

■ Research Paper

Appreciative Design^a

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Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an inquiry into the 'best of' what already exists in a system. It is a search to discover the life-giving forces of the system. Organizations grow in the direction of what they study and, in this sense, invent themselves. AI asserts if good and bad exist in any system, we can choose to study the 'good' instead of the 'bad'. Unfortunately, we are well trained through problem-solving to study the 'bad' instead of the 'good'. However, by changing what is 'studied' in the organization, the system can 'reinvent' itself. When using an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach, the questions we ask will determine what we find. Thus, shaping the inquiry is critical. The questions asked will reveal the life-giving forces of the system. Once those are discovered, the next stage in the process is to dream of what could be. Then comes the design phase: creating the infrastructure that will bridge the best of what is with what could be. The system can then live its destiny by strengthening its affirmative capability. Appreciative Design differs from traditional approaches to organizational design in that it is not a method of problem-solving; rather it is a way to design a system around identified life-giving forces. In this paper, the author will present a model for 'Appreciative Design'. Examples from consulting work and an instructional design class will be used for illustrative purposes. How 'Appreciative Design' could be used to reinvent educational systems will also be discussed. Copyright © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a 'cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999a, p. 10). AI differs from traditional

organizational interventions in that it is not a method of problem-solving. Instead of searching for the problem to solve, when designing 'appreciatively' we begin with a search for the best of what is. It is a search to discover the life-giving forces of the system and to identify what the system wants 'more' of. Design then takes place around these life-giving forces.

The current public education system in the USA is in need of transformation. For all of our change efforts, we have simply managed to replace one bureaucracy with another (Merz

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and Furman, 1997). This is an issue that frustrates many of us, consumes chunks of time in meetings and chunks of money, affects a broad array of stakeholders, has few or no precedents for successful resolution, puts parties into conflict, and is in need of bold leadership and new initiatives (Weisbord, 1992). Banathy states that we

have not grappled with the essential nature of education as a society system; a system interacting with other societal systems, a system which is embedded in the rapidly and dynamically changing larger society. (Banathy, 1991, p. 12)

Yet this much maligned system has some 'good' still in it. No system is totally bad or totally good. If we were to redesign the public education system 'appreciatively', we would begin with a search for the 'goodness' still there.

Beginning with a search for 'goodness' differs from a problem-solving approach. Using a problem-solving approach is part of why we 'have not grappled with the essential nature of education as a society system' (Banathy, 1991, p. 12). In a traditional problem-solving approach, we begin by identifying the problem with the current education system, analyze the causes of these problems, come up with possible solutions, and create an action plan for implementing those solutions. Using an Appreciative Design approach, we begin with a search for the best of 'what is', envision 'what might be', dialogue about 'what should be', and create 'what will be' (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). This approach is based of five principles and a set of propositions that provide the foundation for AI and, thus, Appreciative Design.

FIVE PRINCIPLES AND SOME PROPOSITIONS

Five principles are central to AI theory: the constructionist principle, the principle of simultaneity, the poetic principle, the anticipatory principle, and the positive principle (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). Several propositions contribute to

an 'affirmative basis of organizing' (Cooperrider, 2000b, p. 46). Each principle and their corresponding propositions will be described.

'The Constructionist Principle' asserts that organizations are living, human constructions. They are constructed based on what we think we know; thus what we know and how we know it becomes fateful (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). '[T]he truth about an organization is what those involved agree the truth is' (Zemke, 1999, p. 30). This principle is strengthened by the proposition that stakeholders in the organization carry in their minds some sort of shared idea of what the organization is, how it should function, and what it might become (Cooperrider, 2000b). 'The Constructionist Principle' calls us to unearth and examine the mental models (Senge, 1990) that we hold about an organization. If the organization we are trying to change is the public education system, the constructionist principle asks us to identify and examine the mental models we hold about 'public education' and consider how those mental models have affected the fate of the current system.

Change begins the minute we ask a question. This is the 'Principle of Simultaneity'. The questions posed set the stage for what is found. What is found becomes the data we use to reconstruct the future. 'Even the most innocent question evokes change' (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000, p. 18). Thus, change is not something that happens after an analysis is conducted; change begins with the analysis. A corresponding proposition encourages us to create the conditions for organization-wide appreciation to 'ensure the conscious evolution of a valued and positive future' (Cooperrider, 2000b, p. 52).

If organizations are constructed, they can be reconstructed. Just as a poem can be interpreted and reinterpreted as we bring new meaning to every reading of it, so can organizations be reinterpreted as the system they are embedded in changes. This is 'The Poetic Principle': as the stories of the people in and attached to the organization change, the organization changes. 'There is no such thing as an inevitable organization' (Cooperrider, 2000b, p. 47). This principle teaches us that we can choose what to study in

an organization: the good or the bad, the joy or the alienation, the creativity or mediocrity (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). A related proposition tells us that no matter what the previous history, every system can be altered and reinvented (Cooperrider, 2000b).

From the 'Anticipatory Principle', we learn that the image of the future guides the current behavior and actions of the system (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). Positive images of the future lead to positive actions; negative images lead to negative actions. This image becomes the 'referential core' of the system and determines its essential characteristics (Capra, 1996; Wheatley, 1999). It is possible for this image to be incoherent or unclear or even for it to be pathetic. Many organizations are better at articulating what they don't want than at being clear about what it is they do want. An image that is based on what we don't want is likely to engender negative behavior and actions. Malaise, mediocrity, angst, and dysfunction are likely to be present in such an organization. This principle is supported by the proposition that systems are limited only by their imaginations (Cooperrider, 2000b). Paradoxically, even the best future images can hold the system back if those positive images become so cherished, they cannot be given up for even better images (Cooperrider, 2000b). This proposition reminds us of the first principle: our organizations are constructions.

'The positive principle' teaches that the more positive the question asked is, the more longer lasting and successful the change effort will be (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). Problem-solving is a null-sum game, directing the focus to what is wrong (Zemke, 1999). Building and sustaining momentum for change requires large doses of hope, inspiration, caring, excitement and commitment. Seeking out positive experiences and past successes and using those to build the future engenders positive affect and social bonding. The 'heliotropic' proposition tells us that systems, like plants, move in the direction of light or positive imagery (Cooperrider, 2000b). Thus, organizations move in the direction of what they study. To move in a positive direction, the system has to be studying the positive, not the negative. A related proposition asserts

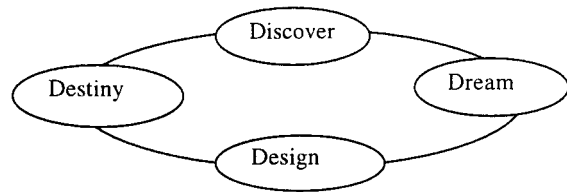


Figure 1. 4 D's

that the more an organization experiments with conscious evolution of positive imagery, the better it will become as its heliotropic and affirmative competencies strengthen (Cooperrider, 2000b). This heliotropic tendency needs to be appreciated and understood – this proposition directs us to appreciate rather than fix our organizations (Cooperrider, 2000b; Zemke, 1999).

These five principles and corresponding propositions form the basis for AI and Appreciative Design. They are the foundation for a four-phase cycle (see Figure 1). The four-phase cycle begins with appreciating 'what is', then moves to envisioning what could be', co-constructing 'what should be' and sustaining what 'will be' (Cooperrider, 2000a; Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Zemke, 1999). This cycle is also referred to as the '4-D Process': Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Zemke, 1999).

FOUR D'S

Appreciative Design begins with an inquiry into what is best the current system: Discovery. Starting from the premise that every system works to some degree, in the Discovery phase we seek to find, describe, and explain the factors that give life to the system. Inspiration is drawn from 'what is' as this is indicative of what might be. History becomes positive possibility (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999b). The Discovery phase is meant to generate new knowledge that will expand the realm of what is possible. The questions asked become critical: the questions asked determine what we find; the data we gather determines what we design. A fair amount of time is devoted to crafting 'good' questions, questions that are affirmative, posed as an invitation, and evoke storytelling about

peak experiences. These questions are meant to engender wonder, surprise, and imagination for both the interviewer and the interviewee (Cooperrider, 2000a).

The Dream phase challenges the status quo by envisioning a different (positive) future. Based in the organization's history, this new future is practical but also generative in that it expands the organization's potential (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999b). The factors that give life to the system are identified in the Discovery phase; in the Dream phase, we seek to understand those factors. As we develop an understanding of the factors that give life to the system, we begin to envision what might be. This helps us to generate images of realistic developmental opportunities: opportunities that expand the realm of what is possible yet realistic. '[T]he future begins to be discerned in the form of visible patterns interwoven into the texture of the actual' (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000, p. 11).

The Design phase uses the data gathered through the Discovery and Dream phases. Once the system has articulated what it wants to become, a new social architecture needs to be co-constructed. An infrastructure and governance system needs to be designed that will support the vision of the system. This vision will live in the strategies, processes, decisions, collaborations, policies and procedures of the system (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999a). Often this entails rethinking how power, authority and wealth are to be redistributed to reflect the vision of the system (Block, 1993; Senge *et al.*, 1999). The new design supports the reinvention of the organization.

The Destiny phase reflects the plan to sustain, maintain, improve, or adjust what has been designed (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). By this time, the change is well underway – it started with the first question asked in the Discovery phase. The Destiny phase is about allowing the change to continue under its own momentum. It is a 'valuation' (as opposed to evaluation) plan (Preskill and Torres, 1999); a plan for appraising what is working about the new design (Norum, 2000a, 2000b). It brings the cycle back to the beginning: Discover what is working, the best of the new system.

This four-phase cycle begins with positive questions. As stated above, change begins the moment we ask a question. In addition, organizations move in the direction of what they study. Thus, the questions we ask become critical to the design and destiny of the organization. 'Understanding depends upon how we look at facts, upon what questions we have asked in arriving at them' (Zohar, 1997, p. 65). To design appreciatively, four types of questions are created. The types are described in the next section.

CHANGE BEGINS WITH THE QUESTIONS ASKED

In Appreciative Design, we seek to understand the life-giving factors of the organization and design around those. AI suggests four basic types of questions be crafted. These questions are crafted to elicit the 'best of' the current system and to understand how these are 'life-giving' factors. The data collected comes in the form of stories: people have stories about their organizations and like to tell them.

To set the storytelling mode, the first type of question asked is a 'deep story question' (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999b). This question asks the interviewee to tell a story about a peak experience or high point. They are encouraged to describe who was involved, what made it a peak experience, what they did to make it a peak experience, and what others contributed to make it a peak experience.

The second type of question has to do with valuing the organization, self, and work (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999b). The more congruence there is between these, the more effective the organization will be. The interviewee is asked what they value about the organization they work in, what they value about themselves, and what they value about the nature of the work they do.

The third type of question is the 'core factors' or life-giving question: What gives 'life' to the system (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999b). This question elicits the specifics about what gives life to the organization and seeks to understand why it gives life. Rather than identify the causes of the problem, this question asks us to ponder the best

Table 1. Creativity and innovation protocol

1. Share a story about a time that you experienced great creativity and/or innovation. Where were you? Who were you with? What were the conditions? (*Deep Story Question*)
2. What do you value most about yourself as a creative and/or innovative person? (*Value Question*)
3. Share a story about a creative and/or innovative moment at this hospital. You may or may not have been part of it. What gives life to creativity and innovation at this hospital? (*Core Factors Question*)
4. If this hospital wrote a book entitled, *All I Ever Needed to Know About Creativity and Innovation I Learned Here*, what stories of creativity and innovation would be regaled in such a book? (*Future Question*)

of the system and understand these factors as deeply as we typically understand what is wrong and why it is wrong.

The fourth type of question is the 'future' question (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999b). This is the question that invites people to dream about the ideal future of the system. It can be posed in many different ways. Two common ways to ask the question are (a) describe the ideal organization five years from now and (b) you have three wishes and they have been implemented – describe this ideal system.

Besides the types of questions, the wording of the questions becomes critical. '[W]e largely create the world we later discover' Cooperrider and Srivastva, 2000, p. 92). Therefore, how we language the question is important: how we ask the question will shape what we find. 'Good' Appreciative Design questions are stated in the affirmative, using positive language; are presented as an invitation; evoke storytelling; are phrased in the vernacular; are sometimes ambiguous; and direct us to value what is (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999b).

APPRECIATIVE DESIGN IN ACTION

Appreciative Design can be implemented on a small or large scale. It can be used to shape a one-day workshop or to transform a complex system. Three examples of Appreciative Design in action are shared.

Appreciatively Designing a Workshop

I used an Appreciative Design approach to conduct a workshop in creativity and innovation.

The workshop was held in November 1999 for 10 regional hospital staff. The workshop was used to explore how people thought of creativity and innovation, to encourage its unleashing, and to determine together ways of nurturing and fostering creativity and innovation. Workshop participants interviewed each other using the protocol in Table 1.

Workshop participants were then asked to share what they had learned from the interviews. A common theme was that they recognized everyone is creative, just in different ways. The mental model of creativity being associated with artists was unearthed, examined, and reconstructed. Data from the last two questions identified the factors that give life to creativity and innovation.

The group created a list of factors for nurturing and fostering creativity and innovation (Table 2). The list included things like risk-taking, effective

Table 2. Factors and measures

What gives life to creativity/innovation	What is currently measured
Risk-taking	Turnover
Effective communication	Patient Outcomes
Open-mindedness	Customer Satisfaction
Willingness to learn from mistakes	Error Rates
Trust	Morale
Knowledge of the whole system	
Safety	
Opportunities to contribute	
Attitude of servitude	

Table 3. Appreciative evaluation

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1. Share a high-point question about the class. (What was a high point of the class for you and why?)
 2. As a student, what did you contribute to the course? What did the course give back?
 3. What did you particularly enjoy or what about the class worked especially well?
 4. It is Fall 2000 and the course has been 'tweaked'. It works particularly well for this degree program because three wishes you had for the class have been implemented. How are your three wishes reflected in the new version of the class?
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communication, open-mindedness, willingness to learn from mistakes, trust, knowledge of the whole system, safety, opportunities to contribute, and an attitude of servitude. We then created a list of what was currently measured in the organization. Being a hospital, the list was quite lengthy, driven by compliance standards, focusing on no errors and correcting deviations. The group immediately saw the dissonance: how to nurture and foster creativity and innovation in a culture that has a very low tolerance for mistakes and for good reason.

What the hospital 'studied' through its measures did not engender the type of culture that would foster and nurture creativity and innovation. The group could not do away with those measures. They could, however, change how they used the measures. In a problem-solving mentality, when the measures indicate a falling short of the mark, we engage in a problem-solving analysis to determine what is wrong and how to fix it. We develop a deep understanding of what is wrong and why it is wrong. Yet those same measures had good news in them – good news that was typically ignored. The workshop participants realized they could use those same measures to understand what was right – what was working and why it was working. By identifying what was working and understanding why it was working, they could begin to intentionally design policies, procedures, and infrastructures that would sustain and maintain what was right. In turn, this would help to create conditions that would foster and nurture creativity and innovation, at least in their little corners of the world. They also realized they could begin to encourage other areas of the hospital to use measures 'appreciatively' by publicizing the stories of positive outcomes

through the internal newsletter and by revising the language in the measures themselves.

Appreciative Course Evaluations

In the Fall of 1999, I adopted an appreciative course evaluation. It was used in addition to the traditional course evaluation required by the university. On the last night of class, 13 students in a required graduate level course interviewed each other using the protocol in Table 3. They first paired up (except for one group of three) to interview each other for about 20 minutes using the protocol. They were then split into two groups to share and analyze the interview data. They were to look for patterns and trends from the interviews and were given approximately 20 minutes for this task. We then convened as a large group to share the patterns and trends from both groups.

The course utilized a technology called Web-CT. This is a template for developing on-line web-based courses. It has features such as a chat room and bulletin board. We utilized these features in lieu of meeting for class physically at times throughout the semester. Students in the class came from school and non-school work settings and were divided into two groups to complete a group project as part of the course requirements. These features of the course design were mentioned in the interviews. For example, for several students, their high point was using a new technology such as the chat room in Web-CT. Class discussions were also mentioned as a high point because these served to engage different perspectives on the assigned readings. There was agreement on what everyone contributed to the class: their stories, unique

backgrounds, and original points of view. In return, students received new ideas that could help them be more effective in their various work settings. Students particularly enjoyed the class format, which was flexible yet structured. They also liked the use of a new technology and the opportunity to work as a group on a project. Suggestions for tweaking the course included exposing them to more than Web-CT technology; making the groups for the group project smaller; reading selected chapters of one of the required texts rather than the full text; and limiting the class size since this is a graduate-level course. I used this information to make changes to the course the next time it was offered (Fall 2000). I also have continued to use an appreciative course evaluation in all my courses.

Students indicated this was the most meaningful course evaluation they had ever been involved in. It was an opportunity to review for themselves what they gained from the course and hear what others gained. In the large group, as we discussed the patterns and trends and suggestions for improving the course, I asked clarification questions and wrote their comments down. Students remarked how seriously this evaluation was being taken and that they could see their feedback mattered.

Appreciative Instructional Design

A specific application of Appreciative Design is Appreciative instructional Design (AiD) (Norum, 2000a). Current models of instructional design are deficit based: the gap between current performance and desired performance is analyzed and, as appropriate, instruction is designed to fill that gap. It is a problem-solving process: what the problem is and how we solve it often begins the analysis (e.g., Seels and Glasgow, 1998). AiD differs from current models of instructional design in that it assumes there is something good to be found and amplified (Bushe, 2000). It is based on discovering the best of what is and designing instruction around those generative factors. Instead of searching for the problem to solve, when designing 'appreciatively' we begin with a search for the best of what

is. It is a search to discover the life-giving forces of the system and to identify what we want 'more' of. Instruction is designed to nurture, develop, and amplify the competencies needed to perform at the 'best of' level and give the organization 'more' of what it wants.

The four-phase AI cycle (Figure 1) is followed in AiD. Analysis of the system operating at its best and identifying life-giving factors takes place in the Discovery and Dream phases. The data gathered is analyzed to find themes, patterns, and refrains (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). Learning objectives flow from the themes and patterns and are tied back to what the system wants 'more of'. Instruction will now be designed to nurture, develop, and amplify competencies that will in turn amplify the identified life-giving factors. How to develop the instruction so it meets the objectives is also considered in this phase. As the instruction is implemented, the Destiny phase is entered.

The Destiny phase reflects the plan to sustain, maintain, improve, and adjust the instruction developed. It is a plan for 'tinkering'. It is a 'valuation' (as opposed to evaluation) plan (Preskill and Torres, 1999). What we choose to measure and evaluate is a sign of what is studied. As the affirmative capabilities of the organization will be strengthened through what is studied and measured, the Destiny Phase outlines what is studied and how. It is the plan for how to appraise what about the instruction is working and brings the AiD Cycle full circle: Discover what is the 'best of' the instruction that has been designed.

During the Spring 2000 semester, two students from a manufacturing plant employed the AiD model intending to design a training program to reduce scrap. As we discussed the AI concept that we create our worlds through the language we use, they changed their language. They were no longer designing training to reduce scrap; rather, this would now be a program about 'yield improvement'. What they really wanted 'more' of was yield, not scrap, and the reason they wanted more yield was because this would increase the profitability of the plant.

Their first step was to craft an interview guide that would help them discover what 'yield

improvement' looked like at its best. The guide was also crafted to discover what the company was doing right; to help them understand what was going on when yield was high. This would help to illuminate competencies needed for yield improvement to operate at its best level. For guidance in the training that would be developed, questions about how people learned were asked to discover what training methods and techniques should be used. To envision what might be, questions about the future of the company were also asked.

After conducting interviews with 27 machinists, the students realized they needed to develop a comprehensive training program to attain their goal of 'yield improvement'. They identified several training modules to be designed and implemented over time. Besides the competencies needed to run the machine in such a manner that yield would improve, through the interviews the students discovered other factors that would contribute to improving yield. These factors included motivation, team building, communication, fiscal implications of production waste, total quality management, and tools for improving efficiencies and productivity. These factors became the learning objectives related to getting 'more' yield and, ultimately, 'more' profit. The employees interviewed also had suggestions for changing the current work process, such as moving away from a production line to a team-based or work-group structure.

The students reported that because the employees targeted to receive the training were interviewed and involved in shaping the training they will receive, there was a sense of enthusiasm and commitment. The training will be delivered in various modes to reflect the employees' feedback of what training methods and techniques worked for them. Strategies for delivery include one-on-one training, manuals, classroom/groups, and video tape. The comprehensive training program developed and delivered at this plant will serve as a pilot program for the parent company. Its success will result in the generation of a proposal to the corporate headquarters to adopt a similar program in all plants.

Generative Power

These three examples of Appreciative Design in action provide a glimpse of its generative power. In each example shared, creativity, positive images, and hope for a new future were inspired. These small-scale applications of Appreciative Design hint at its transformative power. Appreciative Design is a process that holds promise for purposefully reinventing complex systems, such as educational systems.

REINVENTING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS THROUGH APPRECIATIVE DESIGN

The principles and propositions that undergird Appreciative Design suggest that how we talk about the education system creates the system that we have. The current discourse about the American public education system tends to be negative. Politicians make education an issue in their campaigns and frequently promise to fix the system. In the news, we hear of how short American education systems are falling; declines in achievement test scores quickly become stories. Incidents of school violence become breaking news. Berliner and Biddle (1995) contend that we have manufactured the current beliefs about the American education system and exhort us to think about education in a new way.

Appreciative Design suggests that we can change the system by changing its stories (Norum, 2000b). In fact, we can go beyond changing the system to transforming it. A system can be changed and still keep its basic shape; to transform a system is to change its shape or pattern (Feige, 1999; Senge, 1999). It has been argued that proponents of educational reform do not want to really transform the existing educational system (Sarason, 1990). Rather, they focus efforts on improving what already exists (Banathy, 1991; Elmore, 1990; Feige, 1999; Merz and Furman, 1997; Sarason, 1990 and this is inadequate for the long-term performance of our schools (Feige, 1999; Purpel, 1999; Waddock, 1995). This amounts to making caterpillars go faster when butterflies are what is needed

(Banathy, 1991). We change a system's basic shape or pattern by changing it at its core, at its thinking. We get butterflies by examining and challenging 'how people think, what they believe, and how they see the world' (Senge, 1999, p. 13).

The stories we tell about an organization reflect characteristics of the perceived referential core of that organization. Wheatley (1999) describes the referential core of a system as its 'memory'. It is what keeps the system from losing its integrity while allowing it to live on the 'edge of chaos' by reaching out and taking on new forms (Wheatley, 1999). It is where the qualitative features of the system live (Capra, 1996). It is the thing that tells the system what it is, what it is becoming, and what it wants to be (Wheatley, 1997). In the public education system, we seem to have lost track of this referential core as the purpose(s) for public education have become more and more fragmented (Feige, 1999; Merz and Furman, 1997; Norum, unpublished, University of Colorado at Denver, 1997; Purpel, 1999). Postman (1993) states, 'There was a time when American culture knew what schools were for because it offered fully functioning multiple narratives for its people to embrace' (p. 13). Examples of these narratives include educating citizens for a democracy; the great melting pot; and instilling the (Protestant) work ethic (Postman, 1993). Now the public questions what schools are for and educators are unsure of their mission (Hargreaves, 1994; Merz and Furman, 1997). We must reclaim our organizations for the purposes we want them to serve (Wheatley and Whyte, 1996). If the organization we are reclaiming is the public education system, this means we must understand why and in what way education is vital to us (Bestor, 1985). Once that is identified, we need to consider what we want the referential core of the educational system to be in the future.

Banathy (1992) challenges us to rethink, redefine, revision, and recreate the education system by design. Appreciative Design offers a positive process for doing this. Appreciative Design opens the door to tap into people's stories about the American public education system and provides a way to examine how the language we

use creates the system we have. Stories have the potential to expand the imagination and enlarge visions (Feige, 1999). In order to reinvent educational systems, we must examine the stories being told for 'we act according to our story' (Feige, 1999, p. 87). Our stories create the practices and policies that govern educational systems and become 'fundamental to the way we work together, the decisions we make, and the results we create' (Ellinor and Gerard, 1998, p. 59). Our stories create 'patterns of patterns, meta-patterns and meta-messages' (Feige, 1999, p. 87).

AI reminds us that every system has some goodness in it. When it comes to the education system, we have focused efforts on identifying what the problem is, analyzing the causes, and coming up with reform effort after reform effort that may have done more damage than good (Berliner and Biddle, 1995). The process of searching for the problem, analyzing its causes, generating solutions and action plans leads to progressive enfeeblement (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999b) as we become more and more discouraged that the 'solution' is not working. Appreciative Design offers the promise of a way to break this cycle. The Appreciative Design process invites us to discover and appreciate the good in the system, the 'best of', what is working. It is a search for what gives life to the system. As we tap into the goodness of the system, we begin to dream about what might be. Creativity and positive energy are released as we dialogue about what should be, designing infrastructures, policies, procedures, processes, and collaborations that will foster and nurture the identified life-giving elements of the system. The new design takes on a life of its own, changing the destiny of the system. 'The most powerful force in creating new organizational and social contexts is held to be the perspective that powerful actors bring to the situation – perspective produces behavior that enacts its own reality' (Bray *et al.*, 2000, p. 45).

Through the Appreciative Design process, we share our stories of hope for educational systems. As we begin to tell and share hope-filled stories, the dreams that we have for an ideal system no longer are so far fetched. The educational system

begins to change as the stories of those in and attached to it change. In the end, the system has not merely changed, it has transformed. New language, new stories, new visions have changed the thinking of the system. It has been altered at its core. The system has been reconstructed, reinterpreted, reinvented. This is only the beginning. As the stories of the people in and attached to the system continue to evolve, the system continues to evolve. It is an ongoing dance of positive transformation by purposeful design.

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