account for such incongruence by distinguishing technical (i.e. theoretical) and practical knowledge (Eraut, 1994). According to the authors, when the
participants were asked about their beliefs without a concrete event, they might draw on their technical knowledge. In contrast, when the teachers were in the classroom, they had to resort more to their experience and understanding of teaching. Also, it was suggested that experience had a role to play in aligning technical and practical knowledge because a teacher participant with only one year of teaching experience showed the most incongruence in this study. This suggestion implies that teachers’ beliefs might be subject to change as a result of experience.

Another example showing that teachers’ beliefs may or may not be reflected in classroom practices is Farrell and Lim (2005). The authors conducted a case study that examined the stated beliefs and practices of two female primary school teachers of English in Singapore with 10 and 24 years of teaching experience. The focus of the study was also grammar teaching. Data collection for stated beliefs involved primarily interviews, while classroom practices were investigated through classroom observations, and examination of lesson plans, teaching materials and samples of marked students’ writing.

Analysis showed that one teacher showed a “strong sense of convergence” (Farrell & Lim, 2005, p. 9) between the stated beliefs and practices. For example, she expressed her beliefs in explicit grammar instruction, which was also observed in her classrooms as manifested by explicit emphasis on grammar. However, another teacher’s beliefs only partially matched her practices. On one hand, she claimed that grammar teaching was best integrated with actual language use, such as speaking and writing tasks, but it was observed that she provided explicit grammar explanation and decontextualized grammar drilling. The researchers attributed the lack of correspondence between the stated beliefs and actual classroom practices to contextual factors such as the demand on time for communicative activities. Perhaps one limitation of this study is that the authors did not attempt to explain why there existed different degrees of correspondences
between beliefs and practices between the two participants. Assuming both participants were under the influence of similar contextual factors because they were in the same school, the different degrees of correspondence between beliefs and practices implied some other factors in play in the relationship.

Although it appears that teachers’ beliefs are not always reflected in classroom practices and that other factors could have a role to play, there is also some evidence that beliefs and practices could be congruent with each other. Kuzborska (2011) looked into the instruction of reading in the English for academic purposes program in a state university in Lithuania. Although all eight teacher participants had four years of experience in teaching English for academic purposes, none had any professional teacher training at all, except one who attended a one-day training. Similar to studies reviewed earlier, the author conducted observations, interviews and stimulated recalls in order to obtain data for the teachers’ beliefs in teaching reading and their actual practices. From the analysis, the results showed that their beliefs and practices were matched in that a skill-based approach emphasizing on vocabulary, reading aloud, translation and whole class discussion was not only adopted in classroom practices, but was also stated as their beliefs.

On the surface, the findings of Kuzborska (2011) appear to be at odds with those in Basturkmen et al. (2004), for example. But if Basturkmen and colleagues’ explanation on the different degrees of congruence (i.e. experienced teachers being more able to align technical and practical knowledge than less experienced teachers, hence experienced teachers’ beliefs correspond more to their practices) is accepted, it may be interesting to note that the participants in Kuzborska did not receive teacher training (except one who had attended a one-day workshop). Therefore, it could be speculated that the teachers in Kuzborska may not possess
much technical knowledge, specifically about how reading should be taught. As a result, there could be relatively little conflict between technical and practical knowledge, and hence their beliefs and practices were relatively more congruent.

In short, the relationship between teachers’ stated beliefs and classroom practices does not seem to be straightforward in that different levels of correspondence between beliefs and practices have be found in this research. Therefore, caution is suggested in the course of investigating teachers’ beliefs.

**Changes in Teachers’ Beliefs**

Although teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices may not always correspond to each other, it is still one of the motivations of studying teachers’ beliefs to inform teacher education (Borg, 2006). Borg (1997, 2003) attempts to model teachers’ beliefs, identifying various factors that interact with teachers’ beliefs, or in his term, teacher cognition (see Figure 2).
From Borg’s conceptual framework, it could be seen that teachers’ beliefs could be influenced by Schooling (i.e. the teachers’ previous learning experience), Professional Coursework (i.e. pre- and / or in-service teacher training), Contextual Factors and Classroom Practice. Besides the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices and that between beliefs and contextual factors as discussed in the previous sections, schooling and professional coursework could have an impact on teachers’ beliefs. However, due to the limit of space and the scope of the present dissertation, only influence of professional courses on teachers’ beliefs is discussed.

Borg (2011) conducted a qualitative longitudinal study looking into the influence of an eight-week professional development course at diploma level on the teachers’ beliefs of 6 female
in-service teachers of English in the UK whose years of experience in teaching ranged from 2 to 10 years. Data were collected mainly by means of questionnaires, interviews, and examination of the teachers’ coursework, such as lesson plans and reflective journals, as well as the feedback course tutors provided.

The qualitative data analysis was conducted at two levels, namely cyclical and summative. In line with the longitudinal nature of the study, each data collection phase was informed by the data (i.e. interview data and coursework) from the previous phase. For example, the researcher reviewed the interview transcript from Interview 2 and the most recent coursework and tutor comments while preparing for Interview 3 with the same teacher. Therefore, the issues discussed in each interview could be directly linked to evidence from the previous phase. In addition to the cyclical analysis, there was also summative analysis in that the data were reviewed chronologically upon the completion of data collection.

The analysis showed that the teachers did not go through “a deep and radical reversal in beliefs” (Borg, 2011, p. 378). But the author suggested that three out of the six teachers demonstrated their progress from having limited awareness of their own beliefs to having a strong awareness of the beliefs underpinning their work. What might require caution is that the interviews themselves could have prompted the participants to reflect more on their own beliefs than they would normally do during a professional development course. In other words, the extent to which the suggested impact on the teachers’ beliefs (i.e. becoming more aware of their own beliefs) was a result of the interviews remained uncertain.

Unlike Borg (2011), Urmston (2003) focused on 40 pre-service student teachers (31 female and 9 male) of English in Hong Kong at undergraduate level. The author used a questionnaire developed by Pennington and Richards (1993) to survey the attitudes of the
participants toward the teaching of English in the city. There were in total 51 questions (excluding those asking for personal information) covering five areas: Language Use, Instructional Planning and Decision Making, Teaching Approach, Professional Relationships and Responsibilities, and Perceptions and Values. Most of the questions were on a Likert scale, while some of the questions were open-ended for short responses. The questionnaire was administered twice: once at the beginning of the participants’ three-year undergraduate course, and once at the end.

Statistical tests (i.e. dependent sample t-tests and chi-square tests) were performed to identify any possible change between the scores in the first and second administration of the questionnaire. Results found that the most significant change was observed in the area of teachers’ role and responsibilities. However, the teachers’ beliefs in teaching were less changed by the three-year teacher training. The researcher suggested that the lack of change may be a result of the deep-rooted beliefs that were based on their own learning experience as a student. Therefore, the impact of a three-year course on the beliefs formed by being in the education system for more than a decade was limited.

However, the stability of the beliefs of pre-service teachers was not observed consistently. Busch (2010) offered some evidence of change in beliefs of 381 pre-service teachers (82% female and 18% male) enrolled in a course in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) during their three-year teacher training in a state university in California. Busch used a similar methodology to Urmston (2003), i.e. pre- and post-course beliefs surveys on a Likert scale supplemented by open-ended questions on their beliefs in language learning in general. Results showed change in beliefs in several areas such as the length of time and difficulty for acquisition, the role of cultures and error correction, and the importance of grammar. On the
surface, Busch’s (2010) results appear to be conflict with Urmston’s (2003) results in that the former demonstrated change in beliefs as a result of a professional course, while the latter showed a lack of change. However, it could be important to note that Busch administered the post-course questionnaire during the last week of class, while Urmston conducted the survey in the participants’ third year of studies (i.e. not immediately following any particular course). Therefore, the questionnaire in Busch was almost like a test of knowledge at the end of the term when the theory could still be relatively fresh in the participants’ mind. It could be even better if there were delayed post-test(s) when investigating the impact of professional development courses.

Indeed, all three studies reviewed in this section appear to suggest mixed results regarding the impact of professional courses on teachers’ beliefs. Indeed, the methodology used in all three studies also relied on self-reporting. It may have been interesting if lesson observations had been conducted, in order to explore the impact of the professional course on the classroom practices.

Summary and Research Gaps

This chapter first reviewed studies that explored teachers’ beliefs using various methodologies, such as questionnaires and interviews. The advantages and limitation of these approaches were briefly discussed. Then, the relationship between stated teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices was examined. It appears that this relationship may not be straightforward in that the beliefs and practices may or may not be congruent. Also, studies on the influence of professional coursework on teachers’ beliefs also yield mixed results. Therefore, it might be suggested that a very clear picture of relationship between professional course, teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices seems to be yet emerging. Indeed, while much research has been done to
explore the relationship between beliefs and practices, and that between professional courses and belief change, to the knowledge of the author of this dissertation, there appears to be limited work done specifically addressing these two relationships, i.e. the interaction among the three components: Professional development course, beliefs and practices. This potential interaction is important because it is an ultimate aim for teacher education to inform frontline practices. Also, the results from this line of research could be evaluative regarding how well teacher education serves as an agent to allow practical classroom application of research in second language acquisition and foreign language education. As a result, the main objective of the present dissertation is exactly the interaction of professional development courses, teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This study seeks to answer two research questions by exploring the personal beliefs of five English language teachers at an adult learning center in Macau. Macau is a special administrative region governed by China where the researcher lives and works.

The first research question the researcher asks is, “What is the relationship between teachers’ personal belief systems and their classroom practice?” The question is important to explore because there are studies indicating that teachers’ personal beliefs may impact teachers’ pedagogy (Basturkmen et al., 2004). This research question may be key to expanding the research knowledge in this particular field. Moreover, existing research on teacher beliefs in an adult learning center has not been conducted in Macau.

The second research question the researcher asks is, “How do teachers’ educational experience as students in K-12 schools affect their pedagogy at adult English language learning programs?” The question is equally important because previous experience may influence teachers’ classroom practice at different levels (Borg, 1997, 2003). This research question may provide more evidence that supports or contrasts with Borg’s findings. At the same time, observing that this practice is influenced by the teachers’ own experience as students could inform teacher training as it may help educators understand how their learning experiences shape their teaching practice.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism is a useful and often used paradigm in educational research which provides the primary theoretical framework to guide the investigation of this study (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Researchers adopting the interpretive paradigm generally seek to explain people’s behavior through understanding their “consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of
reference of the participant [of research studies]” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 28). In other words, these researchers are generally interested in the participants’ minds, particularly how they subjectively interpret their social world. However, because it can be difficult, if not impossible, to look directly into the mind of individuals, the most common object of much interpretive research is a subject’s behavior. In the current study, the researcher is interested in how English teachers in Macau behave in a foreign language classroom. Specifically, the researcher wants to learn how these educators teach English as a subject in the adult educational language learning center context.

Behavior alone is not the only object of investigation for interpretive researchers (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Perhaps more important is the interpretation of the social world by the participants. In this study, what matters more is how the participating teachers interpret their own behavior (and that of other English teachers as a community) as English teachers. Moreover, the researcher is interested in how the participants see themselves as members of the social community of English teachers, and how they justify what they do in classrooms (i.e. how they teach English). This investigation attempted to produce a picture of the mind of the participants in order to understand their interpretation and how this influences their teaching of English.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used for this study (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007). This design allows the researcher to gain knowledge about the meaning of social phenomena, events, and English teachers’ understanding of their teaching practice in an adult learning center in Macau (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are interested in “understanding how people interpret their experience, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience” (Merriam, 2009,
The researcher conducted two individual interviews with each participant, completed observations, and took field notes (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007). A qualitative research design allows the researcher to inductively analyze the data and build themes, answer the research questions, and discuss the findings in order to understand teachers’ beliefs and their understanding of teaching practice (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007).

**Inductive Approach**

An inductive approach was used for this study (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2008). The inductive approach allows the researcher to understand teachers’ personal beliefs about English language teaching and learning (Merriam, 2009). With the inductive approach, the researcher attempts to produce an overview of the minds of the participants in order to understand their interpretation and how this influences their teaching of English. A combination of a basic qualitative study and the inductive approach is a logical choice for this study because of the flexible design options available to explore the experiences of the participants and gain in-depth data (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2008).

An inductive approach allows the researcher to build themes from the research data and viewpoints of the participants (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2008). While most researchers refer to this process as an inductive approach (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2008), Thomas (2006) refers to it as the general inductive approach (GIA). Also, the general inductive approach is a methodology of “primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher” (p. 238). Moreover, general inductive approach is a methodology that is easy to employ, simple and straightforward for analyzing findings, and does not require detailed understanding and knowledge of a particular approach. Furthermore, the general inductive approach allows
researchers to establish the research themes by constantly reading and comparing the data in an iterative direction. The general inductive approach helped the researcher stay organized by providing a “systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data” (p. 238).

The general inductive approach follows a logical process (Thomas, 2006). For instance, the researcher closely read the interview transcripts multiple times and identified the most important data. The step-by-step process allows the researcher to reduce the lengthy data into a summary format. The process allows for the determination of the association of the study objectives and findings in the final chapter. The result of the general inductive approach is rich, deep descriptive finding in words instead of statistics. Also, the researcher managed direct quotes marked from participants’ interviews, and studied field notes marked from observations during the research (Creswell, 2007; Saldana, 2013; Thomas, 2006). In summary, the general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) provides the researcher a structured approach to inductively analyze the data and identify themes.

**Participants**

A convenience sampling strategy (Creswell, 2008) was be used to invite five English language teachers to better understand their educational experiences as students and how their experiences influence their pedagogy and personal beliefs as teachers. Convenience sampling means that the researcher may select participants based on a pre-existing personal relationship with the researcher, location, access, duration of their classes, and subjects’ willingness to participate (Creswell, 2008). Participants’ demographic information, such as name and age, were gathered and reported under a pseudonym. Selecting these particular participants provides a rich understanding of the studied phenomenon (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2008). The participants include five full-time employees with at least two-years of English language
teaching experience at an adult language learning center in Macau. The participants teach adult learners above the age of 18.

**Participant Recruitment and Research Site Access**

This study was conducted at a private local educational adult learning center in Macau. There are five English teachers teaching at this research site. The researcher contacted the potential participants (i.e. English teachers) through a printed letter to invite them to participate during the Fall 2014 term. The letter provided information including the rationale and purpose of the study, the nature of the data collection process, a declaration about their voluntary participation or non-participation, the protection of privacy, and risk. The recruitment letter and informed consent form can be viewed in Appendix D and Appendix E. Also, the researcher obtained a written letter of permission from the research site by contacting the director of the adult learning center in Macau for permission to conduct this study at the center. After receiving permission from the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher started collect data at the research site. The Northeastern University IRB form can be viewed in Appendix C.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The protection of human subjects is vital to this research study (Creswell, 2008). One main concern is the protection of participants’ identities. As such, the researcher made every effort to protect the identities of all participants by assigning pseudonyms. Protecting participant identities allowed them to remain anonymous to any other employees at the study site. To protect the anonymity of the study site, the researcher also assigned a pseudonym to the research site in order to mask its identity.
All prospective participants were invited to voluntarily participate in the study through a Northeastern University Institutional Review Board-approved personal invitation letter. The invitation letter was sent to all prospective participants by post. The letter included a brief statement outlining the nature and goal of the research study, the contact information of the researcher, an assurance of confidentiality, a prepaid envelope to return the letter directly back to the researcher via post, and a permission request for the researcher to briefly speak directly to the participant via telephone (Seidman, 1991). At that time, the researcher reviewed the nature and goal of the research, and confirmed that the participant understood the expectations, benefits, and risks (if any). Written permission to participate in the study was obtained during the interview process.

**Interview Language Usage**

All participants were required to participate in two individual interviews. They were allowed to express their thoughts and feelings in either English or Cantonese. Also, both the researcher and participants’ mother tongue is Cantonese. However, since this research was being conducted in an English classroom, the participants were highly encouraged to use English to answer the interview questions. Since some personal beliefs and feelings are difficult to explain in a second language (English), the participants were permitted to express some key words in Cantonese. Therefore, expressing language in their mother tongue may strengthen the collection of in-depth data not directly translatable in common speech to English. Note: In order to preserve participant’s authentic voices, excerpts from their interview transcripts were left unedited.

**Data Collection**

Data were primarily collected through interviews and classroom observations. This data collection approach supported the central idea of this study, namely, to explore the participants’
personal beliefs about English language teaching and learning. To ensure the collection of rich data (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2008), the researcher first observed classroom lessons without interviewing each participant about the meaning of their experience. This allowed each participant to observe the holistic relationship between personal beliefs and teaching practice (Seidman, 1991).

The researcher then collected data from the five participants through two individual interviews per participant (i.e. pre-observation interview and post-observation interview), one classroom observation per participant, and descriptive field notes (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 1991). These interviews provided the researcher an opportunity to explore the different motivation of the participants’ teaching behaviors related to the research questions. Observations and field notes helped to triangulate the data from the interviews (Creswell, 2008). Triangulation allows the researcher to gather information from different types of sources and methods (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation is a process of collecting different types of data to enhance validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomas, 2006). In this research, the researcher employed interviews, observations, and field notes. The data collection procedure is described below.

**Interviews**

Interviews are one of the most common data collection approaches in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). According to Seidman (1991) qualitative research in the field of education requires a unique interview process to collect information from teachers. Conducting personal interviews allowed the researcher to better understand the participants’ educational experiences as students and how their experiences influenced their pedagogy and personal beliefs as teachers. Such in-depth data about personal beliefs may not be obtainable by quantitative methods (i.e.
questionnaire) (Merriam, 2009). To accomplish these objectives the researcher conducted two semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with each participant. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. Interview protocol can be viewed in Appendix A.

Employing an interviewing strategy is important to the goals of this study because it is the most direct way to understand the relationship between teachers’ personal beliefs and their classroom practice. The researcher was flexible, responsive, patient, and observed the participants’ non-verbal actions (Creswell, 2008; Seidman, 1991) to add to the collection of rich data. Utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol provided opportunities for the researcher to ask open-ended questions that allowed the participants to express their own feelings through freedom of response (Lichtman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews also helped the participants express their ideas freely and control the content of the answers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The researcher employed Seidman’s (1991) phenomenological interview framework to gather interview data. This framework is ideal for this study because the researcher sought to understand the participants’ educational experiences as students and how their experiences influenced their pedagogy and personal beliefs as teachers. Seidman’s (1991, 2006) framework includes three phases, but based on the needs of this study, the researcher combined the first two phases into a single phase while conducting a third phase separately (Seidman, 2006). The combined interview was a pre-observation interview and was followed by a post-observation interview (Seidman, 2006, 1991). Both interviews were described below.

**Pre-observation interview**

The pre-observation interview was held in a private room at the adult learning center in Macau. The interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview questions focused on how the participants’ recalled their experiences of learning English during their K-12 period and
how they describe and understand their current teaching experiences as English language teachers at the learning center in Macau. The researcher briefly asked the participants to recall their English language learning experiences when they were a K-12 student. Participants were then asked to share their positive and negative experiences about teaching styles, pedagogy, teachers, etc. Besides recalling their previous learning experiences, they were asked questions about how they understand their current teaching experience as English teachers. Participants were asked to describe their teaching experiences based on their existing beliefs about their current teaching practice. Exploring these responses provided rich data and insight into how the participants understand their experience as English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) teachers (Seidman, 2006). The interview questions can be viewed in Appendix A.

**Post-observation interview**

The post-observation interview was conducted after the researcher conducted the classroom observation, which is explained in the following section. This interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was held in a private room at the adult learning center in Macau. The interview questions explored participant beliefs about English language learning experiences and teaching practices, in addition to how they think their beliefs may change or not change over time. The questions provided the opportunity for the participants to think about the relationship between their beliefs and classroom practices. Asking these questions allowed insight into how the participants make meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 2006). This allowed the participants to discuss why particular activities or behaviors occur in the classroom (Seidman, 1991) and helped each participant to reflect on how their previous experiences have converged to arrive at their current viewpoint as a teacher (Seidman, 2006). By observing and interviewing the participants before and after the classroom observation, the researcher was more
likely to establish an in-depth understanding of each participant’s personal beliefs about English language teaching and learning because such information could reveal their personal opinions and experience (Graber, 1996). The interview questions can be viewed in Appendix A.

**Observation**

Observation was employed as another form of data collection. According to Merriam (2009), observations are one of the most common data collection instruments. Further, observations present two important differences from interviews. The first difference is that “observation takes place in the setting where the phenomenon of interest naturally occurs instead of a location designated for the purpose of interviewing” (Merriam, 2009, p.117). It means that observation allows the researcher to gather data directly in the setting. The second difference is that “observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview” (Merriam, 2009, p.117). It means that observation allows the researcher to gain the idea about the participants’ inputs to their students in the classroom environment directly. Observations provide firsthand data for researchers (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009). In this study concerning the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their teaching practices, observing English classes provided clarification of the responses from each participant’s interview. Observations in the participants’ classroom made it possible to mark behaviors as they happened. It may be the best instrument to use when some points are missed in the interviews, but there are activities and behaviors that can be observed directly (Seidman, 1991).

Merriam (2009) defines four roles observers can take during the observation. These include: 1) complete participant, 2) participant as observer, 3) observer as participant, and 4) complete observer. The researcher employed the role of complete observer so that he did not
participate in any classroom activities. During the observation, the researcher sat at the back corner of the classroom in order to avoid interrupting both the students and the teachers. The researcher kept a reasonable distance from both the students and the teachers; however, as the class went on, the researcher had to make some adjustments (Creswell, 2007, 2008; Merriam 2009). Merriam (2009) points out:

Researchers are rarely total participants or total observers. Rather, there is often a mix of roles wherein one might begin as either a full participant and then withdraw into more of a researcher stance or, in reverse, begin as a total observer and become more of a participant over time (p.125).

In other words, during the class, if students have general questions for the teacher and the teacher is not able to answer them all or requires assistance, the researcher may help address student questions.

At the research site in Macau, learners are usually adults, or non-traditional learners with responsibilities outside of school, including family responsibilities, working duties and personal circumstances, etc. Teachers are less likely to have interactions with these students beyond traditional classroom settings. Therefore, observing the classroom provides one of the only sources of data about the interactions between the participants and their learners.

The researcher observed one 60-minute English class taught by each of the participants and used a field notebook to gather information concerning the class observation. The following procedure was used:

1) The researcher conducted an observation of the teaching behavior of the teacher and learners’ reactions in the class.
2) A field notebook was used to record interesting observation points such as the interactions of the participant and learners, physical layout of the classroom, and verbal and non-verbal communications (Creswell, 2008; Seidman, 2006; 1991).

3) During the observation, the researcher focused on observing how the teachers’ personal beliefs impact their teaching practice in their English classroom. Therefore, the researcher referenced the participant’s brief life history (Seidman, 2006; 1991) during the observation, which was derived from the pre-observation interview (i.e., the interview notes from the first phase). For example, the researcher could reflect on information such as why Participant A likes to employ role-play, but not card games? Reading the field notes, observation data, and interview notes helped the researcher to observe the full range of the participants’ teaching philosophy and practice.

Following the observation, the researcher scheduled a post-observation interview and asked for clarification of any discrepancies observed during the classroom observation.

The researcher used the following procedure to organize the observation data (Merriam, 2009):

1) After leaving the setting the researcher recalled as much as possible about the observation by recording additional field notes or constructing a research memo, either written or verbally spoken and audio-recorded, immediately after the observation.

2) In case of lag time between observing and composing a memo, the researcher summarized or outlined the observation, drew a diagram of the setting, traced
movements through it, and incorporated data remembered at a later time into the original field notes (see Appendix B).

Field Notes

Collecting field notes is one of the key tools for observers to gather significant information during observations (Merriam, 2009). The researcher employed a field notebook that is “highly descriptive” (Merriam, 2009, p.130). For example, instead of simply noting the general situation of the classroom, the field notes described how many learners were attending the class, whether or not the learners were prepared for class, which gender was more active in answering questions, etc. Additionally, the field notes are “reflective” (Merriam, 2009, p.131). Besides recording field notes, the researcher commented on captured scenarios. This means that the researcher drew a picture of the classroom, students, and participants, and recorded specific field notes next to the picture to capture rich data about what was happening at that particular moment (Creswell, 2008). The reflective comments served as supporting components to remind the researcher of the background and setting later in the research process (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2008).

Data Storage

The study data were stored on a personal password-protected computer. The audio files, transcribed interviews, and observation notes were accessible only by the researcher. The researcher used NVIVO to assist in coding the data and the program was installed on the same password-protected computer. The researcher was the only one with access to the data in the software program and assigned a pseudonym to protect the identity of each participant.

Data Analysis
A general inductive approach to data analysis was used to analyze the collected data (Thomas, 2006). The analysis process was guided by the objectives of the study whereby the researcher wanted a better understanding of the participants’ educational experiences as students and how their experiences influence their pedagogy and personal beliefs as teachers. Data analysis began after all interviews were professionally transcribed and member checked (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2008).

**Procedure**

The researcher formatted the transcripts and then thoroughly read each transcript. Following the procedure of Thomas (2006), the transcripts were reread multiple times as prescribed by the theoretical framework of interpretivism (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Preliminary themes began to emerge from the multiple readings of the transcripts (Thomas, 2006). The researcher employed constant comparison as described by Merriam (2009) to continually develop descriptive themes from the emerging trends in the data. Data reduction was applied through a specific coding procedure, which means that both general and more specific themes were identified using a selective data coding process (Saldaña, 2013; Thomas, 2006).

**Data Coding**

More specific coding procedures were applied to identify and label the themes as derived from the interview transcripts, observations, and field notes. Since this study was focused on collecting in-depth data derived from the participants’ own words, data were first reduced using in vivo and/or descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013). In vivo coding is designed to represent the participants’ own words while descriptive coding helps the researcher to identify longer passages of text that have similar meaning (Saldaña, 2013). Using this open coding (Merriam, 2009) or first level coding procedure (Saldaña, 2013) allowed for the initial themes to be constructed and
represented based on the participants own words. Thomas (2006) states that the data need to be reduced even further. As such, axial coding was applied to further reduce the data to create a second level coding analysis (Saldaña, 2013; Thomas, 2006). The researcher might still find an abundance of themes after reducing the data through axial coding. If so, the researcher continues analyzing to combine themes that have similar meanings in order to arrive at a goal of five to eight themes at the conclusion of the data analysis process (Thomas, 2006). The data analysis procedure is described below.

**Figure 3. General Inductive Approach by Thomas (2006)**

**Step 1**
- Read Original Text
- Multiple Pages of Raw Materials

**Step 2**
- Identify Segment Materials Related to Research Questions
- Multiple Pages of Segment Materials

**Step 3**
- Start to Code Segment Materials into Categories
- 25-30 Categories
- Start Open Coding Process (in vivo/descriptive)

**Step 4**
- Reduce Duplicate Categories and Start to Create Themes
- 15-20 Categories (Themes)
- Start Axial Coding

**Step 5**
- Significant Categories will Merge into Themes
- 5-8 Themes

**Validity and Credibility**
Merriam (2009) notes that guidelines for the ethical conduct of research have been established since the late 1940s. Qualitative researchers should try their best to employ at “least two” strategies in their research studies in order to confirm validity criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the collected data to increase the persuasiveness of the research (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, this study employed triangulation and member checking as its validation strategies.

In this study, the researcher collected data from three sources: interviews, observations, and field notes. These different data sources were compared to each other to provide triangulation in order to avoid unnecessary bias and to enhance validity. Many researchers (e.g. Creswell, 2012; Lichtman, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) agree that triangulation and member checking are proven strategies for qualitative research studies to support the validity and reliability of findings. Creswell (2007) notes that in qualitative research, researchers define the accuracy of their findings through different types of instruments (i.e. triangulation, member checking). Triangulation is a process of corroborating data from multiple sources (i.e. interviews, observation, and field notes). Member checking is a process of researcher’s asking the participants to check the accuracy of the data gathered from them. In this case, all the participants are allowed to read their own data (Creswell, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomas, 2006).

**Triangulation**

Triangulation allows researchers to collect data information from different types of sources (Maxwell, 2005; 2013). Triangulation is a process of combining information from multiple types of data sources to enhance validity (Creswell, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomas, 2006). According to Merriam (2009), triangulation includes multiple sources to
support the validity of collected data and information. For example, researchers can compare and study data gathered from “observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people” (Merriam, 2009, p.216). In this study, the researcher employed triangulation through interviews, observations, and field notes to increase validity.

**Member Checking**

Member checking, another commonly used technique to support the accuracy of qualitative research, was used to increase credibility (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2008). The member checking process required the participants to confirm the accuracy of the information. Member checking allowed participants to read the transcript, the themes, and the professional summary again in order to confirm the accuracy of the information. To employ the member checking process in this study, the researcher asked the participants to review the information from the transcript, the themes, and the professional summary and provide comments to the researcher within one week (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Member checking included asking participants for input on the themes, their definitions, the significant evidence presented (such as direct quotes) and the interpretation of the data by the researcher. This information were shared with the participants after data analysis and/or the writing of the results chapter of this study.

**Conclusion**

A basic qualitative study allowed the researcher to gain insight into the relationships between teachers’ personal belief systems and their classroom practice and inductively explore how these teachers’ educational experiences as students during K-12 schooling affect their pedagogy at an adult English language learning center in Macau. Using phenomenological
interviewing (Seidman, 2006), observations and field notes (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009) allowed the researcher to explore teachers’ past learning experiences as learners and their current experiences as teachers, as well as how the participants make meaning of their experiences both as learners and teachers. Using a general inductive approach (GIA) to analysis allowed themes to emerge from interview and observation data and to form results to answer the research questions. Finally, the finding of this research may help teachers in multiple educational fields better instruct their students. Also, the local adult learning centers may benefit from greater understanding of the relationships between teachers’ personal beliefs and their teaching practice in classroom environments.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this research is to understand the relationship between previous experiences as a student, personal beliefs, and teaching pedagogies of teachers at a local educational learning center in Macau, China. This study followed a qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007). Through this qualitative inquiry, the researcher was able to inductively analyze the data and build themes, answer the research questions, and discuss the findings in order to understand teacher beliefs and gain an understanding of the study topic (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007). The findings of the study are organized as overall themes and subthemes. These themes and subthemes were derived from the researcher’s examination of all of the data collectively. By analyzing the data as a whole, the researcher was able to identify several common themes and subthemes within the data. The chapter concludes with a summary of the material presented in this chapter and a transition to Chapter Five.

The analysis of the interviews, observations, and field notes yielded 6 superordinate themes and 14 subthemes. The superordinate themes and subthemes are identified in Table 1.
Table 1.

*Identification of Recurring Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes and Subthemes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Amy</th>
<th>Betty</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Danny</th>
<th>Edwin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Student purpose and self-direction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Discovering and understanding student purpose</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Working toward achievement of student purpose</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Respecting student self-direction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Tailoring instruction to meet student needs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Varying means of instruction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Making learning applicable to real life</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Teachers as life-long learners</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Learning community</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Openness to change</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Importance of caring and support</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Negative perceptions of early educational experiences</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Striving to demonstrate care and support</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Dislike for Eastern teaching styles</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Criticism of top down approach</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Discontentment with lack of student-teacher interaction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Rejection of Eastern teaching methods</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Preference for interactive teaching methods</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Engagement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Peer learning</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student Purpose and Self-Direction

Adult learners embark upon their educational pursuits with hopes and goals, and these aspirations provide a significant sense of motivation for the completion of their academic objectives. The first superordinate theme identified among the participants’ responses related to the importance that teachers place on developing an understanding of student purpose and respecting their students’ sense of self-direction. Student purpose relates to the underlying motivational factors and aspirational goals that drive student educational attainment. Self-direction pertains to goal-oriented academic behaviors including class attendance, time management, and assignment completion. The researcher found three primary topic areas among the collected data related to student purpose and self-direction. In expressing this theme, the teachers emphasized the importance of identifying and understanding the purpose guiding each of their students. Further, they discussed the need to work toward the realization of student purpose as a primary objective. Finally, they expressed the belief that adult students are inherently self-directed learners, and should be treated as such. Thus, the three subthemes identified within this superordinate theme were discovering/understanding student purpose, working toward achievement of student purpose, and respecting student self-direction.

Discovering and Understanding Student Purpose

The teachers maintained that adult learners come to school with a clear and definitive purpose in mind. In contrast to regular students, adult learners typically return to school to achieve a specific objective. As Danny explained, “Adult learners come to our center. They must have a direction, they must have purpose. Usually, adults usually do not come here randomly. They come here for a purpose.” Betty supported this point saying, “Adults are adults, they are not machine, they come here for a purpose.” In addition to possessing a purpose, the
understanding of one’s purpose is also an important component of the academic process. Amy noted that, “They are all adults, they understand what they are doing here, and they have a purpose to come to class.” For some students this purpose may be related to personal aspirational goals, and for others this purpose is linked directly to their career objectives. Betty spoke to this point saying, “[Students] come here for a purpose. Some for company, some for their own job.” This purpose serves as an important source of motivation and direction for adult learners. Edwin explained this idea further saying, “Companies have organizational goals…Here, the students have the same goal too. If the students don’t have the same goal, it is more likely that the students leave the classroom after one class.” While having purpose can drive student learning, a lack of a clearly delineated purpose may derail a student’s progression. Amy discussed the responsibility that teachers have regarding the understanding of student purpose. She stated, “[Adult students] come here for a purpose. I can only try my best to help them to understand.” By striving to understand each student’s purpose, and helping students to clarify their purpose, teachers are able to facilitate student growth and academic progression. Thus, each teacher must endeavor to develop a comprehension of the purpose that drives each of their students to pursue their education.

Discovering and understanding student purpose is thus the first subtheme across the participants’ making sense of student purpose and self-direction. The findings regarding to this sub-theme of this study indicated that the participants need to understand what the needs of their students are. Through the detailed information of their teaching and learning experiences, four of the participants kept refining their pedagogy based on the purpose of students. Amy stated, “Many adult students come to my class with a purpose, I usually write notes, or class activity
related to the needs of them. I try my best to fit the needs of them, but not mine.” Edwin echoed this point, saying,

I like to watch newspaper that can reflect to daily events in our society. By creating a contemporary business sense, I can develop some new business materials to students in the business industry. Students working in the business industry want to learn knowledge about business English. Of course I want to build up these senses to help my students. Therefore, my teaching direction focuses on the purpose and objective of my students.

In addition, Danny further discussed how he refined his teaching strategy based on the purpose of his student saying, “Every day is a school day, I must change my teaching strategy in order to fit the needs of my students. Students change every day, so I have to refine my teaching style every day too.” The participants of the study believed that students’ purpose is the first consideration of their teaching pedagogy and teaching strategy. Four of the participants advocated that meeting the needs of their students can also assist them to become better teachers. Thus, each teacher must endeavor to develop a comprehension of the purpose that drives each of their students to pursue their education. As Danny explained, “Because… adult students come here for a purpose, I hope I can help them to achieve the target.”

**Working toward Achieving Student Purpose**

While the identification of a student’s purpose represents one challenge for students and teachers alike, the realization of that purpose constitutes yet another goal. Teachers work jointly with students to help them progress toward the achievement of their purpose. Three of the participants suggested that the primary responsibility of the teacher is to assist their students in achieving the purpose for which they are attending school. As Amy shared, “The major influence of the current teaching experience is to see my previous students meeting their
purpose.” Cathy similarly stated, “I want to understand the purpose of my students.” Danny added to this point, expressing hope that he would be successful in guiding his students toward the fulfillment of their purpose. He stated, “At least before I start[ed] this job, I [didn’t] know the adults’ needs of learning. But now, at least, I hope I can meet the purpose of my students.”

The teachers maintained that this focus on achieving student purpose is what distinguishes adult learning from primary and secondary schooling. Danny spoke to this point noting, “Secondary school is all about testing and grading. But here in adult center, or adult program let’s say, it is about achieving the purpose of my students.” Progressing toward the achievement of the purpose for which students pursue adult learning is an overarching objective for the teachers.

The finding regarding the notion of working toward achieving student purpose indicated that the participants acknowledged that the primary responsibility of the teacher is to assist their students in achieving the purpose for which they are attending school. These insights inspired the teachers to develop teaching strategies, teaching materials, and learning applications that are able to respond to the needs of adult students. Edwin emphasized the importance of assisting their students in achieving their purpose by saying, “If students at the business industry can only learn textbook knowledge, what is the point for them to come here? They want to learn business English. So I have to read materials that are related to our society, our business environment.” Betty expressed a similar view, saying the following:

Once, I have a group of students at the same organization, they are all from a hotel front office department. Many of them are university graduates with solid skills. So I have to design useful and purpose driven materials for these students. Just focus on task book, or even textbooks for hotel workers? I don’t think it is enough.
This belief inspired the teachers to develop teaching strategies, teaching materials, and learning applications that are able to respond to the needs of adult students. For example, Edwin utilized a poster from a local casino as a teaching tool, which resonated deeply with one student who was employed as a casino worker. Instead of focusing assignments and activities on the textbooks, the participants continued to develop materials for students to progress toward the achievement of their purpose.

**Respecting Student Self-direction**

Most of the teachers argued that adult learners are self-directed, and that learning is the student’s choice and responsibility. Because of this belief, teachers reported that they chose not to adopt a punitive style, and worked to establish a balance of power in the classroom. Betty explained this concept by saying the following: “I am here to guide them to be successful. But I am not here to teach them. They are all adults and some of them are even older than me. How much they learn, is totally up to them.” Adult learners are viewed as capable and responsible students who should be entrusted to make their own educational choices. Thus, the value they reap from each lesson is dependent upon the effort they exert in learning the material. Cathy emphasized the importance of allowing students the freedom to devise “their own ways to learn.” The researcher observed during the observation of Cathy’s classroom that she gives more authority to adult students, which contributes to a positive teaching environment. Amy expressed a similar view, saying the following:

Adult learners have a lot of responsibilities, I advise them to review the section and do the assignment before coming to class. But if they cannot do it due to family and working issues, I will [not] be punish[ing] them. This is their own choice. I provide guidance, and they can listen or not.
Rather than ignoring the many external factors competing for the time and attention of adult learners, teachers take these responsibilities into account when working with this unique population of students. Adult learners are given the leniency to attend to their personal affairs and to manage their time appropriately. Amy continued by explaining, “Adults come to school for knowledge and knowledge transfer. They are not children in secondary school. They understand what they need for work, for education, for purpose, for family and so on.” Rather than trying to determine their students’ schedule for them, teachers allow their adult students to assume responsibility for completing their assignments and mastering the material.

On the topic of student self-direction, Edwin stated, “This is all up to them. I am just a teacher, I can’t force them to learn for sure.” Danny expressed a similar point saying, “No matter what, a lesson with adults, teachers. We cannot force them to learn. They come here to learn. That’s all.” Teachers acknowledge that they lack the ability to force students to complete the assignments or to master the lesson. Instead, teachers take responsibility for presenting the material and supporting student learning, but assign students the responsibility of doing the work themselves. Cathy explained, “Some teachers are very hard about the attendance. But I am not, my students are adults. If they cannot attend my lesson, it is not about their failure. It is about responsibilities of their family.” In respecting these responsibilities, it is important for teachers to be understanding of their students’ external obligations. Cathy maintained that it is necessary to leave room for “flexibilities.” Edwin expressed a similar opinion, sharing that his strategy is to “not control too [much]. Release the power or I would say, balance the power between teachers and students.” By creating an environment in which students have the leniency to attend to other needs and responsibilities, but are entrusted with their own learning, teachers ensure that students’ success is limited only by their own self-direction.
Nearly all participants remarked that teaching adult students is not the same as teaching primary or secondary school students. Instead, adult students come to school for a clear purpose. The teaching strategies of the participants are based on the needs of their students. The participants were concerned about their students’ goals and achievements to succeed and practiced behaviors intended to assist their students to gain knowledge. One important finding is that nearly all participants agreed that teachers should not control how students learn. In addition, teachers should understand how to balance the power between teachers and students.

**Instruction Tailored to Student Needs**

In providing instruction to adult English-language learners, teachers utilize a variety of educational methods. These methods can be influenced and guided by a number of factors, depending upon the pedagogy of the teacher. The second superordinate theme identified among the participants’ responses related to the teachers’ desire to make their instruction responsive to the needs of their students. Adult English-language learners present a unique set of needs related in part to the ways in which they comprehend the material and to their educational and vocational objectives. The researcher found two primary topic areas among the collected data related to the customization of instruction in an effort to meet student needs. In expressing this theme, the teachers described the various instructional techniques and educational tools they utilize to assist their students with comprehending the material. Further, they discussed the need to make their lessons applicable to the real world, as many of their students have career-related educational needs. Thus, the two subthemes identified within this superordinate theme were *varying the means of instruction* and *making instruction applicable to real life.*
Varying Means of Instruction

All of the teachers reported the belief that classroom instruction should be tailored to meet the students’ needs. As such, they reported implementing a variety of instructional methods in their classes. By incorporating different means of educational delivery, teachers are able to be more responsive to the unique needs of all of their students. Edwin explained this idea saying, “Teachers should always think about how to develop modules that can match the needs for students.” The utilization of such individualized modifications helps to ensure that students are able to meet their specific learning objectives. Danny reinforced this concept reporting, “In this center, I learn the idea about meeting students’ needs and helping them to achieve the target.” In addition to meeting the individual needs of students, instruction is also designed with industry-based demands in mind. By making sure that lessons are in line with the current needs dictated by the industry, teachers are able to assist students with acquiring job-appropriate skills and competencies. Danny’s statements from the interview were supported by his teaching strategies during the observation as well. Danny employed a business situation listening activity and a role-play activity in his lesson. Betty endorsed this view saying, “Teachers should understand the needs of their students in order to develop the teaching plans… it is important to understand the overall situation of the industry and the needs of the general students.” Betty continued that being aware of the typical communication requirements of an industry is the key by conducting drama play. The interactive activities by these two participants showed that instruction could be refined based on the needs of their students.

In an effort to design a curriculum that is responsive to students’ needs, the teachers reported that they utilize a variety of instructional methods in their classes. For some teachers, classroom modifications include the incorporation of flexibility within the curriculum. Amy
reported, “I should understand the responsibilities of students then assign works. Right now, I am a teacher, and I understand my students are all adults with responsibilities. I create many flexibilities to them.” For other teachers, curriculum modifications include variations in the material itself. Danny offered the following:

For example, like, I have some students who are teachers, they are teaching in a secondary school. A Chinese language oriented school. Let’s say one student first. He comes to our center because he has very high interests in English language. I would teach him vocational English. Some other students come from casino industry, some come from sales department. Therefore, I would, I would teach them vocational and practical English to them.

By assessing the vocational needs of his students, Danny is able to modify his curriculum to focus on helping students gain the specific competencies they need to meet their occupational objectives. Similarly, Edwin offered an account of the ways in which he varies his instructional methods to meet the needs of students. Edwin stated the following:

I am thinking to combine these three [skills] together into a single module to teach my sales industry students. I mean, English class can be more diverse. I can involve some leadership or management skills too…So I will combine what I learn from others and transfer these knowledge to my students.

After determining the various skills that his students will need to be successful in their occupations, Edwin is able to combine these skills and develop a lesson plan that will facilitate their development.

Other teachers aid student comprehension by varying the methods through which they present the educational material. During Cathy’s classroom observation, a student expressed a
lack of understanding of the brainstorming process. In order to help students successfully achieve the goal, Cathy showed an example in brainstorming on the white board. By changing her method of delivery Cathy was able to present the material in a manner which more directly connected with that particular students. Some teachers also utilize supplementary materials to serve as teaching aids in an effort to aid student comprehension. During the observation, Edwin encouraged students’ comprehension of readings by adding contemporary business situations and announcements and trying to raise related questions. The researcher also observed that beyond traditional textbook exercises, Danny designed some business and contemporary conversations in order to meet the needs of his students, such as telephone conversations and face-to-face interactive conversations with customers. Danny strongly believed in listening activities and role-play activities. In his lesson, he encouraged his students to participate in activities. It is important to note that Danny recorded the listening activity himself. The recording materials were created based on the needs of the particular group of students. Students were able to speak during the role-play activity without significant problems as the materials were applicable to their workplaces. By bringing in these materials, the teachers were able to make the lessons more directly applicable to the students’ occupational experiences.

In addition to supplementary materials, visual aids also serve as important educational delivery tools. Several teachers were observed to use visual aids to assist students with grasping the material. During the observation of Amy’s class, the researcher observed that Amy utilized visual aids to assist students in connecting meaning to the vocabulary words they were learning. The term *sweet* was illustrated with pictures of bubble gum, candies, and sugar, thereby allowing students to grasp the word’s meaning. Cathy was also observed to use visual tools to aid student comprehension. To illustrate the concept of brainstorming, Cathy presented a PowerPoint on the
white board screen to show a sample of a brainstorm picture. After the visual sample, there were no further questions from students. Edwin was also observed to utilize non-traditional teaching methods to assist his students. Before the lesson was over, Edwin asked students to post some interesting readings and articles to the Dropbox account which they could share with their classmates. Edwin added, “A student posted a picture about the preposition of different items. For example, in a school, at a school, on the TV, going into my bed, and so on. All of my students came back and discussed this during the lesson. Of course, teaching is not only about textbook, but also other types of learning materials. Students learned new knowledge other than textbook. They discovered by themselves, it works.” Cathy also expressed a similar idea by saying, “One of the best supplementary materials is brainstorming. It is certainly not very famous in Macau or China, but why not to introduce? Adult learning is about flexibility. One student came to me saying he used brainstorming in his marketing meeting. Of course, it may not related to English, but workplace already.” By utilizing a variety of methods and tools to instruct their students, the teachers are able to facilitate students’ mastery of the material and the development of the competencies that are required for success in their occupational fields.

**Making Instruction Applicable to Real Life**

Several teachers also indicated that it is important to make the instruction applicable to the students’ real lives. Students must be able to draw connections and comparisons between what they are learning and the situations and contexts that they encounter in their everyday lives. Danny explained this idea with the following:

Because these things have subtitles, and the language of these thing are more related to our daily life. Those languages are not from textbook, because the English textbook knowledge is not very related to daily life. Also, because a lot of setting or the
background of the textbook are very fixed. For example, there are only background in school, or in a restaurant. These are very uncommon locations. Or these locations are, some places that we don’t go usually. Very, not related to daily life.

Textbooks, while providing helpful fundamental information, can sometimes present information that is not immediately relevant to the experiences of students. Due to this disconnect, it can be difficult to transfer what is learned in the classroom to the situations that students encounter in their real lives. Danny’s observation revealed that beyond traditional textbook exercises, he also designed some business and contemporary conversations in order to meet the needs of students. Edwin backed up this idea saying, “We need to connect the English boring books into our real society. English needs to be realistic…Now, yes, the society needs it to engage with real practices.”

For adult learners, the power of the language lies in real-world functionality as opposed to the stilted dialogue typically found in English textbooks. In Edwin’s classroom, the researcher observed that in order to increase the interests of the business articles, Edwin picked some key sentences or phrases or idiomatic expressions from the business articles which could match the contemporary business environment in the city. From the business article, Edwin highlighted two idioms. The first was “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket” and the second was “Green hand.” In addition to learning idioms from business articles, Edwin also brought three eggs in a basket in his lesson. All students were surprised by the real subjects. By Edwin’s displaying the items, all students understood the idea of these idioms. Other teachers were also observed making modifications to the material to increase student interest. During Cathy’s observation, she was observed using social and real-life cases for students to discuss in effort to increase their interests about the topic. Cathy showed a brainstorming picture to her students. By discussing
the contemporary social issues of the city, all of the students were motivated and encouraged to participate. As Cathy strongly believed teaching strategies should be flexibility and contemporary, she added, “I change my teaching materials almost bi-yearly in order to stay updated. News change every day. But if I continue to introduce old news or 10 year old news, who wants to read it.” Creating clear and direct connections to the students’ real lives helped to generate interest in the material and enabled students to apply the lesson beyond the classroom.

Amy backed up this idea, reporting, “Some of my students are from hotel industry; doing guest-staff role-play can help them to transfer the knowledge immediately after learned.” Betty expressed further support for this theme reporting that she researches the industries in which her students are employed, so that she can adapt her instruction to meet those specific needs. She reported, “I am an adult teacher with large groups of industry-based students; I do have to spend my times to understand the overall picture of the industry.” She continued saying, “For example, adult students . . . need to have the practical skills. If I do not spend times to understand the industry, how can I help my students?” Thus, it is paramount for teachers to develop knowledge about the industries in which their students are employed so that they can design a curriculum which is responsible to these real-world needs. During the observation of Edwin’s class, he presented the class with a poster published from one of the famous casinos in the city. One of the students was observed to respond excitedly to this reading, as he was currently working at the same casino. The researcher noted that Edwin tried to employ contemporary and applied knowledge in the lesson to assist his students with making real-world connection to the material. When students are able to make these real-world connections, the lesson can extend beyond the classroom, and students are better able to retain what they have learned. Danny explained this principle saying, “I hope the knowledge here can be transferred into their workplace. Not just
learn and forget after they learned the knowledge. If they can transfer this knowledge into their workplace, then it would be perfect.” By designing a curriculum in which the instruction is directly applicable to the real lives of students, teachers are able to help students gain knowledge and skills that can be transferred to the students’ places of employment.

To conclude, the participants in this study agreed that teaching and learning for adult students should be tailored in order to meet the needs of their students. Two key points were identified: varying means of instruction and making learning applicable to real life. Although textbook assignments and knowledge should be appropriate to the language level of the students, the students should also receive knowledge at the practical level, such as industrial English and English for casino workers. More importantly, a large number of participants also utilize supplementary materials, such as introducing the brainstorming process, to serve as teaching aids in an effort to improve student comprehension. By bringing in these materials, the teachers were able to make the lesson more directly applicable to the students’ occupational experiences. In addition, some participants may employ visual supplementary materials, such as pictures of business organizations, to encourage students to connect classroom knowledge to their working environment. In sum, the participants believed that learning a language should be applicable to students’ workplace.

**Teachers as Life-long Learners**

Adult learners embark upon their educational pursuits with hopes and goals, and these aspirations provide a significant sense of motivation for the completion of their academic objectives. The third superordinate theme identified from the participants’ responses involved the ideology that the process of learning is life-long and that teachers should strive to continually expand their knowledge. The researcher identified two main topic areas among from data
pertaining to the concept of teachers as life-long learners. In expressing this theme, the teachers described the learning community that exists among the teachers at their school. Teachers learn from one another in a collaborative system in which best practices are shared. Additionally, the teachers emphasized the necessity of being open to change as an instructor. Teachers must be open to the suggestions of others and should consider modifying their instructional methods based upon new insights. Thus, the two subthemes identified within this superordinate theme were the learning community and the need for openness to change.

Learning Community

Most of the teachers expressed the belief that teachers should strive continually to learn and develop their skills. The teachers maintained that their peers within the teaching community serve as an important resource for this continual learning and development. In discussing her interactions within the community of English language teachers, Cathy reported, “If we can share educational and teaching experiences with each other, I think we can produce much better outcomes.” The collaborative effort put forth by all teachers ultimately contributed to the improvement and refinement of the instruction provided by the teachers. Betty explained, “We are a relatively small group of community. We always interact with each other. We like to share some insights and difficulties with others. . . . It is particularly helpful when we are engaging with other affairs.” Teachers are able to learn from each other’s successes and failures to develop best practices. Danny reported, “I like to share my insight and sort of classroom experiences with all teachers . . . Of course, I absorb many types of information from my coworkers . . . I am open to listen[ing] to all types of suggestions.” Edwin similarly explained, “I always interact with other teachers. Their experiences and teaching practices are also learnable.”
The school engenders a culture in which insights are shared freely among all teachers in effort to improve the teaching as a whole. Betty argued this point saying, “But there in adult learning environment, we share knowledge. Actually, yes, how it change my mind, yes, at least this, the current teaching experience allows me to understand teacher is not only a teacher, but a learner too.” In addition to learning from other teachers, the teachers also expressed a willingness to learn from their students as well. Students are viewed by teachers as valuable resources for knowledge and continued professional development. To address this point, Amy stated, “I do not think I am a teacher here in the adult learning classroom. I am a student as well . . . I can learn new knowledge from my students. We share, we discuss, and we engage together as a group.” Betty expressed a similar view saying, “My current students also allow me to think about teachers are not only teachers, but also learners…I work as a teacher, but I learn all the time.” The teachers view their school as a learning community in which everyone has insights to contribute, and everyone can benefit from learning from the knowledge offered by others. Through this process of collaborative sharing and learning, the level of instruction offered by all of the teachers is enhanced.

Openness to Change

Several teachers also maintained that teachers should strive to be open-minded and willing to change. While endless insights can be offered by others within the community, teachers must be open to accepting these insights and changing their instruction accordingly. Danny argued, “I think as a teacher, they should try their best to change, in order to provide better environments to students. But if a teacher continues to be obstinate . . . it is kinda unfair to the students as well.” The assertion is that teachers who refuses to adjust to the needs of their students ultimately provides a disservice to the students. Edwin offered the following argument:
Teachers must be open minded in order to absorb the needs from students. Some teachers in secondary schools are very closed minded. How stupid they are. I mean, the marketing is changing every day. No one is gonna say “I shall” in general. But some of the secondary school teachers continue [to] force students to learn the word “shall.”

Things are changing, teachers need to be changed as well. Without changes, good-bye. The teachers suggested that lesson plans must be aligned with current industry needs, and that teachers must be open to changing their plans to be responsive to these needs. Danny echoed this sentiment reporting, “Teachers must be open. If the teachers do not have the open minded[ness], the teachers cannot break outside of the box. If the teachers stay in the box forever, the teachers wouldn’t have the ability to do much better.” Betty expressed agreement with this philosophy saying, “I somehow want somebody to give me some advises about how to improve my skills. I am open to all types of suggestions.” Ultimately, the refusal to change can prove to be a limitation to teachers, as they may be ill-equipped to provide students with the skills and competencies needed to keep pace with the changing occupational landscape. By remaining open to change, teachers are better able to ensure that their curriculum supports students in meeting the challenges presented by their occupations.

In conclusion, the participants believed that teaching and learning should not be unidirectional. Instead, many argued that both teachers and students could learn from each other. As adult students bring valuable experiences from their workplace to the classroom, teachers could learn updated and contemporary industrial knowledge in order to refresh their teaching strategies as well as their teaching materials. Also, sharing from colleagues and even students could be another key to success. Teachers absorbed successful examples from their peers and colleagues and employed and even enhanced their current classroom environments. Teachers
should encourage students to engage in a learning community; teachers themselves may also engage in a learning community. However, the participants argued that teachers should be open-minded in order to absorb successful examples and advice from their peers. Rejecting recommendations from others could be harmful. If some teachers refuse to accept suggestions from peers, these teachers are less likely to accept recommendations from their students.

Importance of Caring and Support

The qualities possessed and displayed by an instructor play an important role in the educational experiences of his or her students. The fourth superordinate theme identified among the participants’ responses centered on the importance of caring about and supporting students. Care was described as the showing of concern for students’ well-being and mastery of the material. Support was characterized as the demonstration of effort that goes above and beyond the mere presentation of material to ensure that students gain mastery of the lesson. The researcher found two primary topic areas among the collected data related to the importance of caring and support. In expressing this theme, the teachers discussed negative perceptions of their early educational experiences that were primarily due to a perceived lack of support from their teachers. Further, they emphasized the ways in which these experiences have guided their efforts to express care and support toward their own students. Thus, the two subthemes identified within this superordinate theme are negative perceptions of early educational experiences and striving to demonstrate care and support for their own students.

Negative Perceptions of Early Educational Experiences

Most of the teachers reported having very little memory of their earliest academic experiences. However, in discussing their K–12 education, most teachers indicated that the experience had been somewhat negative. Possibly due to the wording of the question presented
to participants, several of the teachers indicated that they could not recall much information from their earliest school years. When asked to describe his early experiences as an English learner, Edwin stated, “Well, first time, honestly, I don’t remember. I am a local student in Macau. So I have to go to school when I was three years old. So I started my education at three years old.”

Cathy similarly stated, “Well, [that was] so many years ago, why don’t I explain the experience that I can remember at the earliest time?” In response to the same question, Danny remarked, “I can’t really tell you the detail because it was [a] long time ago. But I can remember is that there were many assignments and homework.” Among the teachers that did have some memory of their early school years, negative perceptions prevailed.

Cathy shared that she found the grading system during her secondary school years contributed to a sense of “suffer[ing].” Amy offered the following account of her experiences:

You actually remind me [of] a very negative experience during my junior secondary school period. I believe, during my Form 2 grade (eighth grade), my English teacher always asked our class to complete homework and memorize vocabulary… I am not that type of person. It felt very hard and this was the point, that I disliked English.

The rigor of the instruction contributed to Amy’s distaste for the class and the subject of English itself. Edwin offered a similar account:

Well of course I did [have negative experiences]… Some people are just, you know, kinda mean or what. Some teachers like to ask questions in class, and pick somebody to answer it immediately. I mean, I was the one the teachers like to pick. Sigh. . . . Don’t you think it is very annoying? I don’t mind to answer for sure. But not all the time, all right. I made me don’t want to go to the class. I mean, I am tired. I somehow dislike English because of the teacher. Teacher really matters for sure. I mean, yes, if I have a
good teacher, my motivations are very high with no questions. But if the teacher is an ass, well, then, you can imagine.

The negative educational experience appears to have been somewhat psychological in nature, and the negative feelings associated with a particular teacher contributed to the dislike of the subject as a whole. Betty similarly reported, “My secondary school, it was a nightmare. There were only memorization. . . . I did not have the space to express what I want to learn. . . . Secondary school just like, provide me a bad example to not exercise such practice here.” Betty’s complaints about her formative education seem to lie in the constrictive nature of the curriculum. These negative educational experiences played an important formative role in the development of Betty’s pedagogy.

For other students, the negative perceptions of their early educational experiences pertained mainly to workload and time. The teachers generally felt that the excessive amount of assigned work was made more difficult by the limited amount of time allotted for the courses. Danny shared that in addition to feeling a shortage of time in school, “there were just too much homework.” He added, “I felt very unhappy.” Betty recalled her early school experiences, reporting, “When I had questions with some English grammars, some teachers were not willing to answer me. They blamed on me why didn’t I listen to the lesson. What is the point to blame a student?” Amy stated that her professors “did not understand the situation of their students.” She explained, “We had to take seven courses in one semester…But all these professors still assigned unreasonable amount of works to us.” Feelings of being rushed for time and having an unreasonable workload, among other negative perceptions, characterized most teachers’ memories of their early educational experiences.

**Striving to Demonstrate Care and Support**
The teachers reported that through their student experiences with their teachers, they learned the importance of being caring and supportive instructors. Their formative experiences serve as indelible anti-examples for the teachers in their current positions. Betty recalled, “I had an English teacher who only want[ed] to get her paycheck...She did not prepare for class…I mean, if she did not want to do her job, what is the point to come to school and poison her students.” Betty continued saying, “I still needed to ask additional helps from teachers. But very few of them were willing to help.” Betty criticized her teacher’s apparent ambivalence toward her students and uses this experiences as an informative example to avoid when interacting with her own students. Betty maintained that the motivation for teaching should not be externally driven, as is the case for teachers whose only interest is receiving a paycheck. Edwin backed up this point arguing, “Obviously, being a teacher is not a way to make money. For me, I don’t want to be such teachers.” Instead, teachers should be motivated by a genuine desire to help students learn.

The teachers expressed a desire to be better teachers than the ones they encountered during their formative years. Danny reported, “My secondary school experience [was] very negative. Currently, I am a teacher, I would like to provide a positive environment or manner to help my students to learn English.” Betty expressed a similar view saying, “Sometimes, teachers can be very selfish. But I don’t want to be that kind of teacher, you know what I mean.”

Conversely, some teachers reported having experiences with teachers who provided more positive examples of care and support. Amy shared that a positive experience as a student taught her the importance of being a caring teacher. Amy reported the following:

Again, during my secondary school period, one of my English teachers spent extra time with me after school almost every week. English was one of my worst subject during
junior secondary school, but after the teachers’ special caring, I changed. I like to learn English; I like to use English to communicate with others. I can use English to do many things. Now, I can use my skills to help my students to learn English too.

Betty also recalled being positively affected by a supportive primary school teacher who would meet with students and “share her experiences about learning English.” Danny recalled one former teacher saying, “She understood what types of difficulties that we were facing.” He explained that this professor was able to give more attention to students that needed extra support.

As a result of these experiences, several teachers reported that they strive to provide support to their students. As Amy mentioned in her pre-observation interview, she believed spending time with students is significant. Therefore, after her lesson, she spent around 30 minutes providing additional assistance to her students. Betty similarly explained, “Like my general practice, I always stay after school even it is during the late night. I want to understand what the needs of my students are.” To this point, Danny reported the following:

If the lesson only has around 15 students, if one or two students express out questions, then it could be a problem of all of the others. Then I usually don’t mind to spend more time on this topic. Because, yeah. Even if other students understand, but they may not have the in-depth understanding on it. If I explain it one more time, I may hardened the idea of this concept.

By allowing time in his lesson to address the questions of a single student, Edwin believes that he may be helping many students who have unvoiced concerns. Thus, taking time out of the lesson to help even one student is a worthwhile endeavor. This principle was observed in action during Edwin’s observation. One of the students told Edwin that he wanted to have a
detailed explanation of specific material in the textbook. Edwin then spent around five minutes to explain the key words from the articles, which related to the answer. Similarly, Amy was observed checking in with her students during the lesson to confirm that they understood what was being taught. Before moving to the next section of instruction, Amy asked her students if they understood the words she had just reviewed. All of the students then nodded their heads to indicate their comprehension of the material. After the class was over, Amy was approached by a student who asked for additional assistance with the lesson. Amy spent 30 extra minutes providing individual instruction to the student. In addition to addressing students’ questions in class, teachers also indicated that they will spend time after class to find answers to students’ questions that they are unable to answer. As Danny reported, “Even if they don’t understand [the lesson], I would mark it down and find the answer and try my best to answer it next class.” Similarly, in Betty’s classroom, she was observed marking down the questions she received from students and she then instructed students to gather any additional questions about the lesson to review during the next class.

In addition to answering students’ questions, another way in which teachers strive to demonstrate care and support is through being flexible and understanding of their students. Danny’s classroom observation provided evidence of the flexibility and support he provides to his students. Danny reported that he arranges a Dropbox account for all the students to download listening audio. The Dropbox feature serves as a flexible delivery method for students who missed the lesson. Cathy also demonstrated flexibility in her classroom. During the observation of Cathy’s classroom, two members of the class asked for a brief extension on the time allotted to complete a class assignment. Cathy agreed to the extension and added that if the students needed additional help, they were free to ask. By allowing for minor allowances to
accommodate students, taking time to ensure that students are grasping the material, and using their own negative experiences for reference, the teachers are able to demonstrate care and support for their students.

Interestingly, all of the participants received negative early educational experiences during their K-12 period. However, their classrooms do not reflect these negative educational experiences or counterproductive teaching strategies. The two key terms in this finding were caring and support. Several participants reported that the grading system resulted in a sense of suffering. Workload and time management were other negative factors as well. Betty expressed that her teachers were not willing to spend extra time to support her assignments even though she was not a top-tier student. There was only blame for her low grades. Amy also mentioned that the unreasonable workload brought failure to her early educational experiences.

When care and support are effectively given to adult students, their educational experiences could be totally different. All of the participants were willing to stay in order to answer additional questions. Betty maintained that the motivation for teaching should not be externally driven, as is the case for teachers whose only interest is receiving a paycheck. The participants of the study believed that students not only benefit from positive caring and support, but also gain insight and enhancement of what their teachers have done for them. When these students experiences positive caring and support from their teachers, they are more likely to care and support their peers.

**Dislike for Eastern Teaching Styles**

Many distinctions exist between the teaching styles practiced by Western instructors and those practiced among Eastern teachers. The differences among these pedagogies extend to instructional style, methods, and student-teacher interaction style. The fifth superordinate theme
to emerge from the data related to an overall dislike for the teaching style traditionally practiced by Eastern teachers. The researcher found three primary topic areas among the collected data related to the overall opposition to Eastern teaching styles. In expressing this theme, the teachers emphasized the importance of identifying and understanding the purpose guiding each of their students. Further, they discussed the need to work toward the realization of student purpose as a primary objective. Finally, they expressed the belief that adult students are inherently self-directed learners, and should be treated as such. Thus, the three subthemes identified within this superordinate theme were *discovering/understanding student purpose, working toward achievement of student purpose, and respecting student self-direction.*

**Criticism of Top-Down Approach**

All of the teachers discussed differences between the Eastern and Western pedagogical practices, and reported negative perceptions of Eastern teaching styles. Edwin explained the characteristics of Eastern teaching styles saying the following:

"Like, in general, Chinese people are very used to the teacher-listener approach. I think it is what we call the top-bottom in the West? I mean, I grew up in such environment, I am very used to that approach like previously. In general view, in local residents’ view, this top-bottom approach is formed because of the traditional Chinese thinking. Have you heard of the Confucianism? He asked us or like taught us to be good listeners. From the top to the bottom. Just like how it works in the government… In schools here in Macau, such approaches are still very famous or I like to use the word *popular.*

Eastern teaching approaches tend to be characterized by a lecture format in which the teacher presents the information to passive, observant learners. Edwin argued that this style of instruction is not appropriate for adult learners, and expressed a personal distaste for the style
itself. He explained, “I do what I have learned from the university exchange experiences. I don’t want to use the traditional, what, Asian teaching approach. It is not gonna work again here in adult learning.” Edwin continued saying, “I can see how the western educations work. And I dislike the traditional Chinese teaching approach.” Amy similarly opined, “Asian teachers like to use the top-down approach [in] which students can only be the audiences. Such teaching approach is very negative. No voices can be expressed. Even if the teacher is wrong, the students can only listen.” The teachers argued that the top-down approach limits the ability of the students to contribute meaningfully to their educational experiences, and removes their ability to challenge the instructor. This imbalance of power was cited by some teachers as a central problem of the approach. Edwin argued, “It seems like the teachers love the power of control. The teachers like to control the overall environment of the classroom.”

In addition to complaints about the balance of power in the top-down system, several teachers maintained that the approach is not well-suited for helping their students learn the material. Betty expressed this view saying, “In my previous experience, my teachers employed top-bottom and task-based, these are some ways that I believed are not suitable in this century.” Amy explained, “In the Asian communities, memorization seems like to only way to learn knowledge. I am not that type of person. I felt very hard and this was the point that I disliked English.” Participants maintained that the top-down approach contributed to an environment which produced negative feelings among students and was ultimately counterproductive to the goal of material mastery. Betty recalled the following negative experience during her years as a student:

The worst experience must be asking question. Some teachers like to ask questions. They want immediate respond from students as well. Let’s think about it, in a lesson, a
group of students are encountering new knowledge, there are still a big space to absorb
the knowledge. But the teacher continues to ask hard questions and ask somebody to
respond such hard questions. What is the point to do that? Some even blame on students
what can’t they absorb and answer the questions. What a stupid practice.

Edwin reported a similar experience saying, “Some teachers like to ask questions in class, and
pick somebody to answer it immediately. I mean, I was the one the teachers like to pick. . . . It
made me don’t want to go to the class.” The top-down approach was roundly criticized by the
teachers for being a somewhat oppressive system in which students play a limited role in their
educational experiences, and outdated modes of instruction impede student compression of the
material.

**Discontentment with Lack of Student-Teacher Interaction**

The participants also discussed the lack of teacher-student interaction that characterized
the Eastern teaching style they experienced during their school years. Danny reported, “There
were very less interactive activities, also very hard to interact with teachers.” Amy offered some
explanation for this tendency saying, “For such large size classroom, it is hard to think about
interaction, sharing, or even group works.” Amy explained, “I think here in Macau, due to the
large size classroom, teachers are very hard to interact with students. Some teachers may not be
able to remember our name after one academic year, which I cannot accept.” While large class
sizes may play a role in the lack of student-teacher interaction found in the Eastern teaching
tradition, the lack of interaction also seems to be intrinsic to the philosophy of the approach
itself. Edwin also discussed the lack of student-teacher interaction that characterizes Eastern
education. Edwin described Chinese students as “silent,” postulating that “they dislike to speak”
and are “shy.” As Edwin went on to explain, “Easterners, they are like, you know, kinda like
students being listeners. When I speak in class [as a student], it is my bad.” He reported, “You may think it is just a general practice to remember students’ names. But I can tell you it is not general practice. Many teachers cannot remember students’ names all right.” The lack of interaction between students and their teachers stands as a major criticism of the approach, and exists in stark contrast to the methods practiced by the participants in their own classes.

Rejection of Eastern Teaching Methods

In response to these experiences with the top-down approach, many teachers reported or were observed to modify or forego the practice in favor of other teaching styles. Some teachers expressed an outright rejection of the top-down approach for their adult learners. Amy argued, “[My students] are in their adulthood. Some of them are even older than me. What is the point to use the top-down approach again?” Cathy was observed to eschew the traditional top-down teaching approach, and instead decided to give adult students more authority. During Edwin’s observation, it was noted that the lesson tended to be a top-bottom lesson which was against his teaching philosophy. However, because of the necessity of preparing students for an upcoming exam, using a top-down approach seemed to be somehow unavoidable. During the lesson, Edwin also tried to employ contemporary and applied knowledge into the lesson.

Some teachers reported that their own negative experiences with the top-down approach informed their instruction with their own students. Amy reported, “I want to try my best to handle the top-down approach and try to avoid too much assignment, homework, and task. Doing task is important, but not again. Doing written assignment cannot help them to handle much.” Danny explained that he modifies the traditional practice based upon his experiences as a student. Danny reported:

My secondary school experience was not good at all. So this negative experience could
serve as a negative picture for me to avoid. Students are very used to the top-bottom approach. I want to see how to create a balanced plan, which can meet the purpose of my students and able to fit the top-bottom approach.

Amy similarly reported, “I did not learn much in the traditional classroom, also my students in their classroom experiences during the K-12 period. Therefore, here in adult learning environment, I have to set up plans to help them.” By eschewing the traditional Eastern teaching methods in favor of other methods, the teachers maintained that they are able to better serve the needs of their adult students.

In conclusion, more than half of the participants expressed that the Eastern teaching styles only permits passive and observant learners. Also, as identified in the second superordinate theme, teaching strategies and teaching materials should be tailored in order to meet the needs of students. However, the participants argued that the top-down approach and the Eastern teaching styles limit the opportunity of the students to contribute expression to their educational experiences, and remove their ability to challenge the instructor. In addition, several participants mentioned that the lack of student-teacher interaction could adversely affect the educational experiences of all students, because engagement and sharing are two of the primary keys for adult learning. However, due to the necessity of preparing students for an upcoming exam and preparing students for business writing, employing a top-down approach seemed to be unavoidable.

**Preference for Interactive Teaching Methods**

Eastern teaching styles are characterized by a lecture format in which the material is presented by the instructors and absorbed by the student in a top-down manner. In contrast to this style, the participants in this study described practicing a teaching style more akin to
Western pedagogy. The last superordinate theme the researched identified was a general preference for teaching methods that involved close interaction between the teachers and students. The participants described their use of instructional techniques that inspire the students to interact with the lesson, and with each other, more fully. The researcher identified two main topic areas among the data in relation to this preference for interactive teaching methods. In expressing this theme, the teachers described the importance of increasing student engagement with the material presented. Additionally, they discussed the provision of opportunities for peer-learning as an essential component of their pedagogy. Thus, the two subthemes identified within this superordinate theme were engagement and peer learning.

**Engagement**

Most of the teachers reported a preference for interactive teaching methods over the top-down style typically practiced by Chinese teachers. The teachers indicated that they like to incorporate role-playing and peer learning to increase student engagement. Danny argued, “Learning English should be interactive.” These activities can serve as an important motivational tool for students as well. Amy reported, “In the term of classroom motivation or behavior, I try my best to create interactions and activities in the classroom.” Danny stated, “Now, I understand teaching and learning is not about just listen[ing] to teachers. But we are talking about interaction and activities.” In developing a more interactive instructional style some teachers reported taking cues from Western educational practices. Edwin shared, “[In Europe] I experienced how to engage students and teachers together…I want to somehow transfer this teaching approach to my students. I want to host more activities or like games to increase the motivation of the learning environment.” The desire to utilize activities to increase student engagement with the lesson was shared by other participants as well. Danny offered
more support for this idea explaining, “I would bring some audios and allow [students] to have real practice. Otherwise, if there are only lesson exercises, it would be very boring.” Betty offered the following explanation for her use of interactive teaching methods to increase the excitement of her lessons:

I like activities because I can use my language skills to do drama, role-play, something like that. I do not like to just sit down and listen to the teachers. It is very boring. This is also why I continue to do activities in my current classroom.

In support of her account, the researcher observed that Betty likes to employ activities in her class instead of top-bottom approaches. Amy similarly reported, “I encourage mini activity. As the class is not very long each time, but if there are only instructions from teacher, that would be very boring.” In addition to increasing student engagement, class activities can contribute to teacher engagement as well. Amy explained, “I always try to start some peer sharing and activities to engage all students and even myself into the class.”

Utilizing engagement as a guiding objective, Edwin maintained that he aims to strike a balance between instruction and class activities. Edwin reported, “I believe activities are the key here to engage adults to learn. . . . Learning is about conducting, working, sharing, moving and so on. . . . Isn’t that very boring to sit down in the chair and listen to the teachers?” Danny expressed a similar philosophy saying, “If I can engage the questions and answers into some classroom activities, then it would be better. Yes, providing some audios or videos to watch. If the audios and videos can combine with some activities.” Betty shared the following account supporting the importance she places on development student engagement with the material:

My students, many of them are father[s] or mother[s] with many job duties in general, I know they are very tired. But just sitting down on the chair and listening to me could
create more boringness. I do not expect perfect jobs, I am not perfect too. But I expect some movements and activities. I like the idea engagement. Engagement means so much to me. I dislike sitting on ground lesson. I also asked some of my previous students about their opinion of teaching. Many of them agreed that having some sort of movements or activities are good for them to stay awake. I hope I can continue to employ the activities and movement pedagogy to my students.

In a similar vein, Edwin reported that he utilizes a multitude of activities to ensure that students are actively engaging with the material in a fun and interesting way. He reported the following:

I like to engage everybody in class. I mean, even if some students are very shy to engage, particular the young teenagers. I mean, we are in the adult learning center, and we are facing adults; we have to do some practice which is related to adults. Let’s say engagement. I like to employ activities in class. Role-play is perfect for sure. Then some videos with speaking and ask students to speak it loudly. What a nice way. The key here is, I like to engage students with activities.

The teachers maintained that being active in the learning process and interacting with the material are central components of mastering the lesson. Edwin summarized this position best saying, “Learning is about conducting, working, sharing, moving and so on. It is just hard to say, to work without activities.” Class activities contribute to student mastery by encouraging students to engage with the material more fully.

During the classroom observations, the researcher observed that Amy, Betty, and Danny all utilized role-playing as a class activity during their lessons. Cathy was observed utilizing a group oral presentation as an activity in her classroom. Before the lesson began, Cathy announced that the major task of this lesson was to present an in-class oral presentation about the
advantages and disadvantages of using role-plays. Cathy then asked students to divide into two groups to brainstorm the benefits and shortcomings of using role-plays in English speaking lessons. In Cathy’s classroom, she encouraged students to engage with brainstorming, group discussions, sharing, outlining, gathering and oral presenting. Betty was also observed to take an active, positive approach toward teaching her students. The researcher noted that at one point during the observation, Betty stood up and walked to the right front corner of the classroom and sang with the students who were delivering a presentation. She swayed to the music and clapped her hands. Because of Betty’s movements, the other students clapped and sang as well, and appeared to be fully engaged with the lesson. During the classroom presentations, Betty was frequently observed improvising props and tools to assist student with their role-playing. For example, during a Snow White role-play, Betty found an apple in her bag for her students to use. In Danny’s classroom, he also asked his students to complete a mini- role-play. Each student in the discussion group took a role as the audio recorder, giving the others the chance to improve their speaking skills. Danny’s classroom observation showed that he arranges activities and interactions to improve students’ listening proficiency and speaking skills. The observation of Edwin’s classroom showed less evidence of interactive approaches. However, Edwin explained that since that particular lesson was for exam preparation, activities were less likely to be employed. Role-plays, music, presentations, and audio recordings are all examples of the interactive methods employed by the teachers in this study. These methods serve as effective tools to increase student engagement with the material and ultimately to facilitate comprehension of the presented material.

Peer Learning
In addition to interactive activities, several teachers also reported the use of peer learning in their classrooms. Other students can serve as valuable resources in assisting their classmates with understanding the material. This is especially true among adult learners. Amy argued, “For adult learning, I believe sharing and peer support would be the key to learn.” Amy advocated the creation of a supportive and collaborative classroom environment. Amy reported, “I will ask my students if they are willing to share their own difficulties with other classmates. . . . [One] student’s problems could be others’ problems as well. [By sharing] difficulties with other students, all students could be benefited.” Successes, as well as areas of difficulty, may offer opportunities for collaborative development and mutual learning. Edwin discussed the value of peer learning, saying:

If one student does not understand, I would ask if others have the same questions too. If not, I can either help the student after class or engage the student with another peer. Peer sharing is a key for me to, you mean, help students to build up their confidence.

Amy emphasized this point reporting, “I always try to start some peer sharing.”

During her observation, Cathy announced that the major task of this lesson was to present an in-class oral presentation about the advantages and disadvantages of using role-plays. Cathy then divided students into groups to complete the assignment. This assignment facilitated collaborative teamwork among the adult learners. Similarly, Danny was observed to encourage students to share questions with each other and to practice speaking the question transcripts with their peers. Through this process the students were able to correct each other’s mistakes and learn from one another. During Amy’s observation, the researcher noted that students took a collaborative approach to assisting their fellow classmates. When one student erroneously stated, “Yes, the girl want to drink orange juice,” other students reminded her that she should use
the word *wants* instead. Amy then encouraged the female student to repeat the correct sentence again. Upon the completion of her students’ role-play assignment, Amy then provided encouragement to the class by applauding them. This positive reinforcement served to provide support for the students as they assisted each other to attain mastery of the material.

Similarly, Betty asked her students to mark notes during the class role-plays. In particular, she encouraged students to note potential problems and questions, and eventually all students shared their questions with the class. Through this process the students were able to learn from the insights of their classmates and identify areas in need of improvement. Danny was also observed to utilize peer sharing in his classroom. During Danny’s classroom observation, he asked his students to form a discussion group to share questions and answers with their peers. Danny encouraged the students to practice reciting question transcripts with each other. These activities serve to facilitate interaction among members of the class and ultimately help all students to improve their mastery of the material.

Some teachers reported that their use of peer learning activities stems from their own experiences during their school years. Danny shared that during his own time as a student he depended heavily on peer study groups to overcome challenges during his education. He explained, “I would find some classmates, who have better English proficiency to help me. We may form a small group with five or six members. Then help each other.” Amy discussed similar experiences as a student, saying the following:

Sometimes I asked friends and classmates to do peer or group reviews. I may not be the best in all subjects, or all aspects in English. You know, there are reading, listening, speaking and writing. We grouped people to teach each other. For example, I teach speaking, and my classmates teach other writing.
This experience with peer learning has also translated into Amy’s career as a teacher. In addition to utilizing peer learning in her classroom, she utilizes it as a tool to develop her skills as a teacher. Amy explained, “The school also asked teachers to form after-school review sections. I attended all of them, if I have questions about the study guides. I always asked my teachers to solve it during the section. I mean, why not? My questions could be others’ questions too.” By utilizing her fellow teachers as a source of peer learning, Amy is able to hone her instructional methods and sharpen her professional skills.

In addition to the idea of interactive teaching methods, the participants expressed the belief that peer activities were one of the keys to positively encourage students. Nearly all participants believed that the balance between instruction and class activities could motivate peer sharing and activities that engage all students and even teachers into the class. The participants maintained that being active in the learning process and interacting with the material are central components of mastering the lesson. In addition, among adult learners, peer learning could serve as a valuable resource in assisting their classmates with understanding materials. Some participants created discussion groups which could encourage students to share questions and answers with their peers. These activities served to facilitate interaction among members of the class and ultimately helped all students to improve their mastery of the material. Overall, when discussing adult learning, interactive teaching methods were highly advocated. Almost all participants employed several types of interactive teaching methods and activities to enhance the educational experiences of their adult students.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to better understand the relationship between the previous K-12 educational experiences, personal beliefs, and teaching pedagogies of teachers at a local
language learning center in Macau. The research questions were addressed through thematic analysis of all of the qualitative data collectively. Analysis of the interview transcripts, field notes, and observation data jointly enabled the researcher to obtain a holistic, integrated view of the participants’ teaching philosophies and practices.

Teachers place great importance on developing an understanding of student purpose and respecting their students’ sense of self-direction. Student purpose relates to the underlying motivational factors and aspirational goals that drive student educational attainment. Self-direction pertains to goal-oriented academic behaviors including class attendance, time management, and assignment completion. The teachers emphasized the importance of identifying and understanding the purpose guiding each of their students. The teachers maintained that adult learners come to school with a clear and definitive purpose in mind. Thus, each teacher must endeavor to comprehend the purpose that drives each of their students to pursue their education. Further, teachers should work jointly with students to help them progress toward the achievement of their purpose as a primary objective. Finally, they expressed the belief that adult students are inherently self-directed learners, and should be treated as such. By creating an environment in which students have the leniency to attend to other needs and responsibilities, but are entrusted with their own learning, teachers ensure that students’ success is limited only by their own self-direction.

Adult English-language learners present a unique set of needs related to the ways in which they comprehend the material and to their educational and vocational objectives. In providing instruction to adult English-language learners, teachers utilize a variety of educational methods to meet these needs. By incorporating different means of educational delivery, different educational tools, and by building flexibility within the curriculum teachers are able to be more
responsive to the unique needs of all of their students. Further, they discussed the need to make their lessons applicable to the real world, as many of their students have career-related educational needs. By designing a curriculum in which the instruction is directly applicable to the real lives of students, teachers are able to help students gain knowledge and skills that can be transferred to the students’ places of employment.

The teachers espoused the view that the process of learning is life-long and that teachers should strive to continually expand their knowledge. The teachers described the learning community that exists among the teachers at their school. Teachers learn from one another in a collaborative system in which best practices are shared. The collaborative effort put forth by all teachers ultimately contributed to the improvement and refinement of the instruction provided by the teachers. Additionally, the teachers emphasized the necessity of being open to change as an instructor. Teachers must be open to the suggestions of others and should consider modifying their instructional methods based upon new insights. The refusal to change may act as a limitation for some teachers, as they may be ill-equipped to provide students with the skills needed to stay abreast of the changing occupational landscape. By remaining open to change, teachers are better able to ensure that their curriculum supports students in meeting the challenges presented by their occupations.

Participants placed great importance on providing care and support to their students. Central to these concepts was the showing of concern for student well-being and mastery of the material, as well as the demonstration of efforts that go above and beyond the mere presentation of material to ensure that students gain mastery of the lesson. Many teachers drew upon their own negative experiences during their K-12 years as an example of what behaviors to improve upon with their own students. Feelings of being rushed for time and having an unreasonable
workload, among other negative perceptions, characterized most teachers’ negative memories of their early educational experiences. As a result of these experiences, several teachers reported that they strive to provide support to their students. Through making minor allowances to accommodate students, taking time to ensure that students are grasping the material, and using their own negative experiences for reference, the teachers are able to demonstrate care and support for their students.

The teachers expressed an overall dislike for the teaching style traditionally practiced by Eastern teachers. These complaints centered mainly on the differences among Eastern and Western pedagogies as they relate to instructional style, methods, and student-teacher interaction style. Eastern teaching approaches tend to be characterized by a lecture format in which the teacher presents the information to passive, observant learners. This imbalance of power was cited by some teachers as a central problem of the approach. The lack of interaction between students and their teachers also emerged as a major criticism of the approach, and exists in stark contrast to the methods practiced by the participants in their own classes. The top-down approach was roundly criticized by the teachers for being a somewhat oppressive system in which students play a limited role in their educational experiences, and outdated modes of instruction impede student compression of the material. By eschewing the traditional Eastern teaching methods in favor of other methods, the teachers maintained that they are able to better serve the needs of their adult students.

Finally, the teachers expressed a preference for teaching methods that involved close interaction between teachers and students. The participants described their use of instructional techniques that inspire the students to interact with the lesson, and with each other, more fully. In expressing this theme, the teachers described the importance of increasing student engagement
with the presented material. Additionally, the teachers discussed the provision of opportunities for peer-learning as an essential component of their pedagogy. Other students can serve as valuable resources in assisting their classmates with understanding the material. Role-plays, music, presentations, and audio recordings are all examples of the interactive methods employed by the teachers in this study. These activities serve to facilitate interaction among members of the class and ultimately help all students to improve their mastery of the material. In stark contrast to their own K-12 experiences, the teachers maintained that encouraging students to be active in the learning process is a central component of their own pedagogies.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implication for Practice

The purpose of this research study is to capture the personal experiences and beliefs of five English language teachers at an adult English language learning program for second language speakers in Macau, China. Furthermore, this research explores the pedagogies that the teachers employ for daily instruction and the relationship between their personal beliefs and their chosen pedagogy. Each participant provided an in-depth description of their past experiences as students in the Chinese education system, as well as their experience as teachers in an adult English language learning program for second language speakers. Classroom observations contributed to the data collected and analysis of the emergent themes.

The following two research questions guided this study:

1. What is the relationship between teachers’ personal belief systems and their classroom practice?
2. How do teachers’ educational experiences as K-12 students affect their pedagogy at adult English language learning programs?

The research questions were designed to investigate how the teachers’ past experiences and personal belief systems influence their choice in pedagogy. The questions narrowed the focus of the investigation to understand how teachers’ experiences and personal beliefs informed their classroom implementation of pedagogy.

This qualitative study design employed a general inductive approach to investigate the relationship between teachers’ personal beliefs and pedagogies. The qualitative approach provides the most comprehensive approach to collect data through comprehensive and in-depth interviews (Merriam, 2009; Maxwell, 2005; Maxwell, 2013). The findings of this qualitative, inductive design informed the two research questions. Through the inductive approach (Thomas,
2006), the following six superordinate themes emerged from the interviews and observation notes:

- Teachers expressed a need to understand and support the student’s purpose for matriculating and respected their need for self-direction;
- Teachers tailored the varying means of instruction to meet student needs, which made student learning applicable to real-life situations;
- As life-long learners, the teachers felt that they were part of a learning community, contributing and accepting best practices for their classroom, and being open to changes in their pedagogy and curriculum;
- Because of the negative perceptions of their early educational experiences, the teachers recognized the importance of caring and support of their students, and strove to demonstrate those principles;
- Teachers expressed a dislike for Eastern teaching styles and criticized the top-down approach of Eastern teaching;
- The preference for interactive teaching methods enhanced student-teacher engagement and peer learning opportunities.

The theoretical framework for this study comes from the research by Kindsvatter et al. (1996), which conveys an in-depth understanding of how a teacher’s personal belief system (PBS) influences pedagogy choices and daily instruction. According to Kindsvatter et al. (1996), PBS contains intuitive and rational bases that form a bilateral system through which a teacher’s belief system manifests. Personal experience, traditional practices, and personal needs influence the intuitive bases. Rational bases are informed beliefs comprised of the following: pedagogical
principles, constructivist approaches, and research findings. These multiple aspects of PBS provide a lens for this exploration of teacher’s personal belief systems and pedagogy.

The following sections present the interpretation of findings that describe how the themes correspond to or contradict research described in the review of literature. The first section describes in detail the findings that pertain to the first research question. The next section describes the findings pertaining to the second research question. Following the presentation of the findings, limitations of the study describe where there may be areas of interpretive variance, as well as problems in those areas that may have influenced any results obtained. Recommendations for practice describe how practitioners can best apply the information garnered from this study into their daily routines. Subsequently, recommendations for future research explore areas of possible further study, where the themes were not supported by the data. Finally, the conclusions explain how teachers’ personal belief systems contribute to pedagogy and daily instruction.

**Student Purpose and Self-Direction**

Macau is an international city that has quickly grown into a tourist destination, where hospitality is an important economic driver. Many of the jobs in Macau require a basic knowledge of the English language. Simple phrases and words can be learned quickly through interactions with customers, family, or friends; yet this remains a very nascent understanding of the language. The purpose for most of the students to learn English as a second language is to gain promotions in their industry, which is why they must enroll in English language learning programs. Furthermore, the Macau residents’ English comprehension skills are declining, because of the influx of Chinese immigrants to the former Portuguese colony (Bray & Hui, 1989;
Cheng, 1999; Young, 2006). These are seen as underlying motivational factors that direct the students toward their goals.

The teachers understood their student’s motivation, which coincides with Kindsvatter et al.’s (1996) discussion on a teacher’s convergence of personal beliefs and creating a motivational environment to learn. Nespor (1987) found that the role of personal beliefs influence teachers’ actions about what types of teaching practices and strategies best serve best different learning groups. Teachers understand that academic rigor in institutions may affect their students’ ability to learn, making teachers a propitious group to implement the proper teaching practice and strategy within their classroom (Anning, 1988; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1994). Similarly, the finding of this study reflected that five of the participants may not have effective teaching strategies as many of them may not have any chances to participate in such sharing activities.

Teachers were interested in their students’ underlying need to successfully complete their coursework in order to achieve their purpose in meeting career and occupational goals. The participants emphasized the importance of understanding the student’s purpose. Each expressed a need to understand their students’ purpose for taking the class. One participant stated, “Here in adult center . . . it is about achieving the purpose of my students.” The purpose for students was expressed during the interview process as a working knowledge of the language, the extent of which had to be applicable to their employment. Kindsvatter et al.’s (1996) research on teachers’ personal beliefs has produced data that assist in comprehending student purpose to matriculate and complete a course. Analysis of the theory and results from this research revealed that teachers hold beliefs related to a student’s purpose, especially when they may come from a different cultural and academic background. However, all of the participants agreed that when developing curriculum and teaching plans, the purpose of their students should be the prime
consideration. This subordinate theme showed that unlike K-12 students, adults come to institutions for very different reasons.

Keeping students motivated toward their purpose of course completion is an overarching objective for teachers. According to Kindsvatter, et. al. (1996), student motivation comes from the environment that the teacher creates, which can also be used as a measure of the teacher’s effectiveness. The teachers tailored their instruction to accommodate the student purpose for taking the class, thus keeping them motivated to learn English. This also coincides with the second theme that emerged from the results, where teachers’ instruction was tailored to meet their students’ needs. The students’ purpose provided a framework for the teacher to tailor the methods for them to learn, creating an environment conducive for motivated learning.

Teachers expressed the belief that adult students are self-directed learners, and should be treated as such. Several teachers believe that teachers should not act solely as instructors for these adult students. Students have their own working experiences and academic background. Even if the students show no interests in certain topics, they must absorb what they need in their workplace. It was not necessary to force students to learn, because their livelihood depended upon learning English to accommodate foreign visitors.

With an understanding of their students’ purpose to learn English, the teachers developed curriculum and classroom activities to address the individual needs of their students. All five of the teachers interviewed expressed that their personal beliefs were guides for their classroom practices and pedagogy, therefore, the teachers’ intuitive and rational bases aligned with constructivist teaching. Pajares (1992) suggested that personal beliefs affect the teaching and learning contexts under which particular beliefs serve as attitudes or values that have already become a part of teachers’ behaviors. Personal beliefs provide insight to connections among
educational research, teacher practice, teachers’ knowledge, and students’ achievement. Dornyei and Malderez (1997) found that when junior teachers and pre-service teachers enter a school for observation of that school, they can observe what normal teachers do in the classroom and can learn from those experiences; this combines with their own experience as students in order to create their own teaching pedagogies. According to Kindsvatter et al. (1996), constructivist teaching informs pedagogy knowledge base, which in turn informs teacher decision making within the classroom. For a teacher, the ability to make pertinent and informed decisions that affect learning is paramount of all skills (Kindsvatter et al., 1996), which comprises the next superordinate theme.

**Tailoring Instruction to Meet Student Needs**

The teachers suggested that instruction should be tailored to meet the students’ career-related educational needs, making lessons more applicable to real world situations. Teachers reported that the standardized textbooks in the market were not able to respond to the needs of their students. As each city and country has its own economic background and labor market demands, textbooks from foreign cities and countries may only serve as a reference. For adult students, workplace English could emphasize a business-oriented direction for teaching in an adult learning facility. Kuzborska (2011) found that the teacher participants tailored their instruction to meet their students’ needs, which consequently matched their personal beliefs, coinciding with the second superordinate theme of this study. According to Kindsvatter et al. (1996), teachers’ intuitive belief systems inform their decision making with experience-based impressions, which determines that their instruction “be based on the most effective strategies, methods, techniques, and behaviors” (p. 4). The teachers expressed a need to change their
teaching methods and tools to meet their students’ needs and developed individualized instruction to meet that criteria (Aguirre & Speer, 2000).

Once the purpose and motivations were understood, teachers described the interactive instruction they employed to engage their students and meet their needs in learning situational English. According to Handel & Herrington (2003), it is important for teachers to understand their teaching strategies. When teachers do not have a clear notion about a new teaching strategy that is suggested by others, they will not apply it in their classrooms. Also, when teachers do not have a positive belief about a new teaching practice, the outcomes of this teaching practice will not be positive for their students. Some teachers made adjustments to their curriculum in order to present “vocational English” for a student who was teaching English in a school, and a combination of “vocational and practical English” for students in the hospitality industry. These modifications were tailored to the students’ needs, thus allowing the teachers to create a motivational learning environment (Kindsvatter et al., 1996).

One example of varying instruction observed by the researcher was a change in the presentation of the material such that students became more engaged with the process. The teacher found that conveying the concept of brainstorming was better served through relating an example on a white board, which expanded upon the material and presented it in a more conceptual manner than would a traditional lecture. English in a textbook seemed unrelated to the everyday experiences of the participants; the general and broad based delivery of the text was understood better when the focus was narrowed to contemporary conversations and business situations. Other supplementary materials were used to vary the instruction from textbooks to visual aids and computer-based presentations. One teacher encouraged students to contribute to their fellow classmates’ learning through sharing articles that interested the students. The
varieties of methods and tools facilitate the teachers’ ability to facilitate their students’ mastery of the material.

The varying of means of instruction coincides with Kindsvatter et al.’s (1996) theory of personal beliefs. For teachers, current and past classroom experiences comprise their informed beliefs that are one component of the intuitive base of knowledge (Kindsvatter et al., 1996). Students benefited from the teacher’s ability to create a meaningful learning environment, where each student could relate to the information, going beyond rote learning from a textbook (Richard, Callo & Renandya, 2001). The students experienced a change in learning that may be directly related to the teachers’ personal beliefs, which are discussed at length in themes four and five. The teachers implemented changes within their instructional methods and materials, while making the information more applicable to students’ occupations.

Thompson (1992) noted that curriculum and textbooks served as a reference for the students and the teachers. One teacher described the textbook as lacking pertinent instruction and “not very related to daily life” of their students, because their interaction with international visitors is limited. Another teacher expressed nearly the same sentiment that “English needs to be realistic. . .The society needs it to engage with real practices.” Other materials, articles, magazines, and posters were brought into the classroom to teach the real-world applications of conversational English, allowing students to interact with their clients and guests at the facilities in which they work.

Teachers made rational decisions based upon their experience with teaching and the needs of their students, tailoring their instruction methods and curriculum in order to achieve best practices (Kagan, 1992). According to Kindsvatter et al. (1996), the experiences a teacher has in the classroom, prior to teaching and while teaching, direct what is appropriate and useful
for the students to receive. Their decisions to understand their students’ needs, or purpose, suggests a rational decision, which is not intuitively based upon formative experiences as a youth (Cheung & Ng, 2000; Handal & Herrington, 2003). Borg (2003) suggested that teachers’ belief systems are influenced by professional coursework and classroom practice. The next superordinate theme describes how the teachers were influenced by professional development courses, as much as by their personal classroom experiences. Their decisions were influenced by best teaching practices formed from a broader knowledge through continuous education and training.

**Teachers as Life-Long Learners**

Life-long learning was an ideology expressed by all of the participants. The participants expressed a sense of being supported through a learning community that understood learning as a continuous process. A community of learning reflects an external environment where teachers are able to strive to become better teachers through peer collaboration and sharing of best practices. One teacher identified as a life-long learner because he believed that the “teacher is not only a teacher, but a learner, too.” Moreover, being open to new ideas and methods was an important factor toward acceptance and implementation of newly learned concepts. These teachers understood that collaboration was a preferred method of continuous learning, which allowed them to be more successful in their delivery of concepts to their students.

This finding suggests congruence with the rational components of teachers’ personal belief systems (Kindsvatter et al., 1996). Within Kindsvatter et al.’s (1996) personal belief system theory are the following rational components: constructivist approaches, teacher effectiveness, research findings, scholarly contributions, and examined practice. The teachers were involved in developing their pedagogy through continuous learning and collaboration with
other teachers in order to be successful in meeting their students’ needs. Sharing of experiences and personal learning through instruction and scholarly inquiry contributed to collaboration and discussions of self-improvement toward instruction. Teachers collaborated their experiences and insights within and outside the classroom (Czernial & Lumpe, 1996). One teacher described this perception of collaboration through her own personal beliefs, stating sharing “education and teaching experience with each other, I think we can produce much better outcomes.”

A willingness to accept new information was important for teachers to contribute their experiences, as well as feeling that their experiences were being thoughtfully received and validated by their peers. A myopic and “obstinate” teacher was regarded as one who refused to be open and aware of students’ needs and purpose for taking the class. Furthermore, being open-minded about a student’s needs allows for individual attention and adaptation of pedagogy and curriculum to meet those needs. The decisions teachers make to adjust aspects of their teaching suggests that they understand that “effective decisions inevitably precede effective teaching” (Kindsvatter, 1996, p. 13). An effective decision making process for these successful teachers was to remain open to the needs of their students and collaborate with other teachers in order to understand the best practices for their classroom and prevent past experiences in the classroom from obfuscating their judgment.

**Importance of Caring and Support**

As seen in the previously defined findings, teachers based their daily decision making on their past experiences during formative education, contemporary pedagogical methods, and collaborative learning. Teachers reported that these combined experiences taught them the importance of being caring and supportive teachers, which meant being concerned with their students’ mastery of the coursework. Because “assumptions and beliefs are the basis for much of
our everyday behavior” (Kindsvatter, 1996, p. 3), early educational experiences influence how teachers approached their pedagogy and suggest why they have a constructivist approach to lesson planning and individualized instruction.

Participants reported little direct memory of their earliest experiences, but expressed an overall negative view of their formative education. Several participants reported on their negative perceptions of their early educational experiences that pertained mainly to workload and time. One negative experience expressed by a participant described how her teacher believed that her bad grades were due in large part to her laziness. According to Handal & Herrington (2003), if teachers have negative beliefs about a teaching practice, they are less likely to apply this practice into their classroom. Teachers from her early educational experience focused on the amount of classwork, perpetuating their teacher’s belief systems, and were less likely to provide additional support to students. Therefore, the participant in this study developed a negative attitude toward her early educational experiences, which affected how she made a concerted effort to learn about differing teaching strategies and practices from her educational experiences. Offering students additional support meant that the teachers were compassionate to their student’s needs, especially through individualized instruction and curriculum changes to fit the purposes of the students.

Participants facilitated peer sharing and activities that were tailored to the needs of the students and the industry in which they worked. Also, participants were more likely to stay for additional office hours to assist students with special needs. The participants’ behaviors corresponded to constructivist approaches from the rational bases according to the theoretical framework found in Kindsvatter et al.’s (1996) and Kagan’s (1992) findings. Students were regarded as meaning creators, seeking to be successful and obtain a mastery of their coursework.
The teachers were facilitators, offering caring and supportive instruction to help their students meet these goals. All of the teachers believed that their learning experiences, caring, and supporting from teachers are the keys to success.

**Dislike for Eastern Teaching Styles**

According to Handal & Herrington (2003), if teachers have negative beliefs about a teaching practice, they are less likely to apply this practice in their classrooms. The teachers expressed a dislike for the top-down approach found in Eastern teaching styles, which was directly experienced by the teachers when they were students. In the finding concerning the criticism of Eastern teaching styles, the top-down approach was widely accepted by students because of their experiences during their formative years in education. Students in classrooms tend to be silent and listen to their teachers as audiences, which was due to traditional practice according to Kindsvatter et al. (1996). Teachers’ negative experiences formed psychological responses that associated negative feelings with the material and the subject of English language learning. The top-down approach eliminated their motivation to learn the subject. Furthermore, the lack of caring and support negated any encouragement to succeed in the subject area. Also, several teachers believed that Asian classrooms encouraged mnemonic learning methods to force students to understand a foreign language. Such traditional practices were obstacles for students’ motivation to learn and grow, deferring their interests to understand English until later in life when they became teachers.

Another factor of Eastern teaching practices that was criticized was the custom of large class sizes. According to Pedersen & Liu (2003), teachers’ personal beliefs will be changed once a teaching strategy is implemented. Participants decried the lack of student-teacher interaction in a large population of students, which contributed to their feelings of being unsupported by the
faculty throughout their formative years. One participant described their “students’ being listeners” as an obstacle to providing a caring and supportive atmosphere, and creating an environment with less time for student-teacher interactions. Less time to interact with their teachers coincided with the described cultural norm of remaining silent in class.

By echoing the above, one participant described assignments, homework, and classroom tasks as the key materials for learning in traditional Asian classrooms. Because teachers understood their past experiences and the negative associations directly linked with those experiences, they avoided excessive assignments that could detract from student motivation. Having these experiences also played an important formative role in development of pedagogy (Kindsvatter et al., 1996). Many teachers described their preference for additional teacher-student interactions, which allowed students to express their opinions in the classroom and increase motivation. A rejection of past experiences with Eastern teaching styles that formed negative impressions allowed the teachers to create a motivational learning environment meeting the students’ needs and purpose.

**Preference for Interactive Teaching Methods**

The participants of this study described a preference for interactive teaching methods in their classes, which was in direct contrast to the Eastern method of teaching, characterized by a lecture format and excessive classwork. The sixth and final subordinate theme the research identified was the preference for interaction and role-playing to assist student learning in an adult learning environment. Because of their past experiences in Eastern classroom environments, students are collectively engaged as a group to share with each other; however, when they are listening to their teachers, they tend to be obey and sit as audiences. Peacock (1999) concluded that the beliefs and experiences teachers bring into the classroom were possibly different from
their students’, therefore requiring some adjustment from both. The teachers found that such passive behaviors may be obstacles to gain knowledge from engagements.

According to Kindsvatter et al. (1996), the behaviors of students are viewed as intuitive bases; therefore, many of the participants engaged students in different types of learning activities such as role-playing in order to connect with their students in more appropriate learning situations to benefit needs and purpose. Yet, as found during classroom observations, students were receptive to the alternative method of learning through role-playing, but their lack of familiarity proved to be an obstacle to teaching. Teachers improvised methods of delivery to increase classroom participation and engagement with the material. One teacher sang and clapped her hands, so that her students joined in the activity, and appeared fully engaged.

Peer learning was another factor within the subordinate theme found to be an important key for adult learning. One participant described that the ideas exchanged during peer learning can increase the confidence of students. Students exchanged and empathized with each other about their problems associated with learning English. The exchange of problems created a collaborative learning environment, where the exchange of ideas and strategies overcame common instructional problems of limited individual interaction.

Personal experiences and beliefs shaped the pedagogy of the participants in this study (Kindsvatter et al., 1996), which allowed them to embrace Western styles of teaching and reject Eastern styles of teaching. The final subordinate theme presents the application of a culmination of learning how to best instruct students through proven methods that engage and motivate them so that the students persist in the class and succeed in obtaining personal goals.

**Limitations**
The present study mainly focused on English teachers at local private language learning center for adult students, omitting in-service teachers at other types of teaching environments, as well as pre-service teachers and student teachers. The location in Macau, China was limited to a single school and small sample of adult educators. Interviews, observations, and field notes used to investigate the teachers’ personal beliefs limited how these educators’ personal beliefs were identified in their classroom practices, because of interviewer bias and teacher honesty. Utilizing additional research methods, such as quantitative analysis of educator beliefs, might better define the context and environment in which these educators were instructing.

Another limitation for this study was a lack of examination of the adult learning facility’s policy and the administrative powers that create policies. Understanding the overarching guidelines and teacher compliance to those guidelines may achieve a more complete picture of the educational structure for an adult-only learning facility. Furthermore, these policies and procedures may differ from Western standards and examining them may result in a better understanding of the political environment that drives many educational policies.

Implications for Practice

Kindsvatter et al. (1996) has suggested that teachers’ personal belief system (PBS) may impact their teaching behaviors, teaching styles, and pedagogies in classroom practice. The findings from this research coincide with the extant literature and the examination of teachers’ personal beliefs as incorporated into classroom practice. Also, the findings and information within this study are important for the development of effective strategies for policy makers, teachers, school leadership, and teacher educators, who can assess pedagogy and curriculum, as well as implement teaching strategies directly into a classroom environment (Richard et al., 2001; Burton, 2003). The findings of this study can be extrapolated beyond the East Asian and
Chinese region where the study took place and can contribute to the administrators at English language learning institutions and language learning centers in other regions of China. For example, China and Macau’s connection is very strong, such that it is similar to the dynamic between China and Taiwan. Also, secondary school teachers and administrators may find this study to be beneficial, because of the contribution to personal belief systems. As many local teachers do not have experiences in understanding personal beliefs and teacher educational development programs, the study findings can be beneficial for teachers, regardless of their teaching subjects.

Borg (2003) explained that teacher cognition is “what teachers know, believe and think” (p.85), and being cognizant of preconceived notions from past experiences becomes a preventative measure from incorporating personal bias into classroom strategies. Teachers can directly benefit from understanding the findings of this research, because they can recognize the source of connection between personal beliefs and classroom practices. From the findings of this study, teachers may gain a better understanding of their personal beliefs and teaching practice behaviors, which may encourage teachers and administrators to establish training programs that compare former teaching practice with more aware and current practices. For novice teachers with very few teaching experiences, listening to senior co-workers’ opinions allows them to compare teaching strategies found in their former school experiences with their current teaching classroom. Moreover, once the participating teachers finish this training program, the teachers may learn how to share experiences with peers. This may assist teachers to reconsider pedagogical implementation in order to improve their current teaching practice. In addition, a course of understanding personal beliefs could be added into in-service teachers’ training programs in order to introduce concepts of how to assist students to learn effectively.
Pre-service and student teachers may greatly benefit from understanding how their personal belief systems affect their classroom knowledge and strategies. Novice teachers are less likely to incorporate their university instruction into their classrooms, because they rely heavily upon peer acceptance and cultural norms (Kindsvatter et al., 1996). The influence of peer and experienced teachers abrogates the novice teacher’s education in contemporary pedagogy, therefore, affecting their ability to make dynamic decisions within the classroom that befit the situation. Kindsvatter et al. (1996) stressed the frequency of situational decisions teachers experience in a single hour. Furthermore, the experienced teachers were better equipped with years of experience, training, and personal development, as opposed to novice teachers, because their decision making was based on multiple perspectives and not as easily swayed (Lumpe, Haney & Czerniak, 2000; Burton, 2003; Desimone, 2009). The findings of this research study may empower novice teachers to recognize the effects of being part of a social climate, yet maintain a firm grasp of their education in order to incorporate it into the classroom environment.

Professional development programs may benefit from the findings of this study through the development of programs that engage teachers to think about the learning purposes of their adult students. Teachers may want to develop their own curriculum that is contradictory to long-held cultural beliefs and practices in order to meet the purposes and needs of their students. The participants in this study were bold enough to apply Western teaching styles in Eastern classrooms to achieve effective instruction and individualized learning. The findings of this study may embolden other teachers in similar situations who feel trapped in a myopic system, unable to reach their students and help them achieve their personal goals. Moreover, the programs could introduce strategies about engaging students in order to enhance their workplace
knowledge of English through interactive teaching. The participants expressed an increase in student engagement from classroom activities, especially when those activities provided applicable solutions to daily occupational needs. The adult learner in this research study is different from a young student, because of the need for situational language acquisition versus vocational, a more formal and extensive language acquisition. Most of the students in the adult learning facility required a situational knowledge of English that could be applied during their interactions with international clientele. The participants recognized their students’ needs and tailored their classroom activities toward personal interactions with peers, which allowed them to practice their newfound skills with a foreign language.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study supports the extent literature regarding the examination of teachers’ personal beliefs as incorporated into classroom practice. Through an inductive analysis of interview transcripts and classroom observation notes, the individual perceptions of teachers in an adult learning facility emerged to present insights into the similarities and differences between educators and their experiences within the classroom. Future research could incorporate the observations and interviews of students within the program for a better understanding of their purpose for taking the course and how they can apply their knowledge in their daily lives. Furthermore, the interviews could take place prior to the beginning of the session and at completion. Because the courses were not graded, an unbiased opinion of achievement may emerge and lend a better understanding of the efficacy of an interactive classroom environment. The interviews could explore teaching styles and personal attitudes toward the teachers. Also, expanding the sample through quantitative instruments may allow researchers to extrapolate these findings to a larger population or entire teaching community. The quantitative instruments
may reduce the biases found in the answers given by the teachers, which was one of the
limitations of this study. A combination or mixed methods study could juxtapose the perceptions
of the teachers with the students, making for a more comprehensive study of the classroom
environment at a private English language learning facility.

This study focused on experienced teachers and accounted for their experience within the
classroom environment. Future research could focus on pre-service, student, or novice teachers
of English language teaching and their personal belief systems prior to engaging with other
teachers and students in an English language adult learning facility. Having these nascent
perceptions may lend insight into the areas of teacher development courses within and outside
universities. Another possible direction for future research could focus on employing peer
observations of teachers’ professional development. This type of research could investigate
beyond personal belief systems and lead to peer involvement in teachers’ professional
development. Researchers in other countries throughout Asia could replicate this study in other
similar facilities and contribute to the findings of this study, which expands upon the current
literature describing teachers’ personal belief systems in a classroom environment.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how personal belief system
theory was connected with teacher perceptions of pedagogy and classroom environments in an
adult private adult learning facility for English learning in Macau, China. The participants of
this study were teachers with classroom experience and members of a learning community who
believed in collaboration of ideas to create environments for best practices. These teachers
actively sought to understand the purpose and needs of their students for enrolling in the class.
Also, the teachers understood their roles as facilitators of knowledge acquisition. Because these
students were adult learners, most were not enrolled to learn vocational English, but to only acquire situation English that could be applied in their workplace.

Upon completion of the preliminary analysis, PBS theory provided a lens to further interpret the data. Teachers’ belief systems may impact their teaching behaviors, teaching style, and pedagogy (Kindsvatter et al., 1996). According to Kagan (1992), PBS has the unique position of leading teachers toward understanding the large amount of issues and implications of their teaching. Beliefs and practices become congruent with each other (Kuzborska, 2011). This concept becomes more important when developing and implementing pedagogies, as well as improving daily teaching practices (Kagan, 1992). Conversely, teachers’ beliefs may not be reflected in their classroom practices (Farrell & Lim, 2005). Because contextual factors, time constraints, and teaching activities were found to influence a teacher’s ability to adhere to personal beliefs and pedagogy, both congruence and incongruence in the classroom were factors that lent a better understanding of personal beliefs and classroom practices.

According to Kindsvatter et al. (1996), personal belief system theory is a two-tiered approach with a structural backbone of theoretical concepts. The personal belief system theory includes two bases: the intuitive and the rational. Furthermore, each of these two bases can be divided into two separate beliefs systems that are unexamined beliefs and informed beliefs. Below in Figure 1 is a schematic of the personal belief system by Kindsvatter et. al (1996) that best describes these factors affecting teachers’ daily decision-making skills and classroom strategies, as well as the approach to pedagogy and curriculum development.
Figure 1. Personal Belief System (PBS) adapted from Kindsvatter et. al., 1996

The findings of this study described teachers utilizing their personal belief systems to engage their students with the material through interactive teaching strategies, which was counter-intuitive for both teachers and students having been taught with Eastern teaching styles. This research study contributes to the personal belief system theory and broadens the understanding of the perspectives and concepts of English teaching and supervising. The beliefs of teachers influenced their understanding about teaching, as well as their classroom practices (Kindsvatter, et. al 1996), which was directly related to the findings of this study.
References


Pennington, M.C. and Richards, J.C. (1993). Learning to teach English in Hong Kong: The first year in the classroom. (Proposal for earmarked research grant to Hong Kong University and Polytechnic Grants Committee, City Polytechnic of Hong Kong, Department of English, Hong Kong.)


Appendix A

Teacher Interview Protocol Adapted from Seidman (2006, p. 15-19)

Pre-observation Interview: Teachers’ Personal Experience as Language Students (Focused Life History) and Teachers’ Current Teaching Experience (The Details of Experience)

Focused Life History

1) Describe your first English learning experience.
   a. Would you tell me what you remember about your first English learning experience?

2) How did your former English language teachers assist you in learning English?
   a. Were you consciously aware of specific teaching practices your instructor was using?
   b. Tell me a story about your favorite English language teacher and what made them special to you.

3) Besides formal schooling, will you tell me about any other help you had in learning English?
   a. Was English spoken in your childhood home as a second language?
   b. Did any family members speak English with you at home?

4) Did you encounter any negative experiences during your K-12 years that prevented you from participating in your English class?
   a. How did these experiences affect your beliefs about speaking English?

5) Thinking about your previous experience as an English language learner, describe your best and worst English class experience as a student.
   a. What made it so good/bad?
   b. How did it make you feel at that time?
   c. How did you overcome any challenges?

The Details of the Experience

6) Describe your experiences as an English teacher working with your class at the adult learning center.
   a. Describe a typical classroom lesson?
   b. Do you have a preferred way of instructing your students? Please explain.

7) What are your expectations for students in your English language learning classroom?
   a. What do you do if they do not understand something?

8) In your opinion, what types of skills should effective English language teachers have?
   a. Of the skills you mentioned, which one is the most important to you? Why?
9) Describe how your previous experiences as an English language learner influence your current teaching practice?
   a. Based on what you described what was the greatest influence? Please describe in detail.
10) If you would make any change(s) to your teaching practice, what would they be? Please explain.
11) How do you see yourself as a member of the social community of English language teachers at the adult learning center? How do you interact with other English language teachers?

Post-observation Interview: Teachers’ Making Sense of their Language Learning and Teaching Experiences (Making Meaning of their Experiences)

(The researcher will begin by asking about any discrepancies observed during the classroom observation.)

1) Describe how your life experiences and your current practices as an English teacher help you understand what it means to be a teacher? Effective teacher? Please explain.
   a. In your opinion, what types of skills should effective teachers have?
2) Describe how your current experience in an English classroom environment provides meaning to your life as a teacher?
   a. What have been the major influences? Please describe.
   b. Have these experiences altered your beliefs in any way?
3) Describe how your previous experiences as an English language learner and current experiences as a language teacher influence and/or improve your teaching practice in the future? How?
4) Describe how your previous experiences as an English language learner at school may serve as a guideline or blueprint in your current practice? If so, how?
5) How have your beliefs changed from the time when you were an English language learner to now?
   a. What influenced this change?
6) Taking into account everything that you have told me so far about your life experiences before you became a teacher and your experiences up to being where you are currently, how would you describe what it means to you to be an English teacher?
7) Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix B

Example of a Diagram Referencing the Setting of an English language Learning Classroom

Date/Time: 13\textsuperscript{th} April, 2014 (Sunday); 20:00-21:00
Researcher: The Writer
Purpose: To observe the participant and learners
Location: A private local educational learning center/First-year English class for adults
Appendix C
Northeastern University IRB Approval

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION
Date: November 25, 2014  IRB #: CPS14-10-10
Principal Investigator(s): Kimberly Nolan
Luis Miguel Dos Santos
Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University
Title of Project: The Relationship between Personal Beliefs and pedagogy: A Study of an Adult English Language Learning Program at a Private Local Educational Learning Center in Macau, SAR
Participating Sites: forthcoming
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7 Exempt #3 Observation
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: NOVEMBER 24, 2015

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix D

Recruitment Letter

Dear ________________

My name is Luis Miguel Dos Santos and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University working towards my Doctor of Education. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting a study about how what are the relationships between teachers' personal belief systems and their classroom practice at adult English language learning program at private local educational learning center in Macau. My doctoral dissertation topic is: The Relationship between Personal Beliefs and Pedagogy: A Study of An Adult English Language Program at A Private Local Educational Learning Center in Macau.

In order to gather data about this research, I am inviting you to participate in my study. You have been asked to participate in this research because you have been identified as an English language teacher who is working for an adult English language learning program at a private local educational learning center in Macau. If you know of another individual who may be appropriate to include in my research, I welcome those referrals.

Please be aware that your participation is optional and you may withdraw at any point. Also, any participation in the study will be completely confidential; names and other personal information will not be used in the final document. Those who choose to participate will receive a copy of summary of interview.

Please respond this letter via in-person talk, cellphone call to __________, or e-mail to dossantos.l@husky.neu.edu if you are interested or have any questions.

Sincerely,

Luis Miguel Dos Santos

Doctor of Education Candidate
Northeastern University
Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

Dos Santos B: Informed Consent Forms

Northeastern University
Doctor of Education
College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigators:
Kimberly Nolan EdD, Principal Investigator
Luis Miguel Dos Santos, Student Investigator

Title of Research: The Relationship between Personal Beliefs and Pedagogy: A Study of An Adult English Language Learning Program at A Private Local Educational Learning Center in Macau, SAR

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study: Interview (Pre-observation and Post-observation) and Classroom Observation

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask the researcher any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to affirm this statement and have provided you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You have been asked to participate in this research because you have been identified as an English language teacher who are working for an adult English language learning program at a private local educational learning center in Macau. You must be at least 18 years old to participate to this research.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to understand the relationship between personal beliefs and teaching pedagogies of teachers at a local educational learning center in Macau.

Procedures

The face-to-face interviews: participants will be asked to engage in two 60-90 minute digitally recorded interview sessions (i.e. pre-observation interview and post-observation interview), at a time and place that is convenient and comfortable for each of them. The participant may have the chance the select the location as well.
Also, the researcher will observe a 60 minute long English class taught by each participant. A field notebook will be used to record interesting observation points such as the interactions of the participant and learners, physical layout of the classroom, and verbal and non-verbal communications. Member checking is employed for all of the participants to confirm the information accuracy. All of the participants will be invited to the member checking process to review the professional summary of information of the study.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

There is only very less foreseeable risk or discomfort. The possible risk could be time commitment.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help us better understand the effective teaching of pedagogy.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this research. You will be given a pseudonym as will your organization in any reports or publications.

Recordings of the interview will be transcribed by the student investigator. Only the researchers will have access to the recordings.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**

You have the option to choose not to participate.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for solely because of my participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may
quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Luis Miguel Dos Santos, dossantos.l@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Kimberly Nolan EdD at k.nolan@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

No.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

No.

Include any pertinent information that may not be stated elsewhere.

You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

Signature

____________________________ (Name of Participant)

Understand the procedures described above and agree to participate in this study.

____________________________
Signature of Participant

____________________________
Date:

____________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

____________________________
Date:

IRB Approval Expiration date:

APPROVED

11-10-13

Thru 12-31-15

Northeastern University - Human Subject Research Protection
Revised 9/9/2013