

http://www.teacherdrivenchange.org/teacherdrivenchange/appreciative_inquiry/

Appreciative Inquiry

December 10, 2009

Focusing on Strengths: ECE Can Lead the Way

The *What Works* Conference examined new ways to increase student self-reliance and *accountability by emphasizing personal talents and strengths*. While there is a rush by many elected officials and policy makers to promote academics, *What Works* presenters and participants discussed the view that early childhood education should first create a foundation based on student talents and strengths. [Dr. Lindsey Godwin](mailto:l.godwin@moreheadstate.edu), l.godwin@moreheadstate.edu Assistant Professor of Management in the College of Business, Morehead State University and [Matthew Meoble](mailto:m.moehle@moreheadstate.edu), m.moehle@moreheadstate.edu a Clinical Instructor of Education in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Special Education at Morehead State University presented a strong case for how strength-based approaches can act as an antidote for many of the challenges facing our schools today. Specifically, Lindsey and Matt describe how [Appreciative Inquiry](#) (AI) can be used by teachers and parents to create a school community environment that is rich with excitement and passion – passion that is driven by students’ talents and strengths. View <http://whatworksconference.org/> if you would like to view all three AI sessions.

Quoting Thomas Edison, *If we did all the things we were capable of, we would literally astound ourselves*, Dr Godwin described AI as both an approach and philosophy for teachers and parents which had the potential for changing the social and academic environment for our schools. According to many participant comments, the AI presentations reinforced their own ideas as well as provoked new insights and possibilities for their teaching. Matt informed participants that Appreciative Inquiry was extremely powerful because it can be used by both a single person – teacher, student or parent - or an entire organization: classroom, school or district. In other words, AI has the possibility to transform our schools and classrooms to a place where teachers and students co-create a teaching and learning environment that values the social and academic skill and knowledge of students; a place where problems take a backseat to the great things that students bring to the classroom.

Participants were invited to practice reframing some of their own student, classroom or school topics from an appreciative perspective. The resulting interaction was exciting and wonderful to hear teachers and other ECE stakeholders dialogue about the great things taking place in their school community. It was a joyful experience for all those that attended and important reminder of what all public education should like. [Contact](#) the IFT if you would like more information on how you can bring Ai to your school or classroom.

December 09, 2009

[What Works Conference – A Major Success](#)

From October 26 through November 19, 2009, hundreds of California teachers, preschool providers, administrators, parents, and community leaders participated in the CTA IFT *What*



Works Virtual Conference with school community stakeholders from all over the country. Individuals viewed pre-recorded videos and talks, attended live webinars, and participated in thought-provoking discussions that focused on the positive strengths that can be brought to early childhood education environments. While the focus of the conference was on preschool, participants discussed and heard ideas that applied to all of public education. [Click here to view conference sessions, presentations, and panel discussions.](#)

Conversations Matter - From various strength-based school improvement strategies, to sessions that emphasized student resilience and capacity building, participants listened, dialogued, and discussed possible actions that they might take in their classroom and school community. If you attended a workshop, viewed one or more of the panel discussions or workshop archives, or otherwise participated in the *What Works! Conference*, you are eligible to receive a Certificate of Participation. [Login](#) to the *What Works Conference* web site to receive a Certificate of Participation and one will be sent to you.

September 28, 2008

[Introducing Appreciative Inquiry](#)

Meet [David Cooperrider](#), the founder of [Appreciative Inquiry](#). When David Cooperrider was a doctoral candidate at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland Ohio, he was conducting research into organizational behavior with the Cleveland Clinic. David observed that when interviews focused on the problems at the clinic, his subjects' energy decreased and they felt demoralized. When the interviews focused on what was working, they exhibited increased energy and enthusiasm for their work. (See the video below)

Cooperrider also noticed the same impact on those conducting the [interviews](#). When the focus was on problems, the result of the inquiry was a vicious circle spiraling downward. When the focus was on what's working and what's valuable, the result was a virtuous circle spiraling upward. *When I do good I feel good; when I feel good, I do good.* [Contact the CTA IFT](#) if you would like to learn more about Appreciative Inquiry and how it can be used in the schools.

May 01, 2008

Focusing on What Works

A recent [article in the LA Times](#) on student attitudes illustrates an important [Appreciative Inquiry principle](#): *You find what you are looking for – If you are looking for bad stuff you find bad stuff and if you look for good stuff that's what you find.* The article, based on a recent survey of South Los Angeles high school students, suggests that many are frightened, deeply dissatisfied, and exhibit symptoms of clinical depression. Students reported that their school and teachers are failing them, racial tension and gang violence exists in their school community, and that their schools look more like prisons. The survey was conducted in seven South L.A. public schools by a community youth organization, South Central Youth Empowered Thru Action (SCYEA), with technical guidance from the psychology department at Loyola Marymount University. While the intention of this group is notable (as with so many other public and private organizations), there is little evidence that simply identifying problems lead to improvement or change. Otherwise, we would surly not be facing the same problems, issues or concerns that have been voiced over the past 20 years. In addition, by



limiting our discussion to problems we are more likely to increase cynicism and pessimism. What the CTA IFT has uncovered with other teachers, administrators, CTA leaders and staff, and school community representatives is that by investigating only problems we merely become experts on the problems and not on solutions. On the other hand, when we focus on what works and works well, we find solutions, possibilities, and a new sense of hope. Instead of surveying students, teachers, parents and other individuals about what's not working in our schools, the CTA IFT is more interested in observing and asking questions about programs, organizational structures, teacher and administrator decision-making models, school – family relationships, and teaching and learning strategies that work. Once this information is known, we can begin to identify and catalogue successful behaviors and practices that can be replicated in classrooms, schools, and school district communities.

March 16, 2008

Sacramento Teachers Learn about Appreciative Inquiry

On February 19 & 20, 2008, over 40 teachers from the Sacramento City Teachers Association participated in a seminar on Appreciative Inquiry to learn about strength-based thinking and how it can be applied to the classroom, school, and school district. Participants discussed the principles and assumptions underlying Appreciative Inquiry and heard from several high school teachers on how they are using Appreciative Inquiry in their classrooms. According to the teachers, Appreciative Inquiry provides an asset-based model that teachers can use to emphasize student talents over weaknesses and strengths over deficits to create a learning environment that supports and encourages every student to do their best. Participants were provided Appreciative Inquiry case studies and examples of how teachers and students are more likely to become energized and excited about the learning process when they jointly develop a classroom culture based on strengths and positive experiences.

March 01, 2008

Introducing Appreciative Inquiry

Over the past year the CTA IFT has been using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to inspire and encourage legitimate, authentic change in California's public schools. AI suggests that teachers are more likely to be energized, excited and productive when they focus on what is working rather than what is broken. AI is driven by what is best in our schools, classrooms, and school community relations.

Each of us remembers a time when someone really believed in our ability and potential. It could have been a teacher, a family member, or friend who recognized our talents and gifts. Their faith and powerful expectations changed who we were and what we believed we could accomplish.

Unlike the deficit model, AI provides a framework for change that is both replicable and sustainable -- two characteristics lacking in most reform efforts. Anyone that has participated in a school related problem-solving meeting knows how frustrating and debilitating it can be. On the other hand, when people tell stories that remind them of hope, joy, and excitement, they often feel safer, more collaborative, and ultimately, more engaged in the change process. When highly engaged, teachers, like most people, see possibilities everywhere – possibilities of a new vision grounded in individual and collective strengths and positive experiences. From this perspective, school reform is no longer a vicarious or detached process for teachers where external or expert forces attempt to influence the change process. To learn more about the AI approach contact the CTA IFT.

